
Atlantian Revival

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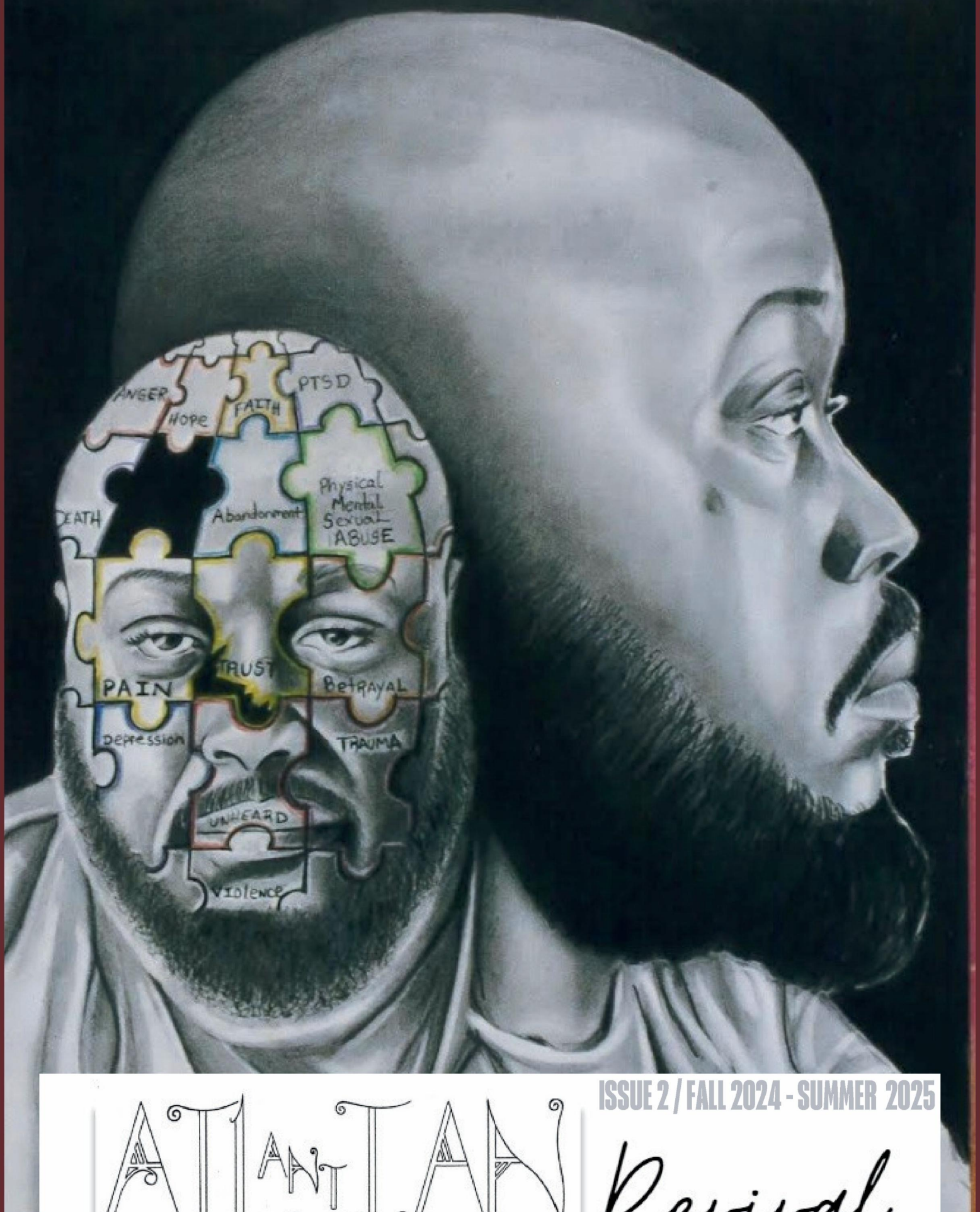
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ATLANTIAN

ISSUE 2 / FALL 2024 - SUMMER 2025

Revival

ATLANTIAN REVIVAL

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The mission of the Atlantian Revival is to empower one another and build solidarity by functioning as a central source of information, highlighting the humanitarian nature inherent in all of us, and above all, being of service and continuing to learn to better serve our community here at historic USP, now FCI, Atlanta.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This issue has been a long time coming. As Managing Editor, I felt the pressure to deliver on the promise we made to the community here at FCI Atlanta: timely news and engaging content packaged in a magazine that would make our predecessors at the original Atlantian proud. But the irony is not lost on me that this issue is focused on mental health, which often requires the courage to ask for help.

Our contributors consistently show up to the work, despite lockdowns, transfers, even a few blessed releases. Thus is the nature of any project undertaken in a prison. But barriers like the technology that's unavailable inside leave the bulk of editing, design and formatting to me, the one "Freeworld" volunteer on staff. I take responsibility for the delay, for my own resistance to asking for help.

To account for this, I had to be honest with myself, vulnerable with others and accepting of my limits. I asked the team to take on more of the work of editing and design, addressing challenges like the lack of tech together. Long-time writers and editors now have leadership roles. The Atlantian Revival will continue to grow as we stick with the work, while trusting the mission we set out to accomplish together. This is no small feat we have undertaken, and we can only succeed with the support of the larger community here, including the staff who make it possible for us to work together each week.

So much progress has been made since our first issue. In the wake of the devastating "dropout" of GSU, two new educational endeavors took root, and people incarcerated at Atlanta now have three different paths to pursue post-secondary education.

And following in a long tradition of mutual aid at this facility, several enterprising community leaders took on the task of raising money over the winter holidays to support the Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative, or PAD Atlanta, whose important de-carceral work was threatened with losing funding.

To quote author and law professor Dean Spade, "Mutual aid is the radical act of caring for each other while working to change the world." The initiative of those who spear-headed the fundraising efforts, the young men of Morehouse who matched their donations, and the resilience and determination to succeed despite systematic barriers, all point to the power of collective action and the way we can together transcend our material circumstances and create hope and wellness for ourselves and our community.

In awe of US as always,

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ART ON THE BOULEVARD

by **Sonny,**
the Pro Se Voice

Art exhibitions are typically renowned for their glitz, glamour and prestige. Contrarily, American prisons are synonymous with harsh, callous, repressive and volatile conditions. On October 23, 2024, Reentry Affairs Coordinator Ms. Bailey transmuted her correctional hat with a curator's touch to create an enriching environment at the intersection of the art world and the carceral system at ground zero: FCI Atlanta.

Art lovers converged on the education department. Judges, politicians, lawyers, professors, activists, and correctional staff both retired and current stood alongside incarcerated musicians, photographers, artists, students and service workers.

Magnificent paintings, drawings, sketches, origami figures, even artisanal crochet and leather works lined the corridors. The ambiance was vibrant, electric, and transformative. Due to the bustling activity, a connoisseur of art may have mistaken this art gallery for one of the last vestiges of the Harlem Renaissance, but this exposition was different. Incarcerated artists mingled with academics and social justice warriors, discussing the nuances of their work. Henry Kenner, who won second place in the art exhibition for his captivating self-portrait titled "Evolution," said the piece was inspired by his own experience of incarceration: "I feel like my imprisonment is tantamount to being treated as an animal."

Folk art, abstract expressionism, primitivism, and modernism adorned the halls. Artist Gary Shields also presented a self-portrait called "Mental Alchemy," which he said was heavily influenced by a style of art known as surrealism. Across from Gary's piece was an origami collection created by Zan, who explained the intricate nature of his designs and said that for him, the practice provides stress relief. "This is traditional origami," Zan said. "I used one sheet of paper with no cuts. However, simple folds are deceptive, and it gets chaotically fun when you layer them."

Impressed by the abundance of creative expression, Common Good Atlanta Executive Director Tiffany Kirk shared, "Art allows for me to tap into the creative part of myself. I'm a visual person. Visual arts are very stimulating for me, mentally and spiritually." Admiring one particular piece, "Native Girl" by Antonio Labrador, Ms. Kirk affirmed, "It has me thinking of what tribe I come from and wanting to do more research on my ancestry."



"Mental Alchemy" by Gary Shields



"Native Girl" by Antonio Labrador



"Just Marley" by Romail "GoldFingerz" Leach

Cartoonist O. Ogun from Brooklyn, New York, won third place for his cartoon, "The Bureau Chronicles, Episode 1: The Yard," a detailed work using satire and color to shed light on a common prison experience. When asked what piqued his interest in art, Ogun explained, "I began drawing at the age of 8 in my living room. I was watching the late Bob Ross paint on PBS and I began to mimic his style with a pencil. I've been addicted to art since that day in 1989."

Multi-talented artist Joshua Sadat Washington submitted a drawing titled, "Death and Life are in the Power of the Tongue." "My interest in art began while I was incarcerated in 2016," Washington said. "During the process of fighting my case, my emotional self-gift was released." In unorthodox fashion, Joshua incorporates art in his fight for freedom. "I actually use and include art with motions that I send to the courts to help me further articulate what I am saying. It's my therapy!" His therapeutic expression aroused the interest of Morehouse professor Rodney Walker. "This is brilliant," Professor Walker proclaimed. "It depicts that the tongue is on trial. Life and death are in the power of the tongue. Wow, this is deep! This art exhibit helps you unshackle the mind first which is a precondition for restorative justice."

FCI Atlanta Warden Thomas and County Court Judge Kenya Johnson also commented on the element of restorative justice inherent in the event. "The United States has the highest incarceration rate when compared to other countries. However, restorative justice in this country has placed its focus on rehabilitation, which is moving in the right direction to reduce recidivism. Pointedly, art exhibitions like this one are an outlet for the incarcerated population and functions to facilitate the reduction of recidivism," Warden Thomas said. Judge Johnson added, "Art enhances your mental wellbeing. Restorative justice is designed to enhance mental wellbeing. Together, we can see healing and new beginnings."

A plethora of legendary artists have contributed to the evolution of art: Pablo Picasso, Vincent Van Gogh, Leonardo Da Vinci, Augusta Savage, Aaron Douglas, and Kara Walker to name a few. However, respectfully, there is only one Jean-Michel Basquiat. While FCI Atlanta's "Art on the Boulevard" showcased its own pantheon of artistry, there was only one Romail "GoldFingerz" Leach. GoldFingerz stole the show with three masterful pieces: "Janet," "Simone Towers Eiffel," and "Just Marley," each piece vying for preeminence. "Janet" was a charcoal portrait of the pop icon with a radiant smile. In "Simone Towers Eiffel," an oil painting, the Olympic gold gymnast Simone Biles is captured in rare form, performing a split leap. "Just Marley," another charcoal drawing depicting the reggae legend singing, won first place. Responding to his victory, GoldFingerz humbly affirmed, "The competition is real!" and described the event as an "epic moment in time."

This exposition was a synergetic display put on by a community of talented incarcerated artists. The curator, Ms. Bailey, appraised, "This experience was indescribable! The smiles on the AICs' faces were priceless! Giving them the opportunity to interact with the community and showcase their masterpieces gave them a sense of freedom and normalcy." Echoing similar sentiments, former USP Atlanta correctional officer Alita Knox offered, "This is a good opportunity for arts to be shown but also needs to be open to the community and be able to be sold, so the artist can be paid for their work." By all accounts, on this fall day in the joint, "Art on the Boulevard," was the place to be. We can call it galvanizing, ravishing, and transformative, but truth be told, FCI Atlanta correctional officer Ms. Lee-Bowe said it best: "Art on the Boulevard was phenomenal."

HENRY KENNER

Interviewed by **Alex R**

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Since arriving here at FCI Atlanta two years ago, Henry Kenner, originally of central Florida, has managed to distinguish himself among a burgeoning community of talented artists. In the company of many masters in the craft of visual self-expression such as GoldFingerz, Jayson Berry, and Oluwasegun "O" Ogun, he placed highly in three major art shows.

Additionally, Henry has brightened our campus by creating murals in the psychology department and outside the library. I had the opportunity one Sunday afternoon to have a word with the stoic and cordial artist on his origins and initiative as a leading artist, not only in this community, but beyond the wall as well.

How did you evolve into the artist you are now, and what moved you to begin with?

I've been drawing my whole life. I was accepted to a magnet elementary school in Ocala, Florida, and I never stopped pursuing and perfecting my skills. For as long as I can remember, I was always drawing what continues to intrigue me the most in life: people. Growing up, I had three older sisters. Because of the lack of male companionship in my household, I drew fictitious characters I felt I could relate to. My art took me to worlds I could create, so I drew places and people that I thought were cool. This was also due to my love of comic books.

That explains a bit, in regard to your unique portrait style. What are your current objectives as an artist?

To me, art is supposed to evoke thought and emotion. I no longer want to just draw people. I want to draw people who are struggling. I want to draw attention to things that need attention, to create conversation and ultimately positive outcomes and progressive change. My hope lies in my belief that by illustrating a person in the true depth of their struggle, they and others will be inspired to overcome their own adversity for being able to visualize the tribulations that we all face and therefore are united by. I call it "the mirror effect." It's why I chose a self-portrait to base two of my winning pieces on. I wanted others to look within themselves.

It takes courage for a person to put themselves out there like you did, Henry. I saw both those pieces inspire that same courage in others. Speaking of inspiration, what artists inspire you most today?

My favorite artists, from whom I continue to find profound inspiration, are musicians. Some of the many who have brought forth that deep emotion which I seek to portray include N.W.A, Public Enemy, Outkast, Rick Ross, Parliament Psychedelic, and Marvin Gaye.



"Evolution" by Henry Kenner

There are countless amazing artists in the world. Many are here in our own community. But there is one visual artist that has always inspired me above all others: my daughter Savannah. She is a born artist who, at 13 years old, has already been accepted to an excellent school in Maryland. There, she is pursuing her own endeavors, majoring in art, with a minor in theater. She's my inspiration, and I am hers.

That's awesome, Henry, now I know why you are almost never seen without your headphones on. Let's talk about tools: What supplies and mediums do you use to create your art?

Ideally, I would prefer acrylic paint. But here I specialize in graphite and color pencils. It isn't ideal, but I do like the precision that the pencils lend for my portraits in particular.

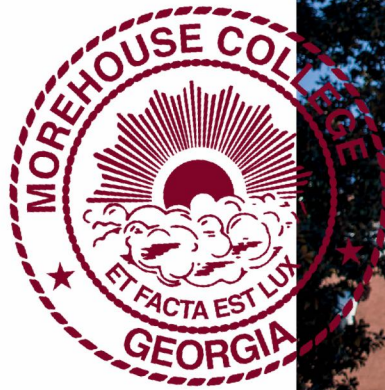
Henry, I can't draw a stick figure. But recently I accepted the very VERY serious task of drawing a unicorn for my six-year-old niece, Violette. "Operation Unicorn 2024," which included a poem/short story, was a success, but it took me almost two months. As a result, I've been "directed" by Violette to make a whole book about her and her unicorn, Pinky Promise. So, what advice can you give me, and other aspiring artists (who may or may not have been strong-armed by a small child) as we begin learning?

Do not get intimidated because you can't draw a straight line, because no artist can. We're not about drawing straight lines. The focus you must maintain is on repetition. Remember that anything you repeatedly apply yourself to, you will inevitably improve on. In short, don't forget this one thing:

DO NOT stop drawing.

CLASS IS IN SESSION

by **Sonny,**
The Pro Se Voice



On Oct. 30, 2024, at 5:30 p.m., 32 distinguished imprisoned men trudged down to FCI Atlanta's Education Department. The coterie comprised Morehouse College's inaugural cohort inside the federal prison system, sponsored by the Andrew Young Center-Morehouse College Higher Education in Prisons program. This program is distinct from the Common Good Atlanta-Morehouse College Humanities Clemente cycle that has been holding classes at FCI Atlanta for the past 18 months. The former is a four-year program that provides a full scholarship toward a pathway for a bachelor's degree, while the latter allows participants to earn six college credits after the completion of a five-course cycle.

Most members of the cohort participated in the Morehouse Humanities Clemente Cycle as a preliminary course; thus, the terrain was familiar, but the stakes were much higher. The classroom was packed with men determined to transform their lives through education. An HBCU mural commemorating Spellman, Clark Atlanta, Morris Brown, and Morehouse adorned the wall, imbuing pride in the hearts and minds of the incarcerated scholars. Folders and pens emblazoned with Morehouse insignia littered the intellectual space, accentuating this historic scholastic moment.

Dr. Kipton Jensen and Professor Rodney Walker were in attendance as US Immigration Judge Winfield Murray kicked off his Critical Thinking course predicated on Race & Law and Constitutional Law. You could feel the hope and optimism of the moment, the silent palpable hunger for intellectualism permeating the room. In my head, I hear the ceremonial school bell ring... Ringggggg! Ringggggg! Ringggggg! Class is now in session!

After providing us with a history of his collegiate background and professional pursuits, Judge Murray focused his lesson on America's founding documents. Particularly, the Articles of Confederation, which we learned was our nation's first "constitution." Exuding charisma and skill, Judge Murray imparted that the Articles of Confederation was a weak document that did not contain a position for presidency due to the founding fathers fear of replicating a monarchy. A debt crisis inflamed distrust between the merchant and farmer classes. The result of this social schism was Shay's Rebellion—a rebellion that broke out in western Massachusetts causing the collapse of the first confederation.

In our next class, we were learning at the feet of the preeminent scholar, Dr. Nathaniel Norment, Jr., at his Writing Workshop. Dr. Norment illuminated, "Writing is a psycho-social linguistic process. Studying the mechanics of grammar is equivalent to studying a foreign language." Embracing this grammatical challenge, incarcerated scholar Stacey Busby expressed, "Writing has helped me get closer to myself and in the same instance embrace my possibilities."

Dr. Michael Patterson was our next illustrious professor. His class examined the African Diaspora, which he defined as "African people who exist outside of the continent of Africa." Dr. Patterson further instructed, "This course explores the numerous ways Black people have contributed to the development of the modern world." Dr. Patterson's pedagogy was fact-intensive and sparked impassioned debates amongst the cohort. Steel sharpens steel, so of course the intellectual skirmishes remained constructive.

Just as our cohort thought we would have to trek this academic journey alone, Professor Rodney Walker escorted 23 magnanimous freshmen from his Leadership Studies class into the fortified halls of FCI Atlanta. The mixer was extraordinary! Maroon Tigers, both in bondage and liberated, prowled together inside the neo-concrete jungle discussing politics, economics, social activism, posterity, and change. Jervonta Walker reflected, "Being a part of the Morehouse College program has exceeded my expectations. The course is something that I look forward to every week. And I appreciate the students of Morehouse coming to visit us. Their presence is felt tremendously."

Morehouse is officially in the building, y'all! Oops, my bad... I mean class is officially in session. As the program continues, I am learning that Morehouse is not just an institution of higher learning. Morehouse is a brotherhood, a family. You may have missed the first cohort, but you haven't missed the second. See you in class!



HOOPIN IT UP

MOREHOUSE BRINGS THE GAME INSIDE
by The **Ag Guy**

"I am taking a mental health day." Over the past few years post-COVID, this has become a familiar phrase: a day granted off from work, school or any other obligation in order to take a break from it all. Many of the men currently residing here at FCI Atlanta were allowed our own mental health day in October, when our top basketball athletes, under the coaching expertise of Mr. Preston and our own Sonny Cochran (The Pro Se Voice) took to the courts to showcase an intramural match against Morehouse College.

The bleachers were filled to capacity. Excitement and anticipation filled the air as we all awaited the arrival of the Morehouse team. The smell of popcorn and cotton candy, combined with the enthusiastic buzz of the crowd, transported my mind to a much different place. I could imagine myself at home with family in our local gym, watching my youngest daughter, cheer captain, rallying the fans as our high school varsity team runs out on the court, led by my son in his pursuit for the 1,000 Point Club.

We, the incarcerated men of FCI Atlanta, need more events and moments such as these. The gym went wild as the Morehouse players entered the doors to the gym. The young "Men of Morehouse" played into the energy themselves, jumping, dancing, and whooping it up. It was a significant example of what may be referred to as restorative justice. In fact, as assistant coach Sonny stated on his thoughts of the event, "This was a transformative event restoring the concept of restorative justice. We did that here today!"

Restorative Justice is a multi-faceted concept that includes repairing harm caused by crime or conflict through communication and collaboration between people who cause harm and are affected by harm in our communities. Morehouse, as an integral part of the Atlanta community, has expressed the college's wishes to play a more vital role in curing poverty, violence, and incarceration. Bringing college classes inside and building community with imprisoned men is one of their strategies and tactics that fall under the theory of restorative justice.

The basketball game, Sonny said, created the opportunity for collaboration and relationship-building between young men of Morehouse and their incarcerated brothers.

"I've done 10 years on this bid, and I did 10 years in New York state. I ain't never seen nothing like this before. So for Morehouse to come up in here, and actually demonstrate through action, their willingness [to bring relief to] the American prison industrial complex, this is a transformative moment."

Tip-off took place and our guys came out on fire. We took an easy lead to start and you could see the players from Morehouse were nervous, unsuspecting. With three-point shots raining and an early, fast-break dunk and monumental blocked shot, I believe even our team was shocked. The taunting started, smack talk flying back and forth, and then a timeout called by the Morehouse coach. That is what they needed, apparently, because from that point on, those guys really put on a show. They had found their rhythm and could not be stopped. Overall, it was an exciting, enjoyable evening and one that we truly did appreciate. As the clock ticked onward to the end of the game, it was almost as if you could feel a collective breath that we never really exhaled. The reality would once more be upon us: where we were, the oppressive and the mundane. Our ask as a community of men here at FCI Atlanta: may this just be the start of what can be a movement forward, toward more healing, transformative events, and moments like this.

DAVE'S TRIANGLE

by DMC



It's early October as I write this, having just been designated for a closer to home transfer after 18+ months here at USP Atlanta, the first stop on my first and only bid. I always said I was glad I never experienced a "normal" low before coming to this living museum. Comparison is the thief of joy.

Joy? At this place? Sounds crazy, because most of us think of joy as blissful, euphoric moments of pleasure, rather than working to create and find contentment, perseverance, or triumph amidst challenging circumstances.

I completely understand that the gut instinct at the thought of leaving this place is to turn around and give it a big middle finger. Yet as I prepare to go, I reflect on my time here, my personal journey of rehabilitation and of finding joys when virtually everything around you tells you otherwise. I'm inclined to share this with the hope that it might make a small difference for even just one man.

First, I need to make one thing clear. The idea of "rehabilitation" through our correctional system is laughable. While some individuals working within the system genuinely care about helping and making a difference, there is no intention from the top to rehabilitate us. The programs offered, generally speaking, are there to put lipstick on the pig.

Rehabilitation is ultimately up to the individual looking in the mirror, making a choice. Wanting to make positive changes, to use this time to better yourself. Choosing not to think you have everything figured out.

This choice may be directly related to the reason you're here in the first place or not. Even the word "rehabilitation" and its connotation might make you uncomfortable. Forget the word. The fact is, we can all stand to work on ourselves, to be better men for our wives, kids, friends and our futures. And we have a unique opportunity away from some of the distractions and temptations of this world to focus on personal growth.

We all know the constant buzz of negativity, the endless complaining the environment here naturally breeds and how it's all too easy to blend in. But that's a miserable way to live, isn't it? I catch myself joining in far too often, but I try to challenge myself to turn away from it as much as possible. It's like a game, to not let this place beat you, and you better believe it's trying to beat you. So play the game, laugh at whatever ridiculousness comes at you, and move on. Consider it a daily challenge to live a life of gratitude, against the grain of every fiber in your body, and against almost every overheard conversation. Try to remove yourself, respectfully and quietly leaving those surroundings when they inevitably find you.

And when you catch yourself complaining, stop and spin it around. Instead, tell yourself something you're grateful for, or how this or that could always be worse. Renew your mind as much as you can in this place and you'll notice an impactful change in how you feel mentally and emotionally. Obviously, life won't turn into rainbows and unicorns, but the daily struggle won't be nearly the same.

I've struggled pretty hard with all three of aspects of health throughout my 41 years. I bet you have too. Each is its own thing. But when I work on improving all three at the same time, a new kind of harmony is opened to me. And it's something I found in prison, which nobody Outside can relate to: the idea that this triangle has become the foundation for a significantly more fulfilling life once my freedom is restored. But there's no way to sugarcoat or fast-track it; It takes commitment, effort, and the grace of God.

I realize I probably just lost many readers' attention, but I hope you're still here. I was dead, in a spiritual sense, for my entire life before I was locked up. And I'm convinced it's a big part of why I ended up here. Call it cliché, but I know I'm not the only one who found God in a jail cell. I don't want to preach; I'm simply sharing how this set the foundation for personal growth and mental stability I could never imagine. I was unknowingly lost without it, and now I have a freedom and purpose I never experienced in the past.

I first began to see the correlation of spiritual and mental health benefits. I struggled with depression and inadequacy issues, secretly, from early teen years. I had seen a few therapists, and I did see progress. I'd recommend it to anyone willing to truly open up. But a relationship with God has been the most influential. The battles never completely disappear, but I've experienced true healing, and I'm better equipped to deal with them when they surface.

Men, especially men in prison, learn our masculinity is proven by not letting your guard down. But this can be overcome, even if on a very personal and private basis. I didn't seek God as a treatment for my mental health issues. It was just one of the many beautiful results that came from finding connection with a higher power than myself.

The completion of the triangle is physical wellness. It's not easy to get proper nutrition here. I love honey buns, Fritos, and Kool-Aid as much as the next guy. Moderation and self-control are vital in trying to opt for the small handful of healthier choices we have.

We're not all training for our next UFC contract or running a 10K, but our long-term health is greatly affected even by moderate exercise. Getting regular exercise, even just walking, correlates with better sleep and yes, better mental health. Fresh air, vitamin D from the sun, guys who regularly get these simple things are often in a much better place than those who don't.

I can personally attest focusing on these three aspects of our health can do wonders for effectively dealing with the nonsense we face here every day. It has improved my life in countless ways. Putting in the time and effort will bear fruit, both now and when our bids are up. We all need a fresh outlook for when that time comes, both for ourselves and for our loved ones.

THE HOPE WITHIN: LESSONS I'VE LEARNED FROM YEARS OF MENTAL HEALTH BATTLES

by Delina Williams
for CCWF Paper Trail
November 22, 2024

Many here at Central California Women's Facility (CCWF), myself included, are adopting new approaches to bring their mental health struggles into the light and to begin healing.

The process of healing fully is still a mystery. It's not easy to identify what works for whom and why. So let's inquire and make room for those of us in this world who need a little more time, care and compassion. Maybe, just maybe, we can find the route to wellness within and leave behind the scars.

I remember at one point in my life all I wanted to do was die. I could not fathom living in a world where nothing truly mattered. I was constantly having my stomach pumped because I would swallow pennies, pills, dirt, anything to take me from the house of chaos I lived in. I was alone. I was confused. I was a child. There could come no respite because I knew no cause.

Later on in my teen years, I continually had dreams where I was in my aunt's house looking over the balcony and suddenly I was dropping through the air; spiraling to the wooden floor. Before I hit the floor I would wake up. Death surrounded me and compelled me to throw myself to the wind. I could not bear to have breath inside of me nor a heart that beat for most of my living days.

The fears inside of me were brought out through internal conflict. Fear of life. Fear of my parents. Fear of everything. These truths haunt me to this day and my nights are still filled with the terrors I cannot escape. Yes, I have those lived dreams that bring me to my knees, heart conflicted and rapid. I struggle every night and wake none the wiser. It could be said that life is what you make of it and so it goes that I destroyed my life. Or so I believed for many years.

Yet even in fear, the mind's desire to have community is inherently plugged into our core as a human. To be without others is the equivalent of slowly dissolving into a pool of nothingness because all we, as humans, really crave is the warmth of another to understand us. Reframing the thinking processes in order to stimulate the brain out of depression is not an easy feat. There is a complex maze of therapy, drugs, and willingness needed to see where the person can turn and promote self into believing self is worthy of others.

The New York Times mental health reporter Ellen Barry wrote an article back in November 2023, about a new study on traumatic memories, conducted by researchers at Yale and the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. The study found empirical evidence supporting the notion that traumatic memories are experienced in a different part of the brain than normal memories. They involve the posterior cingulate cortex, or P.C.C., the place of introspection or daydreaming.

This finding is interesting because it means it could be possible, in a therapeutic context, to move the memory, so to speak, from the part of the brain that processes internal experience to the one that creates context, essentially turning traumatic memories into more manageable sad ones.

This gives a new slant to many who think they should just move through their days without validating their trauma. It surely should not be so. Healing means strength and that strength is necessary to build a trauma-informed community. It is in receiving trauma-based therapy through my current psychiatrist that I see the forest and the trees. The stigma of mental health treatment can no longer hold me down because I know I am more than what I used to be or what I used to do.

Additionally, I know there is a direct connection with quality sleep and negative thought loops, so I do my best to rest appropriately. As Dr. Alex Dimitri, of Menlo Park Psychiatry and Sleep Medicine wrote in Psychiatry Today, "deep sleep renews metabolism, restoring insulin sensitivity to provide energy, and it boosts immune functions." This can help move me through my days.



Should we choose to pick up a tablet at 9 p.m.? Certainly not! There have been many studies done by Harvard and other universities that conclude the "blue light" from screens can have a negative impact on sleep because it suppresses the secretion of melatonin, a hormone that influences sleep rhythm.

All this takes work. It takes trust. This takes time. Being vulnerable means hearing things about yourself that are difficult to hear. It is necessary work, in order for roots of change to manifest and take hold. I am certainly worth the work. And so is anyone who struggles with mental health.

I think poet S.C. Lourie says it best:

Be confused,

It's where you begin to learn new things.

Be broken,

Be frustrated,

It's where you start to make more authentic decisions.

Be sad,

Because if we are brave enough, we can hear our hearts' wisdom through it.

Be whatever you are right now.

No More Hiding!

You are worthy,

ALWAYS.

I understand there will be days when my mind, mouth, and movements do not want to process my surroundings. I also understand that by not processing these surroundings, I am giving into a system that has slated me for failure. This cannot be. No! My potential is not designed to fail. I will overcome my mental health struggles. It is in the looking up and not around that I will see the beauty GOD ALMIGHTY has created for such a day as this. I believe there is hope for all who struggle within. Help is out there. It is in the work we do to rise.

HOLIDAY BLUES



Art by O

The holiday season. A time for family, friends, and togetherness. Bah humbug. Spending the holidays behind bars is a stark reminder of what we've lost and the mistakes that led us here. It's a time of reflection, introspection, and a struggle to find hope amid steel and concrete. For me, surviving the holidays comes down to three simple mantras:

It is what it is. Consider this an abbreviated version of the Serenity Prayer. The reality is what it is, and no amount of wishing or complaining will change it. Accepting this allows me to focus on the present moment and make the best of it.

It could be worse. As difficult as things are, I remind myself it could always be worse. I could be in solitary, I could be facing a longer sentence, or I could be dealing with even more challenging circumstances. This perspective helps me appreciate the things I do have, even in this restricted environment.

One day at a time. The weight of a prison sentence can be overwhelming. Focusing on the future can lead to despair. Instead, I take it one day at a time. Especially in times like these, when it's easier to treat the holidays like any other day, I focus on getting through today, making the most of the present moment, and finding small victories where I can.

These mantras may seem simple, but they're powerful tools for survival in a challenging environment. They help me stay grounded, focused, and hopeful, especially when I am missing my family even more than usual. Some things never change, and the holidays are, and always have been, a difficult time to be in prison. The following stories are a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and a reminder that even in the darkest of places, hope can still shine through. **-Chase Espy**

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The holidays while incarcerated is a peculiar time of year when my anxiety level increases. In most institutions, compassion decreases when decorations go up. When I'm forced to think of the loved ones that my incarceration separates me from, when I'm reminded my phone minutes restrict my communications. There are holiday movies and NFL football, but television shows are less effective. My thoughts are on the memories that I couldn't be part of. This is the time of the year when the journey turns uphill. The time when one has to put on their armor and endure. Try allowing your love for family to help fuel your heart. I'll think of my family having dinner over my holiday lunch in the chow hall, and a sack dinner in the housing unit. I expect long phone lines, maybe even a lockdown. We'll think about grandmothers and grandfathers, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, aunts and uncles, cousins, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, husbands and wives. And then there is "friend" to add to the recipe. What greater title can you bestow upon people? These are the titles that we bear, although we are incarcerated behind a 40-foot concrete wall: Grandfather, father, brother, son, uncle, cousin and friend. While incarcerated, we remain people who will be thought of, mentioned in prayer, and dearly missed at family gatherings. Happy holidays, but aye, not that happy! **-Bro. Akhu**

Holidays are tough in prison. Growing up, holidays were really important to my family. So many great memories were shared in my 28 years as a free man with my family & friends. This coming Christmas is my 13th behind these walls, where it's just another day. The only thing special is the holiday meal, and even that has gotten less special over the years. Each year, the meal and Christmas bag has gotten smaller and smaller. On Christmas, I call my loved ones, but there always is a lack of staff during the holidays. Half the time we get locked down. I usually try to make a big holiday meal with a few of my friends to show them I appreciate them. But for me, the holidays are a rough time to be an "adult in custody."

-Brock Boston

My kids, my wife, and I always looked forward to the Christmas celebration. Elf on the shelf, the debate of real vs. artificial trees, and at the center of our celebration, the birth of the Christ child. Last Christmas was the first I spent separated from the fellowship of family, gifts and gatherings. However, I've fully experienced His presence in the absence of my loved ones' presents. **-The Ag Guy**

Mis navidades de niño era la mejor época del año. Amo lo que representa (unión familiar y felicidad). En prisión mi festividad cambió un poco, pero sigue siendo para mí la mejor época del año; en este lugar festejé un poco con la misma similitud, ya que me reúno con los que considero amigos, cocinamos juntos, y agradecemos por un año más. Sé que un día regresaré a casa y me reuniré con ellas para celebrar Navidad.

-Francisco Cruz-Avila

Christmas is the season for cheer and family love. But for me there will be no presents, or mom's famous sweet chicken. For 13 years it has been a bittersweet feeling, celebrating the joyous holiday in prison. But it isn't all "bah humbug." K-love provides Christmas tunes, we men make community meals, and TNT provides us with classic holiday movies. This will be my last Christmas in federal prison, happy to say, and it will be a memorable one, because I'm turning in my prison browns in exchange for free world jeans. **-O**

Mis días festivos se ven hoy diferentes. Lo que un día fue árboles de navidad, regalos, familia y amor, hoy es soledad. Detrás del muro nos dan comida festiva, cocinamos con nuestros compañeros, pero eso no se compara con mi festividad. Cuando miro a mi alrededor me recuerdo que estoy en prisión, y mi soledad regresa. Digo todo esto para decir que hoy no tengo días festivos, por ahora solo son momentos y experiencias que me dan fuerza. Hoy solo digo que un día estaré en casa para mis fiestas. **-Salvador Barrera**

TIS THE SEASON

A HERCULEAN HOLIDAY FUNDRAISING EFFORT

by **Sonny, The Pro Se Voice**

There is the misconception that men behind bars are incorrigible, heartless and parasitic. In July 2023, a group of men at FCI Atlanta conspired to debunk this false narrative. Philanthropy was the agenda. Romail, Blue and Kenyatta spearheaded the pursuit, and within 30 days a total of 41 people came together to raise \$2,605. The funds were donated to Frontline Response, a non-profit organization serving impoverished communities in Atlanta. For example, in response to the devastating impact that Hurricane Helene had on the Atlanta area, Frontline Response opened its doors, providing hot meals and warm beds to 110 people that had nowhere to go.

For Romail, the intent and purpose for initiating this philanthropic endeavor was clear: "To fulfill a duty to our youth. To remind them not in word but in action that they are valued, loved, and respected from afar. To assure them that their cries are echoing beyond society, so loud that we've heard them and have chosen to act in response to that cry with our donation." Romail, Blue and Kenyatta embraced this mindset and hit the compound running, canvassing the institution for like-minded men. Kenyatta, a painter and musician, explained the process. "Brothers Blue, Romail and myself stepped out on the grounds daily, greeting our peers with a mission statement and a Frontline Response brochure. This was a moment to embrace and exercise soft skills, asking for donations of \$10-100."

The philanthropic endeavor was a success. On November 17, 2023, representatives from Frontline Response visited USP Atlanta to thank the men for their altruism. Blue, a maintenance worker, shared his take: "It was a great experience. There was an urgency, a desire amongst the brothers to do something positive. It showed me a way of doing something positive in what's supposed to be a negative setting." George, a Latino brother who works in the laundry, was instrumental in gathering donations from the Latino community, helping to make this a multi-racial coalition.

This effort rekindled a forgotten tradition of altruism by men incarcerated at this institution. During the 1940-60s, men imprisoned at USP Atlanta participated in blood banks, food banks, and raised money to donate to those they felt were less fortunate. On August 16, 1945, an ambulance carrying two doctors and five nurses from Grady Memorial Hospital entered USP Atlanta. "This septenary medical group was but the vanguard of many to follow - the first contingent to arrive at Atlanta to receive donations of blood for the hospital's blood bank." (By Their Actions...YOU SHALL KNOW THEM, 1946)

Atlanta's Inmate Welfare Club

★ ★ ★

Donations to Date

HUNDREDS
OF
PEOPLE
AIDED



SCORES
OF
FAMILIES
HELPED

\$6,395.59

(MAY 26, 1947)

★ ★ ★

YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE LIFE SAVERS

Illustration from the Atlatian Volume 7, 1947

Through Foster Parents Inc., an organization devoted to finding sponsors for children around the world, the men of USP Atlanta donated \$15 per month, as well as food and clothing, to three children living overseas. USP Atlanta's most prized association of goodwill was the "Inmate Welfare Club." Beginning in 1942, spurred by a single donation of \$10 to a woman in society, this union grew to over 1,200 members by 1961. The Inmate Welfare Club was a collaborative effort between administrative staff, imprisoned men, The Red Cross, Salvation Army, state and county welfare agencies, medical aid societies, Catholic charities, and various civic organizations. The Inmate Welfare Club provided financial resources to families, released men, and others outside of prison. In 1952, the organization began conducting special Christmas drives, one of which raised \$3,700 in 1960 (\$40K in 2025 dollars). In 1955, the organization implemented its annual "King for the Day Contest," which honored the 10 men who donated the most money in the weeks before Christmas. "The Recreation Department plays host to these winners one evening, awarding each a steak dinner with all the trimmings, a carton of cigarettes, and an evening of television." (The Convict Conscience, Spring 1961).

TIS THE SEASON, CONTINUED

There are times where we can feel submerged in darkness, lost and forgotten. However, through the spirit of giving we can find intent and purpose, light and hope, and a pathway to sustaining and improving our mental health. In fact, Blue confirms that he experienced a "sense of gratitude, purpose and upliftment." Romail imparts, "When you are able to assist others in feeling better, it makes you feel better."

This year, imprisoned men at FCI Atlanta made a collective decision to honor this long-standing tradition of philanthropy at this institution. First order of business was to find a nonprofit organization doing good work in Atlanta. After meeting with Denise White, Deputy Director for PAD Atlanta, the incarcerated journalists of the Atlantian Revival and incarcerated scholars of the Morehouse Higher Education in Prison Program conferred and selected PAD for our fundraising efforts.

Also known as the Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative, this organization focuses on reducing arrest and subsequent incarceration in Atlanta communities by providing an alternative to police interaction with community members. PAD offers a unique service that allows community members to call 311 to reach their case managers and social workers who will respond to the scene, providing resources to address basic quality of life issues, which often involve homelessness, substance abuse, domestic violence, or mental health.

dear warden sanford:

last winter i was in Grady hospital and liked to die the Drs had to give me a lot of blood to save me the Dr. told me most of the blood come from the men at the federal penitentiary becuz i only had mi man to give for me warden will u thank them men for saving mi life

i am sincerely
(S) Manuel Hill

Warden Joseph W. Sanford
U. S. Federal Prison,
Atlanta, Ga.

My dear Sir:

At a time when the whole world is filled with hate, prejudice, and intolerance, it occurs to me that the solution of all our troubles is not at Bikini or at Peace Conferences, but in the hearts of unselfish men, giving their blood and money to save the lives and relieve the suffering of people in distress. Men of all nationalities, colors, and creeds, giving to people they will never even know—that is a contribution to better human relations that will surely not go unrewarded.

Yours sincerely,
(S) A. H. STIENING

Dear Mr. Sanford:

I wish to thank the men who have given blood to people at Grady. My life was saved because I received blood after an auto accident where I was badly hurt.

I will always be thankful and remain

yours truly,
(S) Willard Hilton



Miss Mary Wilson, who is alive today because sufficient quantities of blood were available when she lay seriously ill from pernicious anemia; Mr. A. H. Stiening, President of Atlanta's "Gallon Club;" and a youngster who wouldn't have survived after inadvertently swallowing some lye if it hadn't been for the availability of blood for the numerous transfusions he needed; are pictured as they thanked two inmate-donors upon the occasion of the 1st Anniversary of the institution of this unique, humanitarian activity at Atlanta.

Dear Warden:

While my husband was sick for three years, we had a very hard time getting along. Then I brought my little boy to Grady. They told me he had anemia because I had not been feeding him right. The doctors wanted to give him a lot of blood transfusions. All our friends offered to donate, but even they could not give enough. We did not know what to do until the doctor said he could use some of the blood given by the Federal Penitentiary.

I wish you could see my boy now. We hardly know he is the same child. I feel much of his recovery was due to the generosity of those men at the Penitentiary and all I can say is thank you.

Yours very truly,
(S) Hattie Henderson

Dear Warden Sanford:

Early in June my little girl had the misfortune to be badly burned. She was rushed to Grady Hospital and it was necessary for her to have one transfusion after another. In the first few weeks she must have had at least 25 and has had several since.

My husband and I could not find enough donors and we felt pretty desperate. The doctor told us the men at the Federal Penitentiary were donating blood just for such cases as Helen, when professional donors could not be afforded.

My husband and I want to thank those men because we feel they truly helped to save our little girl's life. Helen has a long stay in the hospital before her, but we thank God she is alive.

Very truly yours,
(S) Esther Mitchell

Excerpt from the Atlantian Volume 6, 1946

During the month of December 2024, 19 magnanimous men canvassed the compound soliciting donations for PAD. They were rigorous in their pursuits. Within two weeks, the prison population raised over \$4,000. Once the funds were deducted from accounts on Dec. 19, approximately \$3,700 was designated to go to PAD. Our philanthropic endeavor was a success. We even surpassed our total donation from the previous year. We were ebullient, ecstatic. Then something happened. A glitch in the system. On December 20, the money was refunded, our donations rescinded. What happened? We asked ourselves. We asked the staff. We asked the administration. No one knew. For the next 10 days, we were left in the dark as to what had happened, or what would happen, with the money for PAD. A state of ambivalence spread among the men, ranging from uncertainty to discouragement. This resulted in some spending the money on Christmas commissary. The holiday spirit returned on December 30, however, when the donations were deducted once again from our accounts. This time, 85 imprisoned men at FCI Atlanta had donated \$3,092.20 to PAD. Together, as a multiracial coalition, we were able to make a positive impact in our community despite our incarceration.



PAD Deputy Director Denise White accepts matching checks from Morehouse student ambassadors and FCI donors

The donors experienced another setback. The \$3,092 donation was, once again, disapproved by facility staff. Exemplifying the true meaning of benevolence, perseverance, determination and commitment, the altruistic imprisoned men went back to the drawing board, undeterred. A third round of solicitations ensued. Hacking and gashing through the disgruntlement and frustration permeating throughout the prison population, they were able to raise \$2,100. After overcoming a number of setbacks, the sum is a testament to the determination and desire to do something positive and transformative, and to make a positive impact. Respectfully, in hindsight and for future reference, it would behoove the FCI Atlanta administration, staff and imprisoned men to recapture the communal spirit of the philanthropic endeavors of the 1940-1960s, and to collaborate more effectively and efficiently.

Fully conscious that the energy that we put out into the universe is the energy that we will attract, we encouraged our fellow Maroon Tigers to join us in our effort and to conduct a fundraiser for PAD to meet or exceed our donations.

Mission Accomplished: On March 12, 2025, a ceremony took place at FCI Atlanta celebrating the fundraising efforts for PAD. In addition to the imprisoned donors, representatives from PAD, Common Good Atlanta, The Atlantian Revival, and Morehouse were in attendance. To our surprise, the Men of Morehouse (on campus) answered the philanthropic call from the Maroon Tigers on the inside and presented their own check. Together, a total of \$4,398.42 went to the Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative.

Morehouse Higher Education in Prison Student Ambassador Jackson Gleser spearheaded the campus fundraising efforts. Mr. Gleser stated, "We wanted to match the funds, not just to give to a great cause, but to also show our solidarity to the men inside." Mr. Gleser said he believes the endeavor helped spread the word about the Higher Education in Prison program to the rest of the Morehouse community.

"Words cannot express how much this means to the PAD team," Ms. White said after the check presentation. **"The donations will help empower our participants, and for that, we are incredibly thankful. We are deeply moved by the kindness and support by all the donors at USP, and we couldn't be more grateful for your belief in our mission."**

Despite the challenges faced by all donors involved in this fundraising effort, we were all able to stay the course and make a positive impact in society. This is a testament to the transformative powers of persistence, commitment, and intention. This collective act exemplifies what restorative justice can look like in America. We'll see you all next year! Until then, continue to pay it forward in your own way and the universe will bless you with reciprocity!

NEW YEAR, NEW RULES

by Chase Espy

Illustration by Gary Shields

BOP UPDATES COMMUNICATIONS POLICIES



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The BOP updated its policies regarding phone calls, making free monthly telephone minutes contingent on eligibility for First Step Act incentives. During the pandemic emergency period, the BOP was required to provide free phone calls and increased the monthly allotment from 300 to 510 minutes. After the emergency period expired, the Bureau continued providing free phone calls through the end of 2024.

Alas, all good things must come to an end. As of January 1, "due to budget constraints" and "to incentivize programming participation," free phone calls are now provided as an FSA incentive only to those who are on the waitlist for, or participating in, an Evidence-Based Recidivism Reduction program. Instead of 510 minutes, the monthly allotment has been reduced back to 300 minutes. Oh, and we only get two 15-minute calls per day instead of four, cutting the amount of phone time down to one half hour per day.

Eligibility for the next monthly validation period will be determined at the end of each month. Anyone who does not qualify for the incentive on that date will not receive free minutes until after their next revalidation date, assuming they qualify at that point. In addition to being enrolled in or waitlisted for an EBRR program, as of the last day of the month, you also must not: be in refusal status for the periodic payments required under the Financial Responsibility Program; have refused needs assessment; have declined or refused any EBRR or other Programming Activity during the previous calendar month; or be in disciplinary segregation (i.e., "DS time" in the SHU) as a sanction imposed by the Disciplinary Hearing Officer (those in the SHU awaiting a

hearing are technically in "administrative segregation," which theoretically would not disqualify them from the phone incentive).

The FSA authorizes the BOP to award "up to" 510 additional phone minutes as an incentive to individuals participating in programming, over and above the "up to" 300 (paid) minutes everyone could use prior to the COVID pandemic, during which everyone got 510 (free) minutes. In other words, the BOP is going back to charging everyone for calls unless you qualify for the FSA incentive, in which case you then only get 300 free minutes per month instead of "up to" 810, as Congress seems to have intended.

Those who do not meet the BOP's eligibility criteria will be responsible for the cost of phone and video calls. A recent rulemaking by the Federal Communications Commission imposed caps on charges to incarcerated people at \$0.06 per minute for all audio communications and \$0.16 per minute for video communications (still waiting on that capability at this facility).

On the bright side, for those who do not qualify for the free minutes provided as an FSA incentive, the new rates going into effect this year will reduce the cost of a 15-minute phone call from \$3.15 (at \$0.21/min) to just \$0.90. And if we ever get non-pandemic-emergency video messaging, a 15-minute video call would cost just \$2.40. But if you haven't already, you might want to have your people add some money to your phone account.

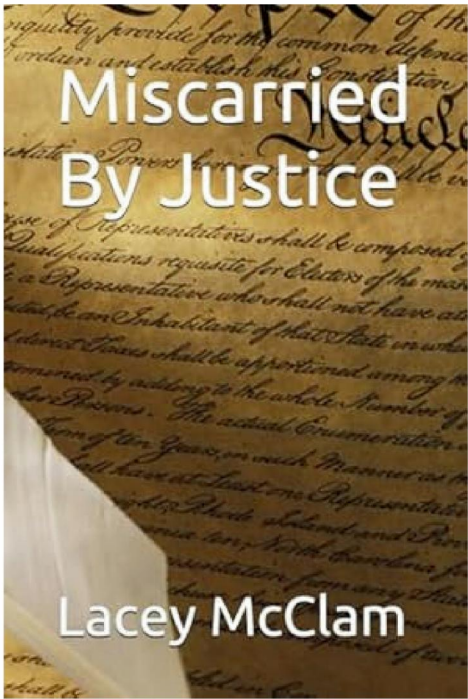
ACQUITTED CONDUCT

Lacey McClam's memoir, "Miscarried by Justice"
Reviewed by **KMT Hand**

"Acquitted conduct." What does this term actually mean? By no means am I a legal scholar, so if you are like me, you may not have any idea either. I had no knowledge up until Mr. Lacey McClam, a man incarcerated at this prison up until recently, asked me to read a rough draft he'd written of his journey through the criminal system. At that time, he had yet to publish his work but was in the process of doing so. "Miscarried by Justice," the now-published book, chronicles McClam's life from the misfortunes that resulted in his entanglement in a string of armed robberies, to the adversities and hardships he faced throughout his incarceration. Through his account of dealings with so-called friends, loved ones and family, McClam gives vivid details of his experiences that are unfortunately all too common for those who may find themselves incarcerated.

Acquitted Conduct deals with sentencing, where conduct a person was acquitted of in a prior case is used in calculating a sentence range under the federal guidelines. A casualty of this unjust sentencing enhancement, the author received up to 39 years of incarceration for conduct of which he was previously acquitted. "Miscarried by Justice" highlights how McClam's life was altered by one of the many tools of mass incarceration: unjustly extravagant sentences.

In April 2024, the US Sentencing Commission voted to approve several amendments to the guidelines. The provision to exclude acquitted conduct was among the amendments approved. On August 8, 2024, the Commission took public comment, and a vote was scheduled to make §1B1.10(b) retroactive, to be usable by someone already in prison.



2023 Proposed Amendment

In January 2023, the Commission first proposed an amendment addressing the use of acquitted conduct.

Chair Reeves noted, "We received an immense amount of comment on our proposals regarding acquitted-conduct sentencing. Some asked us to preserve judges' ability to consider acquitted conduct. Some asked us to move forward with the proposal to significantly limit how judges can use such conduct. But many others wanted us to go bolder, either by banning any consideration of acquitted conduct when using the guidelines or addressing other forms of conduct judges can currently consider."

In April 2023, the Commission determined it needed more time to consider the issue and announced it would prioritize acquitted conduct again the next amendment year.

Supreme Court

In *McClinton v. United States*, 143 S. Ct. (June 2023), multiple Justices suggested that it would be appropriate for the Commission to resolve the question of how acquitted conduct is considered under the guidelines.

Justice Kavanaugh, joined by Justice Gorsuch and Justice Barrett wrote, "As Justice Sotomayor explains, the Court's denial of certiorari today should not be misinterpreted. The use of acquitted conduct to alter a defendant's Sentencing Guidelines range raises important questions. But the Sentencing Commission is currently considering the issue. It is appropriate for this Court to wait for the Sentencing Commission's determination before the Court decides whether to grant certiorari in a case involving the use of acquitted conduct."

118th Congress

In the 118th session of Congress, the Senate and House both introduced bills with bipartisan support that would limit or prohibit consideration of acquitted conduct at sentencing.

See Prohibiting Punishment of Acquitted Conduct Act of 2023, S. 2788 and Prohibiting Punishment of Acquitted Conduct Act of 2023, H.R. 5430 (introduced September 2023).

Senators Durbin and Booker submitted public comment in February 2024 stating that the use of acquitted conduct to increase sentences "largely frustrates" the goals of sentencing and the Commission's mission. "Punishing a defendant for acquitted conduct is a fundamentally unfair practice, which fails to uphold the goals of sentencing and promote respect for the law."

2024 Amendment

Following another year of fact-gathering and consideration, the bipartisan Commission unanimously voted in April 2024 to exclude conduct for which a person was acquitted in federal court from being used in calculating a sentence range under the federal guidelines. Limiting the scope to federal acquittals reflects the principles of the dual-sovereignty doctrine and responds to concerns about administrability.

The amendment acknowledges the court's authority to consider acquitted conduct under 18 U.S.C. § 3661.

"Not guilty means not guilty," said Chair Reeves. "By enshrining this basic fact within the federal sentencing guidelines, the Commission is taking an important step to protect the credibility of our courts and criminal justice system."

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Complaints of overreach with retroactivity were raised by far right-leaning Republican senators. When the time came for the vote, the Commission did not do so, likely because they were being cautious during an election year. The retroactivity has not been granted or denied and at this point is on hold.

"Miscarried by Justice" was written, McClam said, to enlighten the masses to just one of the many forms of injustice in the justice system by way of the acquitted conduct provision. He had hoped the amendment would be passed and made retroactive by the Sentencing Commission. With the retroactivity now on pause, at this time, no relief is in sight for the thousands of incarcerated men and women unjustly punished for acquitted conduct.

I suggested to Mr. McClam that he send a few copies of his book to the members of the Sentencing Commission and Congress. They should all read his book, in my opinion. Maybe a few, if not all, would be engaged, educated, moved, and at many times upset by what McClam's testimonial reveals. McClam's story resonated with me. As a fellow captive, I was curious how the man who transformed himself into a barber, entrepreneur, fitness trainer, Christian, motivational speaker and of course an author while incarcerated managed to do so. For me, "Miscarried by Justice" was another example of what, with unwavering faith and determination no matter the adversity, a person can rise above and become.

NEW SCHOOL ON THE BLOCK

THE UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

has joined Common Good Atlanta and Morehouse College in offering accredited college classes at FCI Atlanta. Site Director Dr. Abigail Kolb shared the university's goals in bringing a degree program to the federal prison in Atlanta.

UWG's first goal, Dr. Kolb said, is to promote equity by extending access to higher education to people in prison. "Addressing systemic inequities in education access for disproportionately affected, marginalized populations reduces recidivism and equips students with tools and credentials needed to secure employment and reintegrate into the free world successfully."

About 28 students started UWG classes at FCI Atlanta in January 2025. Two students who did not qualify for the Second Chance Pell Grant were awarded scholarships. The Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies (BIS) is also offered to students at Hays State Prison in Trion, GA.

"The program aims to provide culturally competent programming that both supports equity and addresses some of the unique challenges faced by incarcerated individuals," Dr. Kolb said, including "trauma, mental health issues, and systemic inequities."

UWG Prison Education Director Dr. Tiffany Parsons said another cohort of FCI Atlanta students will matriculate in August 2026 for the 2026-27 school year.

"We want to welcome you, the University of West Georgia, to the community," wrote Atlantian Revival contributor Bro. Akhu, who started classes at UWG this year. He said his cohort sees this not only as a degree program, but rather, "an opportunity to improve and protect community."

"We who use our sociological imaginations here at FCI Atlanta are representative of the optimistic class, the brotherhood that framed FCI Atlanta as a 'holy ground.'" Akhu said. "By providing higher education and reentry preparation, FCI Atlanta has the opportunity to become the standard-setting torch-bearer. Labeling it a penitentiary doesn't exclude it from becoming a substantial resource for community improvement."

"We see ourselves as success stories still being written."

-Bro. Akhu

BLACK HISTORY PRESENTS:

CULTURE, CLASS, AND SCHOLARSHIP

by Romain Leach

On February 27, 2025, an epic collaboration was on full display. There was an array of stellar performances from the staff, incarcerated scholars, and distinguished guests. The evening began with our emcee, Education Director Dr. Gary welcoming everyone to the highly anticipated Black History Month program. To break the ice and initiate the cultural spirit, we began with a harmonious melody by Brother Anthony Blair. Eloquently, with fire and tempered emotions, he sang the Black National Anthem. Mr. Baldwin gave us a powerful poem entitled "Mother to Son," and Dr. Gary recited inspiring quotes throughout the presentation.

Representing the Incarcerated Scholars of Morehouse was Sonny, The Pro Se Voice. As expected, he displayed a profound charisma and scholarship with an original spoken word piece. He delivered culture and history while sharing the dynamic perspectives of icons Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. What a scholastic showcase for all in attendance. Morehouse was honored to have such an astute student representing the Maroon Tiger brand. Next, a presentation from our phenomenal Drug Treatment Specialist, Ms. Frazier. Women have always been part of the struggle to attain Freedom, Justice and Equality. Ms. Frazier boldly and poetically shared a piece by Maya Angelou entitled, "Phenomenal Woman." Her words echoed, thundering with confidence. Morehouse Higher Education in Prison Student Ambassador Tristian St. John presented us with a piece that touched everyone in the room and displayed his commitment and love for higher education inside of prison. Recreation staff member Mr. Brown gave a brief history of the Divine Nine. Black Greek-Letter organizations have made a huge impact on the African American culture. Members of various sororities and fraternities were in attendance.

Dr. Norment, Dr. Jensen, Prof. Walker, and Morehouse Student Ambassadors Mr. St. John and Mr. Jackson Gleser came to the stage on behalf of Morehouse to reveal the Essay Winners for the annual essay competition held by Dr. Crawford (Director of the Morehouse King Collection) based on Dr. Martin Luther King's famous book, "Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?" The first prize went to Morehouse trailblazer, Sonny, the Pro Se Voice. Dr. Norment said the powerful content of Sonny's essay could have won first prize on the Morehouse campus. Our second-place winner was another Incarcerated scholar with high aspirations, Jevontae Walker.

Our keynote speaker was Clay Colbert, respectfully known as Brother Akhu. The lights were not too bright as he walked us through the history of Black History Month, expounding on the founder Carter G. Woodson. Brother Akhu demonstrated the mountain top of penal scholarship coupled with oratory skills, sending shock waves of awe through the audience.

The Divine Nine couldn't leave without a showdown. Clark Atlanta University kicked it off with Kappa Alpha Psi. Mentor Coordinator Mr. William was in the DJ booth. Dr. Gary put on a performance alongside Mr. Greene, representing for the Omega Psi Phi. Ms. Lassiter had to set the tone for the sorority sisters. She let it be known that Sigma Gamma Rho was in the building. Ms. Wilbon represented for the Zeta Phi Beta alongside Ms. Heatrice. Mr. McCroy and Mr. Brown put on for the Kappa Alpha Psi. Dr. Haynes encouraged the Deltas from Clark Atlanta University to showcase their sisterhood. And Dr. A showed up for the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, stepping strong as everyone who participated did. This was a historical event for the ages. You had to be there to believe it!

HIGH PRAISE FOR SHAMORA

by Alex R

On the evening of December 8, I had the honor and privilege to take part in a special performance by renowned gospel & soul singer/songwriter Shamora, brought to us by the dedicated staff of our chapel. This was a truly momentous occasion, the likes of which I never experienced in my many years in prison nor as a musician.

Shamora, a locally based artist, led an electrifying hour-long set of soulful praise and worship songs, which included fantastic originals such as "Everything," "This Love," and my personal favorite, "Bend, Don't Break." Her voice was inconceivably powerful, seeming to have range without limit. She sent every note straight from the heart to its crescendo.

In preparation for the event, I studied her album the day before at the chapel library. After overcoming the unforeseen obstacle of remembering how to operate a CD player, I was able to jam along with the record on guitar. However, Shamora and her band sounded even better live than on the recording.

Her band was a three-piece phenomenon of its own, comprised of two of her regular musicians and one special guest. Pianist "Ant" was the musical anchor point from which each song emerged. At times, the music threatened to lift him out of his chair as it escaped from his hands. But as only a master musician is capable, his charisma and showmanship never once impeded on his precision. No matter how into it he got, his fingers hit the keys like a cat landing on its feet.

Bassist Téja's slick, melodious, and at times punchy bass lines were felt as much as heard, which made it impossible for even the stiffest, most reluctant audience member to remain seated. She scored extra points for doing all this while looking cool and stylish with her silver 5-string bass equipped with neon pink strings (which she told me glow under black light).

Perhaps most notable was the third member of the group, a special guest who was asked to fill in on short notice when Shamora's drummer could not make the event: none other than our own drum guru Nathaniel Colleton, or as Shamora referred to him, "The world famous KiKi!!"

Kiki once again reaffirmed his sterling reputation as a man of rare talent, having somehow learned over seven songs (apparently in his sleep) without a trace of discernable effort. This was most evident during periods of musical improvisation, when he melded seamlessly with the band and carried on with a coolness and swagger which earned him a well-deserved standing ovation of his own at the end of the night.

The event opened with a short performance from community musicians including myself, fellow guitarist Santos "El Mariachi," Pianist/drummer/singer: Brian "Boone" Davis; Pianist/singer: Salvador "Suave" Portillo; and the trio of soul-singers: Mr. Harry Olin, Calvin Lewis, and "Zoe."

I was caught off-guard by how moving this experience turned out to be. I witnessed the spirit of goodwill and



Nathaniel "KiKi" Colleton

redemption manifest in the crowd as many were brought to tears, and others to their knees. I saw brothers embrace as wounds were healed. While making my way around the pound on a rainy Monday, many asked me how they could send letters to thank Shamora and her team. My advice: drop your letters off at the chapel.

But just in case: on behalf of this big colorful community behind The Wall, thank you Shamora, Anthony, Téja, & KiKi for the one-of-a-kind blessing you bestowed on us.

GRAN PROCLAMACIÓN A SHAMORA

Autor: **Alex R**

Traductor: **Antonio Abrego Bega**

En la tarde de Diciembre 8 del 2024 tuve el honor no solo de atender, sino también ser parte de una acción especial por parte de una reconocida cantante evangelical y del alma y escritora; Shamora. El evento fue traído a nosotros por parte de los dedicados miembros de nuestra capilla donde se dio a cabo el Domingo a las seis de la tarde. Esto fue una verdadera ocasión de momentos como los cuales nunca había experimentado en mis muchos años como prisionero, ni como músico.

Shamora, una artista local, llevó a cabo un set de una hora electrificante de canciones de adoracion y oracion de alma completa, los cuales incluían originales fantásticos tales como "Todo," "Este Amor," y mi favorita personal, "Doblate Pero No Te Quiebres." Su voz era inconcebiblemente poderosa, con un rango que parecía no tener límites. Ella mando cada nota directo desde el corazón hasta lo más alto.

En preparación para el evento, yo estudié su álbum "Abuso de Sustancias...El Altar," el día anterior cuando estaba disponible en la librería de la capilla. Después de vencer el obstáculo al poder recordar cómo poder usar un CD player, pude seguir la música tocando con mi guitarra. Lo que escuche me gusto. De cualquier manera Shamora y su banda están en mi lista de grupos especiales los cuales manejan el sonido mejor en vivo que en grabación. (Quizás queda humildemente sugerir un álbum en vivo tentativamente titulado; "Vivo desde USP Atlanta"?)

Su banda estaba compuesta por tres piezas fenomenales compuesta por dos de sus músicos regulares y un invitado especial. Aquí les dejo mi explicación de su asombrosidad.

El pianista Anthony "Ant," el cual a mi parecer es el ancla del musical del cual cada canción energía. A veces la música mencionada con levantarlo de la silla como si escapara de sus manos. Pero, así como solo un maestro de la música es capaz de hacer, su carisma como un hombre del show, nunca impidió su precisión. Sin importar qué tan comprometido estaba, su dedos tocaban las teclas como un gato cae en sus pies. Este hombre es asombroso.

A su lado estaba la bajista "Téja." Siendo yo un bajista la mayoría de mi vida, ella acaparó mi atención inmediatamente, la melodía de Téja y la manera como tocaba esas líneas del bajo cada canción, se sentían así como se escuchaban. Esto hizo imposible que hasta el miembro más reluciente de la audiencia permaneciera sentado. Ella obtuvo puntos extra por hacer esto mientras su estilo se miraba bien con su bajo Schecter plateado de cinco cuerdas equipado con cuerdas rosa neon de la marca D.R. (el cual me dijo que brillaba bajo la oscuridad).

Quizás, lo más notable es el tercer miembro del grupo, un invitado especial al cual se le pidió que completara el grupo cuando supieron que el baterista de Shamora no pudo llegar al evento. Nadie más que nuestro Guru de la batería: Nathaniel Colloton, o como Shamora se refiere a él; "El mundialmente famoso KIKI!"

KIKI una vez más reafirmó su reputación como un músico profesional de clase mundial, aprendiendo de alguna manera siete canciones (aparentemente mientras dormía) y sin ninguna muestra de esfuerzo discernible. Él es un hombre de un talento raro y una habilidad posiblemente superhumana, un proverbio del maestro de Kung-Fu de la batería. Esta fue más evidente durante periodos de improvisación de música cuando se mezcló con la banda con un swag fresco que solo le pertenece a KIKI. El se ganó una muy merecida ovación de pie al final del evento.

El evento se abrió con una corta actuación con músicos de la comunidad incluyendome a mi mismo, compañero guitarrista Santos "El Mariachi," cantante/ baterista/pianista Brian "Boom" Davis, cantante/pianista Salvador "Suave" Portillo, y el trío de cantantes del alma: El Señor Harry Olin, Calvin Lewis, y Alfonso "Zoe" Brewton.

Me tomaron desprevenido por como esta actuación resultó ser. Fui testigo del espíritu de la buena voluntad y la redención manifestándose a sí misma a través de los presentes los cuales rompieron en llanto y otros se arrodillaron. Vi a los hermanos abrazarse como si las heridas fueran sanadas. Mientras hacía mi camino a través del lluvioso e inundado lunes, muchos me preguntan cómo podrían enviar cartas para darle las gracias a Shamora y su equipo. Mi consejo; llevenlas a la capilla.

Con respecto al caso, detrás de esta comunidad colorida "Atrás de la pared" gracias Shamora, Anthony, Téja, y KIKI por la bendición única de su tipo que nos otorgaron a nosotros.



MORE PRAISE FOR SHAMORA by Alex R

During the editing process of the first article which reviewed Shamora's December 8 concert, our managing editor reached out to Shamora, who asked to see the draft I had submitted. Shamora's reaction was a huge surprise to us, but also it was a true testament to her genuinely giving nature.

On the following Thursday afternoon, I was informed by Chaplain Johnson that Shamora had promptly contacted him after reading the article. In response to our gratitude, she asked to return to perform a special concert for us on what is without a doubt, the busiest day of the year for an artist of her genre: Easter Sunday.

The concert was as moving as the first but in an entirely different manner. The performance focused more on moments of extended improvisation that delved deep into the rich spiritual nature of Shamora's soulful music. The outstanding musicianship of her band bolstered a profoundly moving worship experience.

The event was again held at USP Atlanta's Chapel, at the same time as the first: 6pm until recall. Turnout was greater this time, with every seat filled, plus auxiliary seating in the adjoining corridors. Just prior to the event the air-conditioning had malfunctioned, and despite the quick-thinking resourcefulness of Chaplain Johnson and Mentorship Coordinator/Rev. Williams, the show was a toasty affair. Multiple fans and a portable A.C. unit manned by our own HVAC master-at-arms "Hest: The Best" Hester, were of little effect. The testament was that this made no difference to the crowd. Every seat stayed filled and every heart stayed engaged.

The event opened with a brief performance by the USP Atlanta praise & gospel band, which recently welcomed two new members, and the return of one founding member. Veteran minister & lead vocalist Dan "Pastor Dan" Dixon, originally from Manhattan, and the gospel pianist from Memphis, Kenneth "Keys" Hicks, recently joined the group, adding their own soulful elements to the ensemble. Will Gresham (also known as "Church") had returned from a long hiatus courtesy of his ongoing battle in court. Prior to his temporary exodus, he was the sole pianist, but now he has gravitated towards the microphone, contributing his unique singing style, and also bass guitar. As a team, we felt sincerely blessed and privileged to open once more for Shamora and her group.

Once more, I received a multitude of gratitude for "Shamora & The Crew of 2 + Kiki," and one request: "Alex please give a warm salutation and my thanks to Shamora for coming back... Also, we would love to hear her sing in Spanish. Maybe you could translate a song for her," Señor Colombia suggested in Spanish.

To Shamora; your originals made a palpable impact on your first visit. Your short commentaries before songs such as "Everything" and "Bend, don't break" are important to me personally, and for many others as well. Inspiration is a gift of sudden strength. Hearing of your inspiration was inspiring. May I humbly suggest a tentative follow-up event titled something like "Acoustic Songwriter Sessions Feat. Shamora & Co.," or "Testimony by Song- Friday night at USP Atlanta?"

The best ideas are not ideas at all. They are something more from somewhere more; they are inspiration. Thank you Shamora, Téja, Anthony, and Kiki for blessing us again, The Community in Unity behind The Wall.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION SPOTLIGHT: PVS BY THE AG GUY

PVS PRISONER
VISITATION
& SUPPORT

A letter, phone call, or email: three different ways to stay connected to your family and loved ones. Oh, but what about a personal visit? For some who have been placed here at FCI Atlanta, those personal visits may not be an eligible option. The good news is there is a nonprofit organization based out of Pennsylvania that has volunteers across the US who provide once-monthly, hour-long personal visitations. I myself have utilized this service for 17 months. Here at FCI Atlanta there currently are four volunteers who donate their time and kindness to come in every last Sunday of the month. The volunteer I meet with always has great engaging news and topics of conversation and is always compassionate towards what is going on with me personally. To get more information and possibly sign up, please see Ms. Bailey, Reentry Affairs Coordinator, in the Educational Building.

From www.prisonervisitation.org:



Our Mission

Prisoner Visitation and Support (PVS) is a volunteer visitation program for federal and military prisoners throughout the United States.

Our mission is to provide prisoners with regular, face to face contact from the world outside of prison to help them cope with prison life, encourage personal growth, and prepare for successful reentry into society.

Our vision is to provide qualified visitors to fulfill all requests for visits by prisoners in every federal and military prison.

Our priority is to visit those prisoners who:

- do not ordinarily receive visits from family and friends,
- want or need visits,
- are in solitary confinement,
- are on death row,
- or are serving long sentences.

PVS PRISONER
VISITATION
& SUPPORT

The Power
of
Visiting

CO-LIVING IN HARMONY

by ID
Art by O

If I hadn't been incarcerated myself,

I would have thought nothing of the psychological impacts behind doing time. The living arrangements in prison, particularly the practice of space sharing, can give rise to significant psychological stress. The forced cohabitation of individuals with different backgrounds, personalities, and coping mechanisms is a perfect setup to create constant conflicts. These conflicts can have serious mental health consequences. In 2018 when I first landed inside the US Federal Detention Center at Seagoville, TX, my biggest concern, besides my pending indictment, was adjustment issues and overcrowding.

Incarcerated people have little to no choice over who we share a cell with, leading to heightened anxiety and stress. The differences in personal habits such as cleanliness, noise level or sleep pattern can cause frictions. Incarcerated men conduct their daily life, including personal hygiene, within a small shared space. Imagine using the bathroom in the presence of a complete stranger, a daily reality for many of us. This absence of privacy can make one feel vulnerable and irritated. Having no control over the environment we find ourselves in makes us feel powerless, causing states of anger and being "over the edge."

People here are constantly surrounded by others, with absolutely no place to go to escape the crowd. But ironically, the overwhelming effect of overcrowding can create deep feelings of isolation. Co-living with incompatible cellmates can further increase those feelings. What ensues is a constant struggle to form meaningful connections and support networks. Ultimately, the social isolation combined with the harsh conditions that come with confinement intensifies the feelings of loneliness and despair. As a result, some people develop different unhealthy coping mechanisms. These are men and women labeled "burnt up." Co-living arrangements can also create opportunities for dominance and control. More aggressive or dominant individuals command control over the use of shared resources like the bed, the sink, the toilet, or dictate how the cell is maintained. This power imbalance can contribute to heightened fear, anxiety and trauma. The psychological impact is particularly severe for those unable to change their living conditions, further deepening feelings of helplessness and inferiority.

We can all agree that a person's mood or overall behavior is governed by the energy of his environment. Regardless of how bright-spirited or positive a person you are, if you are cooped up with a grouchy, foul-mannered person, you may develop the same traits sooner or later.

We conducted an independent survey among men incarcerated here at FCI Atlanta in September 2024. Each participant was asked to name the top five conditions that make it hard for him to do time. Not surprisingly, 98% named space sharing among their top five issues, and 90% said their cellmate situation was first on their list. Due to its sensitivity and complexity, most men recounted at least one incompatibility incident.

Contrasting personalities can easily lead to friction, making it challenging to coexist. Discordant habits, interests, or values can create a tense atmosphere that would undermine a harmonious situation. The mood of disharmony inside the cell then inevitably transfers outside the cell, impacting every interaction, including with officers and other incarcerated men.

The importance of hygiene is substantial, especially inside prisons where thousands of bodies are crammed and warehoused together. Yet the diverse demographics in the federal prison system makes hygiene a cultural relativity. While to shower at least once a day is a must to most, some men feel if they haven't worked out or sweated, a shower is not necessary.

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Incarcerated people have little to no choice over who we share a cell with, leading to heightened anxiety and stress.

A practice as common as handwashing after using the bathroom is completely disregarded by some. This could cause the co-occupant of the cell to have to live with OCD-type symptoms. The thought of sleeping in or even returning to such living conditions after a day at work or education can be traumatic. Consider the management of light inside the cell. Some prefer the cell dimly lit when sleeping, while others want full light for reading and writing. Some work during the day, while others prefer to stay up all night and sleep during the day. Should the cellmate refrain from going in and out of the cell during the day while he sleeps? While the answer to these questions may seem simple and straightforward, this issue could create a very tense debate with strong arguments on both sides. Disagreements about light management can lead to frustrations, conflict, and even sleep deprivation.

Speaking of sleep deprivation, what about the individual who snores? Snoring can be tied to a medical condition, but everyone snores sometimes due to exhaustion or a poorly designed sleeping apparatus such as our mattress and pillow. And while that is manageable, chronic snoring can be distressing, leading to lack of sleep which affects both occupants of the cell. I recall an event involving an individual who, after exhausting all remedial avenues, earplugs, going to bed before the guy who snores, decided to wake the snoring cellmate because, as he said, "If I can't sleep, you won't sleep either." The ensuing sleep deprivation deteriorated both of their moods and overall mental faculties.

If you happen to snore uncontrollably (or if your cellmate does) there is potential for relief. Show up at sick call immediately after breakfast with a cop-out stating your concern. Ms. Barnett, who works at the pill window, said most people arrive at this facility having already gone through the process of getting a medical pass for a CPAP machine, which would alleviate the snoring and promote better sleep. A sleep study is conducted on the patient to determine his sleep score. This would determine if you're getting enough oxygen during sleep. Fatigue can be a factor for snoring. Regardless, a complete diagnosis would determine the need of a sleeping apparatus to remedy the problem.

In addition to sleeping habits, there is the picky cellmate, the one who is not happy with anything done any other way than his. As this relates to personal items' position inside the cell, such as shoes, chair, laundry laid to dry, etc., the cell organization is exemplified by the recommendation of the institution yet remains more or less subjective. Sharing resources is necessary. Nonetheless, some cellmates will bump heads daily because one person opts to stand to urinate while the other, for religious or hygiene purposes, enforces the sit-down standard. The sink is also a source of disagreement. Do you brush your teeth and spit in the sink or the toilet? Do you wipe dry the sink after each use or do you wait till the end of the day and wipe it clean? One particular participant in our survey recounted a disagreement with a cellmate because he was told he chews too loud. The atmosphere inside the cell became tense, causing both occupants to indulge in tit for tat drama. Being considerate of one's cellmate is an unspoken agreement but is still the source of much conflict.



Sonny Black was housed with a night reader who would keep the lights on during sleeping hours and fall asleep with the lights on. When this happened, Sonny would get up in the wee hours of the night to turn the lights off. But this would awaken the night reader, who would pretend he was still reading. Sonny initiated a gentlemanly conversation to remedy the difference in habits. Alas, it led nowhere. So, as the bigger person, Sonny resorted to using one of his T-shirts as a blindfold to temporarily fix the problem. Meanwhile, during the day, he actively looked for ways to change cells.

Loud music, not respecting personal space or being disruptive, especially during quiet hours, can escalate tensions. In a confined environment, consideration of one another's comfort is crucial for maintaining peace. If we apply a philosophical approach in resolving incompatibility issues, it is possible to find common ground. The key attitude to adopt is compromise.

A Muslim cellie, for instance, does not stand up to urinate. That is the Islamic way. It would be immoral and futile to try to convince him otherwise.

Some individuals are germ-phobic, leading them to clean compulsively, often with bleach. Some like their cell maintained in a certain order. Others are extremely specific about the use of the shared resources inside the cell.

All of these are examples of coping mechanisms adopted gradually over a period of time. It would be difficult to ask such a person to refrain from their carefully cultivated habits.

There are some who decide to split every area of the already-small cell into equal parts in order to avoid frictions. For instance, the table would have a dividing line. The hooks to hang clothes would also be assigned. But when the edge of either's bowl crosses the border or his oversized shirt hangs too far on the other occupant's side, a reality TV-like drama becomes inevitable.

Background and cultural differences can handicap compatibility. And that vulnerability is obvious when housing men who have already adapted and grown tolerant to abnormal living conditions with newcomers, whose forced adjustment can create a stressful environment for both. The institutionalized individual has developed coping mechanisms and routines that are important to him. The newcomer's disruption to that routine, however unintentional, to that routine can create a power imbalance where seniority dominates. The newcomer would then struggle to adjust to the harsh realities of prison life.

Mr. Busby has been incarcerated about 22 years to date. He has been at every security level of the federal prison system except for the camp and is considered an "OG." When I shared the results of our survey with him, his initial reaction was, "this is a conversation that is worth having."

Though Mr. Busby said he personally hasn't lived the situations recounted, he attests they are very common, especially at the lower security prison levels.

"I feel like those who have been incarcerated for a long period of time deserve to be housed in single cell units, because it would be challenging for a newly incarcerated person to adjust without causing a stressful environment."

We should be empathetic, especially towards those who still have a lot of time to complete. For that matter, it is recommended to work around them and stay out of their way. Administrators in charge of making cell changes could be a skeptical toward our requests to move cells due to certain individuals' abuse or misuse. Before requesting a move, the first step is to communicate with the future and current cellmate and to be honest, especially about habits. It is best to talk thoroughly, then pay the case manager or counselor a visit together. If two people cannot find common ground, the case manager or counselor will ultimately decide whether to execute the move.

Despite the unfortunate reality, incarcerated men and women have championed ways to cope in order to maintain their sanity. Those who succeed are adept at identifying and adhering to good company. They have a superb ability to sense problems in any environment and exclude themselves. They have bonded to form supportive co-advisory systems. The slew of competent prison lawyers proves that many incarcerated individuals focus on self-education and excel at it. Some of the most complex and effective physical exercise routines originated from prisons. And the religious devotions and brotherhoods in prisons are second to none.

The necessity of a correctional system is unquestionable in today's society, but prison is a thing of the past. It leads to legal exploitation and inhumane practices, degrading individuals and the destruction of family bonds. Perhaps the most taxing consequences are the symptoms of post-incarceration syndrome, stemming from harsh and untenable conditions of confinement, including forced cohabitation in unnatural spaces.

One potential solution is to learn from some European prison systems which emphasize rehabilitation and prioritize more private living spaces. A merit-based or consensual housing arrangement could reduce stress and anxieties from the initial introduction to incarceration and could also reduce conflicts of incompatibility.

A suggestion from one survey response was to have a newcomers' unit, where OGs as lead orderlies would mentor the young first-timers in prison. A few months into their adjustment, a merit-based unit assignment could then be conducted to break up the population: one unit for students, one for workers, another for gym rats. And unfortunately, a separate unit for those not interested in trying to improve themselves.

The time we spend in prisons could be turned around and used to our benefit. Paradoxically, our alienation could have a positive effect, as we have less distractions, our faults and shortcomings are quickly exposed. Our biggest enemy and our best advantage is Time. Time to thrive toward a better version of ourselves.

A TIME TO REMEMBER

by **Sonny, The Pro Se Voice**

Knock, knock! "Come in," announced the Case Manager for A-Unit. "Hey Mrs. Whitley, pardon the interruption, but I was wondering do you plan on doing anything for Juneteenth this year?" Pushing away from her computer screen, Mrs. Whitley looked in my direction and replied, "No, I don't have any plans for Juneteenth this year. With all of these new policy changes, I'm poring through my case file to get you guys home as soon as possible."

"Oh, okay well, me and a few of the guys were wondering if we put a program together for Juneteenth would you help us find a location to present it at?"

"Sure," Mrs. Whitley replied, then glanced at her calendar. "It's already May, so that gives you less than 30 days. You know I don't like to do anything last minute, so you need to get your program to me pronto."

"Gotchu, that won't be a problem...and thank you," I stated, departing from her office.

Considering the multiple moving pieces and personalities, pulling an institutional program together in less than a month would be a tall task. At the same time, knowing the caliber of men I would be working with to pull this event off, I knew this task could be completed.

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My first order of business was finding a band. There were a few different bands in FCI Atlanta to choose from. The first person I spoke to was Alex R., a fellow Atlantian Revival journalist, and I struck gold. Alex, and Contra-Band (the name of their band) member William Gresham agreed to have their band play for the Juneteenth program.

Jayson Berry was next. This guy is a genius. He is a musician, painter, script writer and a scholar, attending West Georgia University and Morehouse College. I bumped into him on the walkway during the 10-minute move. "Yo, Jayson what's poppin homie?"

"On my way to the yard to exercise. What's up with you Sonny?"

"I need your expertise. I'm putting this program together for Juneteenth and we need a skit reenacting the moment enslaved African Americans in Galveston, Texas were notified by General Gordon Granger, on June 19, 1865, that they were no longer slaves. That they were free!"

"How soon do you need it?"

"ASAP. The program hasn't been approved yet and we're trying to get Mrs. Whitley to help us find a location. And you know she likes to be early, not late."

"Yeah, you're right. Give me two days and I'll have it for you."

"Damn, two days, that's it?" I said, shocked at such a short turn around. He smiled and walked away.

I needed some speakers, brothers that could light up the stage and electrify the masses. The most preeminent speaker on the compound is a good friend of mine by the name of Dr. Akhu. He's a fellow member of The Atlantian Revival and he also attends West Georgia University and Morehouse College. I found him immersed in his studies. "Dr. Akhu, you want to speak at this Juneteenth event we're putting together?" Dr. Akhu looked at me absurdly, "What kind of question is that? Of course I want to speak. Who else you going to have speaking?" I shrugged. He pursued further, "Are you speaking?" I shook my head and replied, "Nah, I'm going to emcee the joint and do a spoken word. Plus, I'm going to be in the play. On that note, I'mma need you to be in the play as well." Dr. Akhu smirked. "So you just going to put me in the play," he replied. "Yeah, we need you." He rubbed his chin between his thumb and index finger and said, "Okay, I got you. I'll do the play. And I think you should see if Alameen and S.P. want to be speakers for the event."

I know both brothers well. Both are powerful speakers. Alameen is an Imam as well as a fellow Morehouse College student. S.P. was a scholar in his own right. Both brothers agreed to participate.

Just like that, the program was coming together. The band ✓, skit, ✓, speakers, ✓, spoken word, ✓. The only missing piece was a keynote speaker. During a Wednesday night Morehouse class, the cohort brought to Dr. Norment's and Dr. Jensen's attention that we were putting a program together for Juneteenth and wondered if African American Studies professor Dr. Samuel Livingston would be willing to be the keynote speaker. Dr. Jensen assured us that he would. Due to the time constraints, I advised Dr. Jensen to coordinate with Mrs. Whitley.

The week of June 12, Mrs. Whitley called me into her office. "Wilson, I see you work fast. Dr. Livingston has been added to your program as the keynote speaker. How's the rest of your program coming along?"

"We're all set Mrs. Whitley, we're ready to go. I got the band, speakers, a skit, and I'll be doing a spoken word."

"That's great. Now, I was going to see if I could get you guys to have your program in the chapel. However, after speaking with Recreation Supervisor Mr. Preston, we've decided to allow you guys have your program in the yard, with popcorn, ice cones and nachos. And we'll be having it on June 19."

"That'll be dope. We don't care where it's at, the chapel, the mess hall, wherever. But the yard will be epic."

On Juneteenth 2025, the sun was fighting through the clouds. Sean, the recreation orderly, said it was 40% chance of rain. We proceeded forward with setting up the instruments for the band and the stage for the Juneteenth performances. The yard was packed. The stadium was at full capacity, including Morehouse professors and students. We kicked the program off with the skit. Standing ovation! The reenactment of Juneteenth was a hit. The crowd thoroughly enjoyed the drama. Next, the band performed "Lift Every Voice & Sing." Then, Alameen gave a powerful speech titled "What We Need" that brought the rain down. Literally! There was a quick dash for cover by spectators and participants alike. Mrs. Whitley made adjustments on the fly. "Everyone to the chapel."

Once we all transitioned to the chapel, we picked up where we left off. Brother S.P. (for Straight Path) galvanized the audience with a lecture called "Honoring & Protecting Our Women." The band's lead singer Shane Johnson brought the house down with a soulful rendition of Tyrese's "What Am I Going to Do." Dr. Akhu didn't miss the mark with his guiding speech, "The North Star." My spoken word had the crowd hanging with suspense on every stanza. Last but not least, Dr. Samuel Livingston provided a potent lecture highlighting the true origins of slavery in this country and the history of Juneteenth.

It took a team effort to bring this program to life: a collaborative effort from staff members, Mrs. Whitley and Mr. Preston, with an impressive brotherhood of imprisoned scholars at FCI Atlanta. Juneteenth 2025 was one for the ages! Asé to our ancestors!



JUBILEE IN THE JOINT

by **Sonny, The Pro Se Voice**

Prison can be a dark and ominous place. A place where days turn to night with a callous tempo. Piercing through the glum monotony came an announcement over the loudspeaker. "All [people] attending Ms. Bailey's Spring Jubilee event, for April 26, 2025, please report to the visitation room." Some brothers made mental notes and continued on with their day. But some had been waiting for this announcement all year. They filed into the corridors, stepping with purpose to their intended destination.



Nathaniel "KiKi" Colleton and family

36 imprisoned men crossed the Jubilee threshold. This wasn't the same visiting room. Reentry Affairs Coordinator Ms. Bailey had added her touch. Absent were the strict visiting rules and stern correctional officers. In their place were families and correctional officers commingling with pleasantries and smiles on their faces. In addition to the positive atmosphere, there were cotton candy and popcorn machines, catered food, music, board games, and unrestricted movement. This was a vibe. Ms. Bailey affirmed her purpose for creating this event: "I wanted to rebuild and maintain healthy family relationships and provide an opportunity for AIC's to reconnect with their loved ones in a fun environment."

"I wanted to rebuild and maintain healthy family relationships."
-Ms. Bailey



Jake Walters, L., and Brian Hilliard, L., enjoy 'freedom of movement' with family

Rice smothered with chicken gravy, green beans, and macaroni and cheese were served as imprisoned men did the Electric Slide and Boots on the Ground with their families. KiKi led the dance routine, showing he hadn't lost a step and could still slide with the best of them. KiKi's daughter, Natalya, affirmed, "It feels enlightened. A more positive environment that enables you to have a deeper connection beyond just casual conversation and being able to share experiences together."

This was not a regular visit in a penitentiary; this was feeling more and more like a family gathering. Correctional Officer Lucas said, "The food, drinks and music are going. This feels like you are at a family picnic or a family barbecue."

Juan Llanas was visited by his family. His sister, Michelle, described the event as a very liberating experience. "It feels like you don't have a family member in prison," she said. "It feels like a family dinner."

"This experience makes me feel better, happier," Juan's other sister, Abigale, said. "It gives me peace to know the nature of the people that my loved one is surrounded by."

Daniel Barton expressed it this way: "This was great, we were able to sit down and eat a meal with family." Daniel's daughter, Willow, shared, "This was very positive and enjoyable because we can interact like we were in the real world."

Corey from Washington DC said he wanted to thank Ms. Bailey for "creating an atmosphere that felt a little less controlled and made me and my family feel more comfortable."

J-Five spent time with his wife Keia and their three kids. "This is a great experience," J said. "The other spots I've been at, they don't even care about you enough to have something like this. So, it shows that they care a little bit." His wife followed, "This provides a more personal connection with your family. I can see more of his personality, and it strengthens our spirit. Plus, it gives you something to look forward to and keeps him focused with something to look forward to."



Cover artist Henry Kenner and family



Edwin Viera and family



Keyshawn Cooper and family



Juan Ramon Llanas Briones and family



Luis Perez and family

The Ibarra family was also present: Marcelo, his wife Claudia, and their children. "This is great," Marcelo said. "This is the first time I've ever been to an event like this. I love it!" Claudia added, "It's better for the kids." Then, in mid-sentence she hesitated. At that moment Claudia was choked up, and tears began pouring down her face. Marcelo consoled her as she continued, "We're thankful for the opportunity, and I feel like it took a lot to create this family day. I appreciate being able to share this moment."

**This provides
a more
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connection
with your
family...
and it
strengthens
our spirit.**



Just when you thought the event was winding down, Case Manager Miller grabbed the megaphone and announced that there would be an Easter Egg Hunt for the kids. Eggs were already hidden throughout the visiting room. The kids were ecstatic. They ran from the window to the wall, scouring high and low for Easter eggs. This was truly a first.

"The feeling I had watching the AIC's interact with their families and being able to alleviate emotional strain is indescribable," Ms. Bailey said.

"I appreciate being able to share this moment."



Lamark Rozier and family



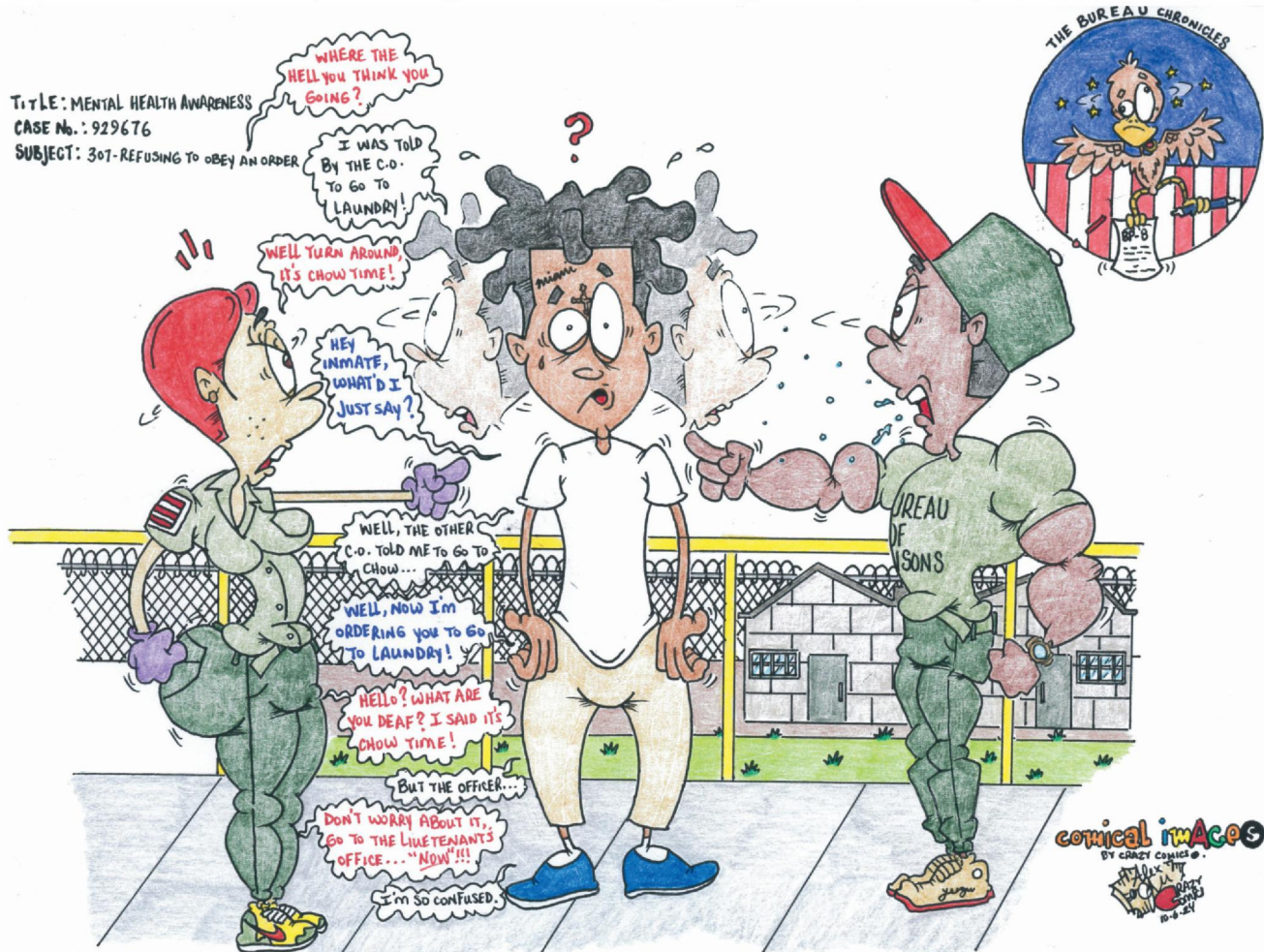
William "Church" Gresham and family

The next day, on April 27, thirty more men were blessed with the opportunity to spend the day with their families in this enriching environment. The only words that can be said to properly end this article are:

**"THANK YOU,
MS. BAILEY!"**

COMICAL IMAGES BY O

O. Ogun is a professional cartoonist who, after visualizing and assessing an image, re-vamps it in his own unique style; finding humor in a subject, situation, or setting. He's been drawing cartoons since the age of 8, and continues to amaze viewers with his customized style of drawing. Look for his work up-coming in the near future beyond these walls.



DOING TIME: A MENTAL HEALTH WORD SCRAMBLE BY THE AG GUY

ZRCYA	-----	TENMERSNET	-----
SNODREPIES	-----	OEIIATDTNM	-----
SBONESOIS	-----	UTRTS	-----
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RATMAU	-----	OJY	---
SIEMDNLFUNS	-----	SPHEINAPS	-----
PNOE DSNESNIMDE	-----	CEEEIONPNTMC	-----

UNBEATABLE HEART

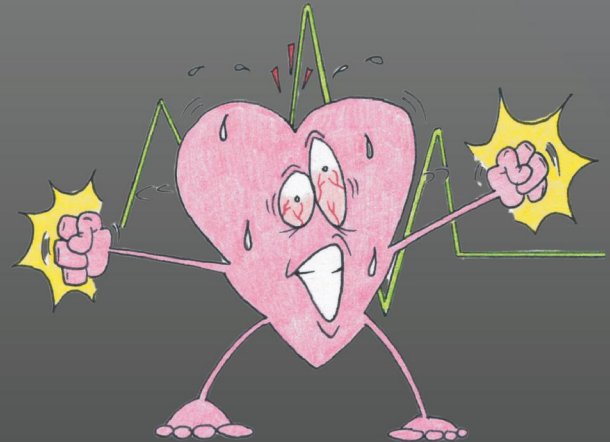
by Alex R
(he)art by O

In my old life as a first responder, I became fascinated with the human spirit. I have seen the sheer desire to fight achieve amazing things. I've also seen a broken heart kill a man, after losing his wife of many decades. For no discernible reason, he declined until his light blinked out. The reality of how grief can manifest itself bodily was made clear to me during a cardiology training, where I learned about a condition known as Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy, or Broken Heart Syndrome.

The Cleveland Clinic defines Takotsubo as a sudden weakness in the heart muscle occurring immediately after a stressful event. Harvard Health described it as "a different kind of heart attack that doesn't involve ruptured plaques and blood clots." Events such as divorce, job loss, death of a loved one, any large, meaningful loss can produce a level of grief that essentially causes the heart to malfunction. Symptoms include chest pain, shortness of breath, irregular heartbeat, low blood pressure, and fainting. Most recover, but complications can follow, including fluid in the lungs, blood clots, heart failure, even death.

The will to live is a greatly underestimated and overlooked phenomenon. It's been described as a "driving force" mainly for its uncanny ability to adapt and overcome adversity. I believe it is also what you might call your spirit, essence, or consciousness.

A sickness of the spirit causes us to wander, as if we've taken our hand off the proverbial wheel. When one forgets from which direction they came into the forest on a hike, in that moment, they are unknowingly lost, before the onset of hopelessness. I regard beliefs, of any spiritual nature, as roads. Each person travels their own road, and at the end of the journey, each of our roads will carry us Home.



Whatever unspoken thing causes you to stop and say, "Man, life is good," it is that love for life itself that gives us direction, transforming sometimes nightmarish realities into a beautiful and hopeful dream. To forget this feeling of gratitude, which came so naturally when we were young, is neglect. It is to be lost, truly lost. And I believe this is what happens when one has lost the will to live. The path diverges, a shortcut to the grave.

Consider the contractible nature of any illness. Think of how one person can spoil your mood, brighten your day, ruin a whole evening, or be the life of the party. A sickness of spirit is equally or more virulent as one of the flesh. But there is one wonderful difference. From the flesh, one can only contain the illness. From the spirit, one may release a contagious goodness that heals.

When you feel the warmth of benevolence radiate from your own belief, know that it can be deliberately shared. I believe that you and I are inside a very great story. Just remember all the best films have some sad parts. One day the storm will be puddles beneath our feet. They will shimmer like pools of sunlight along the street.



THE ATLANTIAN REVIVAL