

BLEAKHOUSE REVIEW

Edited by Robert Johnson & Casey Chiappetta



A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

In this issue, readers will find a rich mix of photography, art, and fiction produced by American University students, current and former prisoners, and freelance artists. Remarkably, many of the AU students published in this issue are first year students, reflecting with originality and insight on issues raised in a Complex Problems course entitled “Harsh Justice” taught by Robert Johnson.

BleakHouse Review 2018 is edited by Robert Johnson, a professor of justice, law and criminology at American University and Casey Chiappetta, a graduate student pursuing an MS in Justice and Public Policy at American University.

Cover art by Carly Thaw

CONTENTS

poetry

- JUST TRUTHS: A COLLECTION OF POEMS** 1–3 ALEXIS McMENAMIN
A DEHUMANIZING JUSTICE SYSTEM 4 DIANA SALAZAR
HELLO WORLD 11 G. LEAKS
ONE SOLUTION 12 YEMANE CHARLES
POEMS ON THE ETHICS OF CRIME AND PUNISHMENT 13–16 SADIE KAPLAN
SOCIETAL SINS POETRY COLLECTION 27–30 DIANA ROY
DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS 37 ADRIAN HOGUE
BURN 38 LEELA NAJAFI

art

- PHOTO COLLECTION** 7–10 STEVEN BABOUN
ART COLLECTION 21–26 CARLY THAW
UNTITLED ILLUSTRATION 31 ROBIN WEINER
ILLUSTRATION 39, 40 CARLY THAW

essays

- HARSH JUSTICE: A REFLECTION ON A COLLEGE COURSE** 17, 18 ISABELLA SIMS
HARSH JUSTICE CONSIDERED 19, 20 SEAN PALMER
EFFECTS OF LINGUISTIC SOLITARY CONFINEMENT 41–44 MEGHAN BALLARD
LISTEN UP, STAND UP, ACT: A REVIEW OF PAUL BUTLER’S CHOKEHOLD 45, 46
ROBERT X. CUSH

short stories

- YARD SALE** 32–36 ROBERT JOHNSON

- BIOS** 47–49

JUST TRUTHS: A collection of poems

Alexis McMenamin

LAST STATEMENTS

Father, forgive me
Mother, I am sorry
For I have sinned.
I have caused you pain.
Im sorry.
Im sorry.
I hope that you could forgive me,
but if you don't I understand.
I hope that my death will bring you peace.
I love you.
Im not mad
Just sad
I just played the hand that life dealt me.
Look at my life and learn from it.
I'm ready to go home.
That's all I have to say Warden.
Thank you sir.

FINAL REFLECTION

its easy to forget who you are
ten years in one room
no mirrors
my face is but a distant memory
my actions blurred by time
in that room there was time to think
but not reflect
I grew separate from myself
its easy to denounce your image

they will never forget who you were
ten years on the outside
looking in
they see my face not my mind
they see a monster not a man
they think death is too sweet an escape
murder is a violent [depraved] delight
and should be met with a violent end [wretched end]

this is my final reflection
they put a needle in my arm and ask me to speak
they face me towards a large mirror and I stare
the man from my mug shot stares back
him and I lay side by side
they give me the needle because of his choice
his choice was a mistake made in a moment
both of us paralyzed by circumstance
as our bodies grow cold

ATLAS UNDONE

I stand tall
but
the weight of his glare is heavy
if
I pull my shoulders into a slouch
then
they will see I am weak

My face is stone
but
the weight of tears is heavy
if
I let tears flow free and fall like boulders
then
they will see that I am weak

I'm just a man
but
the weight of the world is on my shoulders
if
I let it crush me
then
it will be too late to fix me

JUDAS

Justice is blind
but her disciples see in black and white
in every black boy they see a super predator
in Brock Turner, and white men like him, they see reasonable doubt

Justice is blind
and her disciples have broken her scale
they now weigh money over evidence
any well paid man can provide [trump up] alternative facts under oath

Justice is blind
and her disciples have built a broken system
turning boys into men
turning conjecture into evidence

Justice is blind
and her disciples like to play god
these modern apostles give life and death
in terms and sentences

Justice is dead
crucified in the name of the law

SOLITARY

silently sitting
shrouded in solitude
smothered by sin
singularly sedentary

sadistic songs of stranger's
shrieks and screams
suffocate senses,
strangle sanity

systemic sterilization of society
subjected to Sisyphian suffering
seemingly small sacrifices
save societal sanctity

at the cost of insanity

A DEHUMANIZING JUSTICE SYSTEM

Diana Salazar

AN UNBROKEN CYCLE

Another black life
in the hands of a white man
From a master's whip
to the law man's dark gun
It's still white America

COLD DAYS AHEAD

"You're under arrest"
then there is silence until
The cold metal cuffs
steal the warmth from your waists and
dig deep into your black skin

THE TRANSITION

The urban life turned
Juveniles to predators
Stripped of their freedom
tried as adults and sentenced
to death before their first vote

LIVING IN CONFINEMENT

I have traveled to
Congo, France, and Japan while
watching my child grow
these four walls have all I want
I just need to close my eyes

REMEMBRANCE

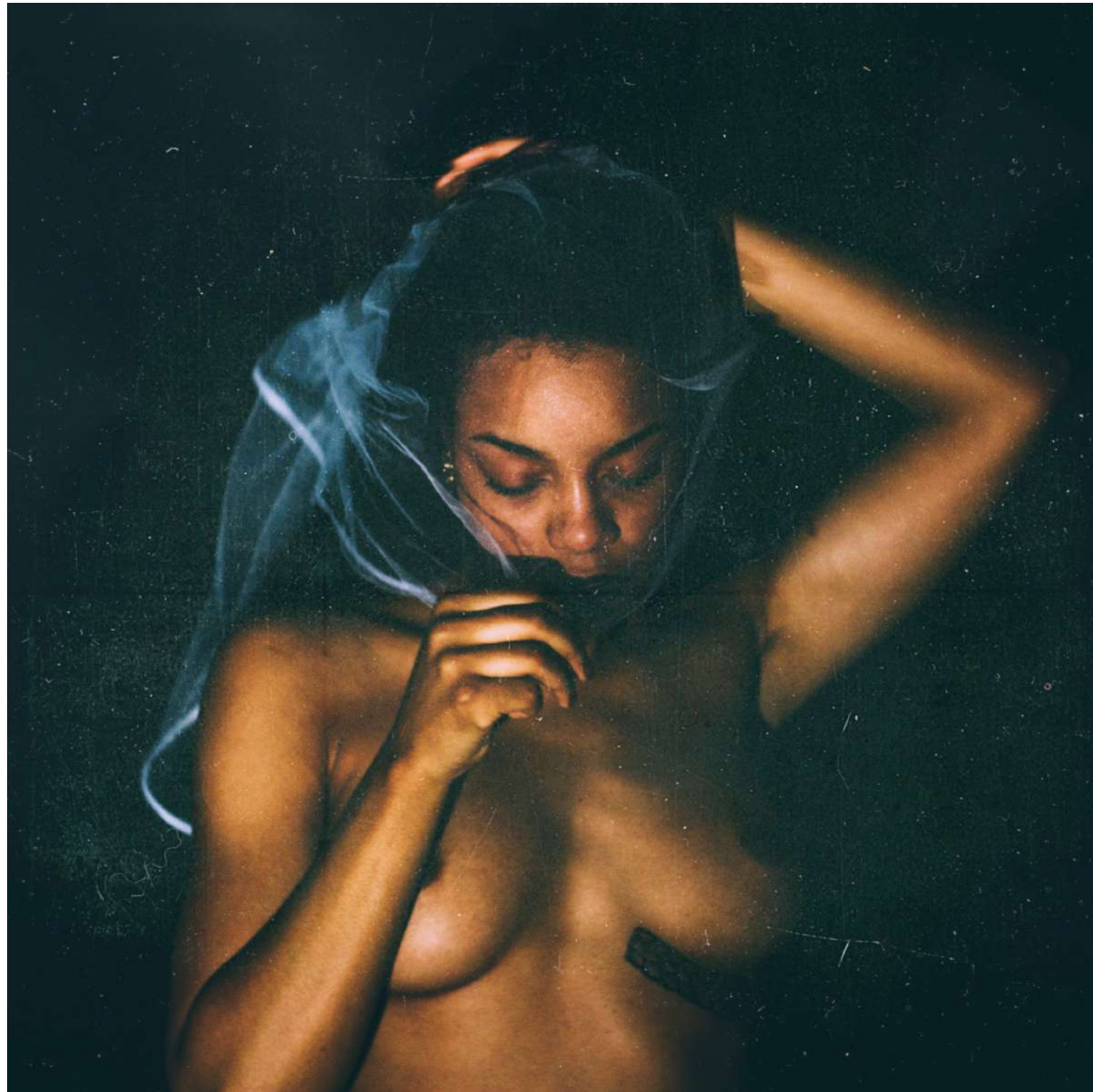
His vacant stare will
never leave your memory
years from now when you
look at his children you will
remember his final words



Li Te Di M' Vini

A PHOTO COLLECTION BY STEVEN BABOUN

My photos deal with issues of identity, religion, sexuality, and emotions all in a Haitian context. My work is aimed at understand the Haitian flesh and everything that makes me Haitian.



La Femme Est Née

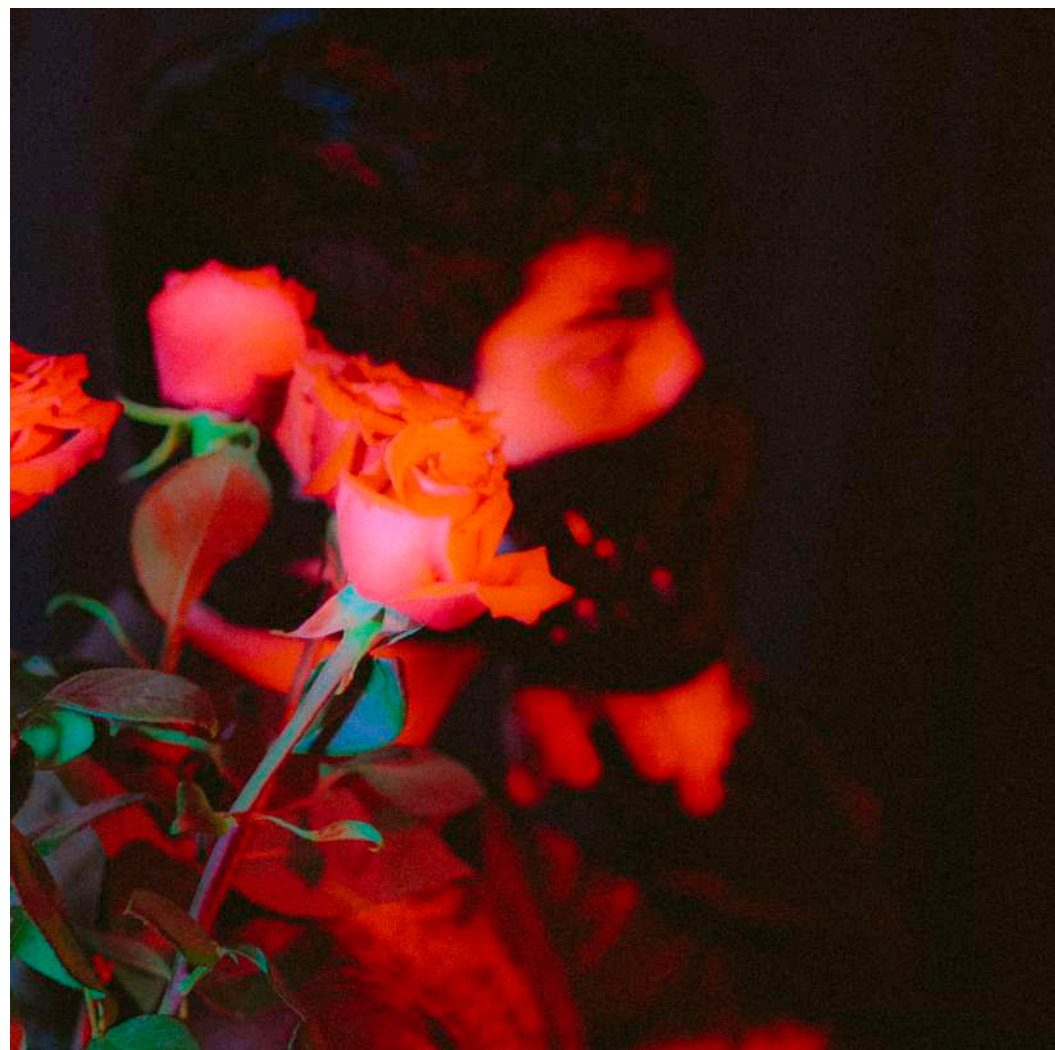
7



Men Did This

8

The Bible Says Nothing
About Identity



La Religion De Ma Jeunesse

Jean Luc

Hello World . . .
 Without further ado ;
 i present me to you
 The Fertile Concrete Vol.2
 G.Leaks . . . that's the name
 I encourage change . . .
 Majority of our minds, is shackled in chains
 Believing everything that our eyes see . . . ears hear
 Talking bout , "space is the final frontier . . ."
 Space been here , before Earth was a sphere .
 Before Earth started spinning . . .
 Before Jupiter had rings . . .
 Before Angels had wings . . .
 Before the Sun's first beam . . .
 Before everything . . . that we thought we knew . . . think we know
 when i think , it show . . . when i think , i grow
 when i grow , i go . . . when i go , i flow
 when i flow , i glow . . . when i glow . i WHOA !
 L.O.L.
 Yes i shall . . . elevate above the psychological cells
 They're proud of the crack in their bell
 If one was superstitious, that would be one hell of an omen
 What's the origin to "AMEN " ?
 Shall we continue to pretend ?
 Or do we post-2-tend ?
 I'm tending to . . . what pretending do
 Jail aint no difference that a friggin zoo
 The untamed stay locked in the friggin shu
 Majority of the inhabitants don't got a friggin clue
 Black is black . . . white is white . . . and migo is migo .
 Everyone know, that so & so's on the d-low
 or Joe Blow , works for the c.o.'s
 I'm balling without shooting ONE mutha fuckin' free throw (SWISH!)
 Why you mad, if you already know she's a freak bro?
 You knew, as soon, as you get your time ,
 that she was going to say, "peace bro"
 If she stay, 9 (1/2) times out of 10 , she'll probably creep bro
 The truth don't care, what you think though . . . nor how you feel . . . nor how you kill.
 False identities get revealed
 "Rat " is spoken fluently behind " ice grills "
 I've seen it a thousand times
 They use distractions, to defertilize minds
 NOT MINES
 G.Leaks , know how to utilize time
 I stay conditioned , by exercising my mind
 I'm in tip-top condition to be exact
 I know the hidden agenda behind " white and black "
 Open your minds as i reveal the facts
 PAY ATTENTION

HELLO WORLD

G. Leaks

ONE SOLUTION

Yemane Charles

Harsh Justice, listen and focus
 Professor Johnson speaking, take notice

First we learned about solitary confinement
 They didn't sign up for this
 Call it injustice

Black people constantly oppressed
 But the government won't confess

The crack epidemic Nixon Took Credit
 Racism said it

Mass incarceration

Shot at the train station
 Police said hands up
 He said what's up
 All I heard was Bang Bang
 Black life down the drain

Story of my life
 All we do is fight
 For what, some bullshit rights

Then let's talk about the Death Penalty
 Probably won't get it if your white or wealthy

Say you the final suspect
 Convict you of life or death
 We dont know whats next

How about lethal injection
 The state gives no love, no affection
 Better yet call it rejection

Call you a criminal, an animal Then lock up
 Society just dont give a fuck Thrown away the key
 Can't afford that bail, that fee

Like Kalief Browder
 Another black man, took away his power

Like Trayvon Martin
 Blood spilling on the street like a fountain

Like Michael Brown
 Once wore an african crown
 But it fell when the police gunned him down

Was once kings and queens
 In the media now we crack fiends

But still you remain innocent
 Have been since you was an infant
 Now the real world seem so distant

But for real black lives matter
 Without reform it gone keep getting sadder

So in conclusion
 There's only one solution
 Get rid of these oppressive institutions

Poems on the Ethics of Crime and Punishment

Sadie Kaplan

LET'S ABSOLVE OUR SINS

When did it become acceptable
To bury a life so susceptible
To trauma and to rage?

Why is it no longer egregious
To lock up a life so precious
In the pursuit of specious safety?

Who calls this the land of the free
Then determines a life to be
Unworthy of value and of liberty?

When did slaughtering become so contagious
That a country views it courageous
To take the blood of its own?

Where is the forgiveness
That's replaced by mute witness
And no hope for remission?

What do we call a nation
That dooms itself to damnation
Yet responds by conflating violence with salvation

The truth is contained behind bars.

SPOILED SUPPER

Tonight as a father prepares his child's favorite dish
From a dusted off recipe book
A prison makes poison for dinner
To be served without dessert.

The two worlds are separated only by walls
And the assumption by one that the barrier will never break down.

WHAT I MISS

The taste of Port Salut Cheese as it hits the tip of my tongue
Being with my people and knowing that they're all mine
Getting my hands dirty in a garden and creating something beautiful
The vivid scenery and the scent of the earth
Taking a bath with lemon oil in it
Natural materials like wood and cotton
The excitement of finding that perfect pair of blue jeans
Having more than thirteen books
Bras that fit
Cooking a proper meal
Running around in snow up to my knees
Eating dinner outside on the deck
Listening to frogs prance along the grass
Being with my children

It's sad to me,
but also kind of beautiful
that what I long for most
exists on the other side
of that cold prison fence,
beckoning me to experience it all over again.

MAKING GOOD

To the fourth grade teacher who told me, "Everybody makes mistakes,"
Do you forgive me?

To the God that ensured the path to everlasting light,
Will you redeem me?

To the family that offered unconditional support,
Do you still love me?

To the relative that provided her home,
Will you still have me?

A promise is but an empty declaration
Until it is kept.

ADVICE FOR A LOST SOUL

Somewhere beyond the gaggle of people
And above the earthly crusade
Is a voice that recognizes your personhood
It is calling out your name.

Until then, try not to lose heart
In this dense and destructive madness
I understand the feeling
Of being a stranger in a strange place.

DESTRUCTIVE DAYDREAM

I closed my eyes and became the greatest version of myself
The one that walks into an unfamiliar place with grace
And rolls up her sleeves in excitement

She is about to take a sip of wine
As her floral skirt begins to blow in the wind
She chuckles and sits down in a patio chair

Her ears take note of the buzzing of the bees
And she notices the intricacies of their tiny wings
She marvels at [revels in] that which is most mundane

In calmness she sits
As she dives into the pages of her favorite book
And then her eyes perk up: She remembers.

So my eyes open too
Unwilling to face the reality
That even my greatest self

Sits in silent judgement.

TO LOVE WHERE I'M AT

You
You with a menacing look on your face
Challenged me to a life of solitary disgrace

But I
I with a life-long engagement to combat
Challenged myself to love where I'm at

Did you think I would shrivel up and disappear
Fraught with the sadness of knowing my years?

I
Determined not to end up like that
Challenged myself to love where I'm at.

Instead
I value my incarceration
To strengthen my feeble foundation
And redefine my own liberation

You
You gave me a limited path
So I'm choosing to love where I'm at.

TWO REFLECTIONS ON HARSH JUSTICE

Harsh Justice: A Reflection on a College Course

Isabella Sims

I remember signing up for the course, Harsh Justice, rather vividly. I was in my environmental science class, half asleep, and bored out of my mind. I was extremely tired of the curriculum my school had to offer, and found myself browsing the AU course page multiple times a day. On this particular day, I received an email concerning University College classes; I was amazed at how interesting the courses were, and how different it would be to be able to speak openly on such controversial topics in a classroom setting. Frantically, I took to my computer to sign up as fast as I could for my first choice: Harsh Justice. Thankfully, I was soon informed that I had been placed in my selection of choice, but I had no idea how much my opinions would change over the course of the semester. I found myself devastated by the treatment of prisoners, infuriated by botched executions, sickened by solitary confinement, and pleasantly surprised by the transformation of many ex-felons. Walking out of class on the last day though, I realized that there was one opinion of mine that hadn't changed: Harsh Justice is endlessly complex, and there is no one solution to its various issues.

When I began the semester, I thought Harsh Justice was a complex problem because society hadn't yet devised a plausible solution. By the end, I found myself coming to understand that there are in fact many solutions, but either they do not benefit everyone involved, or people are simply not willing to pursue them. In this class, I learned that prison is a very different experience depending on what penal institution you are in; some are pretty tame, others are racked by discord. The prison staff and how they choose to forge relationships with inmates has a great effect on how many hardships you endure, and to what degree they influence your time. The treatment of prisoners, both by other inmates and staff, is a complex issue because each prison is unique in its environment. A plausible solution would be to employ better trained, empathetic guards in all establishments, but because this job doesn't exactly attract philanthropists, employers have to take what they can get. Another potential solution would be to set up more cameras in prisons, but some inmates view this as a violation of their privacy rather than a provision of safety.

The issue that struck me the most in the justice system is solitary confinement. The so called logic behind its rules baffles me more and more every time I contemplate it. Why would extra time in solitary confinement ever be considered a resolution for prisoners who harm themselves in their cage? I presume the system cannot reward this "bad behavior" with things like taking inmates out of solitary and putting them in therapy, as it would encourage others to emulate these actions in hopes of getting out. I believe that there are ways to help these inmates, but the effort to implement them is scarcely available. I think if there were a way to send therapists into solitary, without removing the prisoners, the mental health of these inmates would improve exponentially. Even speaking to someone through the meal slot could be life changing for them, and I believe the ability to speak to a mental health professional could significantly lower suicide rates amongst inmates in solitary. Unfortunately, though,

solitary is designed to completely deprive inmates of human interaction and the outside world, so this method would take a total reorganization of the system. In my opinion, it would be worth the money, time, and investment, as not all inmates in solitary deserve to be there in the first place. Many of these inmates are kind and benevolent at their core; so if they clearly respect the wellbeing of others' lives, who is anyone to deprive them of respect for theirs?

Another issue surrounded by complexity is the death penalty. In fact, the one quote that stuck out to me in this class the most was: "it is not a matter of if they deserve to die, but a matter of if we have the right to kill them". Regardless of the crime, I personally despise the fact that our government has and utilizes the power to take a human life. That being said, I cannot foresee a future with the complete dismantlement of the death penalty, so for now, it is important to focus on reform within its practice. Botched executions are far too common in our system, and I believe these failures clearly violate the eighth amendment banning cruel and unusual punishment. The complexity lies in the fact that prisoners are often unable to communicate their pain, and the fact that they did not die instantly—and therefore suffered a painful, lingering death—will either not be discovered unless an autopsy is performed, or will never be discovered at all. For this reason, I think it is imperative to find a foolproof method of painless execution. For some, botched executions are clearly an urgent issue in need of resolution, but most are less concerned with the comfortable death of a murderer. The problem is difficult to resolve because people rarely regard inmates on death row as actual humans with real emotions. To those individuals, I would say: if empathy cannot compel you to search for a more humane method of execution, let the law be your moral compass. Inflicting excruciating pain on any human being is exactly the torture that the eighth amendment is supposed to protect against, so if the death penalty is justified through means of the law, shouldn't the rights of those subject to that law be protected, too?

Harsh Justice is a complex problem, I now believe, not because there are no solutions, but because there are not enough people willing to pursue solutions that recognize and build on the flawed humanity of offenders and those who run our justice system. I think the core of the problem lies in the general disregard for the lives of inmates, and secondarily, the lives of those who work in the justice system. These problems, in turn, help explain the general lack of knowledge among the public about the increasingly brutal treatment that has become the norm in our justice system. If more awareness was raised, more stories were covered, and more time put into education, the public would be appalled by the current system and push for reform. It all starts with us, the regular people at home, and it is never too late to become an advocate.

Harsh Justice Considered

Sean Palmer

If I am being completely honest, Harsh Justice was the last option I selected when I was applying to University College courses at American University. I had no idea what I would be going into with this class, and I thought that I wouldn't enjoy it a single bit when I found out it was the class I was in. I could not have been more wrong.

As we started to dive into the subject matter of the class, I began to realize that I genuinely wasn't sure how I felt about the life sentences, death sentences, solitary confinement or any other harsh sanctions common in our justice system. I hadn't thought much into it. I don't break the law, I don't go to jail, and nobody I know seems to either, so I had nothing to worry about. But as the class started to get into the subject, I started to realize I was truly intrigued with the injustices that happen within our prison system and how ugly the death penalty really is.

I came into the class asking myself how a defender could ever defend a criminal, but after a few weeks began to realize that the only thing worse than defending a criminal is prosecuting an innocent person, and that far too many innocent people were being put in jail in America. Through poetry I began to see the pain and struggles of living on death row and the fear many inmates feel. Poetry is a powerful medium for conveying emotion and humanity, and I'm not sure that our professor could have picked a better way to show students how emotional something as rigid and stoic as the justice system can be.

I learned that hardened criminals aren't always as hardened as they seem, and that many and even most are people who made mistakes or got caught up in the moment. Even some truly repulsive crimes are forgivable when you consider the circumstances they were committed under.

I began to admire the work of people like Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy*, whose monk-like devotion to his cause impresses me beyond words. I can only imagine being as devoted to a cause as him, and I think many people wish they could be struck with the same powerful passion and inspiration he was struck with. Not all people are cut out for that kind of work, but those who are deserve the highest praise our nation can offer. He is a modern champion for justice.

I learned how to spot injustice and learned how to see things from different points of view, gathering as many perspectives along the way. I started to reveal my own inner biases and my own inner thoughts and began to see where I was perpetuating many of the views of criminals that contribute to their troubled re-entry into society.

I've tasked myself with talking to pillars in my community in Grand Junction, Colorado, and have started discussing the founding of an organization that fights for justice and equality, as well as a prisoner re-entry program to help local people reintegrate into our small town society and readjust to living in the free world. Many and most of the homeless living in Mesa County are people who left jail and prison who didn't have the support systems necessary to find jobs or homes.

I have also talked with my local police department about doing a ride-along with a member of the Grand Junction police department to view the similarities and the differences between small town and big city police and how officers think of their jobs and of the people they police. I hope to gain similar

insights from the officer at GJPD as I did with Officer Allen here in DC, and hope to gather a brand new view on justice from the rural point of view, especially considering that just over a year ago the Mesa County Sheriff lost Deputy Geer to a shooting in a confrontation with a 17 year old kid, who will likely be facing a life sentence in prison for his actions.

I learned that injustice isn't a single-faceted issue and that there are many places that justice seems to falter. Injustice in the system cannot solely be attributed to any single thing or ideology, and there are many people involved being caught in a complex crossfire between the public, the incarcerated, legislators, prison staff, lawyers, and activists. Injustice is an immeasurable and unquantifiable subject, but it is absolutely one of the most important issues to discuss in America, considering our massive prison population.

I learned that the system can hurt you for the rest of your life, whether it be by disenfranchising you or by permanently leaving a black mark on otherwise perfect records, making it impossible for good people to work the jobs of their dreams because of a small stain on their record from when they were 16 years old.

I learned that I could never work as a criminal prosecutor, and that I could never live with myself knowing that I have knowingly thrown an innocent person in prison. It is hard for me to bear that other people do it in our world. That injustice can exist so readily and so plainly for some people, yet they are perfectly fine with it. I can't stand to think that there are people like Esther, a former prisoner who visited our class, whose prosecutor told her he wouldn't have done it again, still living and dying in prison if she hadn't earned release. There is no reputation worth putting innocent people through such horrid hardship, and it's something I could never do. Before entering this course I was absolutely convinced that if I ever worked in law, I would be a prosecutor, because I couldn't imagine letting a criminal go... My view on that has completely changed since taking this class.

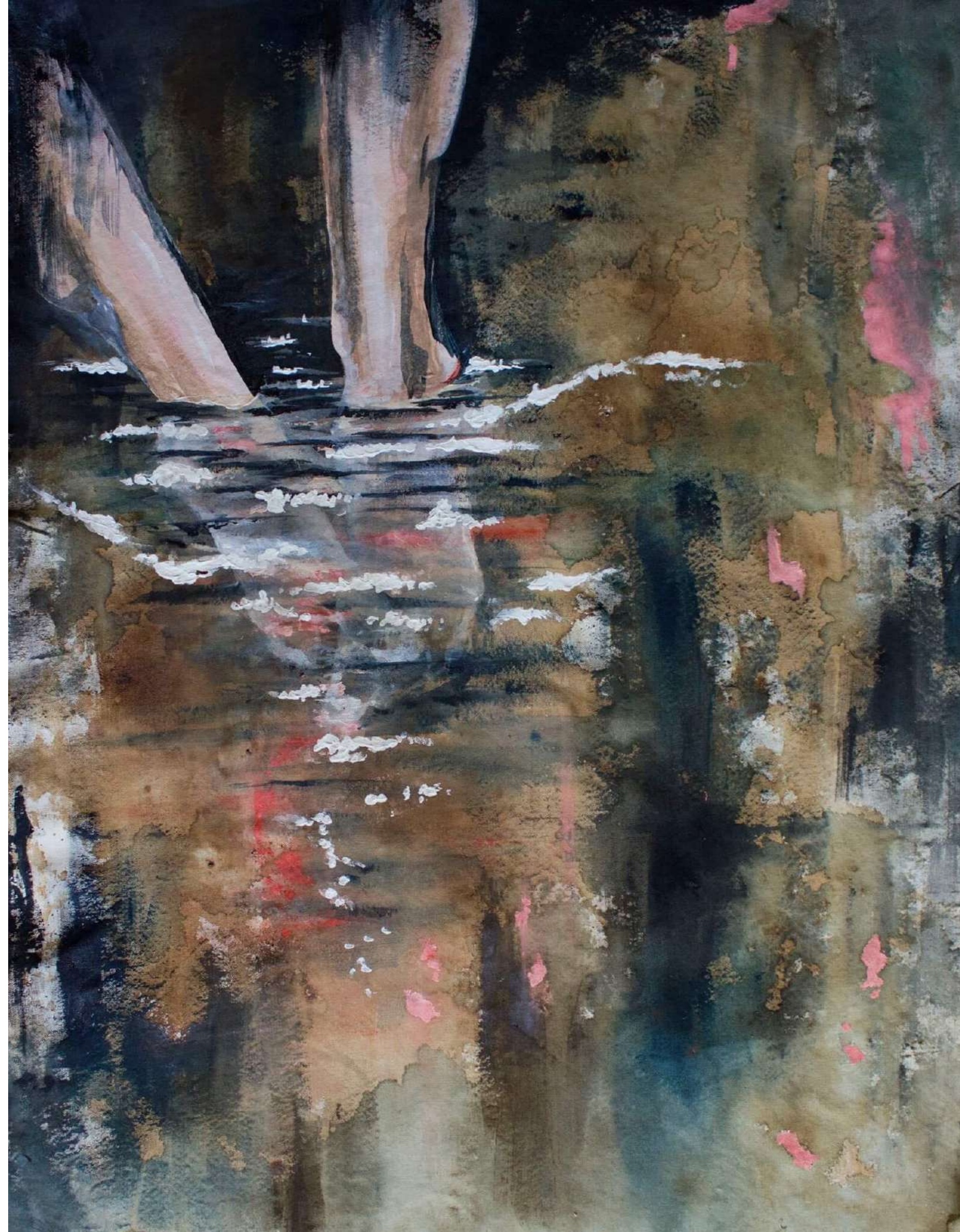
I have been reminded of the importance of art and poetry in hard times, and the power and ability of artistic expression not only as a statement for others, but as a resource for self-help. Finding purpose in what you do, whether you are in jail or not, is one of the most important things you can do. For some, purpose is helping others and fighting for justice, and I've begun to see that I find a great deal of meaning in that. Meaning is something no person should ever be deprived of, no matter how deprived they are. We can take a lot away from people, but when we take away what defines people, we take away more than we can call just.

Most importantly, I have been reminded of how important justice is in our world, and how important it is to remember that all people are human, regardless of their actions, and they must be treated as such. We have to find a better way to reform, and we must fight to reform, not punish. It is time for America to search for a better way, and I would love to be involved in finding that better way. I can't repay the change in perspective or the shift in mentality that this class has given me, so the best I can do is get involved and put it to work. The class is over, but what I gained from it will never be gone, and I can say I am genuinely grateful for that.

A COLLECTION BY CARLY THAW

In my work, I am inspired by the natural beauty of my home state of West Virginia and the experiences I have had since moving away. I like to explore the feelings of isolation I've experienced growing up in rural America, as well as the totally different isolation of culture shock that comes with moving to a city.

GOOSEBUMPS AND PRUNES





REUNION

23



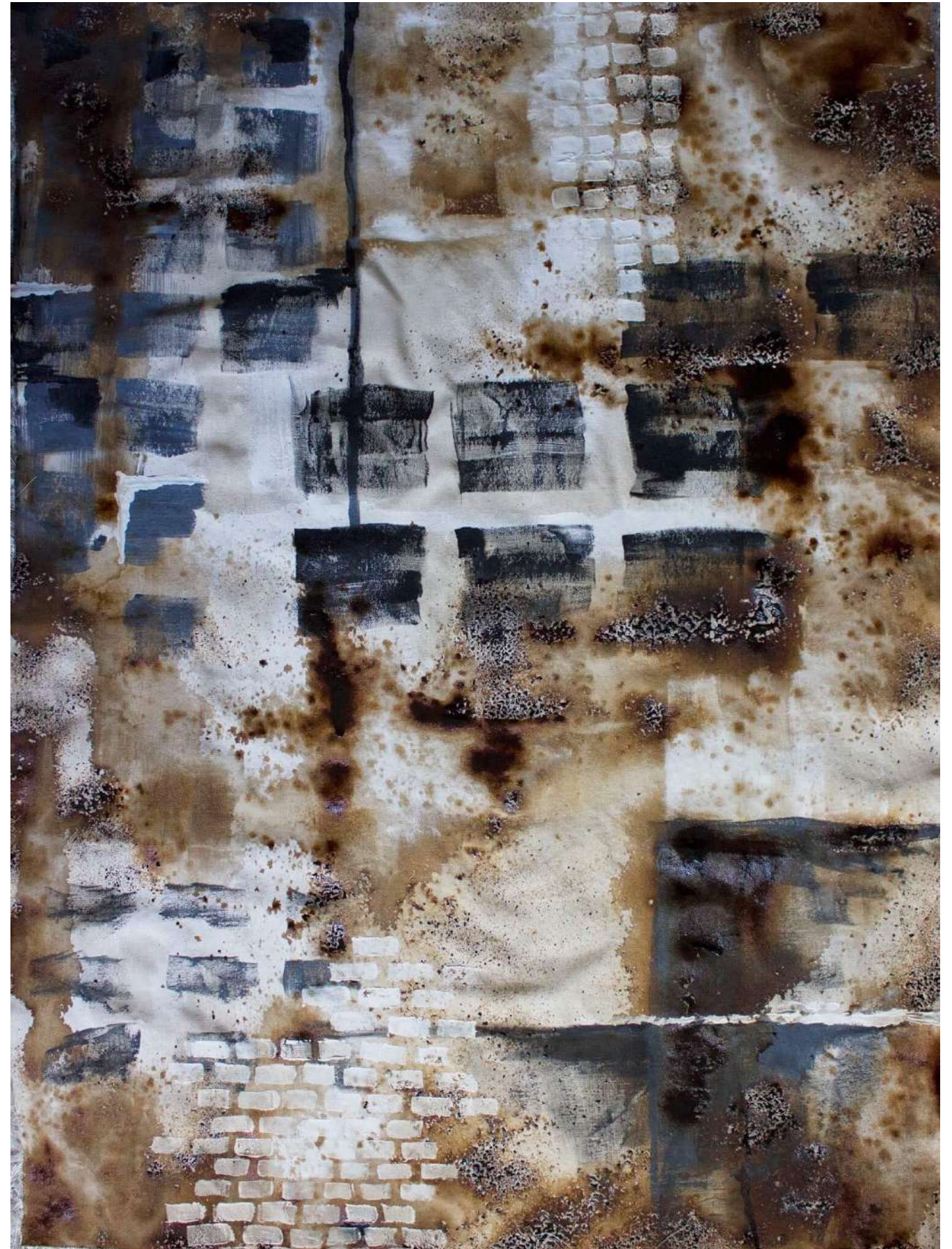
JUST OVER THERE

24



FITTING/BLENDING IN

25



WRONG DIRT

26

Societal Sins:
Poems on Crime, Punishment, Death and the Pursuit of Justice

Diana Roy

ETERNAL PARTNERSHIP

They go together like yin and yang,
One made for compassion, one built for pain.
Withdrawn and secluded, they cave under the strain,
As nothing can ease this intersection in the human brain.

Peanut butter and jelly,
Black and white.
Sitting behind barred windows,
On clear summer nights.

While one is a storm,
Bold and resistant.
The other is rain,
Soothing from a distance.

One is a wild card,
Out of control.
As seen by society,
They've broken the mold.

The latter is predictable,
The expected outcome.
Built, they do
What needs to be done.

It's inmate against prison,
In an ancient match.
One winner and loser,
Until the next batch.

A CONVICT'S CHRONICLE

Her story bled

Red
Like the blood that coated the hammer, the body, her
hands
Slowly washing away and disappearing down the drain
Alerting the world of her crime, her murder, the horror

White
Like the fresh bed sheets that were given to her in a bag
Along with new shoes, toiletries, shirts, and pants
Every item representing her departure from society

Blue
Like the uniform of the guards who brought her here
Ripping away her opportunities, her rights, her dreams
Always the ones to watch her as she wept outside

Ironic, this color play, in
The land of opportunity
The land of liberation
Stripping men and women of all that defines this nation

JUDGEMENT DAY

He slowly walks into the room
Flashes a smile, takes a seat
And pretends his heart isn't ready to explode

The board members take out his file
Greet him, look down at the notes
And ask him for the details of his crime

He pauses, lost for words
Knowing prison is just a continuation of his crime
By others means

LESS THAN FIFTEEN MINUTES

Empty.
 Alone.
 Dark.

Then it hit.

He was
gasping,
grasping,

his hands
reaching

his heart
beating

his throat
constricting

until he was
thrashing
 drowning

Endless waves of pain exploding within.

Thump.
 Thump.
 Thump.

His hands
slamming against thick constraints

His head
raising

his eyes
opening

his mouth
 gaping

his screams
 erupting

as he
searched for an escape.

Nothing. Futile. Dark.

The pain seemed
never-ending,

and it
echoed through his body

before solidifying
in his chest and holding his lungs down.

He wants to try harder, but
 his limbs are heavy

his
 skin is melting

his
 breathing has stopped,

and he can't.

Can't can't can't can't can't.

CRUMBLING FACADE

He sees his face,
In the mirror.
Cheeks damp, mind's in space.

Checks the eyes,
There are tears.
He can't unsee the scene.

Hearing is gone,
Hands are shaking.
The death took way too long.

The burning,
The screaming,
He can picture it clearly.

How is he?
Is he alive?
Yes,
But just barely.

REALITY

Hija, hermano, padre and gato
She never knew so many words existed
Within the same world as hers

Gracioso, bien, enojado and libre
Words she learned
Discussed feelings
Would she ever use them the right way?

Hola is her favorite
A happy greeting in itself
While adios is a curse
A hardened adieu

But hasta luego is cruel
A silent broken promise
To greet the others on the other side

In ten,
Twenty,
Thirty years,
When their time expires.



UNTITLED

Robin Weiner

YARD SALE

Robert Johnson

Warden William Pawlowski stood at the window of his office and looked down upon his world, his prison. Nothing quite like it in the free world, he thought. You want color, danger, an occasional pure testosterone high from fear and rage? Come to my world.

Pawlowski gazed almost fondly upon the motley crew of muggers, murderers, robbers, rapists and thieves milling about the prison yard aimlessly, or so it seemed, rubbing elbows with small-time junkies and pimped-out dealers with big-time dreams, in occasional conferences with prospective buyers, bargaining, overheard but not understood by the nut cases, men in their own orbit, on their own highs, in turn beset by folks so strange they are the crazies are conduits to the gods, think the florid hallucinations of straight-on lunatics are harbingers of things to come, signs that hold answers to their muttered, stuttered pleas for guidance, direction, relief from the chaos that envelops their days and nights in this caged world. Tattoos, big and bold and sometimes rich in color, formed a crazy quilt of sick art, rendered on human flesh, pointing the way to the various and sundry constellations on planet prison, one sadder or madder than the next. This way to gangs and girls (or a reasonable facsimile); that way to muscles with Mom or Mother inscribed on top; watch out for guns half hidden by boxer shorts, peeking out at the waist, as if in a holster, within easy reach; beware devils and goblins and serpents, medieval creatures loose on the sagging skin of bearded, ponderous, dangerous men, folk you watch out for, can't befriend. Follow the yellow brick road but don't show yellow, fellow, or it's a long, long way from Kansas to where you'll be heading, flat on your bruised and bloody face, with your rear end at the business end of some plug ugly guy's dick, a guy who might fuck you and hurt you, carve his initials in your back, mark you as his. Primitive. Primeval. Just-plain-evil. But there it is, there you are, far from home, trying to find a home on the prison range, where life is downright strange, and ain't nobody free.

That's the prison Bill Pawlowski knew, had worked for years, the real deal, he was fond of saying. Deep Water Prison, his domain, was a high-walled Big House pretty much reserved for lifers, men with long and sometimes endless stretches of hard time unfolding before them. But hobo jungle? That's what his wife had called it, a hobo jungle, and a 'charming' hobo jungle at that. Pawlowski couldn't quite get charming and prison to hang together, but his wife Mary was excited. "Let's arrange a yard sale," she'd said, "the ladies from the Bridge Club would love to get inside the prison and buy a few treasures from the prisoners." Treasures – another word alien to prison, a place of rock hard poverty and deep, aching want. Still, the idea kept bouncing around in his head.

"We call that area The Courts," he'd told his wife, pointing, "but it does look like a hobo jungle, now that you mention it."

"It certainly doesn't look like a court, dear," his wife had said, in a sweet, lilting voice, with a slight hint of Irish accent. Mary made it sound as if any sensible person would call it what it was, a jungle for criminal hobos.

Pawlowski lets it drop. He wasn't quite sure how the area got its name. The Courts were basically a collection of makeshift tents and shacks arranged in lean-to format, each big enough to hold, or at least shelter, about four or five guys, with room for cooking and even an area of surrounding territory that was used for barter. Paths zigzagged through this criminal Casbah, connecting each individual court with a network of neighboring courts. A convict might say, "Hey, man, welcome to my court." Some of the individual courts had names, like Paradise or even The Mansion. Convicts did have a sense of humor, it was one of the things that made prison work appealing. A man might welcome you to Paradise and then try to sell you a sandwich or a work of handicraft, or barter for those things from you. "What you got, my brother? What you need? Let me plant the seed? Let me feed... your hunger." The arrangement of individual courts was haphazard at best, though the men kept things clean, took pride in their little patch of prison.

Did the men 'hold court there,' act like they were free? Pawlowski pondered that for a bit. Maybe court was short for courtyard? The system went back for years. The warden couldn't remember a time without it, and he'd worked at Deep Water for some thirty years. Before that, his father and his father's father had walked the tiers. The Courts were in place at least that far back, at the turn of the 20th century. Anyway, Court sounded better than patio, that's for sure. Prison patios had an oddly effeminate ring to it. Convicts frown on effeminacy, he thought, smiling to himself.

The wife's enthusiasm had taken him by surprise. He thought Mary would be a bit frightened, maybe a bit impressed at the tough world he rode herd over. Deep Water had a grim, manly quality to it. Cons worked at doing time, finding ways to fill the day. Staff kept them under a wary eye. There was rarely trouble, but strong emotions seemed to roil just below the surface calm. Deep water covers deep grievances, Pawlowski liked to say. Occasional acts of gruesome violence brought the dangers of prison life home to everyone. Nothing like beheading your cell mate to set a serious course for the day.

The yard sale was set for winter, when the prison had a certain glow. After a snow storm, the prison yard is a wonderland. The ground is transformed from a scraggly desert overrun with rocks and weeds to a smooth, fluffy comforter, filled with down, open and inviting. Soot-stained walls are dressed in white satin, which traces a crazy quilt of undulating drifts and crevices down and across the huge stones, quarried generations ago and jockeyed into place by stoop-shouldered convicts, mostly black, all poor. Dreary gray, the color du jour in prison, is replaced by an ice-bright brilliant white that cuts through the gloom. A snow day in prison is a day in a graveyard somehow come alive with promise.

All good for business, thought Sam Jones, convict number 826260 contemplating the snow. Ripe for trouble, thought Ben Hilliard, security officer assigned to the tower overlooking the snow-filled yard. A mess for the damn yard sale, thought Bill Pawlowski, looking at his watch. A gaggle of free world women, led by his wife, will be descending on the prison in an hour or so, whether the prison was ready for them or not.

Sam Jones had awakened a few hours earlier in his cell, cold but eager to get out on the yard, breathe in the crisp air. The snow had started the night before. Like a little kid on a school snow day, Sam rushed to get ready for morning rec. You almost feel like a kid again, thought Sam. Almost. But in prison, he knew, the games never stop, and the games aren't fun, really, not even for the winners. He is the Yard Master, a key figure in the underground prison economy but one unknown to staff and not found on any organizational chart or book on prisons. He organizes the main game, the sex slave trade. He knows there is no joy in prison, though salacious pleasure can be had; and no rest for the weary, no relief for the downtrodden, no slack for the men who work on their knees and on their backs, bringing release to men who dominate them, sometimes torture them, mark them as damaged goods. By the first count call, with orders pouring in, the yard is a muddy mess and things seem normal, messy and ugly. Somehow this seems better to Sam. Dirty business, dirty day. Keep things in perspective.

Ben Hilliard looks down from his perch in the tower and watches Sam Jones as he enters the yard, stretches, and looks around. What's that look on Sam's face? Wonder? Like a kid? Naw. Not Sam. Sam is a player, and Ben isn't going to be played. Ben senses something going on. The snow, well, for Ben, the snow's a subterfuge, white and inviting but dangerous like dope, something easy to get lost in. A snow day is a security nightmare. His kids are home, having a ball; he's on high alert, ready for trouble. Sam is just a kid, when you come right down to it, Ben thinks to himself, but Sam is doing life so the kid inside the man is long gone, dead to the world, dead to Sam. This saddens Hilliard but it also hardens his resolve. Watch that brother, he thinks, he'll raise cane if he's able.

Sam breathes in the cool air and thinks back to the warm bed he just left, rolling out of his bunk, stepping over the black-market lingerie left behind by his 'date' from last night, a high-priced cell-block whore he keeps on the side. He has some steady girls, and he thinks of them as girls, not men or even girly men, but he has a rep to protect. Can't be seen as pussy whipped, he knows, but still, he has his feelings, it's lonely in the house and a cell, well, a cell ain't a home without someone special to come home to. Sam is a man with a sense of history and something resembling a conscience lurks deep in his heart, buried under a weightlifter's sculpted pecs and an abused boy's hate. Sam is, first and foremost, a man, a prison man, a lonely young man looking for love and willing to settle for sweet sex, served up in as many varieties as possible; but always some species of fair, slim, youthful humanity, preferably with long hair, maybe pulled into a ponytail, and smooth, long, hairless legs, oiled up and soft to the touch. He adjusts his crotch, reminds himself to stay focused on the business at hand.

Ben Hilliard thinks of himself as an upright man, a man of conscience and basic decency. This much he and Sam have in common, though Sam Jones is a wounded, faded version of Ben Hilliard. Sam uses other vulnerable men, while Ben watches out for the meek and the weak, folk who are fodder for Sam and others much worse than Sam. Ben figures the prison is full of people getting what they had coming to them, but some cons, well, they're different. They get more abuse than any man deserves. It's like

they're walking victims in a world where hurting someone else is one of the few guaranteed ways to feel good about yourself, to feel that you are powerful, that you matter. So Ben is alert, a guard on guard, as it were, watching out for signs of trouble.

Sam reaches down, adjusting his left pant leg, rolling it up to form a makeshift cuff. The right pant leg is left untouched. The sale is on; let the bidding commence, he thinks, smiling. Hand signs, variations on gang talk, flash in Sam's direction, heads nod at inmates as they pass near the center of The Courts, seemingly out for a stroll but actually following a carefully scripted routine, a prison version of a beauty pageant with a touch of the perp walk to it. Sam takes in all in, makes his calculations, working out the logistics in his head. Honey Boy to Cell Block C, weekend vacation special; Hot Hands to Cell Block B, an afternoon double-header; Missionary Mike to...

Ben Hilliard catches the flurry of hand signs and tenses. Something's happening, but, well, "what it is ain't exactly clear," he thinks, humming the lyrics to the Buffalo Springfield classic sixties song. Ben, for what it's worth, is "the man with a gun over there," at the heart of the song. He readies his rifle, expecting to shoot a warning shot or two between the gangs, each group neatly demarcated by striking colors, mostly reds, blues and blacks. Like ducks at a shooting gallery, Ben thinks to himself, unnerved for a second. I could pick them off, no problem, he thinks, then shudders. The hand signs stop, the men move along. Ben breathes a sigh of relief, puts his rifle down at his side. Good to be ready, he thinks. That's my job. Good not to let the gun do its thing, good to let those crazy moments pass.

Warden Pawlowski enters the yard, dressed in a pinstriped gray business suit, his hair a distinguished silver gray, very much looking the part of the successful correctional executive. Behind him, sticking close by, is a group of local women from his wife's bridge club. The ladies are a varied lot, but he's learned that all the bridge club ladies love collectibles and are thrilled to be entering the prison yard, about to barter with the "natives" (their term) of this strange and somehow alluring place. "Keep in line behind me," says Pawlowski, with a note anxiety in his voice. He'd seen the hand signs; he'd looked up, seen Officer Hilliard draw a bead on a spot right in the center of The Court, their destination. Shit, he thinks, then relaxes as Hilliard puts down his weapon and gives him the OK sign.

"Dear," says Pawlowski, solicitously, addressing his wife, "this is the hobo jungle. You can go from court to court. See what's on display. Pay with the snack packs from the market." Pausing for a moment, Pawlowski says, "Good hunting," and then walks off, happy to have hidden the anxiety he still feels, mindful that an officer had almost had to shoot an inmate right in front of his wife and her friends.

The women disperse, swarming the first table, run by Sam. Sam is relaxed. He's made his bones for the weekend. He can score a few points with the warden, give the warden's wife and her friends a good show, a bargain or two, though he can't help but appraise the women quickly, furtively, in terms of what they might bring on the open market. He stares for a moment before he realizes what he's doing

and collects himself. Now composed, he asks, with a dramatic flair, "And what do you discerning ladies wish to procure?" He nods his head to emphasize his enthusiasm, to show how much he enjoys dealing with them. The bidding starts for the second time this morning. "Chips, extra crispy, for the little clay replica of a cell? Why sure, that'll be six bags, no questions asked..." Sam is at home.

Of course, being at home in prison is not such a good feeling, not always, anyway. Sam reflects, if only for a second, that his ancestors got to America by way of the slave trade, and were auctioned off in the colonies like cattle, even given names, like Big Buck, that made fun of the functions they were meant to perform, just like the names he's given to his stable of whores. Here he is in prison, if not a slave than certainly a prisoner of the penal plantation, selling off his weaker brothers.

"The customer's always right," he says with a smile to the woman, forced at first, then full and wide. "You pays your money, you takes your chances." The women titter. An authentic voice, they believe, of an American Prisoner, a caged criminal with limited grammatical skills making the best of a bad situation, a make-believe businessman making something of himself while he pays his debt to society.

"Let's see," says Ann, "what would be a fitting souvenir of this special day?" Ann ponders her own question for a moment. "The cozy little tower replica with an itty-bitty guard inside, done out in colorful cigarette wrappers? Yes, that'll do. I could even hang that on the Christmas tree this year, like a good luck charm, an omen, for security in the coming year. I mean, look around here." The ladies nod in agreement. "Guards, guns, towers," muses Ann. "What could be safer?"

An earlier version of this story appears in *Lethal Rejection: Stories on Crime and Punishment* (Johnson, R. and Tabriz S., Eds.) Carolina Academic Press 2009: 149-154. My thanks to Susan Nagelsen and Charles Huckelbury for helpful comments on this version of the story.

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

Adrian Hogue

Women locked up in prison, swimming in derision
Met someone who was guilty but wouldn't say the reason.
While I can't speak on the crime it did open my eyes,
introducing me someone who really did hard time.

She taught us the importance of forging close connections
learning from the people who been there for generations.
She told us that she was very lucky,
Blessed to get another chance through a university.

For most people formerly incarcerated, it never has been easy
Redeeming yourself, in the eyes of our society.
We keep recidivism high and rehabilitation low.

But we are all products of the environment people put us in.
With enough abuse and deprivation we would all turn into criminals
With enough authority over others we would all turn into tyrants.

Every devil looks different depending on the environment.

BURN

Leela Najafi

Flames.
They frame my mind
Knowing that the people doing time
Are pushed aside
Dead, beaten, and dry

Safety?
It's all a lie

There is no safety
When we chew them up
Spit them out
And crime rolls out
Like dimes

Got a dime?
More like two to life

Time.
They do their time
Yet we waste it when
The system recycles men
And leaves them high and dry

What's left to do but

Burn.

SHOTS

Carly Thaw



THE EFFECTS OF LINGUISTIC SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

A conceptual note

Meghan Maree Ballard

This conceptual note calls attention to a commonly overlooked prison subpopulation, inmates who are limited English proficient (“LEP”). LEP individuals do not speak English as their primary language and have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English. While isolation in prison is generally thought of in the context of physical isolation, such as solitary confinement, research indicates that linguistic isolation carries its own potential harms including extreme loneliness, depression, anxiety, and paranoia. Moreover, LEP inmates are often more likely to experience delayed medical attention, be punished for not understanding prison rules and instructions, be denied access to prison programming, and have their rights or access to benefits infringed because documents are only provided in English. Mass incarceration and warehousing of inmates can exacerbate these issues.

Introduction

Individuals are “LEP” if they do not speak English as their primary language and have a limited ability to read, write, or understand English. The United States Census Bureau (2017) estimates that roughly 12.7 percent (25,440,956) of the total population living in the United States aged five and older may be considered LEP. While LEP persons may be competent in English for certain types of communication (e.g., speaking or understanding), they may still be LEP in other ways (e.g., reading or writing) (DOJ LAP, 2012). LEP status may also be context-specific. An individual may have sufficient English language skills to convey basic information, like providing a name or address, but may not have the ability to provide more detailed and technical information in English (LEP Corrections Planning Tool, 1). Additionally, high stress environments – such as police stations, courtrooms, or prisons – may diminish an individual’s English language skills.

Even though the population of individuals who are LEP is sizeable, academic literature addressing the impacts of language barriers is sparse. Of the research that does exist, nearly all focus on the effects of healthcare access and outcomes as a result of social isolation. However, persons who are LEP do not only struggle with language barriers when seeking medical attention. Individuals living in the United States, and struggling to effectively communicate in English, will have difficulties in various aspects of life – which includes interactions with the criminal justice system. Moreover, while language barriers may relate to social isolation, the purpose of this article is to present linguistic isolation as a distinct and unique form of isolation.

This article begins with a description of the first documented case of linguistic isolation, observations of non-German speaking patients being treated at an Austrian hospital in the early 1900s. Then, it applies the concept of linguistic isolation, and the significance of language barriers, to detention facilities. It concludes with a reiteration of the concept’s utility and distinctiveness and calls for future research.

History of linguistic isolation

The earliest attempt to document the harmful effects of language barriers occurred in the early twentieth century. Austrian physician, Rudolf Allers (1920) classified these harmful effects as “psychogenic conditions,” which he found were “closely related to the psychosis of persons with defective hearing” (p. 281). His conclusions were based on observations of three patients who could not communicate in German, the dominant language of the hospital.

Akers writes of how patients could not communicate with hospital staff, which alter affected their psychological states. The first of the observed patients was a Hungarian farmer admitted to the hospital for a forearm flesh wound. None of the hospital personnel on duty spoke Hungarian. Allers initially believed the patient was shy or depressed as he refused to eat and stayed confined to his bed most of the time. While he attempted to communicate in Hungarian with staff, Allers observed that he quickly gave up trying to do so after he saw that no one understood him. After two weeks, his temperament turned violent and suicidal. Once an interpreter was obtained, the man told Allers that he believed people in his ward were plotting against him to prevent him from returning home. While it was unclear what led him to this belief, Allers later writes “during the talks [with the interpreter] the extremely depressed and apprehensive mood of the patient began to change for the better ... after four days he could be classed as completely rational and was freed of his delusions.”

Besides the Hungarian farmer, Allers describes two other patients who were ethnic Tartars who likely originated from the inter-war boundaries of Poland, and could only communicate in Polish. Both exhibited similar symptoms to the first patient, which were summarized as “notions of persecution and by a delusional transformation of the events in his environment” (Allers, 1920). Allers viewed the transformation as stages during which the patient experienced apprehension, depression, fear, hypersensitivity, aggression, and then violence towards himself, others, or both. Allers believed this continued linguistic isolation was the basis for the observed paranoia. All three patients, with the assistance of an appropriate interpreter, reported feeling they were the object of hostile remarks from fellow patients and hospital staff who supposedly wanted to harm them. But as Allers noted, “when the distressing situation [was] removed through reestablishment of linguistic contact with the environment, the symptoms disappear[ed] rapidly ... a sense of relief and a degree of insight [became] evident at once” (Allers, 1920).

Documented harms of unaddressed language barriers in detention facilities

Isolation by language has only been cursorily acknowledged in academic literature, and with the exception of Peter Jan Honigsberg’s (2014) article highlighting the linguistic isolation of a Guantanamo Bay detainee, there exists scant academic research on linguistic isolation in a carceral context. However, civil rights probes and lawsuits have documented a number of harms that stem from language barriers. For example, the findings from a civil rights investigation of the Orleans Parish Prison (“OPP”) in New Orleans, Louisiana found several violations.

After a multiyear investigation, on April 23, 2012, the United States Department of Justice, Civil

Rights Division (“DOJ CRT”) issued a Findings Letter to OPP. The letter raised concerns regarding inadequate services for LEP individuals (Updated OPP Letter of Findings, 2012). Specifically, it raised concerns with OPP’s English-only intake process, a lack of bilingual medical and security staff, and a denial of meaningful access to its programs and activities (pp. 19-20).

OPP’s intake system was almost exclusively in English and did not provide vital materials in a language other than English. When focusing predominately on the Templeman V building, which housed Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) detainees who are nearly 100 percent LEP, DOJ CRT found that OPP had made no provision for language services. None of the OPP staff working at Templeman V were bilingual, and the Warden of Templeman V admitted to relying on other detainees to serve as interpreters. Security staff also admitted to guessing at what detainees were trying to communicate instead of attempting to secure appropriate language services. ICE detainees did not have ready access to sick call slips, and the investigation revealed instances in which OPP failed to provide detainees with medical services because of their inability to communicate with detainees in a language other than English (Updated OPP Letter of Findings, 2012, p. 20).

When LEP detainees sought help from staff they were routinely ridiculed or ignored. One detainee stated that OPP staff called Latino prisoners “monkeys” (p. 19). Former LEP detainees also reported being held beyond the maximum 48-hours ICE hold without an explanation from staff as to what was occurring. Finally, DOJ CRT found that OPP failed to translate important documents into languages other than English. LEP inmates throughout OPP facilities reported being asked to regularly sign forms written in English without translation. Some of these documents reportedly had potential consequences to a prisoner’s rights or access to benefits or services (p. 20-21).

Immediately following the release of the DOJ CRT’s findings, ICE suspended its use of OPP as a housing facility for ICE detainees. Temple Black, an ICE spokesman, said his agency’s decision stemmed from concerns relating to OPP’s inability to provide detainees adequate language services as expressed by the DOJ CRT (Maggi, 2012).

Discussion

Linguistic isolation may be related to the concept of social isolation, but linguistic isolation should not be understood as synonymous with social isolation. Treating both concepts as equal undermines linguistic isolation’s distinctive harms. The Allers (1920) case study showed that even when patients were socially integrated and physically able to interact with medical staff, severe language barriers had crippling psychological consequences such as extreme loneliness, depression, anxiety, and paranoia. Additionally, as highlighted in the findings of DOJ CRT’s investigation of OPP, when language barriers are not adequately addressed in the detention context LEP persons may also experience physical and legal consequences. Unlike other forms of social isolation in prison (e.g. solitary confinement), linguistic isolation can occur even when an inmate is socially integrated in general population. Thus, traditional solutions for socialization, or re-socialization, would not accurately address or mitigate the effects of linguistic isolation. This suggests that linguistic isolation is a distinct form of isolation that may require unique remedies.

Given the observed consequences of linguistic isolation, coupled with the scarce existence of in-depth research exploring the harms of linguistic isolation in a carceral context, it is imperative that

future research be conducted to determine if LEP inmates endure peculiar and dangerous harms that are currently being overlooked. Without such research, society may be denying LEP inmates tools and solutions that may assist them in better handling the already stressful and challenging prison environment.

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LISTEN UP, STAND UP, ACT: A REVIEW OF PAUL BUTLER'S *CHOKEHOLD*

Dr. Robert X. Cush

The book, *Chokehold*, impressed me so much that for quite awhile I felt too overwhelmed and intimidated to even attempt a review that would be read by many. Then I came to the conclusion that I must follow through on my promise to write this review. The only way I could see that I could possibly do a proper review justice is to be myself and share what I feel the best way I could.

This book demands that the reader stand-up or lay down. There is no in-between once you begin to truly comprehend what is being shared by the author. For me there was no conflict of conscience or understanding. Paul Butler was saying exactly what I've been trying to share and explain with others, others being lay people and professionals. When I attempted to explain the concept of Prison Abolition, I received all kinds of objections and arguments.

What Brother Butler was able to put between the covers of this book is nothing short of extraordinary genius! He not only made the argument for Prison Abolition something that can be accomplished, he explains how it is already in practice for white people and has been in practice since the beginning of this nation.

Now when I seek to convince someone that Prison Abolition is a must, I just tell them to read the book, *Chokehold*, by Paul Butler. Of course there is so much more that is explained and taught in this book, but my focus and attention was grabbed and held by the Introduction and Chapters 6, 7, and 8, which explain comprehensively the complete injustices perpetrated by the Criminal Justice System against the Black Man here in America. Never before has this subject been explained and exposed with such clear and unapologetic detail. I've read more than twenty thousand books in my life and only one other book has meant more to me, and that is *The Theology of Time* by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. In my opinion, *Chokehold* should be recognized as one of the top ten books of the last one hundred years. I do not make that statement lightly. I've endured twenty-nine years of solitary confinement under an illegal death sentence and during that time period is when I read the overwhelming majority of those twenty thousand books I spoke about earlier. I've had time to read and study so much that it is even frightening to me how much I've been able to learn and comprehend. But even I am struck silent by the perfection of the gathering and dissemination of the data and information that Paul Butler has put together in his book. This book is so potent and powerful that I do not wonder at the deafening and sickening silence that has accompanied its release/publishing. This book dwarfs Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow*. I "overstand" the fact that Mrs. Alexander's book tells the story of mass incarceration and appropriately calls it by its true name, SLAVERY in these modern times. But *Chokehold* goes to the next level and presents the whole naked and obscene picture of the hell that is the Black Man's life in this United States of America.

The overwhelming majority of the people in this country are living in complete denial of what is going on and has been going on since the beginning/founding of this nation (U.S.A). Genocide of the Original Nations (so-called Indians) and inhumane slavery and oppression are the "common fair" in this land. The world as a whole is guilty of the willful game of "Three Monkeys" (Blind/Deaf/Dumb) when it comes to the horrors perpetrated by the U.S.A. For many nations and peoples in the world, their willful ignorance is due to the cowardice and fear of the bully we as Black Men face everyday in the belly of the beast.

With the publishing of *Chokehold*, there can be no excuse for the claims of not knowing what has happened in the past and continues to this day when it comes to the hell that is living in this country

is for Black Men. As Mr. Butler makes clear, the work of Abolishing Prisons must be a joint work by the masses and not just Black People alone. The whole Criminal Justice System must be undone and we cannot continue to pretend that there is some magic pill that will fix things!

I've been telling everyone I come into contact with about this book, *Chokehold*, by Paul Butler. I've given two sermons from the podium at Muhammad's Temple of Islam at Graterford about this book and explained how critical and important it is for us to not only read the book but put into practice what Mr. Butler is sharing. I've also insisted that my professor friends read the book and recommend it to their students.

I will continue to promote this book just as religiously as I promote the books of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. I sincerely believe that the book, *Chokehold*, is the perfect answer to the social science and political science question of How Do We Fix the Problem of Mass Incarceration and corruption in the Criminal Justice System. There is no other answer that will work or suffice.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts and to review of this extraordinary masterpiece of a book.

BIOS

STEVEN BABOUN is a 22 year-old award-winning photographer, visual artist, and creative director from Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He is a graduate from American University where he received a Bachelor's degree in Film and Media Arts and Education Studies. Steven will be continuing his studies at Parsons School of Design where he will be working toward his MFA in Photo and Fashion. Currently, he is a photographer, social media coordinator, and founding member of a creative agency called 432 Creatives where he helps brand artists.

MEGHAN BALLARD is currently pursuing her Master's in Justice, Law, and Criminology with a concentration in Public Policy at American University. Her ultimate goal is to pursue a career that allows her to use quality research to combat inequities in the criminal justice system and advocate for the preservation of civil rights. Ballard is also the Associate Print Editor for American University's Public Purpose Journal.

YEMANE CHARLES is a freshman studying political science at American University. Charles is from Brooklyn, New York. One quote that particularly resonates with him is: "Black people using creative expression and art as means of justice is more powerful than any shackle ever used on us."

CASEY CHIAPPETTA is pursuing an MS in Justice and Public Policy at American University. She recently graduated summa cum laude with a BA in sociology and received the Outstanding Scholarship at the Undergraduate Level. Her research interests include trauma, work conditionality clauses, urban ecology, and the effects of legal aid on low- and low-middle income individuals. Chiappetta is the Chief Operating Officer of BleakHouse Publishing. In this role, she is responsible for all matters relating to the daily operation of the press and website management. She edited and designed BleakHouse Review.

DR. ROBERT X. CUSH born in Philadelphia, PA, under the name Robert Lee Cook, Jr. graduated from the American International University of California with a Doctorate degree in Philosophy in 1995. He completed his Master's degree in Christian Theology at the Bethel University of the Watchtower and Track Society in New York. In 1996 he obtained his paralegal certification in Corporate Law from the Professional Career Development Institute. His work as a Jailhouse Lawyer has been instrumental in helping many to gain their freedom or reduction in their sentences. He has a passion for reading and writing. Poetry and short stories are his specialties, whether the creations are his own or whether he is simply enjoying the works of others. Since 2003 he has begun painting as a way to express himself. His artworks have been shown in art showcases from the East Coast to the West Coast. His large family and many friends are of the utmost importance in his life. Cush is a Captain in Muhammad's Temple of Islam.

ADRIAN HOGUE is a freshman at American University.

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.

SADIE KAPLAN is a first-year student at American University majoring in American Studies. This past year, she worked in the communications department at a local anti-human trafficking non-profit and was a contributing writer for Her Campus. In her free time, she enjoys indulging in the cultural opportunities that D.C. has to offer and inevitably getting lost on her way back to campus. She fondly calls Toledo, Ohio her home and hopes that the city feels the same about having her.

G. LEAKS is a federal prisoner with a continued interest in creative writing.

ALEXIS MCMENAMIN is a freshman at American University studying CLEG (Communications, Legal systems, Economics, and Government). Her Poems are inspired by research into the death penalty and prison industrialization.

LEELA NAJAFI is a sophomore at American University studying Communications, Legal Institutions, Economics, and Government (CLEG). She is passionate about criminal justice reform, particularly in expanding educational and vocational programming in correctional systems. As a former participant in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, Leela has discussed issues in the justice system alongside inmates at the D.C. Central Detention Facility. Through her work at BleakHouse Publishing, she plans to shed light on the experiences of inmates through a number of artistic forms.

SEAN PALMER is a freshman studying International Relations at American University. He is passionate about social justice and rights, and works with several policy making groups in his home state of Colorado. He is also an avid touring musician and plays guitar for a group based in Grand Junction, CO.

DIANA ROY is a freshman at American University majoring in International Relations and double minoring in Justice & Law and Spanish. Diana aspires to pursue a career with a government agency doing national security work, such as the FBI or CIA, and is passionate about helping others. When she is not busy reading or concentrating on her studies, she enjoys seeing

all of the culture and history that Washington, DC has to offer with her friends.

DIANA SALAZAR is a first generation undergraduate student at American University. She is majoring in Justice and Law with a minor in International Relations. She hopes to continue to learn and write about problems in the American Justice System.

ISABELLA SIMS is a first year student at American University who grew up in Richmond, Virginia. she has been passionate about reforming the American justice system from a young age and hopes to continue to work with her peers and stand to discuss the implementation of plausible solutions.

CARLY THAW is an illustrator, photographer, and designer originally from Charleston, West Virginia. She is anticipating graduation from American University in May 2018, with a BA in Graphic Design, and a minor in Theatre. She does freelance and contracted graphic design work for local performers and artists as well as clubs across campus.

ROBIN WEINER is a D.C.-based actress, designer, and illustrator. Originally from the greater Philadelphia area, she cultivated her passion for the visual and performing arts at American University, where she received a bachelor's degree in Musical Theatre and minored in Art History. Her illustrations are featured in the 2016-2017 edition of Bleakhouse Review, as well as American University's AWOL Magazine. In theatre, she has worked with Flying V, Imagination Stage, Rorschach Theatre, The Goethe Institute and The Kennedy Center.

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