PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY’S BLACK STUDIES DEPARTMENT PRESENTS VOICES FROM THE MACLAREN YOUTH CORRECTIONAL FACILTY

#BLACK LIVES MATTER

SPRING/SUMMER 2016
Writing About Black Lives Matter Behind Bars

By Walidah Imarisha, BST faculty

I have had the honor of going into MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility every month for over a year, getting to work with the African American/Black cultural group there. I was asked to come in to teach and share knowledge, but I have found I leave every session learning as much or more than I have imparted.

When I first started going in, I decided for the first few sessions what we would study. I used hip hop as a framework, thinking that the young men then, most of whom were emcees, would be interested to engage through that lens. The youth were thoughtful and reflective, talking honestly about violence both institutional and interpersonal, gender and masculinity, power and identity. We focused on the contradictions, the difficult edges, the jagged truths.

After several visits, I asked them what they would like to learn about. Their responses humbled me, and expanded my educational pedagogy. They said that they wanted to learn about the positive achievements Black folks have accomplished, that they so often hear about the negative even in Black educational spaces like this one, they wanted information about the ways Black folks have not just struggled and resisted, but also thrived and built.

As someone who has been an educator for 17 years, I think many of us focus on making sure especially youth understand the interlocking systems of oppression, the way inequality is built into the foundation of the institutions that shape all of our lives. We want folks to know how deep it goes, but using that as a starting point often overwhelms people and makes them feel powerless.

The youth reminded me that we can talk about oppression, but through a lens of empowerment. We studied the race films, films made by Black people, in the early 20th century to talk about Jim Crow segregation. We discussed the Black Panther Party in depth to talk about so many issues happening in the world in the 1960s and 1970s. We studied Black superheroes to look at the ways creatively folks are engaging with institutional violence.
So when I told the youth there was an opportunity to have their work published in the PSU Black Studies newsletter, I asked them what topic would they like to focus on. They all said, “Black lives matter,” in a tone that implied, “What else would we write about?” Their desire to discuss the realities of police violence, as well as the systemic violence of poverty, through the lens of the ways Black youth just like them are resisting, are organizing, are envisioning new just worlds, has been beautiful to watch as it comes to fruition. We have spent several months writing about BLM, talking, reading, and watching about it, spending a lot of time connecting overpolicing, police murders, and incarceration, which they know about all too intimately.

One of the most poignant and heartwrenching moments was when one of the youth said, “What about us, though? What if one of us was killed in here? Would the community on the outside even care? Would they rally and march for us? Would they remember us?” That this young Black man thought his community might see his life as disposable, and might not fight for justice for him, was made even more painful by the immense energy and love and hope and vision and determination each of them poured into talking about Black Lives Matter organizing, and how to support and connect to it from behind bars.

Hopefully by presenting their words and vision here, we can show each of them how vital their voices and their presence are to us, how precious each and every one of them is to the larger community, and how connected they are to a long lineage of Black resistance and Black community building.
I was born by Joda
By Joda Cain

I was born for a purpose, not a label. I am the tears Trayvon Martin wept while being gunned down by the assailant George Zimmerman, and the blood Mike Brown shed during the overkill and assassination by Darren Wilson. My brothers and sisters and I make a difference. Don’t label me as you think o feel, but acknowledge me for who I was meant to be: a lawyer, doctor, or even an entrepreneur. I can’t reach that goal if I am murdered in cold blood. That’s why Black lives matter.

Black Lives Matter
by Demetrius

I feel that the police aren’t being fair. I’m thinking that the killings That happen to black people Are on purpose. The killings could easily be avoided But they choose not to. I’m thinking about every Black family That has lost their child, brother, cousin, auntie, Or close friend to the police. I am hoping for the police To stop all the killings Because it only causes Violence in the community.

I feel by Michael
By Michael Savignon

I feel the life exit Out of a young man’s Body. I see pain spread Throughout the community. I hear drips of tears Falling from the faces of Relatives. I smell the earth Splatter against The wooden casket.
Leontrell Bennett

I feel like Black Lives Matter because I am a part of the Black community and based upon past events of unjustified murders on young black teens, I feel like I need to be a positive influence on my community, so the next generation won’t have to go through the same struggles I went through. Such as worrying about police brutality based on skin color and racial profiling. We are pro black but we are not anti others!

BET by Justin
By Justin “De-John” Hubbard

I was watching the 2015 BET Music Awards, and listened to multiple “artists” rap and sing about negativity, such as killing each other. “Try me, try me, Ima kill his whole mothafuckin family” and rapping about drugs: “I’m in love with the co-co, I’m in love with the co-co,” and dehumanizing our women calling them bitches and hoes. All the time, the whole crowd is singing along and cheering. Then Ludacris comes out and says we need to remember that Black lives matter. I was quickly reminded why I hate to watch BET< because I hate hypocrites.

In a world by Justin
By Justin “De-John” Hubbard

In a world where Black lives matter, I imagine no beef, no blood, no children introduced to the evils of the world. No evil in the world altogether. I imagine no mention of race, because all lives matter. I imagine no ignorance because we will all be educated on our history and our present, and all have plans for our future. Not just living for today, because I imagine a world where tomorrow is promised.
Davontay Mosley

It’s more than important to recognize that Black Lives Matter but also to show that All Lives Matter at the end of the day. We are all in this together, before we can start on the bigger problems in life we have to start by solving the little ones. Like black on black crime, unjustified murders and crimes based on race. To show society that we are not animals as they media portrays us to be. All of the lives that were taken by cops were not justified. So for us to stand and fight for what we believe in we should not be looked upon as animals or individuals that don’t obey laws. As these events keep happening we will continue to fight for the Black Lives That Matter.

bit of body text

Travon M.
3/3/16

Black lives matter for many reasons, for one were all equal and are human beings. When people think of race, they automatically assume that person do the things he do in his culture. Just because a person is black doesn’t mean he’s a gang member, drug dealer, or unemployed. Dressing a different way don’t define that person. Sometimes bosses don’t want to hire a black males because they hear negative things about them, or the way they look. I don’t agree with the system for their stereotypical process of black males or any other race. I believe we all should stick together in the future. But life is to short you never know what can happened now days.
In a World by Trei

In a world where Black Lives Matter, I imagine a place where we don’t have to look over our shoulder all the time. I imagine a place beyond the North Star, a place where we as one can eat, live, fight for our liberal justice.

In a World by Peter

In a world where Black Lives Matter
I imagine
Less jail sentences
And more benefits.

In a World by Trei (full-length)

In a world where Black Lives Matter, I imagine a place where we don’t have to look over our shoulder all the time. I imagine a place beyond the North Star, a place where we as one can eat, live, fight for our liberal justice.

I imagine a world that we can go without getting into other folks’ business. I imagine a place that we as a universe can understand each other and live as one, a place where gangs don’t have to recruit folks at a young age to settle beefs and brainwash them into something that will eventually become an evil, mind-blowing criminal that can only think of murder.
Trei Hernandez

When I was younger, the impression of black was always bad. Growing up in a predominant black neighborhood the police always seemed to be around. Whenever I tried to talk about the black culture in school it always went in a bad direction and turned into an argument. And when we did talk about the black culture it was never the good things. My mom always told me when a bad situation presented itself to think about my father. He was a good man but had a bad rep for all the bad he did before he passed.

Joda Cain
Black lives matter:

Being what we’ve been through in the black community, and our suffering from perception of what other’s believe the black community to be. I as a black male have faced a lot of struggles being from Missouri a place where slavery was alive, seeing police judging me based on what I look like versus who I am as a person. Age 14 getting my heartbroken because I was black dating a white girl, and being threatened to get my life taken if the relationship didn’t cease. When I was 15 being held at gunpoint by angry police from issuing the frustration of injustice in the Trayvon Martin case, was this needed or was it needed to be choked out by the white man who threatened to kill me because my pants was sagging, and I had on Jordan’s? I as every Black youth have a dream, and a future, and I like Trayvon Martin at one time wanted to be a pilot, and I did like Mike brown graduate from H.S. to make my mom proud, and overcome the boundaries that the area I grew up has set. I once seen the vigil that black lives matter has formed to express their love that they’ve felt for the mothers in pain who lost their kids, and them advocating for us as one, not us a race I nothing but respect the black lives matter because my life like all youth in every community matter. Thank you!
Killin Season
By Warith “Da Vinci” Mustafa

All the pressure of life got me going under,
I just want to say fuck it and go in a deep slumber,
It's Killin Season

But I got some family members counting on me to make it out,
I told my mom and dad when I get rich they both get a house,
Only way to get my feelings out write it down,
I don’t know how to feel about my home town,
Every day you hear another person getting gunned down, everybody got guns now,
People getting used to that gun sound like a new house when it’s settled down,
It's Killin Season

This shit got me unsettled now, kind of like a hot kettle now,
I know I need to settle down, but in my sleep
I hear that chh chh settle metal sound when a round gets ready
Boom boom and bring medical round,
It's Killin Season

It's a scary thing when on the news you see a person you used to know
Was kind of close talked about that girl this dude and all the weed we used to smoke,
Now I see bullet holes, yeah that's a man I used to know,
It's Killin Season

It's crazy we got killer cops running round with loaded glocks,
Gun laws I laugh at them Ha-ha a couple laws won’t stop
My people from getting gunned down from loaded cops with killer glocks,
I’m going now I won’t stop, fuck the time I don’t want a clock,
My mind is a time bomb and society cut the wrong wire, I’ve blown up,
I’m ready, I know I said fuck the time but it's about time I get these wounds sewn up all ready
It's Killin Season

The jungle ain’t got shit on us, today’s massacres and you can’t forget the mask
Of mascara and Maybelline’s perfect her, straight hair, blue eyes, size zero waist,
I don’t understand because not even in baseball is no curve a perfect curve
It’s Killin Season
No topic is off limits, only the limit at which we limit ourselves,
No one is blemished only when we look in the mirror do we blemish ourselves,
You’re beautiful, you too, and you too, your beauty shines brightest
When you wear the face that suites you, not TV, not Facebook,
Instagram or snapchat, where was that crap at
When little Jenny pushed her cap back

It's Killin Season

The passive attach not working out anymore,
But here’s a start let’s be frank like a ball park,
Let’s move tanks into our parks, let’s help “the Man”
And just shop at Wal-Mart, let’s all workshop
Our NFL and NBA all-stars, and everybody it’s
Mandatory that we all spend at least 100,000 dollars
On a sports car is that everything so far.
Now I’m the crazy man saying shit that's not very nice
But you're the one expecting different results
From doing the same thing twice
Cough, cough George Bush

It's Killin Season

We focus so much energy into what other people
Think about us we forget what we know about ourselves
We spend so much time chasing the American Dream
When America is a nightmare, I believe in karma
So believe me when I say this shit is no accident the killing and slaughtering
Of Un-Americans will come back to haunt the soil
Where blood dropped from a copy who claimed incompetence with a taser
And shot a veteran on accident

It's Killin Season

Give me a reason to smile and you'll see
My cheeks touch my eyelids, but til then
I will concentrate on not having to say
Bye kids to my kids when they’re old enough
To catch a stray bullet from the Hi-kids
We used to watch ride bi-cycles but now
Just killing for some nice kicks

It's Killin Season
I’m a man possessed pencil moving on its own accord
I can’t stop it and I don’t want to stop either or,
Was never poor in the physical sense of the word,
But my poor judgment on the physical sense of
The world put me in intense situations, my physical
Sense of a girl is just like every other man but my
Mental tense when a pearl walks in front of me
I heard it’s better to stop moving or you sink faster
In quicksand, I’m developing as you listen and i
Speak because your reaction to every action I see
Helps me better understand what you see, well you
See I let out some steam, I unbuckled my
Seatbelt, I let my hair down, I let it all out,
But am I free from the oppression or weight
Of these words on my shoulders? I feel like the
Answer is NO, I feel its no until each and every
Person who listens to this understand the old me,
The homie, the wannabe OG, smoking on kush,
Spittin game to every female tryna be low-key,
I think that here in this poem I’m getting
A knife out the drawer that everybody has
In the house and cutting out that guy,
I have to take action sometime and I hope
We didn’t forget
It’s Killin Season