

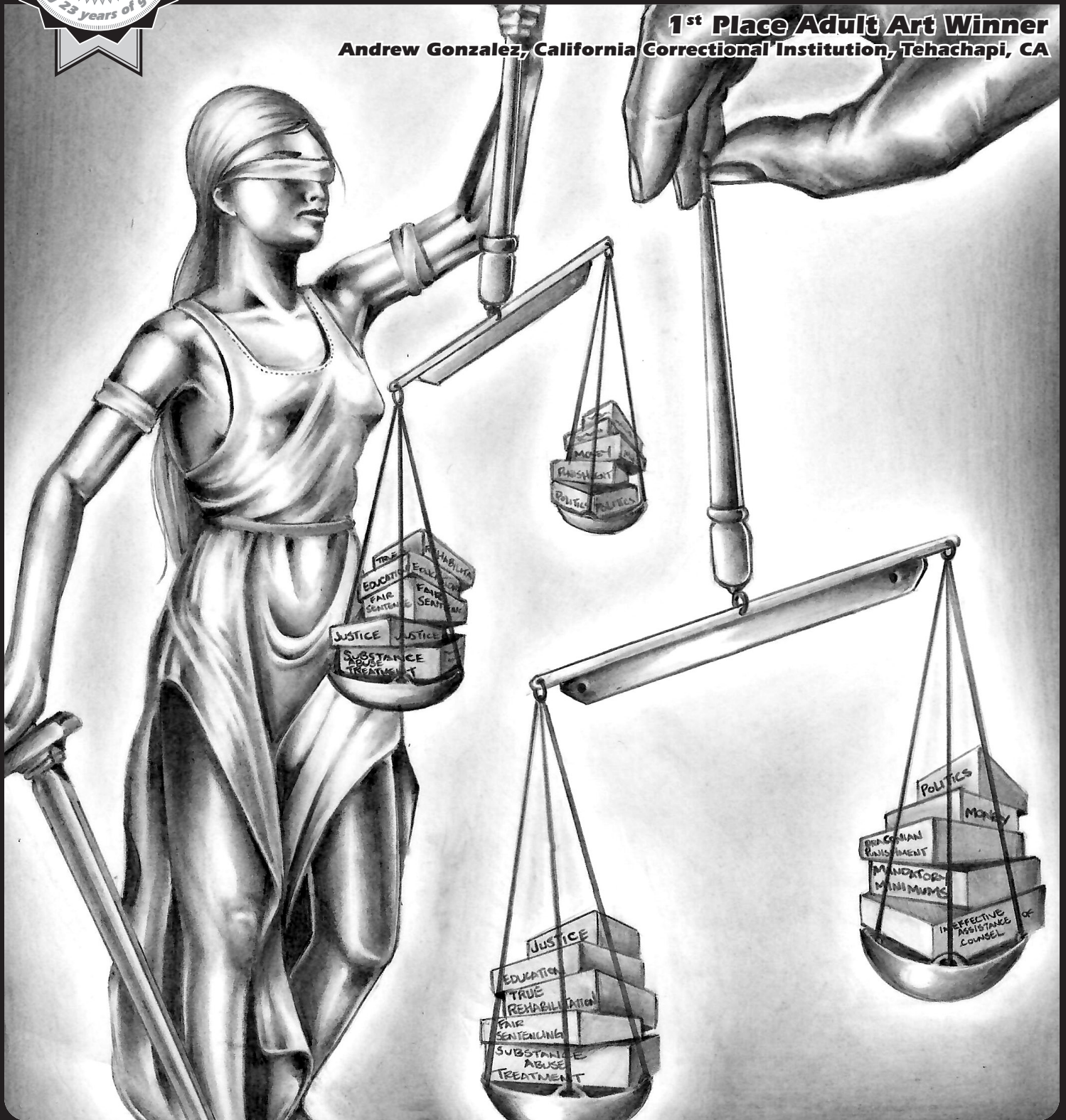


# The Beat Within

## Visions of Reform Issue!



**1<sup>st</sup> Place Adult Art Winner**  
**Andrew Gonzalez, California Correctional Institution, Tehachapi, CA**



**NICJR** ★  
National Institute for  
Criminal Justice Reform

### FEATURING:

**Visions of Reform: Our 2020 Art and Essay Contest**

- **Adult and Youth Essay Winners page 3**
- **Adult and Youth Art Winners page 8**

# EDITOR'S NOTE

**W**elcome, Beat readers and writers, far and wide! This special issue comes at a truly remarkable time for our community. Amidst the global pandemic and shelter-in-place orders that have been defining the social and economic aspects of our lives, we're also experiencing an incredible political moment, inescapable on every front. Right now, our country, states, cities, and schools deeply consider what it means to live in an anti-racist society, one that each of us feels just and equitable being a part of.

Since January 2020, we've been working to compile and publish the outstanding submissions we've received in response to our latest art and essay contest, Visions of Reform. These submissions are heartfelt, personal, critical, and emotional to engage with. We're incredibly humbled by this collection of writing and artwork, and to be able to provide a space for them to exist in together. For this contest, we asked our Beat community:

*Is a world without incarceration possible? Think about what led you to where you are now: the people, resources, places that were or weren't on your side. What changes would you make to the policies/laws that govern our freedom? There have been many reforms made to the criminal justice system that have given some people an opportunity to be released and others the chance of being locked up. If you were the governor or had the*

*ability to make changes to the system, what would you do? Share your stories about what you need to thrive, as well as what you envision reform to look like for all of us to live at our fullest potential.*

The Beat Within, along with our partner National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR), uplift the powerful thoughts and opinions of those who speak from experience. The responses generated from this topic will move you, and they give all of us the courage to fight for a better world. Their voices have always been – and continue to be – at the forefront of our collective struggle for liberation.

First off, We would like to thank the Art for Justice Fund for supporting this project and this very special issue on reform. We'd also like to thank NICJR for their support in bringing this special issue to fruition, as well as our judges, staff, and volunteers for their time in carefully reading and considering each piece.

We'd of course like to thank our writers and artists, who poured their hearts and souls into these wonderful essays and artwork, who make The Beat Within the deep and transformative publication that it is. We are honored to share your truth, and to journey with you forward into the world, strengthening our roots of compassion and resilience. The Beat is here, loud and clear, for you.

The Beat Within publishes a bi-weekly magazine of writing and art by incarcerated youth.

We are a Member of Intersection for the Arts. Intersection provides resources, community and cultural space in order to contribute to the sustainable practices of artists and arts organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area. Visit [www.theintersection.org](http://www.theintersection.org).

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission. If published, your work becomes the property of The Beat Within, but you authors are free to publish elsewhere.

**To our writers:** What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

**The Beat Within, San Francisco, CA:** David Inocencio, Founder, Director & Senior Editor, Lisa Lavaysse, Manen Pau, Peggy Simmons, Michael Kroll, Andrea Flores, Alyssa Maano, Omar Turcios, Simone Larson and Simone Zapata

**National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR):** Cheryl Bonacci, David Muhammad and Cait Ahearn

**Writers:** Thanks to all the participants in our writing workshops. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, please contact us.



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# ADULT ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS!

## Visions of Reform

Is a world without incarceration possible? Think about what led you to where you are now: the people, resources, places that were or weren't on your side. What changes would you make to the policies/laws that govern our freedom? There have been many reforms made to the criminal justice system that have given some people an opportunity to be released and others the chance of being locked up. If you were the governor or had the ability to make changes to the system, what would you do? Share your stories about what you need to thrive, as well as what you envision reform to look like for all of us to live at our fullest potential.



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### A System Where People and Lives Are Valued



It didn't take long during my incarceration to realize how broken our system is. I have seen the depths of wasted taxpayer dollars, lives ruined, relationships and communities left unhealed all in the name of justice.

One doesn't have to go far to experience this reality. Just ask anyone who has been affected by crime to share their story.

It doesn't matter if they were a victim, offender, or family member to either side. The bottom line is when justice winds its way through the legal system, there are not winners.

When I was five years old, my life went off course. That was the age when I began to bottle up my emotions, wear a mask, and pretend everything was good. In all honesty, nothing was good.

It was my first day of kindergarten when my sixteen-year-old brother, Tony, was arrested for a senseless gang related murder. I quickly experience how justice divided us. It was us versus them as both families and a community were left hurting.

I'm sure the life my brother took affected many lives, mine included. The emotional trauma I endured as a five-year-old kid was never properly dealt with. For years, I hid my emotions trying to be strong for my parents as they dealt with the pain of losing their son to prison.

There you have it. Lady injustice intervened, sent my brother to prison for life, told the victim's family that justice was served, and sent all affected parties on their way because everyone knows once justice is handed down, we all can move on with our lives. Or can we?

Time never healed my wounds, how can we expect time to be the master surgeon of so many hurting individuals as a result of a crime? So, where do we go from here?

I can see the most powerful nation in the world embracing a justice system that focuses on healing people, relationships, reconnecting communities where harm was caused.

There's no doubt that hurt people, hurt people. I know because I speak from experience. If justice is about making things right, I believe we need to making things right for all, especially offenders.

I believe that the recidivism rate in California is so high because we have failed offenders over and over again. Sending broken men to sit in prison and expecting them not to return without addressing the issue is insane.

I believe people can heal and grow and ultimately never return to prison if their needs are met, however, it all starts with us as a society, accepting this culture shift. We need to get away from the mindset that sending people to sit and rot away in prison is the answer.

An element of rehabilitation needs to include us offenders taking responsibility for the damage and harm we caused. Not on paper, but through a process where victims and victim families come together with offenders to share their stories. When we give people the opportunity to share, we are humanizing and placing value on relations.

When I was a child, I wanted to reach out to the family who were hurting because of my brother's actions. I wanted to hug all of them and let them know how sorry I was for the inexcusable crime my big brother, Tony, committed on their loved one, and for all the pain they were going through.

I wanted them to know that even though I was the kid brother of their loved one's murder, I too was hurting with them. Is there any question why that hurt kid went on to hurt others?

There's got to be a better way to bring healing to the wounded. I'm hopeful that we can invest in a system where people and lives are valued. After all, all lives matter.

**-Richie Angulo, San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA**  
**Bio: I'm from Eastside Born and raised in Southern California to blue-collar workers. I'm the youngest of 4 brothers. Currently serving a life sentence at Avenal State Prison. I'm committed to my insight so I know why I did the things in my past. Along my journey I'm returning myself to who I was meant to be.**

I believe people can heal and grow and ultimately never return to prison if their needs are met, however, it all starts with us as a society, accepting this culture shift.

# ADULT ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS!



## Words from a Product of the System

Is a world without incarceration possible? Yes it is. Is it practical? No it is not. Allow me to explain why.

I was convicted of committing 30 commercial burglaries and sentenced to 24 years in state prison. Although I find the length of the sentence to be excessive, what other reasonable punishment exists? A big fine? House arrest? Therapy?

But don't get me wrong, I'm not pro-incarceration. I just don't think that it should be the go-to solution 80% of the time that a law is broken. We should aim to cut that number in half. Take a moment and think, what would our communities and prisons look like if we incarcerated at roughly half the rate we do now? ... crazy indeed. But haven't some great ideas been considered crazy before they actually succeeded and became game changers?

Now prison reform is not meant to discard of the system in place (which would be the case if incarceration was eliminated as an option) but rather to minimize its faults. If there is a current system that operates more like an isolated hotel full of socially distrusted tenants than a rehabilitation center, but rehabilitation is included in this system's name, then America we have a problem. And it is all of our duty as citizens of this great country to collaborate with each other to develop solutions to this problem.

Let me also include that just because I'm a convicted felon does not mean that I lose my status as an American citizen, so therefore it is my duty as well. Just like any other individual that has been affected, directly or indirectly, by this system. That is why I am so passionate to write on this topic.

Now I have been affected by this system since I was a little kid when my siblings and I were taken from our parents and split apart by C.P.S. Not to say that extracting us out of that abusive and dangerous living situation was unjustified but to this day, at 31 years of age, I am yet to reunite with any of my biological relatives. I guess that's just collateral damage that I got to live with.

But I'm not a cynic, so I believe that there are actually some good people that work for the system in hopes of transforming lives in order to make our communities safer. But they can't do it alone, nor without the insight of those most affected. So allow me to present you with twelve ideas that I would strive to make happen if I was governor. I fully believe that these ideas would make a tremendously positive impact on the criminal justice system. They may not be perfect but I'm sure both sides of the aisle will agree that they are possible and if applied have the potential to bring enormous change to a system that so desperately needs it.

Thank you very much for reading my essay and I hope you share the same enthusiasm as I do in bringing these ideas into fruition.

And to all my fellow prisoners: with prison reform, change is on the horizon and coming to an institution near you. So accept it, embrace its purpose and don't be afraid to change with it:

**P**rovide additional funding to all prisons to expand self-help and creative expression programs. Behind these walls there are many who would like to partake in these types of programs but the supply rarely meets the demand

**R**equests to attend immediate family funerals should be considered if the prisoner's risk level is low and he/she can pay for the transportation and security measures necessary. This will help with the grieving process that a lot of us, like myself, have gone through that lost family members while serving time.

**I**nstill a sense of responsibility by making it mandatory that all prisoners that are not under disciplinary restrictions either have a job or are enrolled in education or self-help groups.

**S**entences should be shorter for young adults and first-termers to expediate the transformation from prisoner to productive member of society.

**O**utstanding achievements and unique efforts to self-rehabilitate should be more incentivized to encourage that type of positive behavior.

**N**ever assume/or treat a prisoner as if he is beyond the reach of rehabilitation lest you convince him that he is. So whether under disciplinary restrictions or not all prisoners should have the opportunity to partake in some form of positive and productive programming. An outlet for a chance to make a positive change in behavior should always be available.

**R**ecent and repetitive positive efforts/behavior should carry more weight in parole hearings than long past and rare negative conduct.

**E**xpand visiting room sizes as well as visitation hours because outside support plays a big role in successful reintegration in society.

**F**lyers and posters should be put up in all housing units with information on how to donate money/hobby craft items to local charities so prisoners have the opportunity to contribute to something bigger than themselves. You would be surprised at how many prisoners have asked me about this.

**O**rganize more institution-sponsored tournaments to encourage positive prisoner interactions to make for a more peaceful environment.

**R**entry processing should include an updated packet of which companies are hiring in their paroling regions to prioritize parolee employment, which has been proven to reduce recidivism.

**M**ental health disorders are a real issue that are too often treated with medication. Efforts should be made to come up with alternative solutions to treating mental illnesses to prevent prescription drug dependency.

**Bio:** Anthony is a 31-year old Mexican-American that was raised in Susanville, California. He has authored over 30 pieces that have appeared in various publications. He has had a huge interest in creative writing since he was a young teenager and plans to keep writing for many more years to come.

-Anthony Billings, Pleasant Valley State Prison, Coalinga, CA

# ADULT ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS!

## Human Resources: Next Door


 3<sup>rd</sup>

I have been teaching my peers for over a decade. Yet, I quickly became a student when I came to realize how dynamic human beings can be – even prisoner human beings.

In 2007, I was asked to instruct peer-lead classes here on the Progressive Programming Facility in Lancaster, CA.

What I learned is that all of the creativity, intelligence, and capacity for innovation I could ever want or need, is right here, within reach.

Once we got past all the gossip, war stories, and superficial, anti-social traditions of prison culture, we were able to see the unlimited potential and dynamic worth in each other.

Want an awesome painting, a life-like portrait, or to be taught either? We got that. Need your appliances fixed – even without conventional tools or parts? We got that. How about financial planning, real estate tips, or some guidance on how to overcome stress and traumatic events? Yep, we got that, too.

There's so much gift and talent here, and surely at other penal institutions – because people are so fantastic and awesome – when we spend the time to develop their gifts and invest in the apparatuses they need to grow.

When I see Rick helping others transform in phenomenal ways, or John paint masterpieces, or Fred publish books that are both educational and transformative, I am compelled to ask why they're even here.

Of course, it then dawns on me that they, like the rest of us, made some bad decisions in their past. And perhaps, their own realization of this fact, propels them to make amends in the amazing ways they are.

Not to mention, that is really what every taxpayer and perhaps crime survivor should want – change in a positive and productive way.

These guys on the Progressive Programming Facility are taking responsibility for their offenses, passing on what they are learning by teaching others – paying it forward – not only for their futures, but for the future of their communities.

They practice giving back in this confined community, and simultaneously giving back to larger society in the form of charitable donations. After having taken so much for granted, they now practice and participate with purpose, drive, and enthusiasm.

The only thing locked up on them now are their bodies. Their minds, their spirits, and their souls are free. They are no longer held captive by faulty thinking, drug addiction, or unresolved childhood trauma.

And that is precisely what keeps them out of trouble, the distraction of pro-social activities and personal growth.

Maslow was right, self-actualization can be a powerful motivation in and of itself. If you're reading this in some type of confinement, consider what we've accomplished here on the PPF.

If we can do it, a majority of guys sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, then anyone can do it. Believe me, change is within you, change is within us all.

**-Dortell Williams,**

**California State Prison – Los Angeles, Coalinga, CA**

**Bio: I am currently serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. My submission is to remind our readers, especially our youth, of the intrinsic value of others; how to learn, grow and give back by teaching. and how to use pursuits of personal transformation as tools of resilience.**

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# YOUTH ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS!



## Our Voices Matter

Can you please give me a couple of minutes as I take you on a walk?  
 Here's a pair of my shoes  
 Now can you please put them on?  
 I know they might not fit you, but are you just gon' take them off?  
 Because if you do  
 Then I can't show you the system that I lived in behind these brick walls  
 Now that you know I'm locked up  
 Please listen  
 Don't be like the others that stop  
 And as much as they're tryna figure out the law  
 We're tryna figure out why our cells are locked  
 And I'm trying to learn to change  
 Because the same system that made me,  
 put me here, believe it or not  
 So tell them if I would've got help earlier, would I still stand to fall?  
 Look, I grew up in foster homes since I was two years of age  
 That means I had the system with me throughout all of my days  
 So tell me where the system went wrong  
 Because I'm stuck in this cage  
 Tryna tell them my problems, but they turned their backs and went the other way  
 Visions of reform, but tell me what costs' them  
 Opening programs  
 More money is what they be dodging  
 Maybe the system could understand if they look at the root of the problem  
 'Cause if we keep lookin' at the surface  
 Not willing to dig deep  
 How we ever gon' solve them?  
 See, for me, I hate to admit it, but I've been through a lot of trauma  
 So, I picked up a pipe at the age of thirteen hoping it could resolve them  
 Hoping the smoke will slowly dissolve them  
 Twisting and turning and burning all of my problems  
 And let me tell you  
 I tried to reach out, but the system never grabbed my hand  
 Living in major poverty with a drug problem  
 Bu they still seem to never understand  
 Going from the dependency system to the criminal justice system is out of hand  
 The real question is how do we help people from avoiding situations that they can?  
 Maybe if we made a prevention plan, rather than waiting for the problem to come  
 Maybe if we stop using punitive punishment on youth and criminalizing  
 Because when we do, that's all they think they'll become  
 Maybe if we build a trusted support system  
 To help the old and the young  
 Maybe we need to come together  
 and put our thoughts together as one  
 But no, the superior thinks their opinion is always better

Just because they're on top of the food chain  
 Don't mean we got to kill each other  
 So why can't we lend out a hand to help one another?  
 Visions of reform?  
 Where do we start?  
 Maybe by not judging a book by its cover  
 I'm probably walking too fast, so let me slow down for a minute  
 Are you still wearing my shoes and still open to listen?  
 And if not, then I respect that we have different opinions  
 But this is the part where everyone messes up on  
 'Cause we need to come together in order to change the system  
 So please listen to what I envision reform  
 To be  
 As I take out the time to listen to yours  
 And I know I might not be there,  
 but if you want, my ears are all yours  
 'Cause I'm so sick and tired of all this hatred going back and forth  
 So let's just try a little harder to become one big community  
 And stop separating the thoughts of the incarcerated and the free  
 Because our voice matters, just like yours should be  
 Visions of reform, so both sides everyone could learn to see  
 Let's fast forward for a moment, so you can envision what I see  
 Helping youth that was in my position  
 Get a college degree  
 Catching them before they fall,  
 so we can give them what they need  
 Showing each and everyone good examples  
 While focusing on each and everyone individually  
 Because they need someone they could trust  
 And that's what I truly believe  
 Someone to guide them through life and to truly give them what they need  
 Someone that's not just throwing words at them  
 But to show them how to succeed  
 And go ahead and ask me how I think this might help  
 'Cause I once was given that special person when I was ten  
 But he passed away three years later, and I lost myself  
 But let me tell you  
 Those three years were the most beautiful part of my life  
 He gave my sisters and I what we needed  
 A home where I could actually call mine  
 Someone I could trust and go to no matter if it was wrong or right  
 Someone I could depend on through the good and bad times  
 When I had a stable roof  
 It was better than all of my days  
 I was actually going to school, first time I ever got straight A's  
 Coming home, not worrying about the next hot plate  
 His love is unforgettable because of the love he gave  
 Because honestly throughout my childhood, I think I just needed some stability  
 Growing up as a kid, my innocence was took from me  
 I learned to raise myself, which was no good for me  
 And honestly  
 Maybe if the system was different when I was two years old  
 Maybe the situation that I'm in would've ended up differently.

**-King J, San Mateo County, CA**

**Bio: I've been incarcerated most of my teenage years and still am. Writing saved my life and fortunately it saved my future. Thank you The Beat Within.**

Our voice matters, just like yours should be  
 Visions of reform, so both sides everyone could learn to see  
 Let's fast forward for a moment, so you can envision what I see  
 Helping youth that was in my position  
 Get a college degree

# YOUTH ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS!

## Stuck in the System

Shackled in court, ready to face my doom  
Stand as the Judge walks into the room  
Civics lesson time in the land of free  
Everybody stood up for the Judge but me  
Momma stared at me, she was crying  
It hurt so bad, inside I was dying  
The Judge shook his head, he was set to trip  
He banged his gavel and curled his lip  
He said, "Son, you should have taken the plea;  
Can't you see in two years you'd be set free?"  
"First, Sir," I said, "I am not your son,  
Because if I was, we would both see justice done."  
Equality in court is just a fairy tale  
I don't have a job, and I'm too young to post bail  
Said, "Excuse me, please let me say, your Honor,  
I was raised in a pool full of hungry piranhas  
And where I was born if you wanted respect  
You learned early that it came at the end of a tech  
It was a jungle without elephants and monkeys

Just killers, cutthroats, thieves, and junkies  
I stand before you here, Sir, without fear  
'Cause my sixth-grade teacher said I'd end up here."  
This is the great house of sucker bets and threats  
Where the state gets rich off poor folks' debts  
Only God can judge me, so let me stop and pray  
Lord, the system's corrupt and it's been that way  
The evil man hides behind a long, black robe  
So he can treat poor people like the devil did Job  
They snatched us straight off the block  
They got diamonds out of rocks  
Like captured slaves, we were marched off at the dock  
Then traded on wall street as prison stock  
Lord, sometimes I have to wonder what comes next?  
We're chained to the prison-industrial complex  
The emancipation proclamation  
Freed the dark people in this nation  
Oh God, shut down the penitentiary  
It's slavery in the 21st century



**-EliGoCrazy, Santa Clara County, CA**

**Bio: I'm from Eastside San Jose but currently I live in Sunnyvale. I'm a young African American male trying to make a change.**

... I thank the staff here for not holding contempt for me, for recognizing that I don't blame them, and for giving me much needed counsel, comfort, and hope.

## Troubles of Political Battles

At the time of writing, I have been incarcerated at San Jose Juvenile Hall for five months. February 25 is my soonest possible release date, mid-March being the realistically latest. Many wonder, what is a kid like me doing in the criminal justice system? I grew up in a middle class, Chinese household in a two-story home. We lived in Sunnyvale, my family, best friends, and loved ones were never around drugs, alcohol, tobacco, violence or gangs. None of us were victims of crimes, abuse, coercion, neglect, or any trauma. I was taught virtues and manners from a young age, attended Homestead High School, one of the best schools in the country (Steve Jobs is a Homestead alumni); so if the point has not been made clear, my loved ones and I did not experience the set-backs, trauma, and other adverse obstacles incarcerated youth often face. My conflicts in life are not associated with the struggles of impoverished or inner city life, rather, my troubles stem from moral and political conflicts, as I shall explain.

For thousands of years, authoritarians and libertarians quarreled to find their own balance between order and freedom. Radical authoritarians, totalitarians, believe a challenge or doubt to authority anywhere is to destabilize it everywhere. Radical libertarians believe an infringement of any liberty is to oppress it everywhere. Both sides twist Martin Luther King Jr's quote "an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" by associating their own ideology with morally superior justice. Nearly all modern controversies: taxations and spending, gun control, drug laws, legality of prostitution, drinking and voting ages, abortion, foreign policy, immigration laws, ethnic profiling, and many more stem from this eons long conflict.

My involvement did not truly begin until senior year of high school, despite my childhood fortitude for self-ownership and independence. Fellow students began activism for gun control, opposition to hate speech, and new tax payer funded programs in the community. I joined the libertarian party, and took the free speech, gun rights, and free market/pro capitalism stances to balance the dialogue/debate and prompt others to be more thoughtful and open minded. Of course, it all just devolved and escalated into bickering, feuding, name calling, and defamation. The prevalence and severity of hypocrisy, propaganda, libel, double standards, and ignorance was disturbing. Nobody, not even the school administration, respected the true spirit of free speech. They equated their ideas with morally superior justice, then equated any dissenting opinion and speech with evil, violence, and discrimination. One could not ask about whether or not gun control would have the same disastrous consequences as the 18th amendment (i.e. prohibition of alcohol) and the failed war on drugs or make any analogy without being accused of desecrating the victims of gun violence and directly contributing to gun violence. One could not cite the 1st and 2nd amendments of the constitution without being labeled as "alt-right". I eventually lost my patience and began to say things back, calling those

who were zealously progressive and/or authoritarian "tyrant", "hypocrite", "unpatriotic" I would describe them as; I ceased to be a mediator, and became a crusader for libertarian causes and ideals.

After enough time and others intolerance, the administration transferred me to Monta Vista High School against my will, and went out of their way to obstruct any meaningful relationships with my best friends and other friendly peers at Homestead. I escalated my practices in my crusade for liberty to the end, for I decided at one point to give up on any close bonds to friends. I bought a polymer 800 frame for a Glock 76, built and assembled it and the other gun parts, and concealed carry underage and unlicensed. The only reason why I was caught was because San Jose's Board of Supervisors followed San Francisco's Board of Supervisors' decree declaring the National Rifle Association and similar groups as terrorist organizations, all for being gun rights and grassroots efforts. The authority somehow knew of my membership with the Firearms Policy Coalition, Defense Distributed, and California Rifle and Pistol Association, and proceeded to use that as their probable cause to detain and search me.

To be honest, I've been too stoic about this whole situation, and only wish for release not for the reasons people usually have, but just to restore my relationships with my best friends. I was surprised staff here weren't prejudiced against my ideologies, and even understand conceal carrying, despite its risks, is not necessarily dangerous and can't be equated with evil by nature.

That all said, I make the decision to quit the geopolitical socioeconomic arena and cease involvement in the battle of eons. I figure it is futile to be fighting and warring over ideas when neither side is truly listening, and now, I have the opportunity to once again, by with the friends I have been in exile for 15 months from.

I suppose part of the reason I chose to illegally conceal carry was because without my best friends, I gave up on my own happiness and did not care for prison or home.

But now, I can be certain walking out of here one to four weeks from now that I have a life of peace, joy, and harmony to look forward to, that my loved ones unanimously await our reunification, I patiently wait for all the fun things: bike rides, footraces, grad parties, birthdays, airsoft games, starting a garage band, and maybe even pursuing one friendship into the next levels of a relationship. Before I go, let it be known I thank the staff here for not holding contempt for me, for recognizing that I don't blame them, and for giving me much needed counsel, comfort, and hope. I only wish for a peaceful, normal life from here forth. Even better if all of us did. The possibilities!

**-Andy, Santa Clara County, CA**

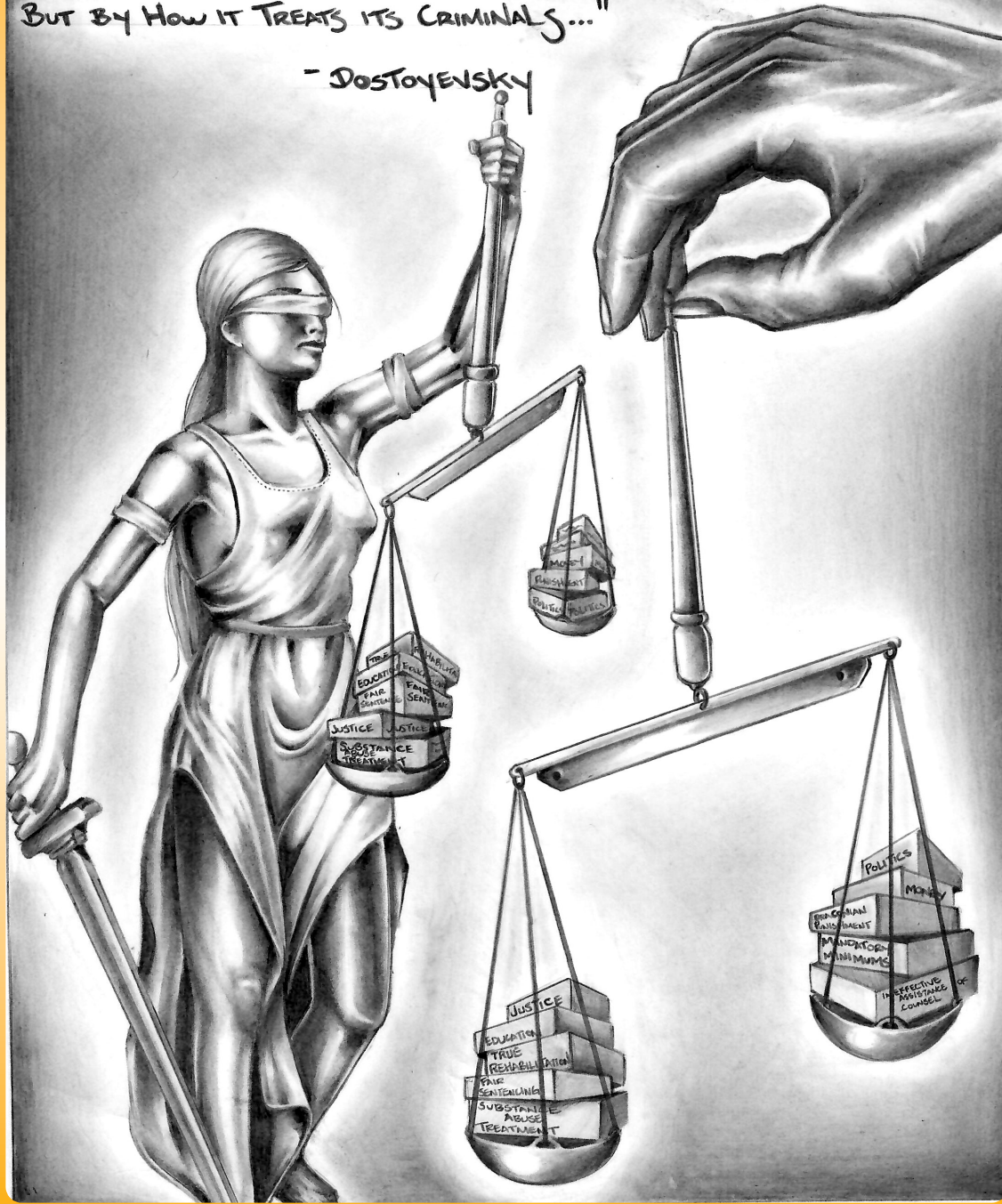
**Bio: I am a young person fighting for my freedom inside the Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall. I am grateful to have this chance to write and share my truths.**



# ★ ADULT ART CONTEST WINNERS! ★ "VISIONS OF REFORM"

"... A SOCIETY SHOULD BE JUDGED NOT BY  
HOW IT TREATS ITS OUTSTANDING CITIZENS,  
BUT BY HOW IT TREATS ITS CRIMINALS..."

- DOSTOYEVSKY



**1st Place Adult Art Winner**  
**Andrew Gonzalez, California Correctional Institution, Tehachapi, CA**  
Title: Scale of Reform  
**Bio: First time arrested, got 36 years for armed robbery spree (no one hurt), to support my meth addiction. I've been down 11 years.**



# ★ ADULT ART CONTEST WINNERS! ★ "VISIONS OF REFORM"

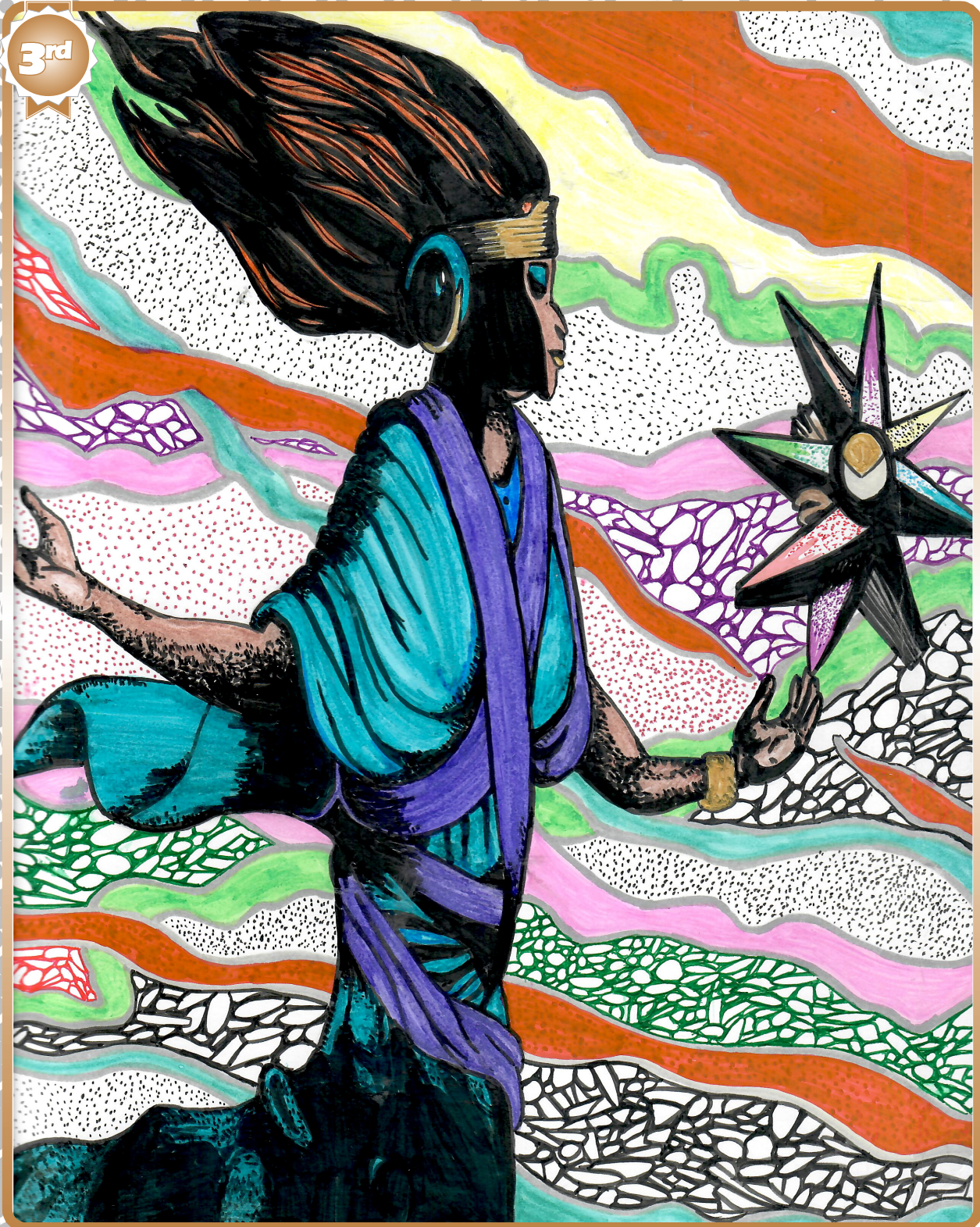


ARNOLDO JUAREZ 310 WATERMECAN

**2nd Place Adult Art Winner**  
 Arnoldo Juarez, Correctional Training Facility, Soledad, CA  
 Title: United We Can

Bio: I'm a healthy Mexican American serving 295 years for two gang-related drivebys (I'm thankful that I did not hurt anyone physically). I have been incarcerated since 2004 and I left the gang life when I became a Christian in 2008. There has been no write-ups to my name since I arrived to prison. I would like to observe the community when I get out of prison.

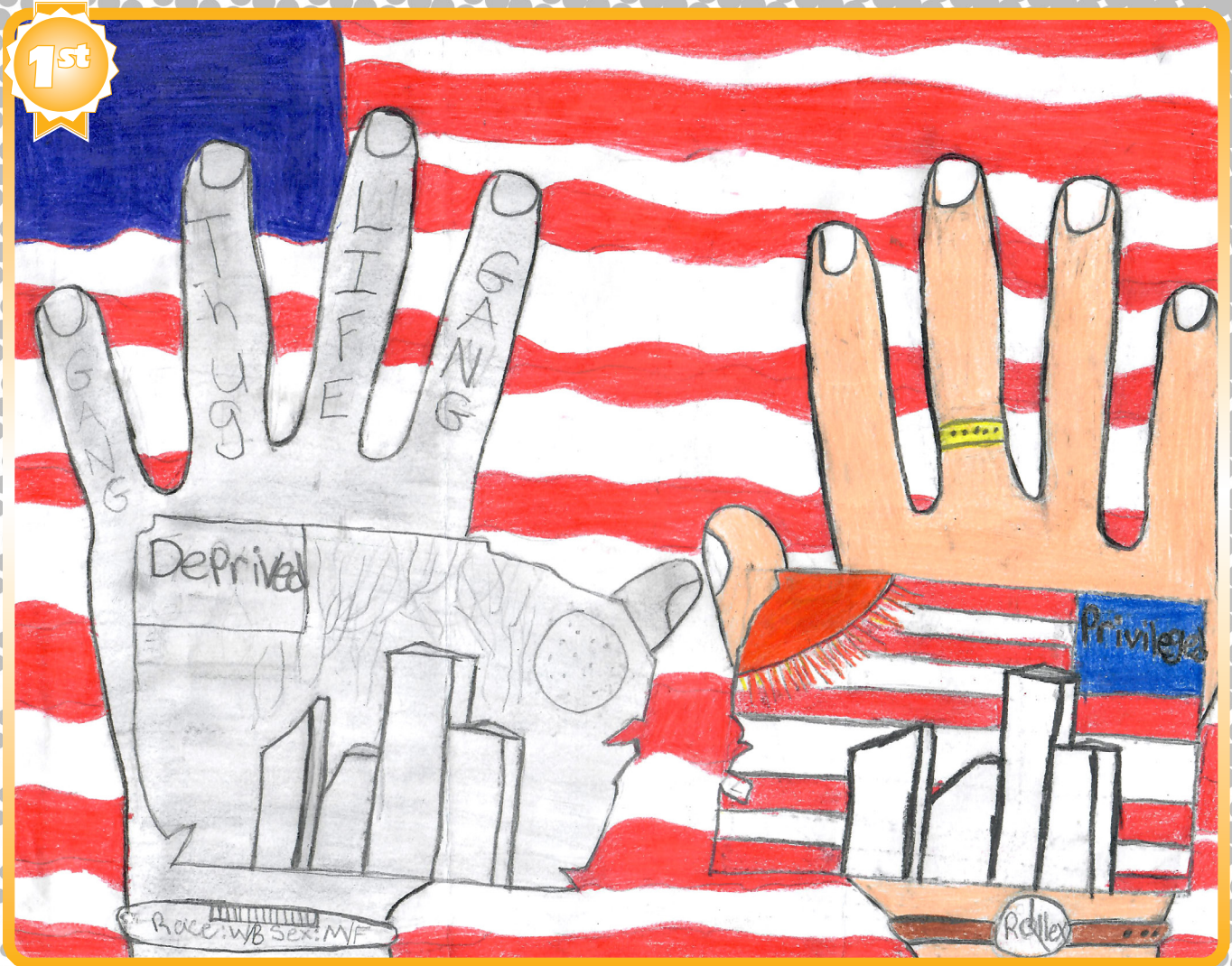
# ★ ADULT ART CONTEST WINNERS! ★ "VISIONS OF REFORM"



**3<sup>rd</sup> Place Adult Art Winner**  
Kelvin Ross, San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA  
Title: Queen Kalipha

**Bio:** I've currently been incarcerated since 2007. I am eligible for parole in early 2030. I hope you like "Queen Kalipha." She is the Black Empress of California.

# ★ YOUTH ART CONTEST WINNERS! ★ "VISIONS OF REFORM"



1st Place Youth Art Winner  
 Sean G, Sacramento, CA  
 Title: Freedom Coming

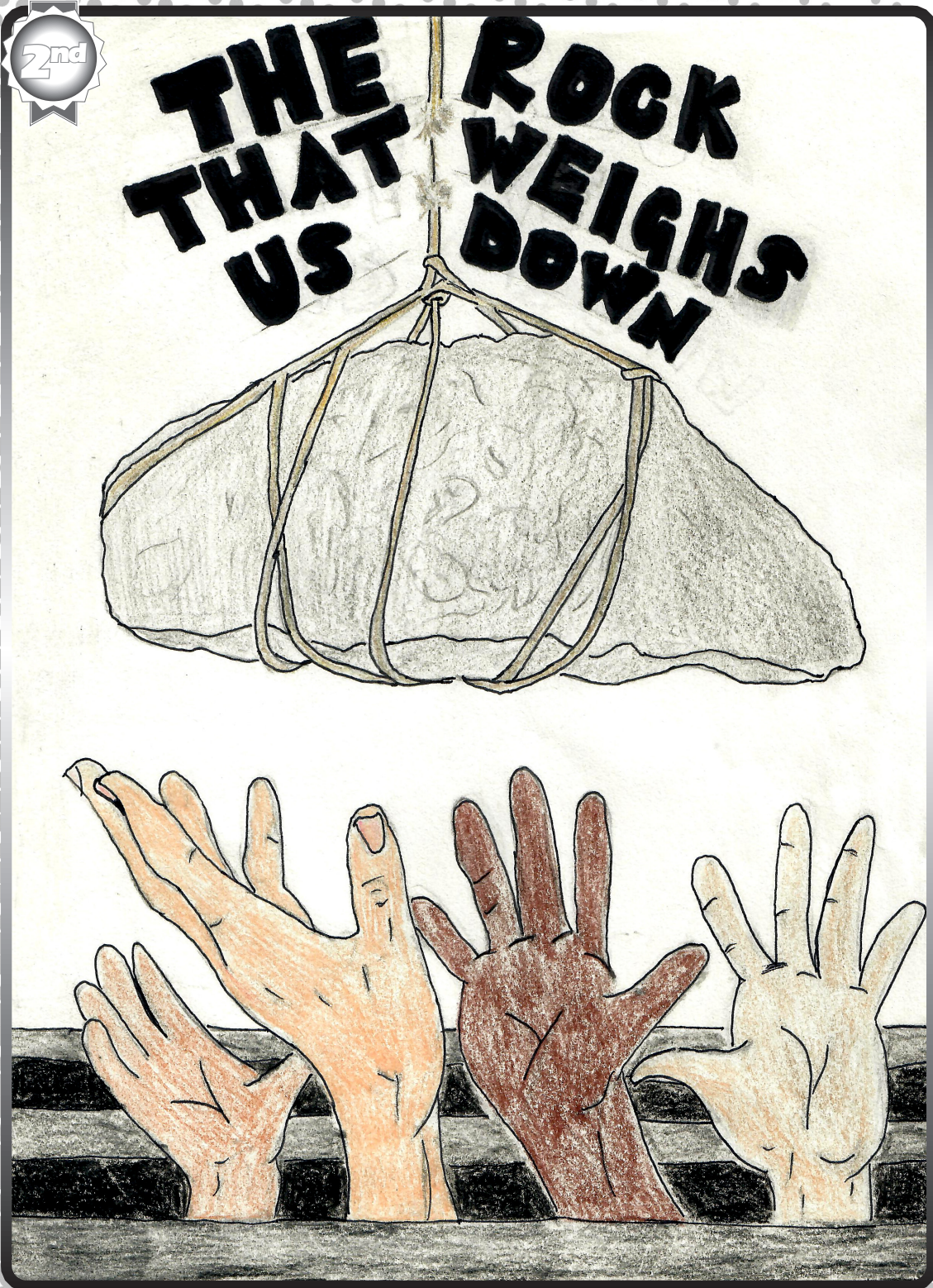
Bio: I am currently locked up at the Youth Detention Facility and I am trying to do better.

I was surprised staff here weren't prejudiced against my ideologies, and even understand conceal carrying, despite its risks, is not necessarily dangerous and can't be equated with evil by nature.

- Andy, *Troubles of Political Battles*, page 7

# ★ YOUTH ART CONTEST WINNERS! ★

"VISIONS OF REFORM"

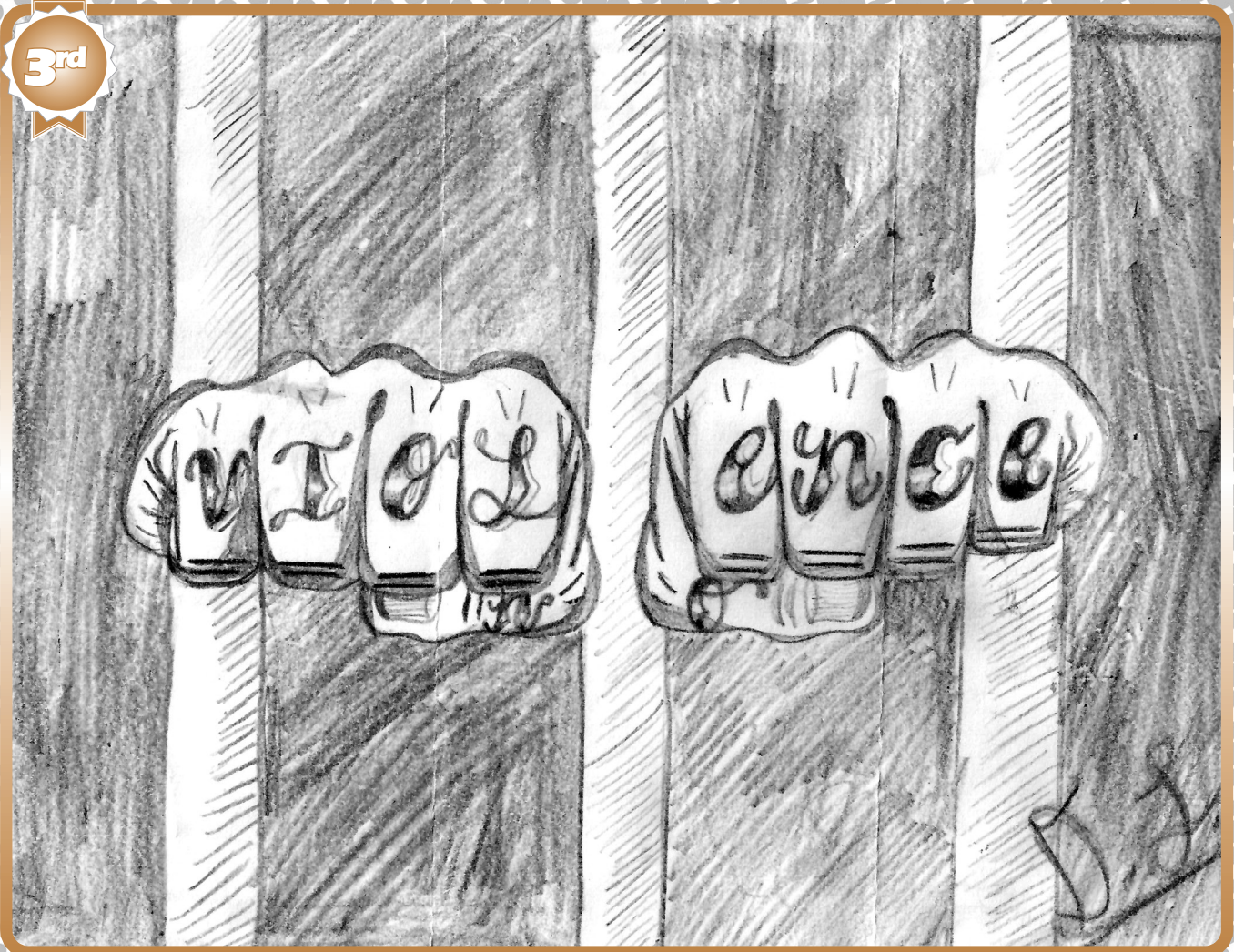


2nd

2nd Place Youth Art Winner  
King J, San Mateo, CA  
Title: The Rock That Weighs Us Down  
**Bio: I've been incarcerated most of my teenage years. Writing saved my life and fortunately, it saved my future. Thank you The Beat Within.**

# ★ YOUTH ART CONTEST WINNERS! ★ "VISIONS OF REFORM"

3rd



3<sup>rd</sup> Place Youth Art Winner  
DL, Sacramento, CA  
Title: No Violence

Bio: I love to draw, play sports, write songs, rap, sing and do Parkour.

I believe that there are actually some good people that work for the system in hopes of transforming lives in order to make our communities safer. But they can't do it alone, nor without the insight of those most affected.

- Anthony, *Words from a Product of the System*, page 4

# VISIONS OF REFORM ESSAYS

Adult Honorable Mention

## Little Houses in The Land O'Plenty

The worst part of this tale, is that it is true. I am a seemingly permanent fixture at the County Jail, and I had just finished doing 20 months and was released a bit sooner than I thought. (Or perhaps I should say sooner than I wished?) So at 8:00 P/M on a FRIDAY, I was launched into society once again with no place to go, and not a dime in my pocket. To make matters worse, none of my medication was there so my first trip was off to the E.R. to make sure I had enough meds to last until Monday. I stayed at my "friend's" home for the weekend. The "" are meant to show that while it WAS a friend of mine, it was an active drug habitat easily seducing me back to active use. The following Monday, through private sources I was able to get a week's lodging. "Okay," I thought, "this will surely be long enough to secure some more temporary housing until a sober living environment can be received." Who was I fooling?

Unlike 2015 and 2017, when I was able to get housing, 2019 was going to end this decade with another visit to jail where at least this time my precarious health is at a point where I can gain a sober living atmosphere. Now once again it is up to Judge and Jury. My private opinion is that for me at least, Minimalism (Tiny Houses) would be ideal for me. I've never been a person who found it necessary to saddle myself with loads and loads of possessions.

Most people on the planet are not as burdened with "goods" as the Good Old United States of America. As far as I am concerned, we are without a doubt the "Land O'Plenty". I don't want to get into a long-winded diatribe about who needs what. I can only speak for myself, and speak I shall. This country can obviously afford to house everybody, it just chooses for some reason not to. I'm not asking for a lot. I'm 60 years old, with a myriad of health problems. This country can either house me in, or outside of prison. I sure wish they could be influenced to make the right choice. Don't get me wrong, good things are slowly happening, just not quickly enough for ME!

So in closing, I beg you, United States O'Plenty, gimme my "Little House." It worked for our ancestors, and it will work for me.

Oh, just in case this is not 800 to 1000 words. (I'm not going to count them) I am including this short anecdote. During my short stint with the outside, a certain "Soup Kitchen" said I was not a Senior Citizen at the age of 60. Well, if they had perchance to walk even 30 of those years in these shoes, they would for sure be counted as senior citizens. Age is only a number used to register and classify people. Until we as a nation come to realize this, a lot of people will slip through the cracks and NOT receive the help and services they require to survive.

**-Pat Dahlen, San Francisco County Jail, San Francisco, CA**

I can only speak for myself, and speak I shall. This country can obviously afford to house everybody, it just chooses for some reason not to.

## My Long Life Story

Hi, my name is Nee-Nee and I came to jail on December 15, 2019. I am in here because they are charging me with something that I had no idea what they are talking about.

I've been to court several of times, and all they do is waive it off for either another week or two. Or maybe even months. But, it's a good thing. I talked to my attorney February 12th and before he went on his vacation, I asked him how he's doing.

Then I asked him if he heard anything on my case, and his response was, "Just know that your case is looking good so far." That kind of made me feel good after hearing that news.

So, all I'm waiting for is now is him to come see me on the 24th and explain to me more. So, I go to court March 5th for my prelim since I've already hit my 60-day mark. While I've been in custody, I've been able to see and talk to my daughter.

Thanks to my good, supportive family for taking time out of their day/work and do what's best for my daughter. That is to constantly come visit her mommy so that she can know that I'm still here for her and that I'm not going anywhere.

That's why I can't wait to get out to regain custody of my one-year old daughter - my queen, my everything, my back and front, my right and left. She just means the world to me. She is very smart for her age.

I'm a proud mother and happy I created a good seed. But, since I've been in jail, I've been able to get into programs like sisters, parenting, etc. I even got to sign up for college classes and got accepted and will be attending on February 24th.

So, I'm also happy for myself for that. I've also been reading books

in here now, because when I first arrived in San Francisco County Jail, I told myself and my fellow inmates that I am not reading, and that's not on my mind.

When I realized that I'm going to be here for a minute, it made me second guess myself and started flying through all different kinds of books and actually reading part 1, part 2, and part 3 of a book. So, I'm proud of myself about that too.

By the way, my name is Vernisha M. I've just turned 26 years old on February 4th, and I have a twin brother who is also incarcerated in Santa Rita Jail. I am the second oldest of all of my mom's six kids - three boys and three girls.

My little sister is 3 years old and I treat her the way I treat my daughter. I love my new little sister. I am from Hunter's Point, Bayview District. That's where most of my family still reside at and represent.

I also wanted to say that I've finished high school - 12th grade and graduated in 2012. I did all of that in Sheriday, WY. From then on, I went to cosmetology school and studied hair, skin, and nails.

I only did two years out there until the show started getting reckless. Before I left, I was in love with a Sheridan College basketball player and I've spent time with him.

Oh, and don't let me forget I did some sports out there like track - 100mt, 200mt, 400mt, 800mt, shot put, hurdles, the relays, etc. I also did cross country, high school basketball, and softball.

I loved every sport and wish I could turn back time. I'd want my daughter to grow up and be athletic just like her mother, and never end up in a place like this. So, I would like to thank my parents or making me become athletic and do what I believed I can do.

**-Vernisha Mandigo, San Francisco County Jail, San Francisco, CA**

...since I've been in jail, I've been able to get into programs like sisters, parenting, etc. I even got to sign up for college classes and got accepted and will be attending on February 24th.

## To The Abyss and Back

Hello World, my name is Derry Brown. I will be speaking to you about one of the U.S.' largest epidemics – mental health.

This topic has been silenced at many dinner tables, yet the reasons (like the cause of the epidemic itself) are unknown. However, from day to day discussions with fellow earth dwellers, I come to find that many fear the unknown.

Therefore, I will peel back a few layers of my tear releasing onion. The year is 1995, and what I've just encountered a few months ago after my release from the California Youth Authority, is mind blowing.

In a haste to get back to my life of crime, I began by helping with the revamping of our decaying neighborhood. Our neighborhood was short on members at this time, so we were in the process of recruiting new individuals to our dying hood.

In the midst of me reconnecting with my former lifestyle, my criminal activities were arrested as a result of God intervening. On a bright sunny day, as I sat in my girlfriend's backyard, something compelled me to look at the sun.

I took on this giant fireball eye to eye until it turned black on me. What appeared in this ball of heat next spooked the daylights out of me. After it turned black, a silhouette figure of an individual sitting on a throne with a staff in hand, appeared.

This appearance spooked me so bad, I had to turn away. When I looked back at the sun, it was shining bright again, ready to take down another sick human being crazy enough to gaze upon its brilliance.

Several events took place after this encounter, but for time's sake, I will highlight a few events leading up to my very first stay inside a mental ward.

Around a week or so after my bout with the sun, I sat on my sister's apartment balcony, sipping on a small bottle of Jensen, gazing at a full moon.

My spook meter goes off again. As I gazed at this beautiful, white, celestial body, it turned bloodshot red, and what appeared to be glitter flakes fell from its direction.

During this time, I was staying with my girlfriend who stayed down the street from my mother (whose house she and I watched get raided by my P.O and local police in search me).

One evening, as my woman and I lounged around her pad, her eyes caught a glimpse of a drawing I drew on a Styrofoam cup I kept from the local hamburger joint I frequented.

The drawing on the cup portrayed some of my inner happenings at the time. On this cup were nice (beyond my scope of drawing) letters that beautifully spelled out: God is love; God the Creator; Dad & Aunty, RIP, etc.

To this cup, my girl asked, "Who drew this?" "I did!" I responded. To my surprise, several days later, she brought me a bible.

As she handed me the Bible, I quickly responded by saying, "I'm cool!" She said, "It will be here on the dresser if you want it." However, as the days passed by, I decided to pick it up and take a look inside.

I opened the bible to the book of Genesis, chapter one, the latter end of verse (2), which state.. "and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

After reading this verse, I found the nearest jug of water and began telling pedestrians that God was in the water. This event, compiled with many others, was the beginning of my spiritual journey.

The final event before taking my first drive to a mental facility was fast approaching. On a very humorous, yet sunny morning, I was spiritually led to my God-fearing mother's house.

In toe with my Bible and Godly jug of water in hand, I entered

my mother's home. For some strange reason, I started shouting, "this is Jesus' house!" over and over as I started pouring water throughout the house.

I entered the restroom and began spraying it down with water and holy shouts. During this heated moment, I tried to open a jammed window that wouldn't open. My hand slipped and busted the window, giving my wrist a small, but deep cut, which need stitches.

After seeing the site of blood, my mother called the ambulance to tend to the wound. However, the police arrived with them to arrest me after explaining to me that there was a warrant out for my arrest.

The officer explained to me that I would be heading to the county jail after I receive stitches. After receiving stitches at the county hospital, I was transferred to the L.A County Jail.

While being processed into the men's central jail, I began breathing in and out fast and deep until I passed out. When I awoke, I was strapped down to a bed with leather straps around my wrist and ankles with a diaper on.

After several days of slipping in and out of consciousness, I was shackled and told to move about the cell (slowly), for I was confined to the best for some time.

After a good shower, I spoke with a doctor who explained to me that I would be going back to the Youth Authority for a parole hearing.

He said that he would keep me on the nutrition pills that he put me on, so that I could regain the weight that I lost while on (4) point restraints. Around a week later, I was transferred back to Y.A.

Upon my arrival, a staff member took me to speak with someone whom I would later find out to be from the psych department. However, at this time, this individual was just another person to me.

He began asking me questions like – what did you eat for breakfast this morning? Who is the current president? Do you know where you are? He then asked me, what kind of meds was I taking?

I told him that I was taking some nutrition pills to regain weight that I lost while being strapped down to a bed in the county jail. He gazed up at the standing staff who brought me in to see him and slowly said, "What are the colors of these nutrition pills?"

As I began calling off these different colors, I could see him mouthing names to the staff. After our brief meeting, he stated that it would be his recommendation to the board (that I was to see in a few weeks) that I stay on the current psychotropic medication for a year inside in the Y. A's psychiatric unit.

My mind is slipping out at this time. Who? Why? What? Who is on psych meds? Why am I being placed in the crazy unit? What the heck just happened here?

Allow me to do a little break down for you If I may. At the time, this one flew over my head. Moreover, Marshall was a unit inside one of the many youth authorities that existed back in this day.

However, this particular Y.A was a receiving facility named S.R.C.C, Southern Reception Center and Clinic. Five years prior, I passed through this Y.A, yet I was on the other side.

The unit, Marshall, stood by itself (alone) beyond the visiting area. This was known as the "crazy" unit to all on the "sane" side of the junior prison. Isn't that just like our ostracizing society – them vs. us or us vs. them?

Isn't this what we teach our young? Marshall – yes, yes, Marshall was the unit I was led to upon returning to this facility. I stepped in Marshall for a few minutes to put up my belongings.

Then, I was led out by staff who took me to see the doctor whom I would later find out was from the psych department and

# VISIONS OF REFORM ESSAYS

Adult Honorable Mention

*continued from previous page*

was doing an assessment on my mental state.

After my check in with the doctor, I was led back to Marshall where I told the staff that I no longer wanted to take medication. This would usher my internal and external war.

Discontinuing their medication wouldn't be as easy as I thought it would be. When under a doctor's care (inside an institution), that doctor's word is final.

Yet, as the days until my board hearing became shorter to see if I would be continued on parole or slammed for a year violation in Marshall. I did a little investigating about the effects of their medications.

I asked the heavy-set guys in the unit if their bellies were as big as they are now before taking the psych meds. I'll be dog on if they all didn't say they were smaller before the meds.

This was before I learned about side effects. As I continued to ingest their meds, I noticed my body beginning to trip on me. The first sign of slippage was of me dozing in the dayroom, which was a no-no in this day and age.

As one of the oldest cats in the unit, you had to stay on your toes and watch out for the young hyenas trying to earn a stripe in the gang life. The second sign of body/mind slippage was of me flooding the tier.

This act would usher in the task force of (G'S's) which stood for Group Supervisor (the equivalent of a correctional officer). They entered in and asked me to take my medication.

If I didn't, they would force me to. The internal war had already begun with my body and mind slipping and tripping by way of craving the drugs that I've been depriving it.

Now, the external was has just begin for the same reason. The officers opened the cell door and rushed me to the ground. We tussled for a bit, then the mace that entered my mouth, nose, and eyes, brought about a surrender in me.

As I laid there on the cold hallway floor like a wounded animal, in goes their tranquilizer, their sedation juice, their zombie creating semen. These affairs began to happen quite often.

One of the most brutal beat downs was after I poured the liquid medication in the nurse's face. Then it happened. I couldn't hear, speak, taste, or feel. I was gone, but still my body roamed.

When I came too, I was in what was known as a camera room where one was watched 24/7. I would find out later that I had several unit write-ups (one being the liquid meds to the nurse's face).

These write-ups were the proof of my roaming about in this gone state. I would later find this to be called, a waling black out. My time to go in front of the board finally arrived.

At this hearing, I was placed on mandatory medication, and given a year to do in Marshall for violating parole.

I was placed on a lovely doctor's caseload whom I had regular weekly visits with; a cool older sista by the name of Dr. Stevenson, who was more like a mother figure to me.

She would call my moms and chat with her, sometimes she would let me holler at my moms too. It was beginning to feel like home in her presence, maybe it was the mother connecting thang - women, you can't live without 'em.

Moreover, Lord knows I didn't want to be on their meds, so I asked her if she could take me off. She stated that she, being a psychologist, didn't have the authority to take me off, but would recommend it to the chief psychiatrist.

With that, she and I worked out a plan to pull me off their meds. Our plan was for me to give them eight or nine months clean (on the meds), for I had become such a wreck to where the staff thought that I was gone (mentally) and wasn't coming back.

I found out later that Dr. Stevenson put in the recommendation to the psychiatrist who said he would wean me off in a few months.

True to their word, when that time came, I was weaned off and a couple of months later, I was released. This was my first trip to the mental ward.

**-Derry "Brotha Dee" Brown,  
San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA**



The internal war had already begun with my body and mind slipping and tripping by way of craving the drugs that I've been depriving it.



Adult Honorable Mention

# VISIONS OF REFORM ESSAYS

## True Reform

In any environment there can always be a change. But most of the time only certain people benefit from the changes made. As a transwoman who has spent 25 years in the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation prison system I can honestly say that it hasn't been easy to access the programs, jobs available that the men can access easily. Due to the fact of fear, stigma, and just downright ignorance of those inside the prison it has been difficult to get the help needed to be rehabilitated in this environment. The countless times of transwomen being judged by their presence and not by their character is at the least very upsetting. Nobody wants to be at a job or a group of men and be called a man, Mr., Fella, he, him, gentleman, or a list of words that are deemed to be a part of a non-educated people's vocabulary on a daily basis. Trying to be a part of how to make changes needed for all to receive the rehabilitation needed is somewhat of a huge challenge. In prison as well as the free world we are taught to react to what we see rather than to listen and observe with our minds, rather than our eyes. Nobody wants to feel like they can't do better and be better each day.

If this is about being rehabilitated in prison then what needs to happen to make the change is for the people who make the decisions of what people need to do to rehabilitate everyone needs to be about just that. Including all races and genders in education, vocational groups, and job areas to make sure everyone is accepted just as they are. Nobody should be left out because they are a transwoman in a man's prison. At the top of the list to assure equality of all incarcerated people – all staph – regardless of if they are offenders, counselors, or even volunteers, should have the training needed to respect everyone in their right to be rehabilitated – they chose to do so. There is not enough done to really help those who are attacked by others on purpose. If the goal was to allow us to be better people once released then prisons need to be about inclusion and not the destruction of lives because of their gender. I deserve to have the same access to all programs as the males do and not have to sacrifice my freedom at the hands of ignorant people who only want to make themselves look good. As the Governor, they have the ability to make changes that can help everyone, even all the people who don't agree with the decisions the Governor would make. Everyone that works for the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation should again be trained first that they can't be biased over the incarcerated person over another and to make sure that for those who truly want the Rehabilitation, then that's what they shall receive.

The transgender population in CDCR is roughly around 500. That is such a small percentage of the population. But still are also an important part to get the rehabilitative programs is to be their people once they return to society. The second part of the reform should include training for incarcerated men who facilitate programs to be more educated on the program usage in order to ensure that trans people can feel like they are a part of programs and not feel like outcasts. These are simple fixes to a better way of life for everyone. Everyone can do their part if they would just realize that everyone should have the same opportunity as the next person. But until people at the top don't take the steps needed to make changes within themselves and then with their staff, then reform will only still be the way it is in a certain group of people and it won't be about rehabilitation for all.

**-Lisa Strawn, San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA**

**If the goal was to allow us to be better people once released then prisons need to be about inclusion and not the destruction of lives because of their gender.**



## I'm Mad

Though I can't change what has happened, I can choose how to go about it, and take time to react and work to a better, instead of feeling bitter and offset. I don't want to spend my life locked up anymore, I feel, I've been more locked up in life than I've been free. And it's because I've had. Throughout my life, I always had a sense to be able to feel the ones I love the most. Sad, mad, happy, or feeling that uncertainty of how things are, with loved ones that are out afar. Being where I'm at don't really help either.

I get mad at my life sometimes not because where I'm at, but because of how I was just a bad person to those who try to help me, to those who loved me, the ones that cared about me and tried to keep me from ending up where I'm at now. I'm mad at myself for not thinking of those who really mattered, like my kids, my wife, my mom, and myself. I would hear this saying that I was told, by a friend. I wouldn't give you up for anything in the world, cars, cash, or clothes, but the truth is I've been trading you for bad habits time after time. From when I was going through life at its worst and hard times, thinking to myself it's never going to get better, and feeling sad for myself, and not being able to see the big picture of it's only going to get better if I make it better.

Not being able to change what happened. But knowing I could change how it ends, feeling the way I feel, and my mind set of the way things are, and this place of where I'm at, and saying it only gets better from here. I would worry about a lot of things and have concerns of mini things. Try not to overthink or see the worst in everything. I tell people don't worry about me when I'm quiet, it's when I'm trying to laugh or make jokes, that's when I'm in my darkest place and trying to pull myself out of it. I was bad for the things I've done. I feel bad for what took place, the things that would never fully be replaced.

The thing I'm unable to forgive myself for is how I was wrong for taking you all for granted and not loving you as I should of. I hope my essay makes sense, I just feel it may not be good enough. Until next time, gone for now but not forever.

I don't care if I win, I just want to be heard —

**-Mark Serrano, San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA**

# VISIONS OF REFORM ESSAYS

Adult Honorable Mention

## The Criminal Justice Disparity: Wealthy vs. Poor

Further changes are needed in the criminal justice system to ensure that those who find themselves caught in its snares are treated fairly. The momentum of the current movement for prison reform is a nice start. We're moving in the right direction. Yet more needs to be done to reverse the harsh sentencing guidelines that still exist.

The criminal justice system disproportionately penalizes minorities and people who live below the poverty line. Individuals who fit into this bracket do not possess the financial means to mount an adequate criminal defense, whereas, people of upper-class social standing have the finances to compete with the district attorney's office in litigation. Wealthy defendants frequently possess the social connections to aid them in receiving a favorable sentence. Calling in a favor is a common method of resolving or reducing a criminal complaint when a person is situated to do so. In contrast, those who live "on the wrong side of the tracks" are almost never positioned to benefit from such relief.

Justice can only be served when it is applied evenly across the board. That's precisely why we look to the statue which depicts a blindfolded woman holding the scales of justice. It is representative of justice being meted out indiscriminately. This is a vision for our justice system which is difficult to effectuate under the current system.

You don't have to look far to see the injustice of it all. One example is: the way wealthy opioid manufacturers are treated.

They never go to prison for the blatant criminal malfeasance they perpetrate against our country's citizens. Purdue Pharma, a corporation reputed to have ignited the opioid epidemic which has killed thousands of people, has never incurred a conviction resulting in the imprisonment of one of their executives or owners.

In fact, the only time a conviction occurred was when three of their executives plead to a misdemeanor misbranding charge which led to a mere sentence of probation, community service, and fines. The evidence against Purdue for creating a death trap responsible for a large portion of the 300,000 deaths attributed to the opioid epidemic—is substantial. And yet no one is being held sufficiently liable for their role in the epidemic.

When I say "sufficiently liable"... I mean in comparison to those who live below the poverty line who incur lengthy prison sentences for much lesser crimes. How many of us in prison know of someone who received a life sentence under the Three Strikes Law for a non-violent property crime? And more than half the people I know here had their sentences doubled for having prior strike conviction. Meanwhile, crooked corporate executives look no further than their checkbooks for actions which cause death and suffering in mass quantity.

If we take a plea bargain or other favorable court disposition given to a wealthy defendant—and apply it uniformly—even to those who are poor, we would have an equitable way of delivering justice. I hope that more criminal justice reforms are on the way. Wouldn't it be nice to see the full spectrum of humankind treated in accordance with sound principles?

**-Kerry Rudd, San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA**

I hope that more criminal justice reforms are on the way. Wouldn't it be nice to see the full spectrum of humankind treated in accordance with sound principles?

## Guns

In my youth, guns were recognized as the ultimate source of power a person could possess. In that era, it lacked the constant and usage with guns, so unlike today's modern times. Everybody was killing and crippling one another without pause to thought of the value of another person's life. The act of war is real within our states, cities, and nation as well as places of joy and comfort, such as parks, concerts, schools, churches, and the list continues without end. My experiences concerning guns prompted me to seek them for my own safety, wealth, and guardianship to my family.

I went to a Fourth of July celebration in Oakland, California at Lake Merritt with Timothy, a friend of mine. We loved going there with its beautiful scenery day and night but tonight is a celebration in colorful display of fireworks. Every year the fireworks seem to get better ending in a joyful time and mood, but Timothy and I, still had some dud firecrackers that didn't explode. In front of Timothy's cousin house, we were igniting them to stomp on them to explode, which they did. A steel grey Cadillac, a 1963 or '64 was passing by, when we made the last firecracker explode. The car screeched to a stop and burned rubber, backing up in reverse, to where we stood. An adult black man got out of his car and approached us, wearing a powder light blue sport suit with a large gun in his right hand. When I noticed the large gun in this man's right hand, I couldn't understand the situation, until the man pointed the gun at my head madly and finally he spoke,

"Who threw the rock at my car." As calmly as I could I told this enraged man that neither one of us threw any rock at his car. That we were only igniting dud firecrackers.

This man eyes were as red as blood, like a raging fire consuming everything in sight. In fear of our lives, moments later, which seemed

like forever, the man quietly backed away from us without another word and drove away. Speechless, Timothy and I looked at one another, not knowing nor understood what just happened. I never forget that dire event, that is etched in my memory. I come to realize some years later, that the man was under the influence of drugs. The craziness in his behavior and facial expressions, I come to know of some years later. Sometime later me and some friends teased a fenced in dog. The dog's owner came out of her house and emptied her gun, shooting blindly at us. We hid by tall trees and bushes by the freeway. She wanted our blood or life.

While in my neighborhood, a police officer once drew his gun and placed it at the back of my head, while using the "N" word repeatedly. "N\*\*\*\*, you and your N\*\*\*\* friends are not to be caught in this train yard again. This is private property and you N\*\*\*\*\* is not wanted here. If I catch you N\*\*\*\*\* in this train yard again, you and your N\*\*\*\* friends will die." I never been so afraid and so many N\*\*\*\*\* before in my life and felt that the police were going to kill me. The gun the police embedded in the back of my head and his foul breath felt deadly to me. That was a time I thought I was dead. Another time, a policeman gave me a ridiculous choice, I could run across an empty field, to my freedom, while he held his gun in his hand.

After those incidents, I became extremely tired of people having that gun power over me, so at the age of 17, I bought my first gun, a 38 Special revolver. That gun came at a serious time for safeguarding me and my family against threats from everywhere.

Having a gun, have saved my life a number of times. My experiences with guns have been bitter-sweet, but now my freedom has been taken, gone! I sit here today in prison, with a life sentence, for the illegal use of a gun, by taking the life of another human being...

**-Osun Walton, San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA**

## Incarceration Changed

Incarcerated child to a incarcerated man or woman. One may ask how is this possible? I believe it is possible in a world where it is accepted as a deliberate form of continued punishment. It is accepted in a world full of hate, discrimination and false traditions, which all paved the "Yellow Brick Road" right into Mass-Incarceration. Ask yourself, why would one want to incarcerate another? Is it really for punishment or vengeance, hatred or discrimination, false traditions or for profit or just for the status quo? You tell me. In this essay I will consider growing up in my community, crime and government solutions and if incarceration can be changed.

Well as a young boy it seemed that I had no problems, no worries, no personal hang-ups or hate for anyone because I thought as a child. While growing up in a community with my family I felt safe. The people in my community felt safe and supported one another. I can still remember walking to school with my mother as a young boy and our neighbors would speak to us, make sure we were safe and encourage my education. My community was hard working people, took time to know one another and help. I can remember when my community had PTA Meetings, School Bus Field Trips, Boys and Girls Club, Summer Camps, Sports Teams, etc... What happened? What happened to the Restorative Justice we once used if a kid broke out a window, took a bike, our community solved these things. The System solved more serious problems. Now in my teens things in our community drastically began to change. Our neighbors became more and more silent and the youths including myself began to blindly follow this "Yellow Brick Road" right into separation and destruction.

Our communities became saturated with drugs, gangs, crime and abuse. Fear began to show its frightened face everywhere, creating a public outcry so loud that something had to be done, but what? I thought no one really wanted to understand how these things gradually began to happen or if something other than incarceration could correct these concerns. In fact, our Government decided to act in a forceful and violent way drafting tougher laws as though we had none already. These new and harsher Laws fell from our beautiful blue and white sky like the Manna in the days of old written about in the Holy Scriptures, where the Children of Israel ate Manna for forty years until they came to the border of the land of Canaan (Exodus 16:35). This Manna was a bread that sustained the Children of Israel and the New Manna of Laws is used to destroy. In contrast, this Manna of Laws began to poison our communities, separate families, scar,

cripple, and kill tens of thousands of citizens across our beautiful country including myself as a youth for life. This New Manna of Laws were being enforced by all means necessary by our state and governmental agencies. This free reign of law enforcement power brought out military weapons like the "Batter-Ram" in conjunction with other military weapons to fight against the drug and crime epidemic prevailing in our communities. Government Officials began to yell out terms like: "LOCK 'EM UP AND THROW AWAY THE KEY, SAY NOPE TO DOPM JUVENILES ARE CRIMINAL PREDATORS, AND THE LIKE." I believe that clichés like these caused further separation in our communities, our humanities and amplified racism in our country. In all this, if one is ignorant of the law and living in poverty there is no excuse. At some point you will be incarcerated and forever scared.

Every living being or creature should not be confined their entire life. What could literally justify this? Robbery, Assault, Murder? Even the Children of Israel did not eat Manna forever.

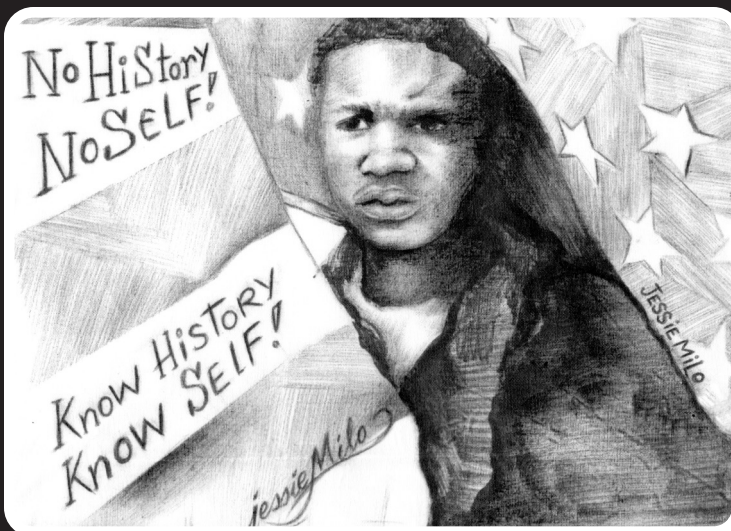
I think this man-made Beast began with a mindset. One that did not reckon with the consequences of what would come. With this new debased and deliberate mindset driving this so-called Law and order Push, incarceration blossomed faster than a dark gray mushroom cloud with the stench of mold that has and is still eating away at our country, state by state. Mass-Incarceration. A man-made Beast that has swallowed up our humanity. Is there any antidote? I think it begins with our families, communities and Governments. Our Systems roar its voice about Rehabilitation and Reforms, but incarceration is still peaking its ugly face over many jails and prison walls right now!

Incarceration, separation and discrimination have been taught to generations of people including me. This belief will choke your soul to death if you let it defeat you. I believe something can be done to change the way we incarcerate, but this is what we do as a people. For instance, we put fish in bowls, birds in cages, animals in pens and of course people in cells and want to confine them for decades even life. This is the true meaning of cruel and unusual beside the hanging of an innocent man, no matter how one spins it.

Can a world without incarceration or different forms of punishment be possible within the same mindset of government who built this "BEAST?" A warden told me to fix an establishment is to get rid of it and bring in a new mindset. At this point, all I can do is click the heels of my prison boots together like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz and wish everyone who find themselves incarcerated mentally or physically away from that dreadful "Yellow Brick Road" right into Heaven's Gate where true freedom lives.

-Timothy Young, San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA

Incarceration, separation  
and discrimination  
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# VISIONS OF REFORM ESSAYS

Adult Honorable Mention

## Thirteen Bars

The Grey Goose prison bus leapt onto the Golden Gate Bridge like a cheetah pouncing on prey. I was one of forty prisoners, all wearing red paper-thin jumpsuits, leaving San Francisco County Jail en route to San Quentin State Prison.

Around our waists were chains, cold as the dark side of the moon, that attached our cuffed hands to our sides. Cold shackles on our feet secured safe travel for us: human cargo.

Out the window, the sun climbed to its zenith. The golden rays sparkled on the bay and dozens of sailboats, propelled by a crisp summer breeze, waltzed on the waves.

Each ripple produced swimming thoughts of my family – from wedding bells to the 63 obituaries. I drifted on bittersweet memories. BURMMMMPPPHHHH.....

The loud horn of a ferry en route to Alcatraz snapped me back to reality. I smiled at the friendly people waving at us on their way to enjoy a tour of the old prison, but my cuffed hands prevented me from waving back.

"Did you know that each prison cell at San Quentin has exactly 13 bars?" asked the old man sitting next to me. His voice was raspy.

His long, grey dreadlocks reeked of mildew mixed with apple shampoo. His walnut brown, Creole skin was creased with wrinkles, but his ocean blue eyes bespoke wisdom. "No sir," I answered with respect.

"Yes Larwd," said the old man, rocking back and forth. "Built in 1852, San Quentin State Prison was designed with us in mind."

His lined face reminded me of Miss Jane Pitman, a black woman up from slavery, who lived to see one hundred and ten years.

"I'm confused, O.G. What do you mean by, 'designed with us in mind'?" I asked.

"Not O.G. Omar be my name, son," the old man corrected me. "Yes sir. Omar it is, sir," I replied.

He said most of us were convicted by twelve jurors of our peers and one judge, which equals 13. He said San Quentin has exactly 13 bars across each cell, 13 steps between each tier, and if I had a rabbit in my blood and tried to escape he said, "They got 13 gun towers to shoot your black ass back down to reality."

"Wow," I said to that, and made a mental note to check his facts. "In America, no hotel has a 13th floor. Like Friday the 13th, it's considered a bad omen. Hence, San Quentin was designed with us unlucky men in mind," he said.

Then, Omar nodded off to sleep with his head on my shoulder. As the Grey Goose slowly pulled up inside San Quentin's main

yard, I saw over two hundred prisoners working out in various groups.

It was 1991, so pig iron was plentiful, and there were men as big as Stanley "Tookie" Williams lifting weights. I peered up to the rolls of razor wires that crowned the forty-foot walls.

Menacing armed CO's were standing at towers in every direction I turned. The bus jerked to a stop. "You first two pile out," ordered the sheriff. "Omar, wake up, we next!" I said, shaking his shoulder.

Omar looked around. "Damn," he frowned, as if remembering a bad dream. Omar and I scooted off the seats and duck walked in shackles to the front. The sheriff removed our shackles and tossed the iron chains into a metal box that sounded like a hundred coins.

Once inside, we were all stripped naked, ordered to raise our private parts and told, "Turn around, bend over, spread your butt cheeks and cough three times." I felt shame, humiliation, and anger all at once.

"I know how you feel, young blood," Omar whispered as we all got dressed. "OK, listen for your name and form two lines," the CO commanded. "Es-CORT!" the CO shouted as we followed him from the lower yard.

As we climbed the stairs, I counted 13 steps between each tier. My cell was cramped and dirty, with a thin mattress on a metal slab passing for a bed. There were no sheets, just a coarse gray blanket.

I turned at the sound of the keys. Once the CO walked away, I counted the metal frame that caged me. "1, 2, 3..." Just as the old man said, I ended my count at exactly 13 bars.

Today, 02-23-2020, after serving 27 years in prison, my vision for reform is:

- Replace the 13 bars prison cells that currently engage 2.3 million Americans, with 13 of the best transformation of character programs that have proven success records.
  - Replace the inhumane six cubic feet that engages two prisoners, per cell, with single room occupancy (SRO). Tiny houses for all reformed and non-violent offenders.
  - Repeal the slavery clause of the 13th amendment and pay all prisoners with living wages so that no one feels forced to return to crime to pay rent or for food.
- In his famous "Me Against The World" rap song, 2Pac once said, "Dreaming of riches, in a position to making a difference, but politicians and hypocrites, they don't want to listen." In conclusion, if I was governor, I would not only listen to these visions of reform but act on them.

-Charles Brooks, San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, CA



Around our waists were chains, cold as the dark side of the moon, that attached our cuffed hands to our sides. Cold shackles on our feet secured safe travel for us: human cargo.

## Reversing the Inaccessibility of a Vibrant Middle Class to People of Color

As my back lays on my prison bunk, what would I tell a governor to end the malaise of mass incarceration at its source? In order for my words to be effective, a governor must possess a fundamental belief in the goodness of people.

I know I bring a unique perspective. I am from the largest state in the Union – California. I am from the populous county in the U.S., Los Angeles. California is a majority-minority state, and Los Angeles is the U.S. gang capital.

In a paper put out by the Prison Policy Institute (PPI), in 2017, Blacks were 12% of the U.S. adult population, but 33% of its prison population. Whites accounted for 64% of the adult population, but 30% of the prison population. Hispanics were 16% of the adult population, but 23% of the prison population.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Blacks were 6% of California's population, and 27% of its prisoners. Hispanics were 38% of its population, and 41% of its prisoners.

Whites were 40% of its population, and 26% of its prisoners, and Asians were 13% of its populations, and 2% of its prisoners. Let's not kid ourselves, mass incarceration disproportionately affects Blacks and Hispanics; but even more so, disproportionately affects African Americans.

Being an African American, I live on the extreme side of America's mass incarceration dilemma. This makes me qualified in giving voice to the cause and solution.

Most research studies have concluded, crime rate increases are connected to unemployment and low wages. In 1993 to 1997, the rate of crime decreased as result of the increase in wages of low skilled employees.

Poverty is not the provenance of the elite. While elite members may have come from poverty, too many of them move away from their impoverished lands, be it domestic or overseas.

One may ask the relevance to the overseas comment to those living stateside. It is mentioned in this context, "What is brain drain?" We love to frown upon the consequences of brain drain to Third World countries; however, in academic literature, the topic of domestic brain drain is not widely written upon.

Is it because members of the academic community in the states would be condemning themselves? Domestic brain drain is inapposite to the proposal I would propose to any governor.

When a person moves away, they create a communication golf too vast to bridge. Why is maintaining contact with the community so vitally important? Because you create visible Road Models within the community to emulate.

As a Los Angeles native, I personally witnessed the impact of the commercial success of Long Beach rapper, Snoop Dogg, and its impact on stunting criminal behavior in Long Beach.

Snoop Dogg's visibility, as someone who could earn a meaningful living by picking up a pen, rather than a dope sack or a pistol, saved lives, and stunted criminal behavior directly associated with the economic conditions in Long Beach.

In 2019, Los Angeles rapper, Nipsey Hussle, was gunned down

over a personal dispute. His funeral and procession was one of the largest in the city's history.

Nipsey was unknown to the elite of the city; a city that is enclaved by wealth, and the legacy of citywide racial segregation practices in the early to mid-20th century, known as racial covenants.

But, because people of color in mass poured into the streets daily over his death, and the media coverage that ensued, the elites of Los Angeles got to know Nipsey Hussle.

How he took distressed and foreclosed storefronts and revitalized them in the gang infested community he was from and provided employment opportunities. He started STEM after school facilities for the youth. And his death, brought about the largest gang truce in the city's history.

These communities are sick communities, and when somebody wells themselves from within these communities and get ghost, these communities will inevitably remain sick. Domestic brain drain in communities of colors is a serious problem.

The elite are quick to banty about the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," but if you are fleeing the village once you are able to pull yourself up by your bootstraps, then what?

Both Snoop Dogg, and Nipsey Hussle were avowed Crips. My Crip gang is known for its football games, and other sports related competitions, against historical mortal enemies.

In the 1994 Crime Bill, President Clinton signed into law, was a provision to fund midnight basketball. The rationale was to give the youth another option other than the street corner as a hangout spot.

This only could have happened if one of the underwriters believed in the fundamental goodness in the people, this new crime bill was going to most adversely affect.

Gangs are not the problem, its gang violence is. In Brazil, a community adopted the Los Angeles low rider culture, absent the violence. The elite go off to grad school and organize themselves into some Greek named fraternity.

They have an initiation just like street gangs. But when hazing leads to death, there is an outcry, and punishments. The elite may never see the lifelong affiliation to a fraternity is similar to the affinity one feels toward their neighborhood gang.

What if the governor called out gangs to compete with one another for neighborhood clean ups? "You take pride in your neighborhood, but you got trash all around it, come on."

Thirty thousand gang members in California prisons did a peaceful hunger strike that lead to the end of long-term solitary confinement. Our community has been screaming in art and film, "give someone in our community an opportunity to make it, and we won't hold them back."

See "Akeelah and the Bee." If policymakers would utilize public-private partnerships to support the arts at the grassroots, while creating a business climate that invests in middle class sustainable jobs. Now, that truly would be a "Vison of Reform."

**-Donald "C-Note" Hooker,  
California State Prison – Los Angeles, Coalinga, CA**

**Most research studies have concluded, crime rate increases are connected to unemployment and low wages. In 1993 to 1997, the rate of crime decreased as result of the increase in wages of low skilled employees.**

# VISIONS OF REFORM ESSAYS

Adult Honorable Mention

## Is Reform Possible?

It seems that the popular question in society today is if reform is possible with all the craziness going on all around us. My answer would be yes reform is possible, but it would take a lot of work and it will be an uphill battle. For any type of reform to take place effort from inmates, politicians, and voters has to occur. It's easy to place sole responsibility on inmates alone yet we can't ignore that policies and laws must change for reform to be possible. I am currently incarcerated for my eighth time meaning eight separate times I have been an inmate of CDCR. I had one violent charge which was a 245 (a)(1) which happened while serving eight months in county jail and a 211 charge. For those who don't know 245 (a)(1) is attempted assault GBI likely which is now a non-violent charge and 211 is armed robbery. To sum it up I was in a fight and the inmate's soups came up missing. This resulted in me receiving a strike. All other times in prison were for property theft, drugs, or possession of a firearm. I mention this because at no time was reform even a thought for me, neither was it a thought for California Department of Corrections. It hasn't been until recently that California has tried to some extent to bring about reform with self-help groups and honestly the progress has been slow.

I always parole to supportive family who help in any way they can and this does help but there is only so much that a family member whom has never been incarcerated can understand about all the trials I face as an ex-inmate as well as all the mental anxiety I go through trying to put the pieces of my life back together. This is where a support group or self-help group would benefit me but unfortunately outside the prison walls this is hard to find.

Self-help groups or support groups exist in prison but the waiting list for these groups are up to a year or longer to be accepted. The reason it takes so long is because the space is limited and those serving life occupy the available spots. This leaves all non-lifers in the same position as when they first came into prison, lost mentally, spiritually, and absent of any of the much-needed tools in order for recovery to be possible. A study was done on how many inmates come back to prison with new cases comparing ex-lifers and short-term offenders and the results were mind-blowing.

The percent of all ex-lifers who re-offended was less than 0.01% while the percent of short-term offenders who re-offended was 75% so why the difference you ask? Preparation. The ex-lifers were prepared with the tools needed to live a productive life of recovery due to the numerous groups and having years of being able to practice what they have learned while incarcerated. So what's the solution? I would have to say more availability in groups for non-lifers. I know firsthand how groups can change someone because I am proof. The minimal amount of time I have been in self-help groups has changed my life a lot and I could only imagine if these same groups were available to me upon my release. So what about law change?

A few years ago Prop 57 was passed by California voters to ease overcrowding in prison by releasing inmates who have shown rehabilitation and who are not deemed a threat to society. The only problem is that in order to meet the criteria for release you have to show positive programming which includes self-help groups. And as I spoke about limited availability the end result is about one out of ten inmates are ever granted Prop 57. Something is wrong with this. We're not dealing with the problem which is hindering reform we are only seeing the tools of the problem.

Most theft is due to drug addiction and this is fact. But theft is only a tool to meet the need of the problem which is drug addiction. California throws numerous people in prison each year for crimes such as theft not addressing the individual's addiction and without learning about why they are addicted such as childhood trauma, pain, abuse. The addiction will never end. We need change in laws for reform to work.

In conclusion I believe that yes reform is absolutely possible. Will the process of reform be like the process of salmon swimming against the current upstream so they can lay their eggs? The answer is yes it will be and problematic to say the least.

In conclusion I ask you the reader to please help me in my quest of reform. There's numerous children hurting due to a parent's incarceration, mine included, and these children will thank you for making reform possible.

**-Andrew Jones, San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, C**



Will the process of reform be like the process of salmon swimming against the current upstream so they can lay their eggs? The answer is yes it will be and problematic to say the least.

# VISIONS OF REFORM ESSAYS

## Changing The System

The system needs more positive influence in all aspects of life. Just because we are locked up doesn't mean that we are bad or crazy individuals. Some of us had a very difficult life as children growing top.

The system needs to stop locking us up as animals and releasing us. This just makes it worse.

**-Beatrice C., San Francisco**

## Changing The System, To Make It Better

I would change the system by making things fair by changing how the court and police look at colored people. How when we get locked up they make us labor workers and work forty hour shifts and make \$10 at the end of the month. How they make the hall feel like it's jail where they're supposed to show us right from what's wrong.

Something that's wrong with the system is the courts and how they treat the kids and stuff. I would go about changing it by talking to people who know about that type of stuff. I would make people give criminals more chances and stop locking up young people over little stuff 'cause of something they did.

**-S, San Mateo**

**From The Beat: You make great points and have great ideas. The system does need drastic changes and we all have to speak up against the locking up of our youth, so these changes can start to happen.**

## Second Chances

I would give people second chances and make a law with a lower jail sentence where only one time you can get a lower sentence. People be getting caught up on some bullshhhh.

**-Tamir, San Diego**

**From The Beat: We would love to hear more about what laws you would revise and change. We want to hear what you think!**

## Change The System!!

If I could change the system, I would change many things. One of the first things I would change is to make things equal between everyone.

**-D, San Diego**

**From The Beat: Equality is something that we all strive to have, and we love that it's on your first of things to change. What does equality look like to you?**

## They Don't Care

Changing the system

Why contemplate and write on something that will never happen

They takin' people

young man, this shhh hella tragic

"System don't discriminate"

but all I see is color

They trying to lock 'em all up and make 'em beat on one another

Ninja from the wrong side then that's a case and no question

They put 'em in a cage expecting 'em to learn a lesson

Making shhh worse so ain't no point in trying to write

If ninjas ain't gone listen they don't care who doin' life.

**-Town Baby, San Mateo**

**From The Beat: The system may not care, but there are plenty of people that do. No need to harbor resentment against anyone. Stick to the ones that actually care and try to overcome all your challenges. We know you can do it, and we're here to support!**

**From The Beat: While this special issue is dedicated to our Visions of Reform Art and Essay contest, we wanted to also highlight the wonderful testimonies that are coming from our youth workshops and various institutions relating to envisioning and changing a justice system that better serves our individuals and communities currently impacted by how it's functioning now. Please join us in welcoming these voices to our pages and our mission.**

## Start With The Juvenile System

I would start with the juvenile justice system and give them more programs and groups to help them realize what they need to have and work on, so they can prosper in the world.

**-B.Ray, San Francisco**

## Gotta Be There

The key in the system is to educate yourself in school so that when you get out, you'll have a future in the long run. You'll work on going in the real world. The key is to get smart, graduate. You'll have a high school diploma, just not the actual school diploma because you earned it in the system.

Now I'm raising a child, I gotta get out the system to be able to be there for my kid, 'cause I don't want no one else raising my blood. And be able to help out my baby momma.

Now if I could have been the elementary good kid back in the day, I would take it back to them days. But at the end of the day I became what I am and I don't regret anything. Now I am a seventeen-year-old raising a family that I gotta be there for.

**-GD, Santa Clara**

**From The Beat: It shows a lot of strength and maturity to realize how you have to step up for your family and your child now. Set high expectations for yourself and steps to getting where you need to be. We know you can do it.**



# VISIONS OF REFORM ESSAYS

Youth Honorable Mention

## If I Could

If I could change the system, I would make jails and prisons less harsh. I think that people that enter these places come out as people who are worse off than before they come in. I would also change about how criminals are put away because any list of people who have compiled different crimes from one another, this will stop the prison and jail fights that happen. With criminals sorted out properly they won't come out as violent people or psychopaths, which usually happens to them when they are in here.

I would also change the style of the detention center to be more appealing but not to the point where it would be suitable to live permanently. Instead of brick walls it should be dry wall. The floor should be carpet instead of being concrete so it isn't as cold. The toilet should have more privacy for the state of comfortability.

The mattresses should be memory foam and the pillows should have cotton instead of being plastic. One important change I would make is allow video games and a TV built into the room to pass the time that goes by in the jail.

**-Karl, San Mateo**

**From The Beat: We agree, less harsh conditions should be applied, but not to the point that it's suitable to live permanently. What would be your form of punishment and what kind of privileges would you take away if you were to get in trouble.**

## If I...

If I were to be governor or to be able to change any policies, I would change and add programs. I feel many programs are very alike y no mi gusta porque none have been beneficial. I want to see programs with the families who need help or support while their child is incarcerated. Just because that person is locked up and going through it, don't mean they family ain't either.

**-Mg, James Ranch, Santa Clara**

**From The Beat: We totally agree with you - families need more support when their children are locked up. Tell us about the kinds of programs you're thinking about!**

## Changes

Yo! It's me just a different man, sike! Ain't nothing new. Nothing has changed but the day of the week. I'm chilling still and I can't stand the halls, but I'm going to push through this 'till I'm out of this salty spittoon. I'm good though. I can't complain, bet you won't be saying my name for a good five-six months.

Now if I could change something in this world it would be the system and how they discriminate against colored people. The discrimination nowadays isn't as preposterous as the 1800's-1960's, but racism is still everywhere in the world.

**-Jo, San Mateo**

**From The Beat: Racism is still well alive in our country and all parts of the world. We must do all we can to educate people about the consequences and make sure we can all get along respectfully regardless of our differences.**

## Let Us Be More Free on EMP

If I could change the system, it would be EMP because I feel like we should be able to go out for a certain amount of time. I don't like how they keep you inside all day.

I used to be on it and I didn't like it, so I cut it off, but that didn't benefit me at all. It just got me back in this place. So I think they should change the law for that and be able to be out and not trapped with a curfew at least 10 pm.

**-Zay, Santa Clara**

**From The Beat: EMP is strict, and it's also a test. See your time on EMP as a challenge to stay on track and prove to the system and yourself that you can do it!**

## Fix The System

If I could change the system, I would do many things to make things a little bit better. First, I would start off by trying to get more programs, like getting tutors to come in here and help out those who need help in school.

Also, programs that have something to do with a trade, or programs that teach you how to draw. There are people who like to draw, but don't really know how to draw. I'm one of those people, when I draw something it makes me feel good. It makes me feel like an artist.

I would allow pets inside this facility too. I think it would be very cool if there was a dog in here. I heard that having dogs is therapeutic.

**-A, San Mateo**

**From The Beat: excellent suggestions on how to improve the system. We like your effort and your ideas.**

## More Activities From The System

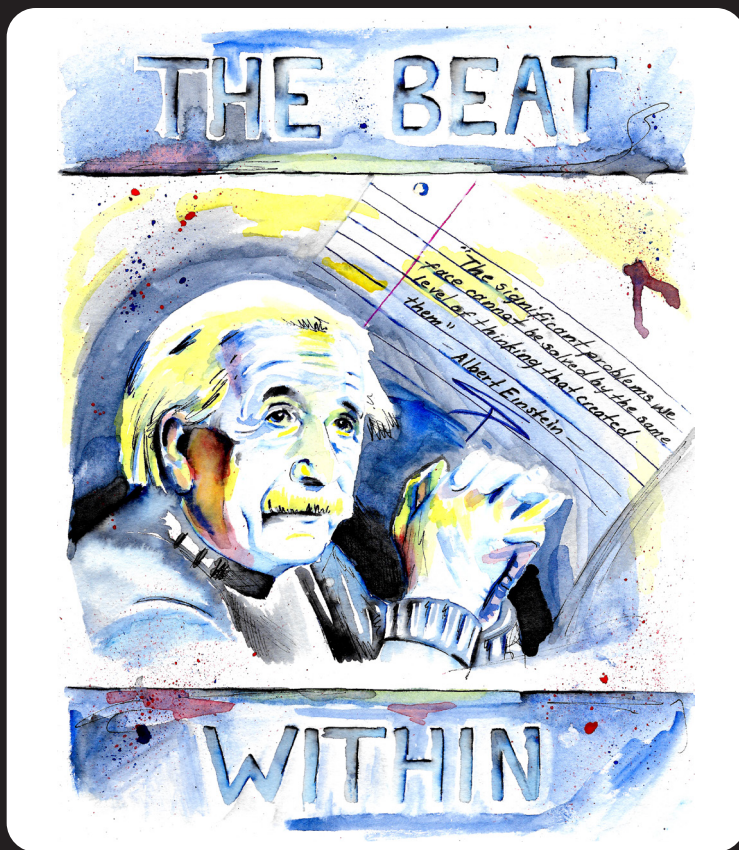
If I could change things from the system I would change the fact that we need more time when we get phone calls, because ten-minutes is too short to talk to my family. I also would change to be out of our rooms more and have more active activities, for example: Play football or go out on a walk.

Also, we should have some smores or something tasty when we do good. We should get treats like pizza, burritos, tacos and a lot more.

Also, give kids more chances if they want to better their lives and yet more support from their community, teachers, schools and counselors - a lot more!

**-Bugs, San Mateo**

**From The Beat: You hit the nail right on the head with the hammer. It's all about giving more support to our youth and doing everything we can to make sure everyone has a chance to succeed.**





# VISIONS OF REFORM ESSAYS

## The Social Worker Should Listen

I feel if I could change the system I would not allow CPS to take away children from nice parents or place children in any group homes the kids don't feel comfortable in. I feel the social worker should listen to the kids more maybe kids would open up and listen if someone would just take the time out and help. Kids would be happier, not run away from their group homes and foster homes if they can place them in the right homes!

**-BJ, Santa Clara**

**From The Beat: Young people have such little say in where they end up once social services gets involved. Keep advocating for yourself, and inspiring other young people to speak up for what they need!**

## Community Halls

If there's one thing I could change it would be making juvenile halls only for real bad crimes, like murder and other charges. I would give juveniles like, community halls or house arrest 'cause juveniles deserve to live life like they're supposed to, rather than be locked up for petty stuff.

The court system should solve cases quick or give sentences out quick because here in Santa Clara County, the court system takes long. They just be postponing the court, making it longer, so that's something I would change.

I would also let the girls unit get some time with the boys unit so the juvenile hall wouldn't be boring and let other units hang out with each other. But I'd go ask the people in the units if they would be good with it, and I would give the kids a little more freedom than just two hours of activity 'cause pretty much you be locked up all day here in Santa Clara county.

**-Xp, Santa Clara**

**From The Beat: We can tell you're searching for a sense of positive community. How can you build this with your peers on the outs?**

## Change The System

If I could change the criminal justice system, one thing that I would change is letting people talk when the DA is speaking down on them as they were not even there. So, being able to argue with whatever the DA is saying about you that you feel is incorrect or wrong.

One example is when I was in court and the DA said I should not go home because I am a danger to society. But they can't say that because they know nothing about me.

**-Christian, Alameda**

**From The Beat: What would you say? What should the DA and the judge know about you that they don't? We are listening.**

## Change the System

A world without incarceration is not possible. Even the world's most developed countries have incarceration. The only difference is that these countries focus on rehabilitating offenders rather than punishing them regardless of whether they are adults or juveniles.

For example, Sweden still has incarceration, but they don't dish out extensive sentences to offenders the way America does, and Sweden rarely gives out twenty-year sentences. The way offenders are treated in Sweden is a lot more humane than the way offenders are treated in America. In Sweden, rather than stuffing the incarcerated into a cell, inmates are given a room with a real bed, real toilet and shower. Of course, they're locked up so they're not allowed to leave their rooms, but it sounds a lot more appealing than cells in America.

**-Danon, Marin**

**From The Beat: We'd be interested in learning more about the system in Sweden compared to the system in the US. Be happy to talk about finding statistics to support your argument.**

We all have a color to our skin. People shouldn't judge just 'cause someone skin is lighter or darker.

## Add A Jury and Then Some!

If I could change the system, I would add juries to juvenile courts. It's unfair that just the judge decides what's going to happen to us.

Also, that we should be out of our rooms more, like when camp came to the hall, we were able to go in and out of our rooms whenever we wanted.

I would also get rid of probation such as you get wrapped up for robbery and do the time and when you're released that you don't have to do ankle monitor or probation. Just release and that's it.

I would add more programs so that everybody would be going to a program. We should have commissary and people are able to put money on our books. You get two free phone calls a week. Those are the changes I would make to the Juvenile Criminal System.

**-Babyface, San Mateo**

**From The Beat: You hit some key points and your ideas are valid. You need more time to stay in touch with your loved ones, and also more time to associate with your peers so you can do positive activities.**

## I'm A Win

People always say I'm guilty but they don't even know me. The judge, the DA and even my own public pretender try to take me to take a deal. Forget that. I didn't do anything wrong. I'm an innocent man, so I'm going to trial and beating my case.

They talking ten plus year but I didn't do nothing wrong, so if I get convicted of this I know for a hundred percent that our system is corrupt. They want to see us fail. They don't want to see us win. So I'm a show them I can succeed.

**-Lil' Conner, Sonoma**

**From The Beat: Our system is not perfect and it can be unjust but you and your attorney must find a way to fight so you can win your case. Don't throw in the towel.**

## Criminal Justice

I would change the criminal justice system because it isn't fair black people always getting accused for things they never did. They're always judging us by our color. I think they're just hating because we're African American and have darker skin than them. And they feel like they're in competition with us.

We all have a color to our skin. People shouldn't judge just 'cause someone skin is lighter or darker. And in history people always want power and when African Americans achieve something, whites get mad.

**-Drea, Alameda**

**From The Beat: Who is always judging us by our color? Judges, DAs and cops? Even the judges DAs and cops who are people of color? Are you saying that in order to make the criminal justice system more fair we have to fight racism in our whole society? We'd agree.**

# VISIONS OF REFORM ESSAYS

Youth Honorable Mention

## Being On Your Own

If I could change the criminal justice system, I would give all young black men plenty of chances no matter how many times they have been to jail.

I know what it is like to be on your own and having to provide for yourself as a teenager.

-Teddy, Alameda

**From The Beat: We hope you continue to be strong. Being on your own as a teenager is hard and we hope you will get the support you need. By the way, if you see this, we hope you will consider writing your life story!? We want to learn from you on what it was like and continues to be like having to support yourself.**

## Change The System

If I had the power to change the system everything would look completely different. It would actually be about justice. No skin color or race would matter. We're all human. Treat us as such.

-The Human Being, Portland, Oregon

**From The Beat: These are words to live by! Keep hoping for change and don't be afraid to make the changes yourself when you need to.**

## Criminal Justice System

If I could change the criminal justice I would focus more on the juvenile side. I would help kids get off probation faster. I would also help kids get bail so they can get released while on trial.

I think that law would be fair 'cause sometimes people are innocent. It's not fair for innocent kids to sit down and wait for trial.

-Frank, San Diego

**From The Beat: These are all great ideas. What's stopping you right now from getting out and accomplishing some of these goals? We would love to see you do it.**



## A Whole Life to Live

If I can change the system I would change the juvenile hall because they change kids lives and we still have a whole life to live, and will come out when we're like twenty to twenty-five.

-Angel, Santa Clara

**From The Beat: The system definitely changes kids lives. What do you see as a better alternative to juvenile hall?**

## Correction, Please

I believe that staff who are allowed to work in corrections need to go through proper training to learn how to deal with different personalities and people who are triggered by things that may not affect others. Where and what is the consequence for them?

-The Observer, Portland, Oregon

**From The Beat: That's an excellent point you that make and a tough question that you ask. Anyone dealing with children should have extensive training in all aspects of child development and they should stick to that training at all times.**

## Warnings Before Incarceration

If I can change the system, I would change kids going to juvie for petty things. They should just be let go on a warning. After three warnings they should have community service.

-Sleaze, San Francisco

**From The Beat: Community service could definitely benefit other people! What should happen if someone commits a crime after community service?**

## Thoughts on Changing the System

If I could change anything in the system, I would get rid of the District Attorneys because they lie and try to do everything possible to keep you locked up.

I would also make it so that there was more visit time, and allow people thirteen and older to visit.

-Cato, Portland, Oregon

**From The Beat: It's hard for our futures to be so dependent on others' decisions! How do you imagine District Attorneys being held accountable when you feel cheated? We also like your visiting ideas!**

## Wrongly Convicted

I would want to change the system because I was wrongly convicted by the criminal justice system for a crime I didn't do and I had to serve an extra three months locked up when I could have been out in two.

I don't understand how the name can have justice in it when there are cases all around the world where people being wrongly convicted end up spending the rest of their life for something they didn't do, and that needs to change.

-Mikey, James Ranch, Santa Clara

**From The Beat: The way justice is carried out isn't always "just." Tell us more about how you envision the system doing a better job at convicting people.**

## Change The System

I think within the system people should just understand kids who committed the crime and understand the reason they did the crime.

-Lil Reckless, San Francisco

**From The Beat: Can you envision what this process could look like? How could the youth be given more opportunity to share their experience? How could the people in charge be helped to understand you more?**

### Changing The Criminal Justice System

If I could change the criminal justice system I would make sure that adolescent don't go to prison at a young age and make sure that kids get the proper help that they need.

-N, San Diego

**From The Beat: We would love for you to get out of here and make a difference in your community for yourself and for your peers!**

### Dead Time

If I could change the criminal justice system, I would change the three strikes law and I would make your dead time count towards your sentence. I would also put more programs like sports and time outside.

-B, Santa Clara

**From The Beat: More sports and positive activities would make a big difference. Keep speaking up for these programs!**

### Change The System

If I could change the system, I would make sure there isn't any more cops and no more firefighters. It would make the world more peaceful and the natural human race that we are.

-Jesus, San Diego

**From The Beat: We would love to hear more about this thought. What would be your proposal for fighting crime and other emergencies?**

### Change

If I were to change the system, I would make DA's and defense lawyers work together and try to find people innocent like Brian Banks.

-Snake, San Diego

**From The Beat: This sounds like a great idea, and you can be someone who contributes to this movement.**

### Changing The System

If I could change the criminal justice system I would first need a position in the government like a legislator. I would change or create some new laws, programs like them therapy ones or mental health, they are pointless unless the government knows and really knows they need that help.

Something is wrong with the system today that I think should be changed and it's the seriousness into crimes that the criminal built the courage to do. Like for example a kid of 16 years old stole a phone and got two months in custody for it and another kid of 17 lit fireworks in a store and got a week or two.

The fireworks could have started a fire or harm somebody. The kid who stole the phone maybe just hurt his feelings maybe even his pride and has to pay restitution. My point is that someone who caused one thing that could have escalated even more, even exaggeratedly and causes harm gets less punishment than someone who took someone else's property and has to pay restitution and do silly time for.

If I was a policy maker and had all the power to change laws, I would hire specific judges so perspective in opinions change, but also that it is fair.

-IA, San Mateo

**From The Beat: Everything is all about perspective and yes we should be concerned with the safety of others in our community. But how do you decide what punishment one should get? Would you take their family history and economical situation into consideration?**



### Change The Criminal System

If I could change the criminal system, first I would have to get my support system for when times get critical. I believe everyone should have a chance to bail out youth or adult.

If you don't have money there's no excuses. Once you turn 16, you could already be getting paid, you just chose not to.

For those who do stay behind walls for a coo minute, I feel like it's okay to have a phone, TV, radio, etc. Just because you broke the law don't mean they need to treat you like an animal. Treat others the way you want to be treated.

If I were governor I would at least let inmates have cellphones. Like can you imagine being in a room for so long with nothing to do. At least a phone, would be cool! Come on who agrees with me?

I know being locked up is supposed to keep you away from society, but that don't mean take away your TV shows, sports and movies. Maybe having a phone would motivate people to do better and to succeed.

-G-Sneaks, San Mateo

**From The Beat: You do have a great concept that society hasn't really quite put their finger on and that's keeping the youth involved in what's going on in their communities. How can we successfully integrate youth back in the communities when we isolate them instead of keeping them up to date?**

### Mandatory Minimums

If I could change the system I would change mandatory minimums because I think it's unfair how that's the only sentence the judge must give you. I would also change two strikes law because I think it's messed up how after three chances, you do like one thing and you become sixteen you can get strikes, which is at an early age, in my opinion. These are the laws in the system I would change.

-Eb, Santa Clara

**From The Beat: You make a lot of good points. Keep advocating for the changes you want to see in the system!**

**G**rowing up as a kid, my innocence was took from me  
I learned to raise myself, which was no good for me  
And honestly

Maybe if the system was different when I was two years old  
Maybe the situation that I'm in would've ended up differently.

read the rest of 1st place contest winner King J's essay on page 6

