

BLEAKHOUSE REVIEW

2016-2017



Editors: Robert Johnson and Casey Chiappetta

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EDITORS' NOTE

BleakHouse Review is an online literary magazine that provides a venue for writing and art on human liberty, both its deprivation and its achievement. Some people find freedom behind prison walls; others, ostensibly free, build prisons for themselves in their everyday lives. The interplay of persons and settings, as well as limits and possibilities, forms the palette on which our writers and artists work, examining their subjects with imagination and care.

The 2016-2017 *BleakHouse Review* is edited by Robert Johnson and Casey Chiappetta.

Cover illustration by Robin Weiner

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NOT JUST TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Zadie Adams

What is time
When you have a full-time job as a prisoner
Not an 8 hour shift
But a life sentence that you can not lift
Time just begins to drift
I begin to drift
I am not even a part of society
There's no variety to my life
Motions filled with anxiety
But i'm expected to keep all emotions inside of me
Same thing different day
No option to make a difference
No option to redeem my past belligerence
The only significance to my life is the pain that I've caused other people
The mistakes I made that were not legal
I can admit my wrongs
I know I did wrong
But I also know that I do not belong here anymore
And that I have strongly repented of my actions
I also know that my sentence was prolonged
Another black man with life gives this country satisfaction
The system does illegal things too, they are just considered legal
But that is unspeakable here
Thinking about what I cant change will only bring me tears
Will only make me disappear,
Not just to the outside world

WE ARE THE SYSTEM'S BAIT.

Zadie Adams

I am innocent!
But to them i'm simply black ignorance
An instrument to them keeping their power
2,207 every 10,000 people arrested
Black men used at tools to create their tower
People claim racism does exist
Only 306 of those 10,000 arrested would be white so I continue to insist
The ignorance of that statement
Yes I'm filled with hatred
Jealous of the privilege
The blind white man
Intentionally failing to address the obvious
Now i'm stuck wasting my lifespan because I was born into this skin
Because I was born black
The word black itself
Automatically associated with evil
Automatically associated with sin
5 times as many whites use drugs than us
Now lets discuss us being incarcerated ten times the rate
My life has been manipulated
Stereotypes simulated my reality
This endless weight
Dictates my emotional state
Complicates what we innovate
We need to educate ALL people on this unfortunate truth.
We are the system's bait

ATTACK SUCCESS 20 TIMES HARDER

Zadie Adams

When I was a kid I wanted to be a doctor
My cute little oblivious self
I failed to consider the true factors
Lack of opportunity in itself
Getting a PHD is no cheap task
Reality soon took off its mask
My dad was in jail
All I could do was Inhale his failure
The lack of him made me angry, made me crazy
Made my mind become hazy
I began to lash out in ways I never had before
Constant war
Between who I wanted to be and who I was expected to be
I knew education was the key
But in my financial state that was no guarantee
And in my town high education was more than unlikely
I lost my drive
Began to deprive myself of my own goals
Began falling deeper and deeper into the hole
That is the cycle
No longer in denial
I felt entitled to the crime
The world was against me
And now i'm doing time
Hoping to get out soon and break this cycle
To teach my kids about survival
To teach them about revival
From this lack of opportunity
To not let their poverty hold them back
To not let my mistakes hold them back
To know that as black men and women they have to attack success 20 times harder

SO I DO AS I'M TOLD

Zadie Adams

Bend over let me see that ass
I do as i'm told knowing that i'll pass
I find it just a tad bit ironic
That right now i'm in prison doing exactly what I got in for
Bending my ass over
How sardonic
I was a prostitute
Go head judge now, put my thoughts on mute
I know I could still refute all your polluted assumptions
I was a good kid until things erupted
And I was abducted
And given to a pimp
16 years old and had nothing
Father was in jail
Mother was all frail from the drugs
I tried to stay in school
But I never had the proper tools
Hung around the wrong people
They had lifelong problems
I was in the wrong place at the wrong time
Which led me to this life of crime
Luckily I eventually escaped
But I was in no shape to get a real job
Now 21 with not even a GED
The life of sex was not new to me
So I kept at it
Offguard for a split second
And a cop bagged me
And so by default I can't disagree with my being here
So I do what i'm told

WE ALL HAVE TO DECIDE TO WORK TOGETHER

Zadie Adams

People fail to take into consideration the officer's perspective
Not all officers are negatively effective
Not all officers are unreflective
Some are actually subjective
I am aware of my actions
I have the ability to have respectful interactions
To think about my reactions
I can empathize with the contraptions of growing up with less than
Color of one's skin automatically reduces their expected lifespan
Yes I do my job and I do it well
To make crime dispel
I put my life on the line
Everyday could be my deadline
But I also understand that there is another issue at hand
Targeting occurs too often and this acknowledgment needs to expand
We have to understand true justice
We have to command true justice
We can not continue to reprimand one another
There is overwhelming animosity on both sides
No one feels safe, there is a constant divide
Discussion can begin to provide
Steps for hatred to subside
But we can't continue to collide
We all have to decide to work together

UNTITLED

Cate Pierson





Emily Pettit

SOVEREIGN MISDIRECTION

Emily Pettit

I did not match their profile, so they took me to a place where I could learn.
Everyone is angry
They say I'm new, they say i'm dumb, they show me how i'm ugly.
They taught me what to do and how to act so that this world would not hurt me.
They taught me what cloths to wear, how I should style my own hair.
Why is everyone still so angry?
I see their stares but inside I am not scared.
Protected by the walls around me
Protected by the voice inside me.
"This is who you are, this is where you are meant to be."

More alone than ever before, I put up my own walls just to shield me.
Every time, All you want is more.
But why should I apologize for being what you made me?
You were supposed to guide me
you were supposed to hold me up and show me what I did wrong.
Show me how to belong.

But now I realize I can never belong in a place where everyone is gone
In a place where I am alone. Stripped, right down to the bone.

I did not 'fit in' there; I do not 'fit in' here.
I was just searching for a home.
This is not who I am or choose to be.

So what if I do not do as I am told?
I will be bold,
forced to pave my own road
Never again overshadowed
By this world that you call home.

MY ADDICTION

Kris Glover

My addiction runs my life
to tell the truth that bitch is my wife
it's always fucking with me, constantly killing me
I need something new to put a thrill in me
but I always go back and that's the problem
if I saw something nice, I'd probably rob them
seriously, this addiction is lethal
and to think it's all just to fill a needle
don't use dope, don't even sniff it
I'm telling you within weeks you'll be sick, kid
my addiction, it's out of whack
I'll be in a room shooting coke and smack
my addiction, it's not a laugh
for a real long time, it's been kicking my ass
my addiction and things that happen, I'll tell the truth
I feel like my story should be told in a booth
my addiction, it's more than cunning
I feel like the devil got my ass running

WAYS I SABOTAGE MY RECOVERY

Kris Glover

I think too hard on the little things
'cause when I try to see the big picture, it burns and stings
sometimes I have no interest in a better life
no nice house, no new cars, no kids and wife
I get amped up, it seems for no reason
it's like it's the summertime and it's the killing season
I do dumb shit; go out and get high
even though I know one of these days I could die
sometimes I feel like the world's on my shoulders
I'm Atlas but I can't seem to hold the boulder
I even hold other people accountable for my sadness
now listen to that, don't it sound like madness?
I'm not in touch with myself
I feel light years away
and this is how I'm supposed to feel day to day
when I've felt like I was good, I just fucked it up
it's like my brain and body can't say enough is enough,
I can't help the feelings I have inside
for the most part, I just go for the ride
these are the ways my recovery is sabotaged
I can hang them on my wall like a terrible collage

RECOVERY

Kris Glover

I'm tired of going into institutions
for what happened to me
I feel like I should get some kind of restitution
my bodies all filled with pollution
but I'm trying to purify it with some good solutions
I'll hit my groups with my head in the sky
'cause to tell you the truth, I don't want to die
but it feels like I am when I'm out getting high
destroying my family and also myself
all I can say to staff right now is thanks for the help
you made me see the error of my ways
I'm thankful I've been clean for 14 days
keep doing your work
I'll keep doing mine
and when I leave here I believe everything will be fine
I'll rebuild the many bridges I've burnt
and say all my sorry's to my family and people I've hurt
I'm saying this now because I believe it
but if I mess this up now, all this won't mean shit
you can all find me in some 6-foot ditch
but I don't believe my time is done
I still got to make my mom a grand mom and have me a son

THINGS CHANGE

Kris Glover

Things change, for better or worse
things change, it can be a gift or a curse
things change, all I used to do was shoot dope
but things change, now I feel full of hope
things change over time, like relationships
things change, all you need is some help and patience
things change, I'm living proof
things change, a month ago you could find me slumped in a stoop
things change like the way you think
over time, you might not need help from a shrink
things change, you can have a good life
just know, it won't happen overnight
things change for addicts and everyone
for parents, just know the addict could be your daughter or son
things change, just like the seasons
this could be bad, or for you, it could be pleasing
things change, just try to let go of your pains
and, like I've been telling you, things can change

TYRANNY TRIUMPHANT

Susan Nagelsen and Charles Huckelberry

How loath we are to give up our pious belief in ghosts and witches, because we like to persecute the one, and frighten ourselves to death with the other.

William Hazlitt
"On the Pleasure of Hating"

An examination of both the theoretical and applied abuses of American exceptionalism tempts the examiner to rely on a strict Marxist interpretation, one describing class divisions and the endemic inequality derived from unbridled capitalism. A concomitant to this position is the judicial arm of government serving as a tool of the elite for social repression, influenced by pressure from the executive branch. Moreover, a statistical analysis of the socioeconomic cohorts of the men and women affected lends support to this critique.

Other than the standard formula for raising the consciousness of the citizens at both ends of the economic and political spectra, however, Marxist criticism offers little in the way of practical advice for altering or eliminating what has become the proverbial thousand-pound gorilla in the living room. That is, everyone acknowledges the existence of massive inequality, but no consensus has arisen as to what to do about it. This fundamental failure can be traced to an incorrect reading of human nature as revealed in the historical politics of Western democracies. Marxist criticism, as bizarre as it sounds to contemporary ears that have heard the sound of the Soviet Union's collapse, is far too sanguine in its interpretation of both human motivation and the perfectibility of the human spirit to mount a successful attack against the arrogation of magisterial power exhibited by the new administration.

To advocate elevating the consciousness

of those in power positions as a means of redressing injustices presupposes a lack of awareness of the consequences of specific acts or omissions committed by those individuals. Marx (1959) maintained that a change in social position produces a change in one's consciousness, since the two are inextricably related. The most familiar elucidation of this school of thought, however, is Paulo Friere's (1993) seminal work, in which he argued that once aware of the immorality or unfairness of his acts, the oppressor will cease further exploitation. To see the weaknesses of both arguments, one need only examine the behavior of American politicians and the private interests that support them, a symbiosis that deliberately consigns men and women to social and economic inequality generation by generation to create a society of philosophical clones.

Contrary to the Jeffersonian idea of provisional political service to one's country, postmodern politicians make careers out of going to Washington, paying lip service to their constituents without intending to return to the hinterlands, and then proceeding to do anything to perpetuate their tenure. Thinly coated with the veneer of personal sacrifice, the experience immediately becomes a constant search for money and power to sustain the office during subsequent elections. Any viable issue that will gain votes becomes a political football, and politicians can always move, say, immigration to the forefront when nothing else is on the political horizon. That is where

refugees factor into the equation. Once the political establishment has defined them as undesirable, any treatment becomes justified in the public's mind.

Friere and Marx thus underestimate the attachment to power and the lengths to which political opportunists will go to maintain it. The change in consciousness anticipated by social transition happens only when individuals step down a rung or two on the socioeconomic ladder, not when they are going up. A senator who suddenly finds himself homeless or in jail certainly would gain a fundamental insight into the plight of the many, which could indeed raise his consciousness. The upward mobility achieved through extravagant salaries, perks, and influence, however, produces little more than a classic illustration of the contamination of unrestricted power, demonstrating that an elevation in social position frequently garners wealth and influence but does nothing to improve one's consciousness.

To illustrate, one of the great philosophical puzzles of American political history has been Thomas Jefferson's (1998) articulated philosophy regarding slavery, versus his participation in that national tragedy. In his Notes on the State of Virginia, the country's third President spoke eloquently about the pernicious influence of slavery on society and even remarked about the injustice of half of the population trampling on the rights of the other half. His initial draft of the Declaration of Independence contained a demand for outlawing the slave trade, yet he owned slaves and never provided for their manumission in his will.

Similarly, Abraham Lincoln (1998), the President more idolized than any other, admitted in a public letter to Horace Greeley, "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it. . . . What I do about slavery of Bill Gates and his wife are notable exceptions. Their generous gifts to a wide variety of causes continue to make headlines.

and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the union" (p.1059) (Emphasis in original). Here, in what many consider heresy, Lincoln echoes Niccolò Machiavelli (1992) during the intrigues of Giuliano de' Medici, when he observed that to preserve the state, a prince often does things against his word, against charity, against humanity, and against even religious beliefs. As an example, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, issued 22 September 1862 and effective on the first day of the new year, freed only the slaves in those states that were then in a "state of rebellion," not because Lincoln acknowledged their fundamental humanity and deserved their freedom but merely to incite them to revolt against their Southern masters. Northern slaves and those not residing in rebellious states continued to wear their chains until passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

Clearly, we have no Jeffersons or Lincolns in American politics today, but the people's elected representatives still voice the same high-minded justification, notwithstanding articulated personal reservations, for relegating certain segments of the population to second-class status: the utilitarian argument for the betterment of society.

The two percent of the wealthiest citizens operate under the same basic principle (expediency), albeit with less finesse than their political soul mates, and they know precisely what they are doing and why: they are getting theirs and keeping it, with philanthropic gestures usually serving merely as good public relations.¹ The wealthy claim for themselves specific rights in the United States, among them the prerogative to decide, through campaign contributions and the concomitant exercise of influence, who runs the country and how

its wealth is distributed. Social fragmentation, with the attendant arrest, incarceration or expulsion of the lower strata, is therefore part of a grand design, an ethnic cleansing of sorts, to maintain a power base and suppress less valued citizens who might object to the methods employed to determine the country's future. A cohesive group thus forms with the primary goal of preserving and extending its influence. As Martin Luther King, Jr. (2000) described it, the fraternity is extremely rigid: "Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but . . . groups tend to be more immoral than individuals" (p. 507) (Our emphasis).

As we will argue, both Marx and Friere are therefore correct in their respective analyses, up to a point, specifically in identifying oppressor-oppressed relationships and the need to elevate the consciousness of the latter. Both, however, ignore the hard-wired motivation of contemporary men and women entrusted with control of the government and those who have common interests with them—and who depend upon them for their continued professional and private success. It is this insidious combination that drives the engine of profound inequality in this country. The collective consciousness of those in power has been euthanized by the pursuit and accumulation of wealth and power, and their actions will always be restricted to what improves their own position at the expense of everything else, even, or perhaps especially, when it comes to imprisoning or banishing other citizens.

So, it is in the United States, where the people charged with formulating policies on law-and-order issues are the same ones charged with regulating business, or under the current ideology, deregulating business. Ruth Morris and G. Gordon West (2000) make an excellent

case for the moral imbecility of this group in their argument for penal abolition. When comparing street crime to "suit" crime, the glaring inconsistencies in

sentencing leap from the pages, even in the case of premeditated crimes on a phenomenal scale. One homicide in, say, Texas merits a death sentence; corporate homicides in Third World countries produce fines and agreements to curtail industrial practices that kill thousands indiscriminately, a classic example of Martin Luther King's (2000) definition of unjust laws: those that a powerful group imposes on the minority but does not make self-binding.

It thus becomes clear that a change in social position hardly guarantees a change in consciousness and may in fact aggravate a consciousness that is already following nature's prime directive to compete without regard to the consequences for anyone else. It will therefore come as no surprise that a state governed by individuals whose primary loyalty is to their benefactors will hardly be receptive to arguments to reduce or eliminate judicial tactics that remove challenges to either their sponsors or themselves. This philosophy extends to the population in general and helps justify the recent phenomena of religious discrimination and xenophobia in the United States.

A contemporary study by Human Rights Watch disclosed that in fourteen major American cities, there was no adequate accountability for police misconduct (Doyle, 1998). The powerful, including the sitting President, reject such complaints as bleeding-heart liberalism that is philosophically misplaced; they regret nothing that enhances their own positions, even when their actions inflict massive pain and suffering outside the corporate offices. The lower socioeconomic

echelons will never be a matter of concern except as a perceived market or, in Malthusian terms, a group that must be either manipulated or kept under strict control lest they attempt to rise above their predetermined position.

Two metaphors generally arise during descriptions of any state: the cosmological model and the organic model, both of which are helpful for this discussion. Montesquieu was one of the earliest to use the former: "The parts of a state are like the parts of the universe, eternally bound by the actions of some and the reactions of others" (Roche, 1998, p. 255). Implicit in this model is the government at the center of the universe, around which all the other segments of the realm revolve and from which all power, for example, life-sustaining light and heat (food and shelter), radiates. Thus, extending the analogy, Newton's inverse square law applies: those closest to the throne are the most affected by the laws and policies initiated by the monarch, while those at the farthest extremes of the kingdom are affected least.

Contemporary analysts have made the same observations on this model of centralized government. Here is George Kennan, cold warrior extraordinaire and the architect of the policy of containment of the old Soviet Union:

I have a great lack of confidence, in fact a great distrust, of the monster nations, where there is an exertion of political authority over millions and millions of people from a given center. . . . I think they are dangerous to themselves, as well as to everybody else. I think they attribute to their centralized governments virtues and powers that are beyond the normal human. You lose all real, intimate connection between the source of national power and the people themselves (Lemann, 2000, p. 100).

In a "monster nation," therefore, centralized power becomes isolated, and the people whom government was designed to serve, those farthest from the seat of power, become marginalized and viewed only as tools to serve the government's ends, or, in many cases, problems to be isolated or eliminated.

For a discussion of the organic model of the state, Rousseau is of course the first choice: "The body politic taken individually can be considered to be an organized body, a living thing similar to the human body" (Roche, 1998, p. 223). Here, depending on one's understanding of physiology, the government was either the head or the heart—or perhaps a combination of the two—of the state, and the interaction of the various "organs" (the people) defined its unity. This model prompted a disease metaphor to describe anything that attempted to alter the natural course of development of the state, usually defined as whatever the seat of power declared it to be. Trivial injury to one of the extremities, a relatively inconsequential citizen, for example, would never pose a threat to the organism; only a systemic "infection" in the way of a revolution or an invasion, for example, could threaten the state's existence.

Both the cosmological and organic model are absolutist; citizens closest to the center of power, or neck deep in the swamp of control, gain enormous influence and economic viability, while those on the fringes become devalued, resulting in arrest, imprisonment, or eviction. Their existence remains stagnated, locked into a servile position that often goes unexamined by their oppressors. It is thus the consciousness of the proletariat, in Marxist terms, that holds the key to the means, exhibited throughout history, by which those in power maintain control over those with none, because that of the oppressor

is immune from both self-examination and modification.

Just as the Medici and the Bourbon rulers knew precisely what they wanted and how to get it, so also do modern industrialists and politicians have a clearly defined set of goals that pay no more attention to the welfare of the average citizen than Louis XVI did prior to the storming of the Bastille. As Louis-Sebastien Mercier cogently put it, “In all governments I see nothing but action and reaction, elasticity, coiled energy, impulse and resistance . . . for the law of politics is based only on reciprocity, on mutual interest” (Roche, 1998, p. 263). Enlightenment scholars recognized that government existed to perpetuate its own self-interest and that any trickle-down benefits to the general population were strictly coincidental.

Little has changed in two hundred years; governments still exclude the powerless from participation in decision-making processes. Modern tactics include discriminatory voter identification laws and disenfranchisement. In the United States today, most jurisdictions deny convicted felons the right to vote. That is, anyone convicted of a felony loses his or her right to participate in the democratic process. In Florida, for example, a state that follows this pattern and that was the center of a vote-counting controversy, approximately ten percent of the voting population has been disenfranchised by criminal convictions, thus removing a viable tool to effect social change. This tactic prevents elements of the powerless from exercising retribution at the polls for their sustained abuse and marginalization by the criminal-justice system. Clearly Machiavelli’s (1992) dictum that the few should have no influence when the many feel secure is

operational.

Given economic or psychological reinforcement to pursue an acquisitive path, therefore, egoism dictates more effort to that perceived end, which often leads to the trampling of fundamental civil rights in the process. In that regard, an examination of Renaissance statesmanship demonstrates how much closer Machiavelli is than either Friere or Marx to illuminating human proclivities that would consider using exclusion as a means of social control.

The state requires the complicity of its citizens to keep some of them subjugated, and, given Donald Trump’s electoral success and his sustained attacks on a free and independent press, here is where Machiavelli’s (1992) observations strike home. It was his belief that “Men are so simple of mind, and so much dominated by their immediate needs, that a deceitful man will always find plenty who are ready to be deceived” (p. 66). In the postmodern era, the potential for deceit is endless, and even those who see through the deception often fail to speak up. “Everyone sees what you [the ruler] seem to be, few know what you really are; and those few do not dare take a stand against the general opinion, supported by the majority of the government” (p. 67). Machiavelli’s advice presumed a certain tractability of the population, based on the ability of the prince to manipulate public opinion, much as politicians today prey on public ignorance and dismiss any revolutionary tendencies.²

If Renaissance Italy is the paradigm for how rulers amass power and keep it, Enlightenment France provides suggestions for obtaining relief from the suppression of dissent via the judicial process, as practiced

during the reign of the last of the Bourbons.³

It is clear that democracies in general, and the United States in particular, in the two hundred years since the French Revolution have continued a variation of the classic theme put forth by Louis XV: “Public order in its entirety emanates from me” (Roche, 1998, p. 330). Anyone daring to object to restrictive executive orders, then or now, risks the immediate loss of freedom or life.

But even the Bourbons eventually came to recognize, albeit too late, that ignoring pervasive social problems was often insufficient to keep the people in line, and this is where the legal process became paramount as a repressive instrument, co-opting where possible and eliminating when necessary. The history, therefore, of punishment and its techniques, and subsequently the potential for redress, must be examined, as Foucault (1995) observes, within the context of power relations among the body politic. While engaged in self-promotion, the heads of government and the elite who enjoy the quid pro quo that proximity to power brings assign social stations and devise plans to perpetuate those divisions, primarily through their public visibility and the bully pulpit. In the United States, this is perhaps more easily accomplished because of the heterogeneous nature of that society.

The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States begins, “We the people . . .,” but “the people” no longer has the unifying power it once did because it lacks taxonomic precision, especially given the polarized nature of current society. Who are “the people” to Republicans, the controlling party in the United States now? They clearly do not include the poor, immigrants (legal or illegal), African Americans, organized labor, gays,

those who favor abortion rights, and certainly not those who appear in arrest statistics. America’s population is amorphous and shifting and therefore easy to divide, subdue, and subsequently imprison or deport when necessary to score political points or advance a particular vested interest. American politicians constantly proclaim the sovereignty of “the people,” but outside political theory, there is no evidence for such a claim because a scrupulous definition of the people is impossible—with one major subset serving as counter-example.

Even in the debacle of the last presidential election, one issue stood out clearly. “The people” being addressed by every Republican candidate, and most vigorously by Donald Trump, excluded over eleven million people, those undocumented immigrants living and working in the United States. Their disenfranchised and exclusion was possible because those in power control the ability to define citizenship. By using his influence to create a common enemy whose mere presence in the community, or whose perceived presence, can be manipulated to frighten or coerce, candidate Trump drew attention away from other, more substantive issues that might prove embarrassing: his personal wealth and tax returns, his business practices, and his plans to increase the national debt, for example.

There is thus created a cultural as well as a legal divide, just as it was under the Bourbons when the nascent revolution produced “criminals” that devolved from being a part of the people to “rabble.” Roche (1998) explains the process: “The history of judicial procedures . . . parallels the political theory of the [government] as perceived through legal discourse, whose purpose was to assign people accused and convicted of crimes a place in

³ We do not excuse the mass executions during the Terror, initiated by Robespierre, Marat, and the other Jacobins. For the purposes of this essay, we distinguish between the bloody excesses of a revolutionary council and a centralized government intent on perpetuating its power and influence.

² Such a political stance carries great risks because the philosophical pendulum does swing, although given the constant movement to the right over the last thirty years, one has to wonder at its extended period.

the sociopolitical sphere,” whose membership consisted of those the government accused of having “no conception of time, work, or money” (p. 307, 328).

In what appears to be a major paradox, however, social unrest and criminalized behavior can play a valued role in capitalist societies. Here is Bernard Mandeville’s (1973) voice from 1715:

I shall be asked what benefit the public receives from thieves and housebreakers. They are, I own, very pernicious to human society, and every government ought to take all imaginable care to root them out and destroy them; yet if all people were strictly honest, and nobody would meddle with or pry into anything but his own, half the smiths of the nation would want employment; and abundance of workmanship (which now serves for ornaments as well as defence) is to be seen everywhere both in town and country that would never have been thought of, but to secure us against the attempts of pilferers and robbers” (p. 2033).

The state thus accomplishes a dual purpose by condemning its malefactors on the one hand and rating their existence for economic reasons on the other. That is, social unrest can benefit those in power, who will therefore be expected to encourage more of it via unilateral policies such as executive orders.

The assignment of this sociopolitical status takes many forms. Politicians, for example, can always run on anticrime platforms, even in districts whose felony rates rival the Vatican’s. By creating pariahs out of undocumented immigrants, representatives convince their constituents that their plan is the best for preserving their security and eliminating the scourges of street crime

and job loss from otherwise respectable neighborhoods. The entertainment industry plays a significant role by pandering to the public’s vicarious need for excitement. Thus, we have the action heroes who always conquer the bad guys—never without buckets of gore—and the advent of real TV, featuring police chases and shoot-outs. Many police “reality shows” follow patrolmen or SWAT teams on actual operations, helping perpetuate the erroneous belief that crime is epidemic just outside the viewers’ living rooms.

Society is thus “educated” about the need for more social control and the nature of the men and women arrested and deported, and it matters not to the decision makers that the education is inaccurate or incomplete. Indeed, a demonstrably erroneous education, like Plato’s famous parable of the cave, in which captive audiences equate shadows with reality (Rouse, 1984, p. 312), often replenishes the public trough more effectively. Once the citizens become convinced that more restrictive laws are the sine qua non for maintaining their safety, they obediently follow their representatives’ orchestration and vote for the plethora of specious remedies (walls and travel bans) that constitute today’s Western society’s turn to the alt-right..

This pattern of thought control is reiterated throughout history. In 1780, the Academy of Berlin posed the philosophical question whether it was useful to the state to deceive the people. The responses garnered from academics and social theorists were divided (Roche, 1998). Clearly today, the education of the people, as it was in eighteenth-century France, “must be contained within useful boundaries and designed not so much to liberate the lower classes as to make them more efficient economically and more docile socially” (Roche, 1998, p. 340), which

naturally facilitates the government’s ability to disenfranchise them when that option becomes attractive. Returning briefly to Machiavelli (1992), he proclaimed that a prince had no moral obligation to keep faith with his people and should lie to them as necessity demanded. The modern example is, of course, Donald Trump, whose temerity includes viewing videos of himself saying one thing and denying that he said it immediately afterward. As for the acquiescent majority, the fear of violence legitimizes government intervention; thus, the public’s perception plays a powerful role and is manipulated by the state and vested interests, precisely as Dostoyevsky (1980) described: “[W]e consider the veriest lies as truth and demand the same lies from others” (p. 318).

If, then, education is how the Western state justifies its policies, only a countervailing campaign of education, led by a free and open press, and a new conception of the economy of power, will enable citizens to recognize the tactic and come to understand the actual relationship between the state’s desire to control and the social policies implemented to promote that end. If Plato was right and antisocial behavior is the direct result of “lack of education and bad nurture and a bad constitution of the state” (Rouse, 1984, p. 350-351), what is evidently needed is a coherent plan to reeducate the citizens, those still retaining the political will to do something, whose united voice will in turn lead to an improvement, albeit a coerced one, in the constitution of the state, one in which a moral imperative will supersede the current existential one. The dilemma of course is whether to reform society first and then the political system or vice versa, and here again is where eighteenth-century France provides a guide.

At the end of the Ancien Regime, public opinion turned against the excesses and

4 Emile Zola, of course, continued this tradition with his famous defense of Dreyfus.

failures of the existing system. Indignation was aroused by a new literary genre, the essay on the cause célèbre,⁴ which brought to reports of tragic criminal cases a new style of writing quite different from that of traditional “gallows literature,” with its obdurate, moralistic attitude rooted in Calvinist theology. Some thinkers urged overturning the entire judicial system and replacing it with one based on the concepts of individual freedom, personal responsibility, and rationalism (Roche, 1998), but such a path seems unlikely today, at least in the United States. The hard-liners are too deeply entrenched with solid control over the White House and Congress to be vulnerable to wholesale deconstruction. The focus therefore must be on society itself, its attitudes and its tendency to accept uncritically claims by the state and interested parties.

This traditionally has required cases of governmental abuse with which the public could identify, cases that did not destroy the peoples’ confidence in the principles of law but produced a serious examination of the entire system and its procedures. The logical leap into the twenty-first century dictates that the same type of excesses and failures in Enlightenment France should produce similar reactions among contemporary populations. Sadly, even the most egregious acts and pronouncements have done little to incite public outrage for more than a sound bite on the evening news. None of these has produced more than a whisper of dissent and that quickly dispersed by the President’s assurances that such incidents are mere creations of “fake news” outlets, or, more frighteningly, necessary responses to imminent threats. A large segment of the population continues to think that they are immune from such tactics; thus, there is no easy way to couple their interests and those of their elected

representatives. The emperor is wearing no clothes, but no one seems to care. Such is the power of the government to define and perpetuate social roles, and voices from the past remind us of the longevity of that power and the entrenched positions of those who wield it.

By now, it will be clear that no change of consciousness by those in power in Western democracies, and specifically in the United States, will be forthcoming. Friere's and Marx's optimism is therefore utterly misplaced, at least with respect to those political systems. The burgeoning United States did not convince the British that oppressive laws and an army of occupation should be withdrawn by appealing to their sense of fair play. Neither did Mohandas Gandhi eject the British from India by raising their collective consciousness above the traditional colonial stage. And Slobodan Milosevic certainly did not abdicate because his consciousness had been raised after attempting to extirpate the Muslim populations of Bosnia and Kosovo. In each case, the price for maintaining the status quo became too expensive to pay following the discovery by the civilian populations that change was up to them to effect. Only after such an epiphany can a similar modification evolve to address the crisis in this country and other Western democracies, and it must be a bottom-up movement.

The Civil Rights Movement required "Bloody Sunday" at the Edmund Pettus Bridge on the march to Selma to mobilize popular opinion against the injustices of segregation, but demonstrations against the election and policies of Donald Trump, for example, continue to alienate thirty-five percent of the public instead of recruiting them because of the perception inculcated by government representatives. A cadre of modern Voltaires and Hugos would hardly suffice to rectify such an intense disinformation campaign, but voices must be raised in the attempt. Recall

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s eloquence from the Birmingham jail and his actions that galvanized a nation that had grown complacent until Bull Connor's police and dogs made confrontation with their own consciences inevitable. Expect that same kind of confrontation from the new administration.

Organizations are in place today that can move society toward a more progressive view, who force participants to confront their policies in town hall meetings and on the open pages of newspapers. Continued criticism by journalists, academics and enlightened members of the judiciary, whose voices can eventually make a difference, are also needed. Only when the scare tactics of the politicians and the ambivalence of the electorate are overcome, as they were in Enlightenment France, only when society recognizes that the current path presents a danger, both fiscal and moral, to its own well-being can the monster of social and economic discrimination be tamed and true reform become a reality instead of a dim hope.

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EVENING

Casey Chiappetta



WHERE DO YOU FIND YOURSELF?

Callen Creeden

If life can be a dream
It can also be a nightmare.

Here's one that will disturb your sleep:

You find yourself in the back of a car.
It's not the ride that costs, it's your time.
It's your first offence
It was an unarmed carjacking
You are a minor.
You are sure to get off easy.

What's easy?

Was it worth it?
In the end it was your choice. You chose to jack that car, and end up in the back seat of that car.

You find yourself on a bench.
You're behind your public defender in the courtroom.
Two years have gone by.
You haven't yet been convicted but now you are 18
You are an adult and tried as such
Now they are asking you to pay.
Big league. Or bigly, to quote our esteemed president.
You pay 6 years, 52,416 hours, 3,144,960 minutes behind bars.

Not so easy.
Was it worth it?
In the end you took a plea to get your time down, which was your choice. You chose to plea guilty because your public defender suggested it to you.

You find yourself on a cold, hard chair with a rigid back.
This is where you've eaten every meal for the past few years.
Maybe it's not the same chair, as you've been moved around a lot, but cold and hard, for sure.
You see a meal in front of you; its grey, green, orange and brown.
A deal at 2 bucks, if you don't have to eat it.

You see mayhem all around you; you try to stay out of it.
You don't have many friends; you're mostly just friendly;
You are just trying to do your time and get out.
You eat this bargain meal alone.
Was it worth it?
At the end of the day it was your choice, you chose to eat alone.
You find yourself on a mattress, musty
Aromatic with human decay.
Nowhere else to go.
It feels like you can't move at all

You feel like you can't stand up straight,
go ahead try, you won't be able to.
You feel like you can't stretch your arms because they will touch the walls, go ahead try, you won't be able to.
You are in the hole at least once a year.
The longest you spent down there at one point was 4 months, around 2,688 hours, 161,280 minutes, give or take a few for the hour of rec time you get each day.
It was to protect you, they say
You did something wrong, they say
Was it worth it?

At the end of the day it was your choice. It was your actions that ended you up in the hole every year.

You find yourself on a window seat in the back of a Greyhound Bus, hightailing it down the highway.
Looking out the window you see the big, gray, dead, cement building you chose to spend 6 years of your life in.
Personal items in hand, the same clothing you had on your back when you got to that God Forsaken building.
Was it worth it?
At the end of the day it was your choice to spend your time there, you chose not to get out on parole those two times.
In a manner of speaking. Justice speak.

You find yourself in a chair across from a manager's desk
two piercing eyes looking back at you.
You're nervous; a few beads of sweat form on your forehead.
You got the interview because your application looked promising on paper, don't stress.
Those piercing eyes are full of judgment; you see them not looking at your eyes but right next to your right eye as you talk.
Those eyes are looking at the tattoo you got when you were in prison.
You talk but all those eyes see are a prisoner.
Inked up, a little menacing, really.
The question finally comes, "Have you ever been convicted of a crime?"
You smile nervously.
You say "yes" and then quickly try to explain why you still deserve this job.
You trip over your words as you explain how you have changed, and how you are no longer a prisoner, you did your time and you are ready to work hard.
You say the past is in the past and you are changed.
You say you work hard every day to be better.
Those eyes stopped listening right after "yes."
Was it worth it?
At the end of the day it was your choice, you chose to get that tattoo.

You find yourself sitting in countless chairs across from a manager's desk.
Those same two dead eyes looking right back at you.

TO BE PRINTED, HELVETICA ON FLESH

Emily Pullen

They all stop listening when they hear that one word, “yes.”

Was it worth it?

Stop asking,

You are no longer sitting, you are standing.

You say:

Stop asking if I was in prison,

Stop assuming that because I was I still am

I am not, I am a free man

I did my time.

I did too much time.

I choose not to end back up in that big gray, dead, cement building.

I choose to live.

I choose to keep at it until those eyes see remorse

Until those eyes see a reformed man who is willing to work hard.

Yes, I was cheated.

Yes, the system saw the color of my skin

They did not see my first offence.

They did not see my 16-year-old face—they chose to see me as an adult.

But that was your choice

You choose to see me

Through a glass darkly, very darkly

If those eyes stop listening after I say “yes”

Then I choose not to work for you.

I know my past

I also know my future

I choose to live

Ask me again if it was worth it.

Was it worth it?

No way.

Not knowing what I know now.

But then?

Can't say.

Still can't say.

Still, I choose to accept my past and move to the future.

I have a drive to be different.

I choose to break free from the chains that you keeping me in when you stop listening after “yes.”

In

First,

You see their crooked smile.

The gaps in their rotting teeth are the ivory cages
holding back all of the poisonous curses
that you never read about in fairy tales.

You wonder how they sleep at night.

Second,

You see the tattoos carved on their knuckles
and countless tally marks of days dripping on the brick.

You ask yourself who could live like this, with
noon bleeding into night and skin bleeding into sentiment,
and you can only gawk at this gruesome masterpiece.

Third,

You hardly even notice their clothes,
because this fashion week's theme ain't weak.

You instead stare at the mask on their face
and the patchwork wrist sewn together with stitches.
You wonder if this trend is couture or culture.

Fourth,

You ask aloud why they're so hot-headed
and why the temperature of temperament
can't be so easily conditioned.

This explosion of torrid tango withers and spirals,
with furious fumes quiver in the untamable wake.

Fifth,

You stay far far away.

The drive is long and the gates are unsightly.
Yet every wrinkle of space between your sky and theirs
is merely an optical illusion, a cruel trick of comfort
assuring you that you don't exist in the same universe.

Out

First,

they pluck the pillow where you rest your head
and then they extract your back molars.
This tooth fairy will pry out your teeth, one by one,
Showing you the bloody roots and reminding you
that they were never yours to begin with.

Second,

they strip your walls of their art:
the drawings your kids made for you in pre-school
and the rug that belonged to your mother.
they steal it for themselves and call it a burden,
criminalizing the hieroglyphics you etch in the void.

Third,

they throw your clothes out the window
like a scorn ex scattering to remove the stain of memory.
they toss the sweater you wore on your first date
and they shred your favorite pair of jeans.
You'll no longer recognize the threads of your own body.

Fourth,

they turn the heat all the way up
until your breath is unbearable and your eyes strain
to see the metallic sheen of that wretched stench.
they watch you shrivel up on the hard inferno ground
And don't you dare look parched.

Fifth,

they build the walls around your limp and naked body—
privatizing your autonomy and automating your privacy.
With just a handful of bars, you're theirs to keep.
After all, you're less than human when
you've been reduced to cells from the start.

REVISITING NONTHOK AND RAWANA

Rose Atichattumrong



Both of these characters are from the most influential Thai epic, Ramakien. It is a Thai appropriation of India's Ramayana folk epic. Nonthok is a minor figure in Ramakien, but he is arguably the source of the conflict that drives the whole story. Nonthok is an asura, a character that represents the evil, who serves as a person to wash the feet of devas of the angels at the foot of the stairs leading to paradise. The devas harass and bully Nonthok by slapping his face and pull

his hair until he becomes bald. Nonthok, whose circumstance is similar to that of a slave, cannot fight back. So he goes to ask for help from Shiva, the supreme God in heaven. Shiva sees that Nonthok serves him faithfully for a long time and grants him a diamond finger which can kill the enemies when pointed at them. When Nonthok returns to his work, he uses his lethal finger to kill countless devas who bully him. Shiva hear of this story and send Vishnu to subdue him. Before Vishnu kills Nonthok, Nonthok rebukes Vishnu for playing unfair because Vishnu has four hands while he only has two. He sneers that the god is not brave enough to fight face to face. Vishnu retorts that he will have him reborn as a ten-faced asura with twenty arms named Rawana. He will be reborn as his rival, in a form of a common human named Rama. From there, the story of Ramakien begins.

The inspiration to use the characters from the national epic is not from myself, but from an artist Jirapat Tatsanasomboon. He uses Nonthok's story to critique on the social political issues that can be interpreted in Thai context or in the global setting. Being one of his audience, I feel that the story of Nonthok resonates that of the disadvantaged in America especially those in the criminal justice system: the African Americans, the economically disadvantaged, etc. The character that I paint resembles the characteristics of both Nonthok and Rawana. He's bald-headed with a face like Nonthok, but the color green of his body is that of Rawana. I would like the audience to rethink if Rawana, the evil character, deserves the reputation to be the king of evil. If one know that story before he became Rawana, s/he sees that he was abused and disadvantaged slave in the heaven. This story of Rawana reminds me of the story of most violent offenders in the United States. I would like the audience to question the same as you would to Rawana to those in the criminal justice system. Many have faced violence regularly in a domestic settings. 50% of juveniles in the justice system have been abused themselves. 80% of girls facing life without parole sentence have been sexually abused. Knowing that this kind of story is in the epic present thousands years ago, the discrimination against the disadvantaged is surprisingly not that modern. Besides, the face of the character that I paint has some elements of the mask that Thai dancers use to perform Ramakien in a style called 'Khon.' The mask that I paint is not worn, but merged and fabricated into the character's skin. This shows the stigma that society gives to the inmates and ex-convicted. The stigma becomes a part of their identity like the mask becomes a part of my character. In the painting, I show the muscles on the chest, neck, and shoulder to shows that this character is still a human being with real flesh and blood but the only difference is his face is merged with the mask.

Nonthok and Rawana were born in an asura class. Those born in this class is inherited with the evil. They are not gods and cannot become one. They have the world of their own, though inferior to the gods in the eyes of the audience. I would like the audience to ask, again, whether the people in the criminal justice system were actually born with mobility. Can they actually choose who they will become? Can they really change their situations? First, we should destigmatize the stigma put on inmates and others in the criminal justice system that they are bad and non rehabilitable. I believe that care and help start from putting oneself in other's shoes. Therefore, like how we try to understand Nonthok and Rawana personally, we should try to understand the personal story behind each inmate also because they are the real human beings that suffer from all issues we have discussed about.

The Donald, or the Duck?

The restrained, imperious smile,
shoulders hunched,
The stalking walk, the pursed
lips tell all.
The tyrant glares, ignoring his
sycophants and toadies,
Shows the mighty scrawl of
his imperious will.
But the little eyes are the tell,
searching, searching,
Looking for the witless gape
of fawning adulation.
But this is public show, the
strutting of the cock
Beneath the sweep and droop
of improbable hair.
What must it be like to be alone,
without the necessary audience?
Must there be mirrors in which
to be admired?
Or will any shiny object do to
reflect his superficial majesty?
And are the mirrors curved and
twisted to distort the image
So as to show him off to his own
admiring gaze,
A handsome, balanced,
symmetrical hero,
And not the freak we see?

THE DONALD, OR THE DUCK?

Wm. Fauxresst

The restrained, imperious smile,
shoulders hunched,
The stalking walk, the pursed
lips tell all.
The tyrant glares, ignoring his
sycophants and toadies,
Shows the mighty scrawl of
his imperious will.
But the little eyes are the tell,
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admiring gaze
A handsome, balanced,
symmetrical hero,
And not the freak we see?



OFFICER

Casey Chiappetta

PROLOGUE

Tashell Mitchell

It's rare that I share my journey with my two incarcerated parents for it's dark, difficult, and can hardly be articulated but this is my attempt. This is me giving life to thoughts that I had drown out awhile ago. In hell or in jail is an open letter of sorts, exploring my ideas about my father and how they have warped and transformed over time. The second piece is an embellished version of one of the first conversations I had with him, which was more or less just me reacting to a bunch of empty promises.

Mother Dearest is an abrupt shift to my mom, and while our relationship wasn't and isn't anything like that with my father, my hope is that my word choice shows the push and pull she and I encounter. It's crazy because my father sold the stuff my mom used, and so, perhaps I feel more connected or obligated to take care of her. Who knows? But the title should be a bit of a double entendre. I often see myself as more of the mother, so it's almost an ode to me.

Round and Round is a strange combination of the two. It's a memory and a present conversation even, but the eerie switch to examining the criminal justice system as a whole is intentional. As messed up as the two of them are, the system is that much more broken. So here I am as a consumer, a receiver, of a product that was shipped away for correction and damage control, and what I get back is just as bad or worse than what I sent off. And so it's a cycle. I keep getting the two of them back, and collectively, we are tasked with welcoming (almost) all inmates back after a long stay in some place that promised to help. It really begs us to ask whether or not our purposes of punishment align with the reality of incarceration. Those of us that care give a lot of voice to inmates, and rightfully so, but have this as an insider gift to the thoughts of someone living in the aftermath of both parents who have spent 80 percent of her life incarcerated.

IN HELL OR IN JAIL

When you left it was like the world opened up
And said goodbye
Before I had even sat my things down
I wrote letters to god and they all came back void
And there I was with all my dolls and damns
I couldn't figure out for the life of me why you chose to leave
I couldn't figure out what had gone so wrong
Who hurt you
Who turned your wine into rind
Who took something so sweet and gave you the seeds
And even if they did, it wasn't me
So why would you bring me here and leave
Eighteen years, sir, is a lifetime of laughs and go to hells and teach me hit the ball well
All of those came and went by another name
But I am not the first and can imagine there will never be a last
But there's a special place right next to god for girls like me
Who grow up needing dogs like you
You were supposed to give me all the cattle on the hill
Yet all you had was a cell
A cell with another man you call friend and
Perhaps my picture hanging with some tape too tired to stick
Jails and cells and glass windows and
anything but sheer tops all hold a familiar spot in my heart
The place you won't know
but here we are
Eighteen have come and gone and the air you inhale is alive and now
I want no part in knowing your name

CONVERSING WITH THE MAN YOU NEVER MET

Hi, how have you been
It's hard to start this because I barely know your name and
When I left you were small and so new
But what a beauty you've become, you look just like me
Wait, wait, wait,
I know I hurt you but there were some things I had to do
And I'm older now
Enough about me, though, let's talk about you
And how you've changed, and how you've grown, and who you are because I don't know any of that
I missed it
Why didn't you ever write me
Didn't your mama tell you about me
I screwed up but I've always loved you
Even when I didn't call and I was a free man and I never made an attempt to see you though your
grandma's address never changed
I know all that
But I love you
When I get out
When I get out
When I get out
Things will be different
Don't you wanna know your pops?
I don't deserve you being so cold, can't you show me a little love?
Well, say something
Come on
Tashell.
So that's how you feel?
That's alright cuz when I get out

MOTHER DEAREST

You aren't just like your mama
Your words don't cut that
deep, your heart doesn't go
that far, your hair doesn't flip
across your face when you
get angry
You were loved but you don't
love
You love you and the
mischievous you make and the
memories you glance back at
And we, we are the ones who
pick up your tab after your
big hooray
I am footing a bill I can't
afford
For a party I didn't attend, for
some food I can't even
swallow
I like your mother
She is sweet and when she
combs my hair, I am
reminded that god may very
well be a black woman with
soft breasts and one gold
tooth
I'm asking you the same
question I asked him, who
hurt you
Who hollowed out so much
space for you to run and
destroy yourself
I missed you and I wrote
letters and each time the
pastor asked,
It was your name I called
I whispered little prayers for
you
To get well
To let those demons go
To get you back
And I did
I got you back for little
moments
But what you needed in your
veins wasn't me
I couldn't fill what you
needed to feel
So each time you came back
small and sunken
We'd nurse you back to
health, fatten you up again
Keep you in the stables until
it was your time to return to
the rodeo
And boy, did you ride
I'm sure they yelled your
name, and with every roar
you went
A little higher
A little faster
Until boom

Now here you are sitting
naked in the back of my
aunt's suburban
And do you even know your
name?
Do you know that we busted
down doors to get to you
And in a place like camden,
that is uncommon
Those men train their dogs to
kill
Those guns fire real shots
So when they say "I'd take a
bullet for you"
I wonder if you know that we
almost did
Did you know that while you
were up in outer space the
rest of us stayed here?
And cleaned you up
And called every center in
the state to find a bed for you
Just to see you sleep well
And to rest
Even though you had no
reason to be tired
Your mother was a mother to
me
And now I'm stuck doing the
same, mother

ROUND AND ROUND

Mother, father
I trace the words
To an old prayer everyday in hopes that
I don't end up like them
They've missed so much
To be reformed?
They haven't repented, their ways are still
wicked
And i'm left to believe that this system, this
cycle can't hold us
It doesn't work in the ways we'd like
Broken boys are sent there and they return with
half the heart they left with
They were empty and hollow before
And now you find bones, bare, bare bones
But once they leave, who do we have to keep the
lights on
Black boys crafted this world with their hands
We've given ourselves as sacrifices for a
country that can't even call us by name
So when you tell me to say goodbye for the next
ten years
What am I to think

I know
You want me to believe that you'll return them
to me better than before
That you'll restore all of those missing pieces
but
You didn't
You don't
You've taken and dissected every piece under a
microscope but
You still got it wrong
A misdiagnosis of sorts
For the broken boys that leave come back
With hurts and mad at the worlds and the
difference is
Those boys soon turn into men

BIOS

ZADIE ADAMS is an undergraduate student studying Justice and Law, focusing in Criminal Justice, at American University. She is a member on Air Force ROTC and recently was initiated as a member of the honorary Arnold Air Society. Writing, specifically poetry, has always been a passion of hers. Upon coming to American University, she has been striving to use that passion to generate social justice reform. The piece she contributed to BleakHouse Review entails her interpretation and examinations of the pieces engaged in Dr. Robert Johnson's, "Violence and Institutions" class. Further, the piece aims to shine light on different perspectives of those who have fallen victim to the criminal justice system.

ROSE ATICHATTUMRONG is an undergraduate student at American University. She pursues double majors in Justice and Law and Studio Arts. In Thailand, her home country, she has interned at the Thai Department of Juvenile Justice. She has also volunteered as a teacher for children awaiting their adjudicatory hearings in a remand home.

CASEY CHIAPPETTA is a Master's student studying Justice and Public Policy at American University. She recently graduated summa cum laude from American University with a BA in sociology, and received the prestigious Award for Outstanding Scholarship at the Undergraduate Level, an award conferred on only two graduating seniors each year. In 2015, she was the lead author, with Dr. Robert Johnson, of a peer-reviewed article in an international journal detailing justifications for harsh punishment in the American criminal justice system. Chiappetta is also the Chief Operating Officer of BleakHouse Publishing, where she is responsible for all matters relating to the daily operation of the press and website management. She edited and designed *BleakHouse Review*.

CALLEN CREEDEN is an undergraduate student studying political science and environmental studies at American University. He will be working with Dr. Robert Johnson as a Peer Leader in the class Harsh Justice; in which we discuss the American prison system and how it leads the world in the use of harsh punishments.

KRIS GLOVER is 31 years old and currently living in Brigantine NJ. He writes about his recovery from his addiction and mental health issues, along with how he's feeling both in the moment and about past traumas. He hopes to continue writing in the future and to have his poetry help others in a significant way. Professionally, he aspires to become a mechanic with his own shop. In his free time, he enjoys walking and running on the beach, surfing, fishing, searching for a lady, and, of course, writing.

CHARLES HUCKELBERRY is a writer and a poet. His work has been featured in publications such as *The Touchstone*, *Tacenda*, and *Bleakhouse Review*. He is a senior consulting editor for BleakHouse Publishing, whose offices are in American University in Washington, DC. He serves as the associate editor of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, a peer-reviewed criminal justice journal, to which he is also a frequent contributor, published by the University of Ottawa. He has two books of poetry, *Tales of the Purple Penguin* and *Distant Thunder*.

ROBERT JOHNSON is a professor of Justice, Law, and Society at American University and a

widely published author of fiction and nonfiction dealing with crime and punishment. His short story, "The Practice of Killing," won the Wild Violet Fiction Contest in 2003. Several of his works have been adapted for the stage. His best known work of social science, *Death Work: A Study of the Modern Execution Process*, won the Outstanding Book Award of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

WM. FAUXRESST is a former teacher of English and foreign language, retired naval officer, Viet Nam veteran and long-time official within the Department of Defense, father, and grandfather. Quiet but discouraged patriot, determined to speak truth to power, but wary of the roiling clouds of deception, animosity, and vengeful rapacity that now bear so ominously down upon the Republic.

TASHELL MITCHELL is a graduate of American University with a Bachelor's in Justice and Law. During her time there, she did much work surrounding marginalization of the black community. That work included an interactive study of mass incarceration, specifically within the California penal system as well as leading a group of students to New Orleans to examine the intersections of race, poverty, and education. Inspired by the shortcomings of the criminal justice system, she now teaches kindergarten at a DC Public Charter School, with the hopes of using that experience as case study grounding her future work in policy. Tashell has always believed in the power of words to transform, and bring light to dead places.

SUSAN NAGELSEN Until retirement in June 2014, Susan Nagelsen was the director of the writing program at New England College in Henniker, NH. She is a senior consulting editor for BleakHouse Publishing, whose offices are in American University in Washington, DC. She serves as the associate editor of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, a peer-reviewed criminal justice journal, to which she is also a frequent contributor, published by the University of Ottawa. Her book, *Exiled Voices: Portals of Discovery*, is a collection of writings by women and men in prisons across the country, gathered during her research and fieldwork and is used in writing curricula in a number of colleges and universities. Susan has also published short fiction, most recently in *Tacenda Literary Magazine*, *New Plains Review* (Central Oklahoma University) and *IdeaGems*. Her poem, "Standards of Decency" was recently published in *Laws*. Her two great passions in life are writing and education, each inextricably bound to the other.

EMILY PETTIT is currently the project manager of TechFreedom, a tech-policy nonprofit, where she oversees a number of responsibilities such as project management, intern management, hiring, event planning, and the Justice for Work coalition (a bipartisan movement launched by R Street on criminal justice reform that deals with issues from occupational licensing and background checks, to general reintegration). Previously, she was a campaign intern for Rand Paul's presidential campaign, a criminal and civil justice intern for the American Legislative Exchange Council, and communications intern for PR firm, FP1 strategies. Emily has excelled in each of these positions while still maintaining her status at American University as a pre-law major. Upon graduation, Emily hopes to continue her non profit work while attending law school in an effort to reshape the modern prison system.

CATE PIERSON is a former student at American University who is currently taking the year off to travel the world while planning the rest of her life (potentially). Along with drawing, Cate enjoys learning new languages and listening to podcasts in the grocery store.

EMILY PULLEN is an undergraduate student at American University working towards an interdisciplinary major in Communications, Law, Economics and Government (CLEG). Raised in Santa Fe, New Mexico, she spent her high school years working and directing a local Teen Court program, igniting her interest in criminal justice reform. This past year, she took on a social action project with the American University SPA Leadership program in order to bridge narratives of justice, organizing a year-end symposium focused on expanding empathy while working as a research intern with the Council for Court Excellence. Pullen will be spending this upcoming year studying political science and multi-media storytelling at the University of Edinburgh in efforts to understand how literacy can be used as a tool to mitigate discrepancies in power.

ROBIN WEINER is a recent graduate of American University, where she got her Bachelor's in Musical Theatre and minor in Art History. Originally from the greater Philadelphia area, Robin has a longstanding passion for the visual and performing arts. She is currently working as a freelance actress, costume designer and illustrator in the DMV area.

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