

AGAINST ALL ODDS:

MY TRANSITION FROM A YOUNG STREET THUG TO A SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS, POLITICIZED PRISONER

by: Brian Lee Rowe
(A.K.A. Uhuru Baraka Rowe)

DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this pamphlet to those in my family who passed away during the course of my incarceration:

Robert Lee Rowe, Sr. (March 6, 1943-November 20, 2012) My father who couldn't escape his alcohol addiction but possessed a certain strength and determination that allowed him to turn nothing into something and worked hard just so his kids could have a roof over our heads, food on the table and cloths on our backs. Some say I look just like you, so whenever I want to see you I'll just look in the mirror

Daryl Peyton Rowe (June 20, 1968- December 9, 2011) My brother who always lived life to the fullest and was always the life of the party. I looked up to you Bro. I remember the many nights we spent chasing "skirts" together and partying like there was no tomorrow. Life will never be the same without you, but I will definitely keep your name alive, even when others don't.

Leonardo "Leo" Robinson (Died April of 2008) My mild-mannered and bright-eyed nephew. I knew there was something different about you the first time I seen you. You had the potential to be one of the great ones in our family. Sorry we didn't have time to bond because of my incarceration, but we'll have plenty of time to bond in the afterlife. Why the good ones always die so young?

Cousar, III and Tameisha Alford (Died July 18, 1995) My two bright and beautiful cousins. I resent the fact that we never got as close to each other as we could have because of religious differences between our families. After all the time that has passed since you've been gone my heart still cries for the both of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....1
CHAPTER 1 HOW IT ALL STARTED.....3
CHAPTER 2 IN TOO DEEP.....8
CHAPTER 3 THE POINT OF NO RETURN.....11
CHAPTER 4 MY TRANSITION.....32

INTRODUCTION

I write this pamphlet to both inspire and warn the younge generation of black men and women, that if we do not become knowledgeable concerning the grand scheme of this imperialis white supremacist system we call the United States of Americ whose main goal is to oppress and annihilate any person of color (blacks, latinos, asians, native americans) then we will be doomed as a people and as a nation. We must become intellegent, disciplined men and women capable of creating great change within ourselves and our communities. If we do not become the solution to what's plaguing our communites rather than the probem this generation will be viewed as a failure by the generation that succeeds us. Our families and communities are being devasted by the vast number of black men and women, many of whom are fathers and mothers, being sent away to prison for decades while their children are lef to the influence of the "streets".

According to The Sentencing Project the number of inmates in state and federal prisons has increasec seven-fold from less than 200,000 in 1970 to a 1,613,556 by 2009. An additional 767,620 are held in local jails, for a total of 2.3 million. As of 2008, 1 of every 134 Americans was incarcerated in prison or jail. One in ten black males aged 25-29 was in prison or jail in 2009 as well as 1 in 25 Hispanic males compared to 1 in 64 white males in the same age group. Adult black males have a 32% chance of serving time in prison at some point in their lives and Hispanic males have a 17% chance, compared to only a 6% chance for white males. Black women represent to fastest growing segment of the prison population. As of 2009, there were 201,200 women in state and federal prison or local jails. Each day in America, 4,302 children are arrested-locked up at such a rate that a Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance, and a Black girl a 1 in 17 chance, of going to prison in his or her life-time. For decades it has been known that some youths are more at risk of going astray than others But a recent groundbreaking report by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), entitled "America's Cradle to to Prison Pipeline," found that, because of fester-ing social and economic disadvantages that exist

many times at birth, some black adolescents are n only at-risk- but destined- to end up in prison c die a violent, most likely gun-related, death. "W can look at children from a very young age and based on any number of factors, predict with alarm ing accuracy which ones will likely end up incarce ated," CDF President Marian Wright Elderman says Edelman says that the fate of a child can be "pre dicted" early in life by assessing factors from poverty, abuse and lack of health/mental coverage poor schools, dangerous communities and little t no quality early-childhood education."The cradle- to-prison pipeline is a man-made disaster," Edelm says, adding that many children "already in the pipeline to prison before taking a single step or uttering a word, and many youths in juvenile justi facilites never were in the pipeline to college c success." To prove her point, Edelman cites figure that 1 in 3 Black men in their 20's is under correctional supervision or control. At midyear 2006, about 579,000 Black males were serving sente ces in state or federal prison, while only 48,000 Black males earned a Bachelor's degree that year. "What should we expect when states spend nearly three times as much per prisoner as per public school student," Edelman asked. **Indeed, prisons a the new plantations.**

In an attempt to shed light on my having fallen victim to cradle-to-prison pipeline and my tran- sition from a street thug to a socially conscious politicized prisoner, I've chosen to take whoever read this pamphlet on a brief journey from my point of origin as a young child growing up in the tough a gritty streets on the South Side of Richmond, V.A in the late 80's to early 90's to where I am at present-serving a 93 year prison sentence handed down by a racist judge for my involvement in a robbery that result in the shooting deaths of two people. It is hoped that through my story of hope lessness, tradegy and despair to a liberated mind I can inspire and encourage the next generation and the generation now in existence to educate themselves concerning the plight and condition of

our people and in the process become the new man and women capable of resisting and overcoming systemic racism and oppression in all its forms and designs. We, the New Afrikan (Black) Nation, must become the vangard (front line defense) of our communities.

CHAPTER 1 HOW IT ALL STARTED

My life as a young child reflected that of most black youth growing up within the poor working-class throngs of society. As far back as I could remember I was always a rebel- a anti-authoritarian. My mother and father would tell me not to do something and I would do it anyway just to prove to myself that I had the heart to do it and could never be controlled. I was so eager to get out into the world and take my rightful place in society. When I was 13 years old, I would break into people cars and rob them for their money and other valuables. In an attempt to justify what I was doing, my rationale was this: How dare these people have these nice cars and fancy cloths and I barely have cloths to wear or food in my stomach. I was the product of a working-class family, but because there were seven kids living under one roof, money was always tight. Either we had food in the refrigerator and no lights or vice versa. I can remember plenty of days eating a nice meal in the dark under the candle light. Or the days we had to use a pay phone around the corner because the house phone was turned off. Occasionally when I would break into cars I would find guns. Lots of guns! It got to the point where I was finding and stealing so many guns I accumulated a small arsenal which I kept stashed under a house we stayed in on Winber Drive. This was a quiet, middle-class section of South Side where there wasn't too much happening. Nice cars and even nicer houses. If somebody was blindfolded and dropped off on Winber Drive, upon taking their blindfold off, one would think they were in Beverly Hills somewhere. Of course we could never afford to buy a nice house. We always had to rent. But us kids, we didn't know the difference. We were just glad we didn't have to live in the projects.

As bad as I was, I could never bring myself to shoot the guns that I had stashed under the house. In my young mind, I believed what I would see in cartoons, that if I shot them, I would get blown back a couple of city blocks by the recoil. So having no use for them at the time, I would give them away to the older drugs dealers that use to hang out on the side of Jack Rabbits (store) around the corner. I idolized these brothers. They had the dope cars, cloths and jewelry. And they had all the women in the neighborhood. I was trying to gain their respect and acceptance by giving them guns. It wasn't long before they let me hang out on their front porch with them or stand on the side of the store with them while they sold drugs. Instead of wanting to be a doctor or a lawyer, I wanted to be just like them- a street hustler and a thug. The badest mutherfucker walking the planet This was the beginning of my path to no return.

Growing up, I was the youngest out of seven kids. So naturally I was spoiled. If my parents weren't willing to get me something that I wanted I went and stole it. My mother worked night shifts as a nurse and my father worked during the day as a forklift operator. He never came home straight from work. He'd hang out at various corner stores getting drunk. I often would run across him at Jack Rabbits when I went there to play video games. He would be leaning up against the wall with one of his feet propped up against the wall with a bottle of Wild Irish Rose in his hand like a O.G. and a Pimp-all mixed into one. My brothers were all out-and-about doing whatever it was they were in to. They would never let me hang out with them. So I hung out with my three sisters. Where ever they went I went. They all had boyfriends living on the other end of Souh Side in the Oakgrov section. We had lived in this neighborhood prior to moving on Winber Drive. Oakgrove was the complet opposite from the neighborhood we had moved to. Oakgrove had run-down houses, trash floating around in the streets, stray dogs running around, the smell of urine and the housing projects were just

a short walking distance down the street. There were many times when my sisters and I would walk from Winber Drive all the way to Oakgrove so they could visit their boyfriends. I would always wonder why their men didn't drive to pick them up. Especially my older sister's boyfriend being that she had just given birth to a baby which she had to push in a stroller during our long trek across South Side. I secretly thought that these men were no good for my sisters, and plus my feet use to hurt from all that walking!

A couple of years later when I was around 14 years of age we moved further up Hull Street on Kimrod Road. This was a very diverse neighborhood. There were Chinese, Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. But it was still the working middle-class nonetheless. There was a big red brick church right across the street from our house which I use to break-in on the regular and steal electronics. Or sometimes I would just simply break in and vandalize because I was bored and didn't have anything else better to do. One time when the church people was having their service I took a small knife and punched holes in all their tires. It was a predominantly white church so I found pleasure in watching them through my bedroom window as they came out of service and witness what I had done. The look on their faces gave me pure pleasure.

Around this time all but one of my brothers had moved out and found their own place. The brother that remained had just gotten out of prison for a robbery he tried to pull on some white dude when we were still living on Winber Drive. He came home a completely different type of person- withdrawn, angry, lost in pensive reflection. One day when I was just trying to have some fun with him he got up and swung at me with the intention of trying to knock me out. From that moment on I knew it was best that I should him alone- my own brother. Two of my sisters remained and they experienced the brunt of all my picking. I use to set little traps like laying tacks and small nails on the floor so

they could step on them or I would shoot water at them from my water gun after they had just gotten their hair done or while they were laying in the bed trying to go to sleep. When I wasn't terrorizing my sisters I would ride around the neighborhood on my bicycle to see what type of destruction I could cause. One day I met up with two white boys down the street the same age as me. We became best friends. We would steal cigars from the corner store and sneak behind one of the blindspots at the church across the street and smoke. This was the first time I had ever smoked tobacco. But my two white friends, I could tell they had done this before. They were professional They taught me how to blow smoke out of my mouth and then inhale it back in through my nose. They were just as bad as I was. They would talk back to their mother and father and even curse at them As bad as I thought I was. I would never talk back to my parents or curse them to their face, I knew better. Both my mother and father had hard hands and wouldn't hesitate to use them. One day when I got locked-up at school for trying to break int a car while I was skipping school my mother hit m with a hard right across my face and I saw stars for two days. Even to this day after all the fight I've been in since I've been in prison that punch from my mother is the hardest punch I have ever felt in my life. As much as I wanted to change that so-called "street life" would not stop callin Instead of skipping classes in school I started skipping the whole day. I would get off the school bus and go right to the train tracks behind the school where I would smoke weed and shoot guns. This was High School and I didn't want no parts of it. The group of kids that I hung out with at school all brought guns to schools. When we weren' skipping, we would sit in the back of the class an show our guns off to each other. I use to get in so much trouble at school that it seemed like the police was bringing me home almost every day. My mother got so fed up with me that she had me comm itted to Westbrook Hospital- a place for troubled youth. Instead of seeing it as punishment- I love

it. Most of the dudes that were in there I knew from either school or from the streets. And plus the food was awesome! Fried chicken, bacon and eggs, hot dogs with chili and cheese . Whatever food you could find in a five-star resturant, they had it. Plus the section for the girls was right across the hall where we could talk to each other. On occasion, they would allow the girls over to our side when they showed movies. Of course there was a lot of touching and smooching going on. I stayed there for about eight weeks until the insurance ran out. I felt kind of conflicted because when it was time for me to go home a part of me wanted to stay. But the other part of me was tired of having to go to all the group therapy sessions where we had to talk about our problems. There were white doctors (shrinks) from affluent neighborhoods with their fancy suits and nice cars. And then there was us- a bunch of blacks and poors whites whom they considered a lost cause because we were black and poor and not because of any underlying emotional or psychological issues. And on top of that I wasn't learning a damn thing but how to sit back and have a good time and have a free ride off of other peoples' expense. When the day came for me to leave, I kissed the female who had become my girlfriend while I was there, shook hands with my homies, and it was back to the streets, to pick up right where I left off. We moved again shortly after I came home. This time to a predominantly white neighborhood around the corner on Clearfield Street. I could feel the racism when I come down the block, especially from the old white couple that lived across the street If was common to see them peeping through their window to see what us "niggers" were up to whenever we made too much of a commotion outside. I felt like a fish out of water in this neighborhood. So I would often walk to other parts of the city to see what I could get into. It got to the point where, instead of breaking into people cars to still their possessions, I would still the whole car and go joy riding. I thought I was the shit riding around in other peoples' cars. I could take a flat-head

and steal a car in under 90 seconds. There wasn't a person alive who could tell me anything about me and my life and the direction I was headed in. My mother use to always say, "You reap what you sow." I didn't realize at the time how right she was.

CHAPTER 2 IN TOO DEEP

Eventually the brother that did time in prison had moved out to live with a girl he had met while he was working at Dairy Queen. They would evenutally get married. I actually felt kind of happy for him because she was an older woman and I knew she would keep him out of trouble The only sibling left at home was the youngest of my sisters. I had stopped terrorizing her at this point because I started to become interested in girls. I use to sit and talk on the phone all day to a couple of white girls that I had met out in Henrico County when I was running the streets; There was this other girl too who I met at a Kingdom Hall which is a church-like place where Jehovah's Witness go to worship. She was fine, too Dark-skinned, slim, kind of nerdy. This was the first girl I ever fell head-over-heals for. I mean she had my nose wide open. We use to sit on the phone and talk about getting married and having kids when we got older. But in the back of my mind I knew we would never work. We were too different I was into the streets and she was into school and building a future for herself. Me, I didn't know if I would survive the day. On top of it all not even love could derail me from the path that would lead me to prison or an early death.

When I was around 17 years old, my cousin and I was out joyriding in a stolen car when we got pulled over by the police. We both jumped out and ran. My cousin got away. I got caught. The police could never outrun me. I was still in decent shape from the days when I use to place recreational and High School football. But this day I was high from smoking weed and drinking beer. I ran just one

city block and gave up. This chubby white cop tackled me to the ground like he was a NFL linebacker. Because I was a juvenile I simply got released again to my mother like so many times before. By this point I had grown too big for my mother or father to beat me. My mother's weapon by this point was to look so disgusted and disappointed in me that I literally would feel sorry for hurting her. This arrest slowed me down a bit and eventually I went into Job Corps. I went to a campus way out in Coeburn, Virginia in the South Western part of Virginia. Klan Town! The staff that worked there made it clear to us black folks to never leave off campus and venture too far into the surrounding neighborhoods. As hard as I was trying to be in the streets, I imagined that I would be no match for some racist Klan member trying to lynch me by hanging me from some tree. But I would fight to the death, I thought to myself. Job Corps was just like all the other institutions I had been to before. The food was good, there were drugs, alcohol, porn movies. Oh, and there were girls. Lots of girls! I was attending school to get a degree in Welding. Life was good for me. I finally felt like I was getting my life on track and for once I was doing something to make my mother proud of me. But as always I found a way to fuck it up. I got myself into a drug debt with some dudes from out D.C. and they told me that if I didn't pay by a certain time I was going to get my ass kicked. There was other dudes there from Richmond but they weren't the type to have my back if something went down. So I felt compelled to break into the canteen that was there to steal some boxes of cigarettes to pay my drug debt. I ended up getting caught as always. The staff called my mother and told them to come and get me because I was being expelled. My mother drove all the way from Richmond to the Flatwoods Job Corps Center in Coeburn to get me. The strange thing was that she didn't even look mad or disappointed. By this time I figured she had gotten use to all my mishaps with the law. She had lost faith in me and any hope that she had that I would eventually turn my life around was gone.

During the five months that I spent in Coebu Job Corps my brother Daryl had moved back home, and with him came the beer. I had slowed down on my drinking by this point. But Daryl was like ou father- the day wasn't right if they weren't intoxicated in some type of way. So looking up to my brother I started back drinking. I was only 17 years old. I could drink a whole 40 ounce of Old English 800 in ten to twenty minutes. After we got drunk, we'd call our cousin to come and pick us up so we can go out riding. He had a brand new candy apple red Ford Probe with the booming system and a bad ass wife. I wanted what he had. So I went and got me a job at Dairy Queer flipping burgers until I saved up enough money t buy my own car. I paid $800 for a 1985 Ford Escor Wagon that had silver five-star rims. It was no Ford Probe but it was mine and I didn't have to jump out and run whenever the cops pulled up behind me. It was a four speed manual shift which I didn't even know how to drive. After my father taught me how to drive it I was gone in the wind. Me and my partners would ride every where- Virgini Beach, North Carolina; we even drove to Tennessee one time. It wasn't long though before my car became a tool whereby I could commit crime more efficiently. Instead of robbing and stealing and having to run away on foot I could now drive away in my car. By this time I was deep in the stick-up game. We would drive out to all the counties and rob them county boys for their gold chains, rings and what little cash they had in their pockets. It was during this time I met this girl who turned my world upside down. She was differen from the other girl I had fell in love with, mainl becuase she always gave me some excuse not to hav sex with me. But this girl, we would make love on the regular. She would get up in the morning to cook me breakfast. Up until this point I had neve known love like this before. It was almost like we were married. After a while, I ended up moving in with her. Every chance we got we would have sex We couldn't keep our hands off each other. She wa a good girl- faithful, loyal, passionate, considera

and extremely experienced in the art of love-making. She taught me many things about making love that even I didn't know. She was three years younger than me but I could tell that she was way more mature than I was. Our relationship was new, exciting and refreshing and a strange thing started to happen to me. Instead of feeling anger and rage I begin to feel joyful and happy. I would sit on her front porch and notice the beauty in the way leaves would fall from the tree or theway the flowers would move to and fro as if dancing to the tune of the wind. I started to feel alive for the first time in my life. Not only was we in love butwe were infatuated with each other. As much as I wanted it to last I knew deep down inside that such love is not meant to last. Plus there was danger lurking nearby that would come and snatch me by the collar and throw me into the pits of hell.

CHAPTER 3 THE POINT OF NO RETURN

My drug use increased a few weeks after I met my new love. Instead of just smoking weed, I was now sniffing heroin and drinking hard wine. I went home to my mother's house so high one day I started hallucinating. My father took me to the Hospital where I stay over night under observation. About a week later my mother convinced me that I needed help and so I ended up going to Central State Hospital, a hospital for people with severe psychological and emotional problems, and where people go who have been found not guilty by reason of insanity by the courts. This place wasn't like Westbrook Hospital for boys and girls with minor problems. This was a hardcore adult psychological institution. The people confined here were schizophrenic, delusional, had multipal personality disorders and were bipolar. Now I considered myslef crazy but I wasn't THIS kind of crazy. These people were walking around talking to theirselves, drooling from the mouth, completely withdrawn from reality and zapped-out on hardcore psych meds.

After about three weeks of putting up with this madness I called home and begged my mother to come and get me out of this hellhole. About a week later she came and got me out. There was a condition I had to agree to, though, and that condition was that I had to agree to go to Rubicon which is a drug and alcohol treatment facility. I happily agreed. Anywhere had to better than this mental facility, which was nothing more than a prison for crazy people. When I got to Rubicon and saw how lax the security was I knew that I could just walk out the front door. Rubicon was just a haven for drug and alcohol abuse. I saw drug needles and empty beer cans all over the floor I could tell this place didn't receive much funding from the city. The walls was dirty and the building itself looked like if you blew on it it would fall down. Upon close observation I could tell the patients from the staff. One of the staffers who checked me at the door had on ragedy cloths, her eyes had dark circles as if she hadn't slept in weeks, and she had dirt caked under her finger nails as if she hadn't bathed in days. The chair I was sitting in was facing Hull Street and I could see people walking back and forth and cars driving by. Freedom was just a few steps away. I wanted to do the right thing and stay to get the treatment that I so badly needed but I couldn't resist the temptation to get up and walked out. When I left out the front door I could hear someone from the top window yell at me, "Hey, where are you going,". I ran as hard as I could until my body couldn't run no more. I went and got my car and picked up my comrades and I was back on the streets. As much as my mother tried, ther was nothing she could have done or said that could have convinced me to straighten my life up. I was focused on one thing- destruction. Either somebody else's destruction or my own. Instead of giving away my the guns that I found to the older hustlers on the block I started carrying them. Guns drugs, alcohol, and a bunch of trigger-happy young

black boys. It was all a bad combination.

Eventually I quit the job I had flipping burgers at Dairy Queen. I got tired of slaving over a hot stove for minimum wage. Even though it felt good getting a check with my name on it, the money wasn't enough for the work I had to do to get it. After three months after I quit my job my car broke down. Out of a car and no money in my pocket, I went back to what I was good at- robbing. By this time I had met this dude who was as cold-hearted as I was. He was much older than I was. He showed me and my homeboys how to rob stores, banks and other commercial businesses. So we graduated from pulling small time robberies like breaking into other people cars and steeling their money to pulling big time robberies.

The first big time robbery I pulled felt like I was doing something I was born to do. It felt so natural and easy. The money that came from it gave me an even bigger high than what I was getting smoking weed. It was some restaurant out in the county. We marched in four deep and pulled out our weapons and said, "Stick up. Everyone down on the floor." There was about ten people on the inside. After we robbed everyone for their money we started to run for the front door until I heard this voice that told me to turn around and shoot. I turned around and aimed my pistol at the clerk and then I squeezed the trigger until all the bullets were gone. I didn't even wait to see the body drop. When we got back to our getaway van one of my homeboys who witnessed the whole thing started crying to my surprise! He was one of the guys we all considered to be the hardest out of us all. It became obvious to me that even though he liked to carry guns he hadn't shot anybody before or seen someone else get shot. Even I was a little shaken up. This was the first time I had shot somebody. While my comrades were crying and over-come with fear, I felt good about what I had done, and I relished in the moment because all who knew me would know that I wouldn't hesitate to kill if it came down to it.

The next day everyone was giving much respect and admiration because of what I did, which, in turn, fed my ego and lust for more destruction.

The dream that I had when I was younger of being one of the meanest, cold-hearted mutherfucker to ever walk the planet had finally become my reality In an instant, I went from being a small time car thief to a cold-blooded murder. I now had blood on my hands and I had come to the point of no return.

Around this time the marriage between my mother and father was coming to an end. Actually it ended many years ago but they tried to work it out for the sake of us kids. My father was having an affair with another woman who stayed in the apartments beneath us and my mother got to the point where she was tired of every thing- tired of being married to a chronic alcoholic; tired of the us kids driving her crazy; tired of working hard but never seeming able to make ends meet; just sick and tired of being sick and tired. My father moved out, and upon loosing the apartment we stayed in because my mother couldn't afford to pay the rent by herself, we moved in with my brother Daryl and his "wife" down on Joplin Street up the hill from the Hillside Court housing projects. Everything my mother and I owned were either in the back of her car or in storage. Witnessing first hand how my mother had worked hard all those years so us kids could enjoy a certain measure of comfort and witnessing how much she invested in her marriage trying to make it work, to see it all come crumbling down, I felt tremendous sorrow for my mother. Instead of being there for her like a son should in her time of need, I was still hanging in the streets and chasing behind my girlfriend. All this took place at the end of 1994 and by this time I had pulled countless robberies. Its quite possible that I robbed every business on Belt Boulevard and Jefferson Davis Highway. When my old Ford Escort Wagon broke down I knew I had to get some more money so I could buy me another car.

Through one of my homeboys I met this dude who was just like me- a cold-hearted, rebellious,

homeless teenager who didn't give a fuck about anything or anybody- not even himself. The first time I looked into his eyes it was as I was staring into the eyes of Lucifer. I could tell that he was full of rage and was ready to unleash his pain at the flip of a switch. All the other dudes was scarred of him because they thought he was crazy. I embraced him like a brother. We hung out all the time together. If you seen one of us, the other one was surely some place nearby. The relationship I wish I had with my real brothers, I found in him. There were many nights we were layed-up in the City Motel with some girls we had picked up at a club or off the streets. By this time the relationship I had with my girlfriend was all but over. She was a good girl but she was in love with a bad boy. She tried to get me to stop living this so-called street life. I could tell that she really cared for me every time I looked in her eyes and the way she tried to hold on to me when I would leave out the front door to go run the street- but it was never meant to work. We were from two different worlds, she and I. She was an honor student and a cheerleader in highschool with a promising future ahead of her. Me, I was a high-school drop-out, a drug addict and alcoholic, my spirit tormented by evil things I had done, and my future looked bleak. Either I was going to end up dead on the street or sent to prison for the rest of my life.

She held on tight one fateful night as I was leaving out the front door. In fact, she begged me to stay with her. It was as if she could see into the future and knew something bad was about to happen. She'd heard of the rumors of all the things I was doing in the streets. Maybe it was because of the guilt she was feeling from enjoying all the money I would give her that kept her from asking. The look in her eyes as I pulled away tore my soul apart. This was my queen, my love, the girl who I wanted to marry when we got a little older and got out money right. I couldn't look soft, though. My comrade was watching from the car. I had to be tough. I had to be a man. I walked away from the sweetest, most innocent thing I had ever known.

So there we were- me and my comrade and some other dude he brought with him from the North Sid of Richmond. I didn't know him nor was I trying to know him. Whenever I looked at him he would look down towards the ground to avoid eye contact Something seemed fishy about him. I knew I couldn't trust him. I had to keep my eyes on him. My comrade started having second thoughts. "Let's chill out for a while," he said. "We're too hot." But I wasn't trying here what he was saying even though I knew deep done inside he was telling the truth. They looked up to me. I was their leader. I could have stopped our late-night mission. I should have known better, but I had money and blood on my mind There was no room for weak shit. I looked at my comrade while he was driving and for the first time I could see fear in his eyes. Underneath his tough exterior, I could see his vulnerability. He was driving much slower than he use to as if he was buying time so that someone would come rescue us from our imminent demise. But nobody rescued us and suddenly we found ourselves standing outside the store- ready to make our move. At the last minute my comrade's friend got cold feet. "I'm not cut out for this," he confesses. So my comrade chastise him severely before sending him back to the car. "Are you ready," I ask my comrade. He looks at me with a cold stare- the fear and vulnerability no longer there. "Let's do this," he commanded with a low, but determined tone. "This is a stick-up, put all the money on the counter," I exclaimed with a loud, commanding voice. In an instant I blanked-out and when I regained my wits there were two deads bodies on the floor. Me and my comrade ran the hell up out of there as quick as we could. On our ride back to Gilpin Court housing projects on the North Side we were all quiet. The only noise being made was the music coming from the radio. Each one of us lost in our own thoughts reflecting on the horror we had just committed. As I layed in the bed that night, looking out the window at the rain beating down against the ground suddenly I felt filthy and dirty, as if I had been

rolling around in a underground sewer. The smell of blood and gunpowder coated the inside of my nose which caused me to feel as if I had to vomit. My cloths smelled of beer, cigarette smoke, and sweat. In the quietness of my mind I hear the likeness of my mother's voice calling out to me saying, "Brian, come home to me." I closed my eyes to clear my mind, but I suceeded only in passing out from all the beer I had drunk and the weed I had smoked earlier that morning.

The next day, I went and leased a used 1994 blue Honda Accord with the money I had taken from the robbery. I put down $800 cash money for it. The car dealer looked as if he was a crack addict. His cloths were dirty and his skin was greasy. When I pulled the money out of my pocket for the car his eyes damn near popped out of his head. He handed me the keys to the car and I was on my way. Though the Honda was used, it was in fair condition and a big improvement from the old, beat-up Ford Escort Wagon I had previously. My comrade and I took his friend down to the Hillside projects so he could pick up his little son from his baby's mother house. The two of them drove in my comrade's car and I drove in mine. My comrade and I sat outside while his friend ran in to get his son, which was a bad idea because Hillside Court during this time in the late 80's and early 90's was a warzone. There was a murder committed here almost daily. Though I was intoxicated, I kept my eyes open wide as I tightly gripped my .357 revolver I had sitting on my lap. We waited outside for what seemed like an hour. Something didn't seem right. "Why is it taking him so long to run in and get his son," I thought to myself. I felt anger, rage and paranoia starting to build up inside of me. "I don't even know this dude. Why am I putting my life in danger for him," I thought to myself. I take a few puffs from a blunt I had sittin my ashtray since that morning. Suddenly the anger and rage subsides but the paranio remained. Finally he comes out the apartment with his son and makes his way back to the car; but not before he turns around and gives his baby's mother a kiss and a delicate smack on the ass. I envied him at that moment because I wanted to be with my

girl. I yelled to my comrade that I had to make a run and so we parted ways. What I really wanted to do was go and check on my girlfriend to see if I could save our relationship. Though I would never say it our loud, I loved this girl more than I loved the streets. There were times when I secretly wished I was with her enjoying the tender affections of her kisses rather than driving around pulling robberies. I pulled up to her front door and to my surprise she came running out to me as if she hadn't seen me in a hundred years. We spent a couple hours talking about our future together and about the cause of all that was going on in our relationship, Which we both agreed was my thug-life persona and my addiction to alcohol and drugs. I was only 17 years old and I was a full blown alcoholic. I have come to the conclusion that my father taught me three things in life and that is: 1) how to work hard , 2)how to drive a four speed stick shift, and 3) how to get drunk and have a good time. His drink of choice was Wild Irish Rose. When I was growing up I would always find his wine stash that he would hide around the house or out in the garage. I would take a sip or two just so I could experience what he was feeling One time I ended up drinking a quarter of a bottle I found under his matress and ended up getting so intoxicated that I ran around acting life a fool that whole day. Of course, acting like a fool for me was normal so no one knew the difference. My father would come home so drunk he couldn't tell one son or daughter from the other. There were many days where he would call me Daryl or Lisa (my oldest sister). Us kids would often find him to be quite comical when he was in his drunken state. Even our mother found him to be humorous at times. However, when my father was sober, he wasn't very pleasant to be around. When he wasn't intoxicated he was a vicious, angry and bitter man who ruled with an iron fist. I vaguely remember one day when I tried wholeheartedly to engage him in some father-son conversation while he was working on the family car, he turned around a gave me a hard punch across

my face, and told me to get away from him. There were times when I had to literally tip-toe across the floor of the house just to keep from provoking him to inflict one of his rage-filled beatings upon me. As bad as a father he was to me I never could bring myself to hate him. Even as a young child I understood that he was suffering from some type of deep-seated emotional issues as a result of some childhood trauma he experienced and the only way he could cope with it was by getting drunk. I felt nothing but pity and love for him even though I knew he was incapable of loving me back. When I found out he died November 20, 2012, I felt a tremendous amount of guilt because I managed to shed only two tears.

My girlfriend and I were engaged in a long, passionate kiss on the front porch of her house when my comrade and his friend pulled up in his car. We had bought new sound systems for our cars earlier that day and we took the time to hook them up in the front yard of my girlfriend's house before we took to the road. We both agreed that it would be best to get out of town for awhile until the heat blows over from the last robbery we pulled. My girlfriend came to the door and told me that my mother was on the phone and so I went in to talk to her. She said she was afraid for me hanging out in the streets all day and that she wanted me to come home for awhile. I told her that I would be home in thirty minutes. My mother was seperated from my father during this time, and being the youngest out of seven children, all of whom had moved out on their own, I was the only thing my mother had left- besides my brother whom she was staying with. As bad of a child I was, I hated to disappoint my mother. So when there were opportunities I could cause her some comfort and peace of mind, I jumped at it.

My girlfried intercepted me at the front to give me a kiss goodbye for the night. I loved the way her lips felt on mine. They felt like heaven and made it seem as if time stood still.

We held hands for a moment talking about what we would do the next day. With all the shit I had gotten myself into I knew that our time together was limited. We kissed one last time and when my hand left hers I knew it was the last tim I would feel the tenderness of those hands again.

On my way back to the car, out of no where, about ten police cars surrounded me, my comrade and his friend. One police officer ran up behind me and pressed his 10mm Semi-Automatic pistol to the back of my head and told me if I moved one inch he would blow my head off. This fat black cop came from out of no where, grabbed me by the colla of my shirt and threw me down to the ground with such force that I was nearly knocked unconscious. The white cop was looking at the black cop like he had gone mad. This situation reminded me of som thing I read years later in a book called "Soledad Brother" written by the late-great George Lester Jackson; a brother who had become politicized in the California prison system, became a Black Panther revolutionary prison activist and author. Jackson was assassinated in the prison yard of San Quentin in an alleged escape attempt August 21, 1971. In Soledad Brother Jackson stated "The black cop could be a large factor in preventing our genocide. But no help can be expected from this quarter. The sam stupidity and desperation that brought him to the gates prevents from interceding. The job, the wage means too much to him. Often he feels compelled to prove himself, prove that he is loyal to the force prove that he is not prejudiced in favor of us, prove that he is honest. His honesty prevents him from dealing in contraband as every white pig does The same fear will cause him to show more zeal in the "club therapy" sessions [police beatings] than even the whites manage. If the victim is black, he he is going to get so mad that white pigs [police] will have to stand back and let him swing. If they dont have murder planned for that session, they will have to pull that nigger off you." From the look in this black cop's eyes I could tell that he wanted to kill me just to appease his white counter

part. I still remember the look of jubilation as he slapped the cuffs on me and put me in the back of the white cop's police car.

So there we were- the three of us- me, my comrade, and his friend, headed down to the police precinct. It was around 12 o'clock in the morning. We were taken to a back room where all three of us were seperated. Seperation is a tactic often used by the police when there are multiple suspects to inspire disunity and suspicion. It is often called divide-and-conquer. The police will often tell each suspect that the other is already cooperating with the investigation, which is almost always a lie, with intent of getting that suspect to confess. After the investigation was over I was labeled a leader of our group and it was revealed that my comrade's friend, Antonio Crews, called Crime Stoppers while he was in his baby's mother apartment and tipped them off to the robbery and murder we had committed. He even provided them with my girlfriend's address so the police would know where to come and arrest us . In the end, my comrade and I were charged with two counts of capital murder, robbery and three gun charges. Crews testified against my comrade in exchange for having his murder charges non-processed and would spend only a year in prison. My comrade was convicted by and jury and sentenced to life. To avoid Crews coming to testify against me at my trial, I plead guilty to two murder chages, robbery and gun charges and sentenced to 93 years in the penitentiary. The whole time my comrade and I was sitting outside in our cars down Hillside Court waiting for Crews to come out with his son he was on the telephone with the police setting us up for the fall. Knowing this left a bitter taste in my mouth for many years.

I was down the Richmond City Jail, this time in 1995 , locked-up with hardened criminals. I spent my first day trying to get adjusted to this new environment. The time I spent a Westbrook and Central State prepared me for the jail. It is all a form of control. I started reading the bible and

praying like most prisoners do hoping that God would come and rescue me from my situation and give me another chance. But God never came and I knew I had to make the best out of a bad situatio All I could do was think about my mother and the pain and disappointment that I had brought upon her. Even in jail, facing the very real possibili of spending the rest of my life behing bars, I still was a rebel. This one dude came in the dorm making plenty of noise early in the morning while other inmates were trying to sleep. About 20 inmates jumped on him. So, trying to make a name for myself, I jumped on him too. We beat this guy to a pulp. The jail guards came and dragged him off the dorm. Then they came back to find out who the inmates were that was involved in the beating Nobody said a thing. During the nine months I spent down the City Jail I became good friends with this older brother named Shandu. He was much bigger and a couple of years older than myself. By the time I came down the jail he had already built a reputation as being one of those dudes other inmates didn't want no problems with. When he walked around the dorm, other inmates made sure to move out of his way. He would beat up the inmates who were from New York and take their commissary. Whenever his girlfriend didn't come to visit him as promised, he would get mad and walk aound the dorm and knock-out other inmates with one punch just because he was pissed-off. All the inmates on the dorm was scarred of him. I was the only one brave enough and smart enough to make him my friend. In the summer time it got so hot on the dorm that I could literally see steam coming off o my body. I made quite many friends on the dorm. I was well known because of my case being repeatedly advertised on the news. I would play cards all day or do pullups and pushups so I could get myself in to shape. I was only 145 pounds soaking wet. Or I would lay in my bed and read the Bible, which is what a lot of inmates do, hoping and praying that I would be able to survive this environment. Or I would sit back and watch Shandu terrorize the othe inmates on the dorm. I was amazed at how much fear

he put into the hearts of the other inmates. He was big and menacing and knew how to use his hands in a fight. But this fear that the other inmates had of him would prove to be his down-fall in the years to come. I looked up to him, sort of like a big brother and he embraced me just the same. And a lot of other inmates gave me respect just because of this. They knew that if they had a problem with me then they would have to deal with him too. So I got away with doing a alot of shit that I knew I would not have gotten away with if me and Shandu were not cool.

Later that year in September of 1995, the time came for me to get transferred out from the jail into the prison system where all the hard-nosed convicts were at. A place where there were inmates who had already been in prison twenty or thirty years. I had already heard about the stories about what goes on in the penitentiary- the rapes, the stabbings, the murders. No other inmate will openly admit this but when I was on that bus headed for the penitentiary, I was scarred and I could feel my heart-beating a humdred miles a second. I had made my mind up that if another inmate tried anything with me, I was going to kill'em without any hesitation.

When I entered the prison system this seemed familiar territory to me. I had been in other institutions before. All institutions have one fundamental function and purpose and that is containment. Keeping the social misfits of society from speading to the more affluent, mostly white middle and upper-class neighborhoods. This is one of the reasons section 8 housing projects are never built in the suburban or rural areas. They are almost always built in urban inner-city neighborhoods populated by poor non-white minorities.

At the Brunswick Correctional Center in 1996 I ran across some revolutionary minded brothers. Mentally, these brothers were sharp. I would sit and listen to them talk about racial pride, black power, politics, and how to overcome the oppression of the black man by a white-supremacist political/educational/economical/cultural system.

I was in my late teens and I heard never heard about the things these brothers were talking about. These brothers were disciplined, militant, and when they walked, they walked with authority, pride and purpose. But there was a darkside of the penitentiary, that sector that would lure the weaker inmates that did not already have the proper guidance. There were open acts of homosexuality. I witnessed many younger- and somethimes even older- inmates come in and get turned-out. The homosexuals would look at us younger brothers coming into the prison system as potential victims. Many of these brothers in the "punk"game were weak-minded or was already on the "down low" before they even came to prison. I witnessed how some of these dudes lay in the bed with an ther man and have sex and then go over to the visitation room and kiss their wives or girlfriend in the mouth. It was all sickening to me and I new that this was a world I wanted no parts of.

This older brother name Fred gave me a book to read called "Black on Black Violence- The Psychodynamics of Black Self-Annihilation in Service of White Domination" written by the great revolutionary black author/psychologist Amos Wilson. This book stated that "The black on Black violent criminal hates in other Blacks those characteristics he hates most in himself. His expressed contempt for attacks on other Blacks are the means by which he refrains from recognizing and expressing his self-concept. By externalizing his self-contempt he stays his own hand from attacking himself. He commits homicide to keep from committing suicide. His homicidal mania, violent rages, are curious and perverted forms of self-preservation. He is compelled, therefore, to externalize his self-contempt, to blame, berate, humiliate others. This, however, throws him in a toil of a vicious circle. The more he despises others the less he is aware of his self-contempt- and the self-contempt grows more violent and merciless and the more hopeless he becomes. To strike out at others is then a matter of self-preservation. Having accepted the notion promulgated by his White oppressors- that he will never

measure up to their...standard, never be as good as they- he vindictively asserts that they will never be as 'bad' as he. Thus, he finds near erotic delight in demonstrating himself to be the 'baddest' who ever walked the earth. In this game he had a better than a sporting chance to win. In this game he makes the rules. The essence of the Black on Black criminal is self-hatred or self-alienation. These can occur as the result of the self having been made to apprear to be hateful, ugly, degrading, rejected, associated with pain, non-existent or devoid of meaning, and inherently inferior. Such appearances and associations are the fruits of White American narcissistic racial projections against the Afriacan American community". Wilson states further: "As the controller of information, the 'validator' of truth, ministers of education and instruction, role model, chief reinforcer, as the Final Word and ultimate authority, it is the White American community that must bear the responsibility for injecting as the central motivating factor self-hatred, or more accurately, self-alienation into the heart of the Black on Black criminal and the minds of the rest of the maladjusted African Community.The Black on Black Criminal is what he is because he has been treated criminal at some crucial point in his life, and/or treated to a history or model of criminality. He is within a context that evokes or instigates criminal behavior not inhibited or redirected by effective opposing or alternative moral, intellectual, socioeconomic, cultural and valuation structures. The Black on Black criminal is violent because he has been violated, or perceives himself as such. He is vindictive. He wants to 'pay the world back' for some insult which may have resulted in his having been conceived and born; an insult which occurred to him in the womb; an insult for which occurred centuries before he or his parents were born- a history of unrequited grievances."

The reason for my being a rebel all became clear to me. Everytime I squeezed the trigger of a gun I was trying kill that part of myself which I was

taught to hate: my thick nose and lips, my brown skin complexion, my kinky hair. After all the years I spent in school, this was the first book I read front to back. I had never read anything like this before. It was revolutionary and it made me think about my life and all the things I had done. I realized that I was a pawn in a game where I was programmed to destroy myself and my own people. I learnt more in the 9 days it took me to read this book than the entire 19 years I had been in existence. Public schools- or what pass as as in the urban minority communites- are not designed to liberate the minds of black children; they are not designed to teach us about our true African heritage that pre-dates the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and that we, the black Africans, were the original people on this planet, and the fact that we descended from Kings and Queens; they are not designed to teach us how to be entreprenuers- owners of businesses and land. All they succeeded in doing was teaching us how to stay in our place, to accept being a dominated, oppressed, lower-class people and how to remain 20th Century slaves in service to a white-supremacist capitalistic system. The more I read about my culture and politics in general I started thinking different. I started feeling empowered. Instead of walking with my head down, I started walking with my head pointed to the sky, with my back straight, shoulders pulled back. I started walking with purpose. I began to have pride and began to see it as a privilege to be an African. Instead of feeling ashamed whenever I came in contact with white people, I started looking white people in the eye instead of holding my head down as if I was still a slave; because I was equipped with the knowledge that I descended from a people who had existed on this planet long before the white man came into existence. When the white man was still dwelling in the caves of the Caucus Mountains, Afrikans had flourishing kingdoms like Timbuktu (in present day Mali), Nubia (an acient kingdom in the Nile River Valley of South Egypt and North Sudan), Cush (Kush) (an ancient Kingdom of Nubia in North Sudan which flourished from the 11th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D.)

and the famous Ancient Egyptians. I'm talking about the original black Egyptians like Cleopatra who was an Egyptian Queen back in 51 B.C., Nefertiti who was an Egytpain Queen back in the 14th Century, and Akhenaton, also known as Amenhotep the 4th, who was Egyptian king back in 1375? B.C.- not the white, pale-skinned Egyptians we see on the television played by white actors who try to brainwash us into believing the Ancient Egyptians were white. When the Greeks first traveled to Africa 2,500 years ago, the Egyptian civilization was already ancient. The Great Pyramid was over 3,00 years old and the sphinx was even older. Writing, science, medicine and religion were already a part of the civilization and had reached their zenith. The Greeks came to Africa as students to sit at the feet of the Ancient Egyptians and to discover what Africans already knew. In any student/teacher relationship the teacher can only teach as much as the student is capable of understanding. Egyptians, like other Africans, understood that life existed beyond the grave. Ancestral worship is a way of acknowledging the lives of the people who have come before you, and their ability to offer guidance and direction to the living. Temples were designed as places where the ancestors could be honored and holidays (Holy Days) were the days designated to do so. The Egyptians had hundreds of temples and hundreds of Holy Days to worship their ancestors. The Greeks thought the Africans had a preoccupation with death. The act of ancestral worship becam e known as necromancy, or communication with the dead. The root word necro means dead. Another word for necromancy means magic- that Old Black Magic which was practiced in ancient Africa. When the Greeks returned to Europe, they took their distorted beliefs with them and the word negro evolved out of this great misunderstanding. Less than 300 years after the first Greeks came to Egypt as students, their descendents returned as conquerors. They distoyed the cities, temples and libraries of Egyptians and claimed African knowledge as

as their own. Not only was the African legacy stolen, but the wholesale theft of African people soon followed. With the birth of the slave trade, it bacame necessary to dehumanize Africans and devalue their historical worth as a people in order to ensure their value as slaves. So there you have it, the negro- a race of dead people with a dead history and no hope for resurrection as long as they remainded ignorant of their of their past. This was a triple death- the death of the mind, body, and spirit of the African people.

For a while it felt good to learn something new- something that boosted my self-esteem and self-worth. But my transition from that street thug I tried so hard to be on the streets was far from complete. When I first came to prison the inmates were segregated along geographical lines. The Norfolk inmates stayed to themselves. The D.C. inmates stayed to themselves. The inmates from Northern Virginia stayed to themselves. And of course us Richmond inmates- we were a whole different story. Each group wanted to prove that their city went the hardest and this created a lot of tension. In the early 90's Richmond was the murder capital of the whole United States. This little, tiny city averaged 150 murders a year. Richmond itself was devided along geographical lines. There were a lot of terf wars going on between South Side, North Side, West End, and East End which was inspired, in large part, by the rise of the crack epidempic which swept across every hood, ghetto, project in the nation during the late 80's and early 90's. In the prison system, inmates from Richmond was the most feared due in large part to our potential for violence and the fact that we out-numbered inmates from other areas five-to-one. Whenever a fight jumped off that involved an inmate from Richmond, we would all get involved. There were no such thing as fair fights as far as we were concerned. And dam near all of us were serving 50, 60, 70, and life term prison sentences. We were young, wild, angry, and hope-

less with nothing tc lose . One day while I was laying in my bed watching the news, I learned that a riot had jumped off at the Greensville Correctional Center between inmates from Richmond and D.C., and that Shandu, the older brother who I looked up to as my big brother while I was at the city jail, was stabbed to death on the recreation yard. It felt like someone had hit me in the stomach with a bag of bricks. I had developed a certain love for this brother and he was well known by most of the inmates from the South Side of Richmond. Soon the word spread about his death and we wanted to do something about it. When we learned that inmates from D.C. were bragging about his death, we knew what we had to do. About twenty of us young brothers from Richmond approached a group of D.C. inmates as they were coming from the cafeteria and started a fight. We outnumbered them 2-to-1. They didn't have a chance. Even though none of them were stabbed or killed, we put a real beating on them that day. One of the prison guards came and snatched me and two of my comrades up, put us in cuffs, and locked us in a cage with five other inmates from D.C. who were not cuffed. We later learned that those five D.C. inmates had homemade knives on them and didn't even use them. To this day I believe the prison guards were trying to set us up to get stabbed or possibly killed. We all ended up spending six months in solitary confinement- locked in a single cell twenty-four hours a day. If it wasn't for my radio, I probably would have lost my mind. When I finally got relased back to general population, the older brothers who had inspired me to start reading, were very disappointed with me. They didn't condone any type of black on black violence. But I wasn't ready to be a disciplined soldier in the struggle just yet. In the three years I spent at Brunswick, I accumulated nearly fifteen infractions (writeups) for disobeying prison rules and regulations. I was so out of control, that when the newly built super max prison, Sussex One State Prison, was opened in 1998, I was among the first group of inmates to be transferred there.

Sussex One State Prison represented a new form of control. It was built to house the so-called "worst of the worst." We were locked-down in our cells most of the time and only came out when it was time to eat or when we were allowed to go outside, which was once every three or four days. Control movement was enforced to the 'max'. We were forced to stand by the wall whenever we came out our cell to eat and we had to walk in a single file line along the designated yellow lines painted on the ground. The guards here were allowed to possess shotguns loaded with both lethal and non-lethal ammunition. Whenever there was a fight or if inmates refused to walk along the yellow lines on the ground, the guards, both black and white, would point the shotguns and shoot indiscriminately. On a number of occasions I witnessed inmates get their eyes shot out by bouncing rubber pellets. Any inmate who was not fast enough to run back in his cell or duck behind a wall when the pigs started shooting would potentially get shot. This was torture and inhumane treatment at its best. Whenever I stepped out my cell I always stayed near my cell door so I could quickly duck back inside if the trigger-happy guards started shooting.

After a year had gone by after first arriving at this so-called super-max, I was approached by this inmate from Compton, California not much older than myself at the time. He told me that he was visiting his family in Virginia when he got caught-up in a drug bust. He told me he'd been watching me for a while and that he liked the way I conducted myself in a militant fashion. He told me that he was a Blood gangmember and that he wanted me to be a part of it. I already had previous dealings with this "organization" prior to my coming to prison, but didn't have a whole lot of knowledge concerning its history. At first I declined his offer because I already considered myself to be a so-called gangster. But the more me and this brother talked, and the more he told me about the history of the Bloods, the more I became interested. As far back as I could remember, I always wanted to be gangster. So here was

my chance to be a "real" one. So I got "made" and became a Blood in the summer of 1998 and was given the name B-Love, short for Blood Love. What I didn't know was that I officially entered into a life-style that could cause me to get more time added onto my sentence, or worse, get me killed. This life-style put me directly in the middle of a conflict between us inmates who claimed Blood (there were about 5 of us) and those inmates who claimed Crip (there were about 4 of them). There were a lot of blind spots on Sussex One if you knew where to look. If an inmate got caught in one of those blind spots and another inmate wanted to do something to another inmate, that inmate could easily get stabbed without anyone knowing who did it. Such a place was the steps (staircase) leading from the first floor of the building to the second floor. One day after we were on our way back to the dorm after eating lunch, I, along with two other Bloods, got into a conflict with two Crips on the staircase. All of us Bloods were in good shape. We exercised faithfully in the dorm every morning. The Crips didn't have a chance. During the midst of the fight, one of the Crips pulled out a razor-blade and slashed the Blood that was standing beside me on his forearm. I gave him one good punch to the side of his head making him drop his blade to the ground. I reached down, picked the blade up, and was about to slash him with it when we heard the prison guards running down the steps from the third floor. We all ran back to our dorms as fast as we could to avoid being placed on solitary confinement. The Blood that got cut ended up going to the hospital to get stitches for the cut on his forearm. When I got back to my cell, that same dirty feeling that came over me after the double murders suddenly came back. After all the stuff I had seen, done, and experienced in my life, I felt tired and exhausted; and for the first time, I felt willing to embrace this new path that would soon be placed before me.

CHAPTER 4 MY TRANSITION

My cellmate at the time was an much older brother from New York. At the time, he had already be locked-up for almost twenty years. He was a fully dedicated member of the Nation of Islam. He had a habit of always trying to push his religion on me- giving me literature and books to read about the Nation. He was extremely hard on me, trying to get me to change my juvenile, self-destructive tendencies. Naturally, there were some friction between us. He was an older, seasoned convict who had been around many years in the prison system. I was a young, headstrong, immature, and inexperienced teenager who saw no "light" at the end of the tunnel. He had a well-known reputation for getting into fights with the prison guards. He even stabbed a prison guard on one occasion. So he was always paranoid that the guards would run up in the cell on him. So, from sun up until sun down, he would sit by the cell door on his footlocker with a prison-made knife in his hand. I was kind of intimidated by him so I went and bought me a knife. I wouldn't allow myself to go to sleep until he was already sleep. We got into many verbal confrontations because he would always suggest how I should conduct myself in prison. My mentality was that I didn't come all the way to prison to have some washed-up convict tell what to do. The truth is, the more time I spent around this brother, the more all the things he was telling me started making sense. I could tell that underneath his tough exterior, he really had a certain degree of love and concern for me. He was an extremely militant brother to the 10th power. He always kept his clothes ironed and his boots cleaned and polished. He always kept his pants pulled-up and shirt tucked in his pants- even in the cell. When we left the cell, he always stood with his back against the wall, his head and eyes moving from side to side, always on the watch for the unexpected. It wasn't long before I stopped looking at him as a potential enemy and started looking up to him as my mentor. He taught me how to do my time under

the "convict code." He impressed upon me the importance of never laughing and joking with the guards, to always show and give respect to a fellow convict, and to always utilize every moment to broaden and expand my consciousness. Most importantly, he stressed the importance of staying alive, physically and mentally, in this graveyard known as prison. He had a wealth of books and literature that I could choose from. The only books I seen in my home when I was growing up were religious books and books that I had brought home from school that were filled with empty knowledge. Out of all the time I spent in school I never read one book. During the course of my reading and studying, I became filled with the knowledge of my culture and the history of the people from which I decended from. I learned about the civil rights and black power struggles of the 60's and 70's here in the U.S. I learned about revolutionaries like Karl Marx, V.I. Lenin, Frantz Fanon, and Che' Guerrero. I learned about militant black organizations like the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the Black Liberation Army, the Deacons for Defense and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, to name just a few. I read about militant white anti-racist, anti-imperialist organizations like Students for a Democratic Society, and its offshoot, the Weather Underground, the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee, and the George Jackson Brigade, to name just a few. I learned about the New Afrikan Independence Movement. Slowly, but surely, I stopped seeing every Black person that I came across as my potential enemy and I started to love, value and respect myself as a person. I started to realize that all the social and economic ills which plague every non-white and poor white communites was the direct result of a male-dominated, white-supremacist, capitalistic system whose only goal is to accumulate as much capital as possible off the labor of the global proletariat (working-class poor).

My cellmate (my mentor) was transferred in the summer of 2000 and not too long after that I

was transferred to Nottoway Correctional Center. I had managed to stay out of trouble long enough for my security points to drop. Even though Nottoway was a medium security prison, it was ran as if it was a super-max. The guards were allowed to use dogs to escort us prisoners to and from the cafeteria. I lucked up and got me a job working in the kitchen. I had the chance to gain some of the weight I lost when I went to Sussex One. I would sneak and eat entire watermelons, baskets of grapes, and huge bowls of rice and beans. I managed to get up to 200 pounds. There was a boxing program called the "smoker" where inmates where allowed to get in a boxing ring, gloves and all, and fight for three rounds. Five rounds if it was a main event. The fight was streamed live over the prison channel. The one fight I fought I one by a split decision. It wasn't really about winning for me. It was about seeing how much shape I was in and to see if all the training I was doing made any difference.It reminded me of the days when I was barely a teenager when I was training at the Million Dollar Boxing Club on Hull Street in the South Side of Richmond. Even when I was young I was in shape. That was something my father passed on to me in my genes. I remeber the first day I was sparring at the boxing club, all of the club's trainers were standing back watching me as if they thought I was the second coming of Mike Tyson. My mother and father couldn't afford to pay the admision fee. So I had to stop going. Sometimes I sit and wonder what would have come from if if I'd stayed, trained, and became a professional boxer. One of the reasons most minorites don't succeed in life is because we don't have equality of opportunity, or the same opportunities that most whites have because of "white priviledge". White America, through its race-, class-based caste system actively strives to keep all minority commnuties in a state of poverty, ingonorance and despair becuase it knows that if the minority communites were free to exercise its right to self-determination, those persons who exist in such communities would rise up to become just as brilliant as any other white

person in all fields of human endeavor.

After about three years of being on Nottoway, I made a conscious, but hard, decision to cut my gang ties. It was a hard decision because I developed a deep-seated love and respect for a lot of these brothers and for what the organization originally stood for. In order for me to walk away from it all, I knew that I was putting my life in danger. In the gang world, the motto is "blood in, blood out." I made an agreement with the older brothers who made up the "committee" to simply "jump me out." And so, on that fateful day, I let five Bloods beat me down in the cell while I was holding my hands behind my back. This was the price I had to pay for the life I chose. After the beating was over, we all shook hands and I walked away from that life vowing never to go back into it.

Over the years of my incarceration I've continued to make countless mistake that would put both my freedom and life in jeopardy. I continued to use and sell drugs and commit petty crimes. I once read in a newspaper article that the Virginia prison system is the safest prison system in the United States. However, for those not familiar with life on the inside of the penitentiary during the early 90's, it was a slaughterhouse. Around every corner lurked the possibility that an inmate could get stabbed, killed, robbed and even raped. I once intervened in a situation where four inmates from Norfolk were trying to rape this one inmate from Newport News who I was close friends with. This friend of mine was one of the guys that was considered to be a "pretty boy". He acted kind of feminine at times and spent a lot of time in the mirror brushing his hair. He was quiet, unassuming, stayed to himself, and didn't possess the heart or know-how to stand up for himself. For all of the above reasons, the much more aggressive inmates saw him as a target. Myself, I was bullied in Highschool, so as I got older I developed a natural reaction to aid and assist a vulnerable person being exploited, mistreated, or being taken advantage of. So, on this occasion when I witnessed

the four inmates from Norfolk trying to entise him to come into their cell to force him to perform sexual favors on them, the humanity in me forced me to jump up between he and them and I told them that if they wanted to do something to him they would have to go through me first. They looked at me as if I was crazy and backed away not wanting a fight.

On the streets, during a conflict, people will often run for a gun to resolve a conflict. But there are no guns in prison, so I had to learn how to be skilled in the art of close hand-to-hand combat. Since I've been in prison I've been in many fights (some I've won and some I've lost). I've been in riots where twenty or more were involved in group fights. I've been robbed of my possessions and I have myself robbed other inmates when I was trying to make a name for myself. I once was slashed with a razor during a conflict with another inmate when I tried to cut the line for the telephone. That one I deserved. Prison during the 90's were called gladiator schools and we had to become warriors; cold-hearted monsters even in order to survive. That's one of the many contradictions of during time: society lock us away because we're monsters. Then we have to become even more cold-hearted of a monster in order to survive inside of this "concrete jungle" and then we end up going home in worst of a condition than before we came in.

About a year after I cut my gang ties and was half way down the road to redemption, my cellmate and I were placed on isolation (solitary confinement) based on a tip the prison guards received from a confidential informant saying my cellmate and I were planning to escape. Of course this accusation was bogus. By that time I had made so many enemies, it was hard for me to pinpoint who this confidential informant was. It is often said that people fear what they don't understand and hate what they can't conquer. Becuase I am a nononsense type of brother who carries myself with extreme discipline and Did very little talking, there were quite a few inmates who was intimidated

by me and wanted me out of the way. Fabricating a story about an escape plan and "leaking" it to the prison guards was one way to do it. My cellmate and I end up spending six months in solitary confinement. Though the guards and informants thought this ordeal would "break me" or knock me off balance, I simply utilized the time on isolation to read, study and meditate. When I finally went back to general population, I was more determined than ever to transform my criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality.

During the years I've spent studying the law and working on my criminal case, in an attempt to liberate my body from this physical conifinement through America's criminal injustice system, I have become highly skilled at practicing law. For those inmates just coming into the prison system who don't have the benefit of a lawyer, I'd help them draft petitions and motions and file them in the courts- free of charge. I have become what is often termed a "jailhouse lawyer." Helping other inmates to challenge their criminal or civil case in a court of law is an act of resistance. It is my goal to enroll in law school to earn a law degree upon my eventual release from prison. I desire to create some sort of non-profit legal organization dedicated to assisting incarcerated indigent inmates with drafting motions, petitions, and lawsuits in the courts. This too will be an act of resistance.

I look back over my life from the time I Picked up my first gun before I was even a teenager to where I am at present- choosing to be an agent of life to my people instead of being an agent of death, it amazes me how far I've come. And this transition all started when I read my first book. In an article I found amongst my mounds of paperwork (author unknown) entitled "Black People Don't Read" it states that "white corporate America continue to reap profits from Blacks without the effort of physical slavery. Look at the current method of containment that we use on ourselves: IGNORANCE, GREED, and SELF-

ISHNESS.

"Our IGNORANCE is the primary weapon of containment. A man once said, 'The best way to hide something from Black People is to put it in a book'. We now live in the information age. We have gained the opportunity to read any book on any subject through the efforts of our fight for freedom, yet we refuse to read. There are numerous books readily available at Borders, Barnes & Nobles, and Amazon.com, not to mention our own Black Bookstores that provide solid blueprints to reach economic equality (which should have been our fight all along), but few of us read consistently, if at all.

"GREED is another weapon of containment. Blacks, since the abolition of slavery, have had large amounts of money at their disposal. Last year we spent 10 billion dollars during Christmas, out of our 450 billion dollars in total yearly income (2.22%). Any segment of corporate America can use us as their target market for any business venture they care to dream up, no matter how outlandish, we will buy into it. Being primarily a consumer people, we function totally by greed. We continually want more, with little thought of saving or investing. We would rather buy some new sneaker than invest in starting a business. Some of us even neglect our children to have the latest TOMMY or FUBU, and we still think that having a Mercedes and a big house give us 'status' or that we have achieved our DREAM. We are fools! The vast majority of our people are still in poverty because our greed holds us back from collectively making better communites. With the help of B.E.T., and the rest of our Black media that often broadcasts destructive images into our homes, white corporate America will continue to see huge profits like those of TOMMY and NIKE. We'll continue to show off to each other while corporate Whites build solid communites with the profit from their businesses that they market to us.

"SELFISHNESS, ingrained in our minds through slavery, is one of the major ways they will continue to contain us. One of our own, W.E.B. DuBois

said that there is an innate division in our culture. A 'Talented Tenth' he called it. He was correct in his deduction that there are segments of our culture that has achieved some 'form' of success. However, that segment missed the fullness of his work. We didn't read that the 'Talented Tenth' was then responsible to aid the Non-Talented Ninety Percent in achieving a better life...Instead, that segment has created another class, a Buppie class that looks down on our people or aids them in a condescending manner. We will never achieve what they (corporate Whites) have. Our selfishness does not allow us to be able to work together on any project or endeavor of substance. When we do get together, our selfishness lets our egos get in the way of our goal and our so-called help organization seem to only want to promote their name without making any real change in our communities. We are content to sit in conferences and conventions in their (corporate Whites) hotels, and talk about what we will do while we award plaques to the best speakers, not the best doers. Is there no end to our selfishness? We steadfastly refuse to see that Together Each One Achieves More (TEAM). We do not understand that we are no better than each other because of what we own, as a matter of fact, most of these Buppies are but one or two paychecks away from poverty. All of which is under the control of their (corporate Whites) pens in their offices and rooms. Yes, they will continue to contain us as long as we refuse to read, continue to buy anything we want, and keep thinking we are 'helping' our communities by paying dues to organizations which do little other than hold lavish conventions in their (corporate Whites) hotels. By the way, we don't have to worry about any on of us reading this letter, remember, 'We don't READ!'"

While I agree with the author of this article that most Black people don't read, and when we do read it's often street novels, car/hip hop magazines, smut novels or books containing other useless information, the author failed expound

on the reason why we don't read, or why we lack the desire or skills to unite around a common cause or agenda. It is common knowledge that during chattel slavery enslaved Africans were forbidden to learn how to read and write, because their slavemasters were extremely fearful that these skills would facilitate a rebellion or revolution amongst the slave-class which would have the potential to bring an end to the plantation slavery system and its profits. The slave-masters new that the mind is the most potent weapon in existence. The politicized/revolutionary mind is the most dangerous weapon in existence. Once we were able to attain a certain degree of knowledge, the slave masters of old--and even the white supremacists and corporate elites today- knew that we would began to question the quality of information that we allow to enter our minds that will not assist us in in overcoming oppression, and consequently, we would begin to engage in revolutionary politics., which if applied correctly, will compel us to rise up, confront, and overthrow global white supremacy and imperialism.

Every since the advent of slavery of blacks here in America, white supremacist and their capitalist elite, has devised a "devide and conquer" scheme to keep Blacks (and poor Whites) devided to keep them from uniting to overthrow class-based exploitation and oppression. The devision between blacks themselves was first inspired by Willie Lynch back in the early 1700's. Before a gathering of plantation owners in Virginia in 1712, Lynch proposed not only instigating sharp division between Blacks and Whites, but among the Black slaves as well, by playing on the minor differences between them to create fear and distrust. Lynch stated to the plantation owners:

"Gentlemen, I greet you here on the banks of the James River in the year of our Lord 1712. First, I shall thank you, the gentlemen of the Colony of Virginia for bringing me here. I am here to help you solve some of your problems with slaves. Your invitation reached me on my modest plantation in the West Indies where I have ex-

perimented with some of the newest and still oldest methods for control of slaves. Ancient Rome would envy us if my program was implemented. As our boat sailed south of the James River, named for our illustrious King, whose version of the Bible we cherish, I saw enough to know that yourt problem is not unique. While Rome used cords of wood as crosses for standing human bodies along its old highway in great numbers, you are here using the tree and the rope on occasion.

"I caught the whiff of a dead slave hanging from a tree a couple of miles back. You are not only loosing valuable stock by hangings, you are having uprisings, slaves are running away. Your crops are sometimes left in the fields too long for maximum profit, you suffer occasional fires, your animals are killed. Gentlemen, you know what your problems are; I do not need to elaborate. I am not here to enumerate your problems, however, I am here to introduce you to methods of solving them.

"In my bag here, I have outlined a number of DIFFERENCES among the slaves and I take their differences and make them bigger. I use FEAR, DISTRUST, and ENVY for control purposes. These methods have worked on my modest plantation in the West Indies and it will work throughout the the South. Take this simple little list of differences and think about them. On top of my list is "AGE," but it is there because it starts with an "A"; the second is "COLOR" of "SHADE," there is INTELLIGENCE, SIZE, SEX, STATUS ON PLANTATION, ATTITUDE OF OWNERS, WHETHER THE SLAVES LIVE IN THE VALLEY, ON THE HILL, EAST, WEST, NORTH or SOUTH, HAVE FINE FAIR or COURSE HAIR, or is TALL or SHORT. Now that you have a list of differences, I shall give you an outline of ACTION- but before that I shall assure you that distrust is stronger than trust, and envy is stronger than adulation, respect or admiration.

"The Black slave after receiving this indoctrination shall carry on and will become self-refueling and self-generating for hundreds of

years, maybe thousands.

"Don't forget you must pitch the OLD BLACK MALE verses the YOUNG BLACK MALE, and the YOUNG BLACK MALE verses the OLD BLACK MALE. You must use the DARK SKIN SLAVE verses the LIGHT SKIN SLAVE and the LIGHT SKIN SLAVE verses the DARK SKIN SLAVE. You must use the FEMALE verses the MALE and the MALE verses the FEMALE. You must also have your white servants and overseers distrust all Blacks, but it is necesary that your slaves trust and depend on us. They must love, respect, and trust ONLY US.

"Gentlemen, these kits are your keys to control. Use them. Have your wives and children use them. Never miss an opportunity- if used intensively for one year, the slaves themselves will remain perpetually distrustful. Thank you, gentlemen."

Since 1712, these methods of dividing Blacks can clearly be seen in operation today, and the effects still remain with us- the anger, rage, distrust, envy, fear and the complete lack of love we have for ourself and each other. Today, this divide-and-control tactic has also been used to drive a wedge between all non-white, and even poor whites, to further global white-supremacist, imperialist and capitalist interests. Yesterdays chattel slaves have become today's wage earners, only the slave-class today has grown to include all races and nationalities and yesterday's plantation owners/slave masters have become today's ruling capitalist elite.

According to the Black Liberation Army Political Dictionary, the Proletariat represents the majority of the working massess or wage earners. They must sell their labor power in order to survive. They represent the lowest level of the unemployed, lowest wages, less benefits and rights and usually have little or no power or control over their working conditions, management, and planning. It is this class that has the most to lose due to the advent of increased technology, automation (the process of using mechanical or electronic machines to do routine repetitive work

automatically instead of employing human hands and minds) and cyber-nation because they are being driven out of their jobs into the ranks of the unemployed. Karl Marx classified them as the most potentially revolutionary class because of their sheer numbers as well as their social consciousness and needs which is directly tied to the whole process of production. Then there are the lumpen proletariat which represents the under-class, unemployed, marginally employed and those who live outside of the law, i.e. criminal element. This class also include the aged and infirmed. The diabled are also part of this class because they are marginally employed, therefore, not a secure part of the productive process. Those on welfare, social security are also members of this class.

The working-class poor must resist all race-based, counter-productive divide-and-control tactics. White people in general, and the White Left in particular, who are actively working to confront and destroy racism within themselves and the entire white community, must join hands in solidarity with the Black, Brown, Red and Yellow peoples of the planet in a Unified Front- on a clear cut radical and progressive political program to combat global racism, colonialism, imperialism, fascism, and government policies here in the U.S. that overwhelmingly favor super rich corporate elites while at the same time punishing working-class people. As our beloved comrade, George Lester Jackson, stated: "There must be a collective redirection of the old guard- the factory and union agitator- with the campus acitivist who can counter the ill-effects of fascism at its training site, and the lumpen proletariat intellectuals who possess revolutionary scientific socialist attitudes to deal with massess of street people living outside the system. They must work toward developing the unity of the pamphlet and the silenced pistol. Black, Brown, [Red], and White [people] are all victims together. At the end of this massive,

collective struggle, we will uncover our new man, the unpredictable culmination of the revolutionary process. He will be better equipped to wage the real struggle, the permanent struggle after the revolutionary process- the one of new relationships between men." -Blood In My Eye.

It is in the spirit of the revolutionary liberation struggles of all oppressed peoples to eradicate exploitation and oppression and in memory of both my father and brother - who, despite working hard all their lives for a greedy capitalist system that took from them everything but gave them crumbs in return, and died essentially without a pot to piss in nor a window to throw it out- that I write this book, to add my vision, my voice, my ideas to the big dream- a just, equal, free, socialist society for all.,

ALL POWER TO ALL PEOPLE WHO OPPOSE RACISM, COLONIALISM, IMPERIALISM, FASCISM, MONOPLY CAPITALISM, WILLIE LYNCH-STYLE DIVIDE-AND-CONQUER TACTICS AND THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL SLAVE COMPLEX!

Brian Lee Rowe #1131545
(A.K.A. Uhuru Baraka Rowe)
Buckingham Correctional Center
P.O. Box 430
Dillwyn, Virginia 23936

FROM UNITY

TO

COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

An Essay by
Brian L. Rowe



South Chicago ABC
Zine Distro
P.O. Box 721
Homewood, IL 60430