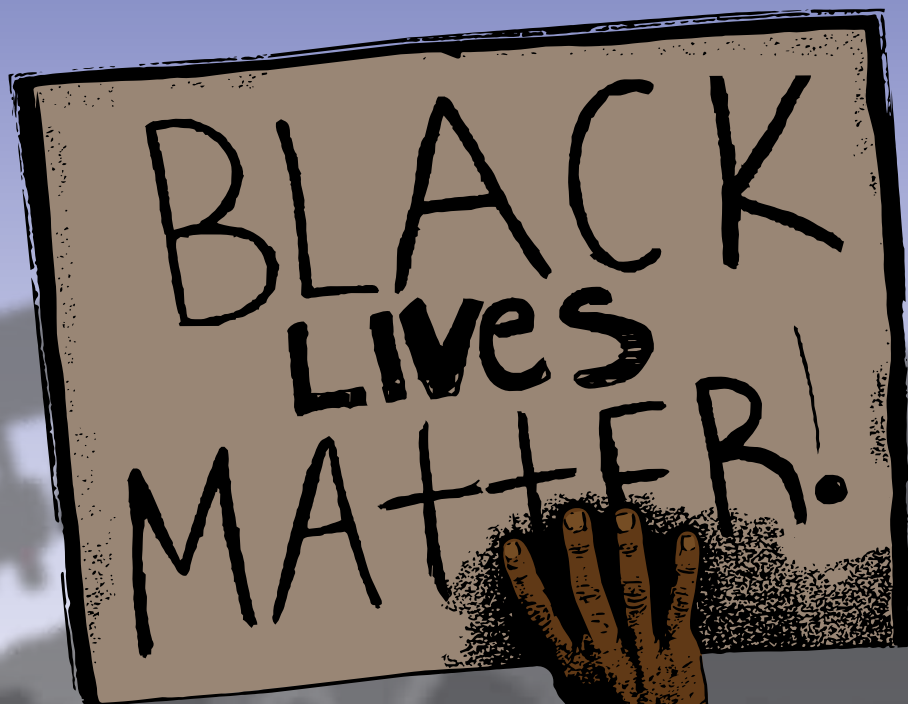


September/October 2020
Vol. 9, Issue 4

Free minds Connect



**FREE MINDS MEMBERS ON
A GLOBAL MOVEMENT AND
WHAT IT MEANS TO THEM**

**INSPIRING
POETRY CALLS
FOR BLACK
LIBERATION**

**BUILDING
POWER IN
DC'S BLACK
COMMUNITY**

**BLACK LIVES
MATTER
AROUND
THE WORLD**

Letter from the Editor

For this issue, we asked Free Minds Book Club Facilitator Eyone to be a guest editor in this Connect dedicated to the Black Lives Matter movement. Eyone is passionate about uplifting the voices of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated writers.

Hello to all,

My name is Eyone and I'm a facilitator and writing coach with Free Minds Book Club. I'm a lover of reading and writing. I'm also an author of 11 novels, which I worked hard to publish and sell myself. While in prison, I began writing and even publishing books. After 17 years, I made parole and continued writing and working with writing programs on the outside. I get the most joy out of working with my Free Minds family, using reflective writing to open up conversations about real issues that we all face in life after prison – and sometimes while in prison as well.

With COVID-19 changing the way we deal with normal life, we at Free Minds have been doing our weekly Build Up over the internet through an app called Zoom, which allows close to 60 members to meet online. It's a great way to network and show support, unity, and brotherhood. Many of us who meet at Build Up are friends, or at least know of one another from doing time in prison. We share all types of news that we all can use to do things like find a job, understand voting, and any news that our wonderful job coaches have to share that will help make life after prison less of a challenge.

Every week we also come up with a strong topic that affects many of us. We use writing to reflect on that topic, then talk and share ideas about dealing with it. For example: with the big election coming up in the United States, we discussed voter registration and researching the politicians who are running for office. Overall, we create a safe space, using reading and writing to help each other move forward in a positive direction.

Black Lives Matter has dominated the news for months

now. People far and wide have come to the aid of the BLM movement: everyone from leaders of all races to pro athletes. At our Free Minds Build Up, we have also discussed the BLM movement. Many members have asked the question, does BLM only count when other people do terrible things to Black people? Many activists and organizers with the BLM movement in the city are also working hard to build up our people and our communities, even when the media doesn't show it. With all the violence going on in the world, many members express a desire for us, mostly Black guys, to really apply the BLM mentality and show love to our brothers – to help each other, build each other up, and be our brother's keeper.

All of you who are writing and reading with Free Minds are doing that – building up our community. In this issue of the *Connect*, you'll find powerful work from start to finish; be sure to check out the deep poems on pages 10-12, 16-17, 20, and 28-29 (lots of fantastic poetry in this issue!), like CXS's "Human." Deep and concise. In "Just Hear Me Out," AH paints a picture of how America could be. Don't miss the essays on pages 25-26, or the interviews with FM members Kalef (page 7) and Gary (page 36) about the necessary work they're doing in the DC community. All good reading and food for thought. Stay focused and allow your thoughts to be free.

With that being said, I just want to send a big salute to all of our members and remind you all to keep your head and hold on. Things are changing and must get better soon.

Eyone

**Next Issue's Theme:
Purpose**

The Connect is a bimonthly creative writing newsletter published by the members, staff, and friends of the Free Minds Book Club. Each issue focuses on a specific theme as well as highlights the discussions of the Free Minds long distance BAM! (Books Across the Miles) book club. We publish five issues per year.



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Demetria, Reentry Coach

Shannon, Advocacy & Leadership

Development Specialist

Araba & Jessica, Interns

FREE MINDS HQ

All the latest updates on what's going on at the Free Minds office

By Imanee

Reentry Members Start Black History Group

Free Minds has established a Black History Cooperative Learning Group!

The group was formed in response to the worldwide protests after George Floyd's death; members wanted to connect US history to today's current fight for racial justice. Each week, the group decides by consensus which topics to discuss, and so far, have focused on the Jim Crow era, the Tulsa Race Massacre, redlining and the racial wealth gap, the legacies of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, and racial disparities in the criminal legal system.

Jameon says members "build intellectually," often tackling difficult questions such as the effectiveness of certain ideologies in the struggle for human equality. We are so inspired by this group. A Free Mind is a learning mind!



Shannon & Jameon's Leadership

Free Minds welcomes our newest Congressman John Lewis (CJL) Fellow, Jameon! Jameon shadowed under our previous CJL Fellow, Shannon, until August 31st and has now fully assumed his position. Jameon actively participates at Free Minds' volunteer Letter Writers Circle each Monday: answering questions from participants, detailing the importance of letter writing, and inspiring volunteers. He shares his story and your poetry in On The Same Page community outreach events. See Jameon's article on page 37.

We are excited to announce a new staff position! Shannon is now the Free Minds Advocacy and Leadership Development Specialist, leading our advocacy efforts and providing leadership and professional development opportunities to reentry members. We can't wait to see the positive change the next generation of Free Minds leaders will bring. See Shannon's article about this new position on page 4.

On The Same Page Outreach Program Goes Virtual During COVID-19

Nothing can stop our message of connecting through books and poetry.

Poet Ambassadors, led by Janet and Jameon, have spoken to diverse audiences, from international students to Capital One employees. At a recent engagement with college professors, Jameon shared a poem he wrote about his first day of school at age 15. The creative writing professor loved his poem so much that she asked to use it as a template or writing prompt, so that her students can write a similar poem!

We are ALWAYS looking for new contributors. Write or draw something for our next issue and send it to us! (Pieces not published in the *Connect* may appear on our Writing Blog and at a Write Night Event!)

Please write us when you are transferred so we have your up-to-date address as soon as possible!

Free Minds Book Club
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ADVOCACY AND LEADERSHIP

By Shannon

Greetings, brothers! In my new role as Advocacy and Leadership Development Specialist, it is my pleasure to continue on as part of the Free Minds team. I'm excited to advocate for the change that's absolutely necessary, to help fix a system that has been broken so long and has been biased against minority communities for centuries. This can only be undone by totally dismantling the system, step by step and piece by piece, because we are faced with antiquated laws derived from a racist mindset.

I will be participating in various meetings and panels, where I can have a direct impact on discussions of how best to improve the conditions of incarcerated men and women and returning citizens. It's my responsibility to be a supporting force in these tough times of a new normal, because I know y'all are being subjected to the whims of those who don't have your best interests at heart and will surely try to silence your voices.

I represent Free Minds on different coalitions such as Thrive Under 25, the Reentry Action Network, the Emerging Youth working group, DC Justice Lab, and Youth Justice Project, which are sincerely working to upend many of the negative policies that I have experienced firsthand over my 25 years of incarceration. We are y'all's voice and we won't be denied, because we are fighting this fight with a loving passion that's being led by men and women who truly understand what your hardships represent. Our ultimate goal is to dismantle this system and pave the way for everyone to be afforded opportunities and justice.

What advocacy priorities would you like to share with these committees and other change-makers? We want to hear from you!



In Loving Memory

We've been listening to your suggestions about how we can continue to honor the Free Minds members who we have lost. One of your ideas was to dedicate every issue of the *Connect* to their memory. Keep sending your ideas.

Rest in Power:

James, Cortez, Derrick, Christian, JohnQuan, Nadar, Andre, Darond, Dontel, Tyree, Antwone, Amari, Kuron, Dwayne, Darnell, Marcus, Wayne, Eric, Sharod, Arthur, Isaiah, DeMario, Mshairi, Tahlil, Joshua, John, Delonte, Eddie, Gary, Benny, Michael, David

If you know of other Free Minds members that we've lost who are not on this list, please let us know so we can include them in our memorial.

FREE MINDS MAILBAG

We love getting mail from our Free Minds family. Here are some of your thoughts on the April/May/June 2020 Connect Music:

AH: "I enjoyed a lot of people's views on music and liked reading the article by Pramila, "Did You Know? The Importance of Music in Religions," since as a Muslim, music from an Islamic perspective can be a touchy subject. Many cultures do different things, but yes, many musical instruments are forbidden, so many stay away from listening to it or engaging in it. I appreciate her giving all insight into it."

DK: "I really was amazed by the section about people who are deaf and their enjoyment of music. Due to ignorance, I did not think those who were deaf enjoyed music. This enlightened me. Thank you all for opening my eyes to this!"

CM: "When I read in this month's issue about the COVID response team y'all started, all I could do was smile. I've met some of the best people out of my whole life through FM. Music is a big part of me, so the whole theme was like that, but Craig's story of him and his sister was real close to home for me, because my whole life all I had was my big sister. Lastly, I read how David did 25 and is helping out with the youth. That is my inspiration because I was in and out of Oak Hill from 13 to 17 years old. I've always said I want to help the youth see that the world is vast, and you can be better than what your PO tells you you can't be. My whole life I was told I would live my life in and out of prison. It hurts me because it became my reality. If I had that one positive influence saying, "you can change," maybe I would have. So I really want to help the youth when things in my life change."

AW: "From cover to cover, I read this Music issue. I thought "Conversation with Sabrea" was that much-needed breath of fresh air I needed to raise up out of a nasty depression I fell into. The Staples Singers, the Emotions, the Jones Girls are the bands from that era that sing in my heart today. Indeed, Sister Sabrea's letter to Music was well received by me and the universe. Thank you. The piece by Afropop brought me face to face with Robert Nester Marley's song, "Zimbabwe." During that struggle for that people's self-determination, Mr. Marley and the Wailers were invited to perform there in Zimbabwe - while the liberation struggle was still in full swing. I appreciate the history lesson and the introduction to the mbira tradition from Zimbabwe. Mr. Banning, I cannot wait for my first opportunity to enjoy the spiritual sounds and ancestral conversations that chimurenga will invoke. Thank you. Shout out to Ontae for your strong faith and belief in God. Shout out to Kelli for doing the interview. Shout to David for being a living, breathing example of what he believes - thanks Kelli for doing the interview. :) Shout out to all the Free Minds members whose poems inspired me to write though I am sick as... sick as can be. (Like that song goes, "I will survive/As long as I know how to love I know I'll get by"). Shout out to everyone at Free Minds Family."

QUOTE-I-VATOR

"I find, in being black, a thing of beauty: a joy; a strength; a secret cup of gladness."

– Ossie Davis, Actor, Director, Playwright, Activist

"It's up to all of us – black, white, everyone – no matter how well-meaning we think we might be, to do the honest, uncomfortable work of rooting it out. It starts with self-examination and listening to those whose lives are different from our own. It ends with justice, compassion, and empathy that manifests in our lives and on our streets." – Michelle Obama, former First Lady on racism

"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly."

– Langston Hughes, Poet, Author (*The Dream Keeper, The Ways of White Folks*)

"Never be limited by other people's limited imaginations." – Dr. Mae Jemison, Astronaut (first Black woman in space)

"For us, #BlackLivesMatter is really a re-humanization project. It's a way for us to love each other again, to love ourselves, and to project that love into the world so that we can transform it."

– Alicia Garza, Co-Founder of Black Lives Matter Movement



Michelle Obama,
former First Lady



BLACK
LIVES
MATTER

BLACK
IS A
VIBE

BLACK
LIVES
MATTER

BLACK
LIVES
MATTER

DESTROY
LACIA
MUSEUM

REENTRY PROFILE: PROTESTING FOR THE GENERATIONS BEFORE US, AND THOSE TO COME

Profile of Kalef, FM Member by Kelli

Free Minds member Kalef has been home since 2015. He works as a Cleaning Manager for Clean Decisions, a janitorial and general labor services company started by Free Minds member Will and run by returning citizens in DC. He has a four-year-old son. When activists called for people in Washington, DC to gather in protest following the murder of George Floyd in late May, Kalef knew that he couldn't sit back and watch. For 11 days and nights in a row, he went downtown to participate in the protests. Recently, Kelli talked with Kalef about the experience.

KELLI: Why did you join the protests?

KALEF: Being a Black man and a convicted felon myself, I've been roughed up by law enforcement, no question. Luckily I haven't been shot. When I was at the protests, it was more about the big picture though, just knowing that so many places in this country are so prejudiced. So much hatred, and for WHAT? Black folks didn't ever do anything but try to survive. I mean, look what happened at the first NFL football game in Kansas City. Their fans booed during a moment of silence for racial unity! Where does this animosity come from? What is it for? People don't even know why they hate like this!

I went to the protests because I want change. I mean, look at Free Minds! We are so diverse and have so many ethnicities. We have guys who are Latinx, and we have guys who are African American. We have some staff who are Caucasian, some who are Asian, Latinx, and Black. And just being around that every day at the office before the pandemic, or now when we get together on Zoom calls, I mean, it's a front row seat to how the world could really be if everybody would just get on the same page. It's the truth! It's so sad because racism in America has been going on SO long! We're talking 400 years! Just because I'm younger doesn't mean I shouldn't join the movement. I have a child. I don't want to deal with this, and I don't want him to have to deal with it. It hurts for us to go through this on a daily basis still. When I was standing down at that White House gate, I was there because of those who came before me and those who will come after me.

KELLI: What did it feel like to protest?

KALEF: I remember when I got down to Franklin Square that first night. You could feel the anger and the rage. People were yelling and screaming because they were scared and hurt by what's going on in this country. But you could feel that something was about to happen. There were very clearly two different groups of people there. There were the ones like me who were standing up for justice. And there was another group who was there for the wrong reasons. They are the ones who went on to loot and destroy things. They set cars on fire, threw bikes through store windows, set shops on fire. Every liquor store all the way up to the National Zoo had windows busted and fires set! There were pepper balls in the night air mixed with smoke from burning cars. But none of that stopped me from being there and standing up for the right thing.

I felt mixed emotions at the protests. Sometimes it made me feel empowered. You feel your voice is heard. You can scream and shout, hold up signs, and say what you want to say. But on the flip side, it's emotional and it's traumatic. Because the whole time you're going through all of that, you're remembering the people you're standing out there for: the families of people who have been killed.

This was a life-changing experience for me. It's something I thought I would never be a part of.

KELLI: Do you feel like the protests have had an impact?

KALEF: It's sad to say, and maybe controversial, but I really don't think so. At the height of the protests, we had all of America on our side. You had athletes boycotting their own sporting events, people taking a knee, "Black Lives Matter" written on the backs of jerseys and on the courts. Soccer teams in other countries were even taking a knee and saying "Black Lives Matter." They didn't have to do that! That was

continued on page 43

DEAR MR. ADVICE

Do you have advice for TF? If so, write in and we may print your advice in the next issue. And if you have a question for the FM Fam, please send it to us. We want to hear from you!

Dear Advice Man,

I need help fulfilling my mother's wishes. My mother has battled cancer and won. But as they say, if it ain't one thing it's another. Now she has heart problems. I called her one day last week and we cried together on the phone. She told me that if anything happens to her, she doesn't want me to get into any trouble. Plus she said when I get home, I should take care of myself. I have mental health problems and have had them since I was 19. I'm 35 now and I'm stable on meds. My grandmother would say God works through medicine. Do you have any advice for me?

TF

Dear FM brother,

First I want to offer my deepest condolences on your mother's medical condition. I sympathize with the fact that your focus is on what can happen, but I think when it comes to your mom in particular, you should try to focus on what has happened. Her victory over cancer has shown you that she's both a fighter and a very strong woman. Have faith that she'll give her heart problems the very same rumble she gave cancer, and once again defeat the odds. Trust me, I know it's never easy dealing with seeing our mothers experience hardships – especially things beyond our control – but you have to be strong and allow her to feed off your strength to reinforce her own.

The easiest way to fulfill your mom's wishes would be to steer clear of trouble at all cost. Honoring her request should drive, motivate, and encourage you to also start planning for your future. Because your mother had two wishes and the second is: take care of yourself when you come home. Don't take her wishes to mean something bad will happen. Understanding her own fight, let her wishes inspire you to fight equally hard to make those wishes come true.

It's extremely important to continue taking care of your own health, also a concern for your mom. She wants you to be strong in every aspect and she's trusting you to do so. I know it's easier said than done, but remain faithful that she will prevail once again and the next time you cry together they'll be tears of joy and triumph.

My heart truly goes out to you in a major way and I sincerely pray that everything is alright at present and continues to be so going forward. Take great care of yourself.

Sincerely,
DA, FM Member

PAYING IT FORWARD

INTERVIEW WITH GREGORY, ZEN FRIEND AND URBAN MONK

By Imanee

1. Introduction:

My name is Gregory, and I'm originally from New Orleans, Louisiana. I grew up in Granada Hills, California. The name of my business is Zen Friend and Urban Monk, which is a one-on-one coaching business for Black men who are seeking to be nurtured and loving in their divine masculine. [In my business,] there are various methods to addressing boundaries, emotional intelligence, and consent. I help these men find their calling. The leg, or the subsidiary version of the business, is called "King's College: The Divine Masculine Theory," which is basically the same thing but for groups.

2. What incited your interest in becoming a monk and joining the Buddhist faith? How did you find your calling?

My senior year of high school, I took a class called "Search for Self in Contemporary Literature." The final project for the class was to write an essay in which we analyzed a quote from the famous French philosopher Michel Foucault, about the idea that "self" is not given to us; we must therefore create ourselves as a work of art.

The two books I read to supplement my writing were by Thích Nhất Hạnh, the famous Vietnamese monk. Those books were called *Living Buddha, Living Christ* and *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*. It was his teaching on the power of the practitioner to transform his or her conditioned suffering and the discipline of the mind. That inspired me to seek out my own home temple once I started college in New Orleans in 2009. And so I started practicing at the New Orleans Zen Temple under Robert Livingston Roshi, who taught me the practice of Zazen – Zen meditation. I lived there for three years as a resident, from 2011 to 2014. I've been practicing ever since.

Being ordained as a monk, that calling, essentially was to bring what I learned from Robert and to make this practice as available to as many people as possible because of the impact that it had on me, especially for those who look like me. I believe that Eastern practices can be of great benefit to Black people and people of color in America, especially as it relates to navigating transgenerational trauma. The practice of Zazen isn't therapy; one should approach the practice of Zazen with an attitude of "non-profit," what we call "Mushotoku Mind," no goal, no gain. That is not to say the practice doesn't have beneficial side effects, which for me have included letting go of a lot of hindrances, attachments, and also being able to sit with the discomfort of the human experience, observing the sensation of my body and responding from a grounded place. My calling to become a monk was 1) To be an example of this practice and 2) To assist any person in developing their own practice.

3. As a member of the LGBTQ community, how would you go about raising awareness for other members of that community who face racism, police brutality, etc.? How can African Americans who aren't part of the LGBTQ community help those who are?

The first thing I would say is we have to interrogate our own conditioning. That starts with empowering the individual to analyze and deconstruct the ways they've been conditioned by white psychosis or what some people call "white supremacy,"



Buddhist Lotus Flower

capitalism, individualism, and patriarchy. Becoming aware of the ways in which those forces have shaped our own behavior and self-construct.

The other thing is to empower the most marginalized within Black communities – Black queer and trans people, Black women in particular – and give them a platform to make their experiences known, and to put these members of our community in positions of power. It's by drawing on their own life experience that they can accurately target the aspects of our culture that have put them in such marginalized positions in the first place. So: 1) Radically interrogating our own conditioning and 2) Listening to and elevating the platforms of Black queer people and Black women.

4. What inspired you to start a men's group? What lessons/practices will you be teaching, and what do you hope participants will get out of this?

The inspiration had to do with my own journey in striving to embody the mature masculine and witnessing the power that being in safe containers among other men has in transforming the ways in which we relate to one another. My experience has been that we don't relate to one another from a place of competitiveness or one up-ing one another, but rather from a place of wholeness, vulnerability, radical integrity, and accountability. My hope is that from this work, all men – and Black men in particular – will begin to practice radical integrity, meaning their words and their actions are aligned, and that we will begin to look at the commitments we make and hold true to them. I hope that we will hold ourselves accountable for the impact of our actions, both intended and unintended, and begin to empower each other to live in alignment with our truths.

5. You are an African American Buddhist monk who is a part of the LGBTQ community; you paved your way without confining yourself to any labels, any hindrances. What message would you give to youth who are still finding their own paths?

Hypothetically, if I was speaking to my younger self, the one thing I needed to know the most and to internationalize was this: in each and every "now" moment, radically and unconditionally love and accept yourself. That unconditional love and acceptance is like an oasis. We can always come back to ourselves and not seek to complete ourselves by being with another person, by obtaining some sort of job or by obtaining material possessions.

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Human **By CXS**

I wear my hair low because you say so

My eyes see your light even when darkness abounds

My smile is not sincere but it's what's required

My ears have never heard "you love me," even though they continue to listen for the sound

My shoulders are broad so you know that I'm strong, but my arms are weak because pain is heavy

My chest ink covers the stories the streets tell, gun shots and stab wounds are not fiction

My legs are tired of walking from one home to another, but my feet would walk off the earth for that permanent place of refuge

My back carries what was loaded onto it but not asked for.

This is what makes me human. I'm waiting for you to acknowledge the same!

Who Says? **By AL**

Who says I can't be what I want to be?
Cause I grew up in the average black society
And tried to be, more than what you said I could
after the fact that you lied to me.

Deprived me of my dreams that were written for within
my reach,
Afraid I would find out the truth.
So, is that why you lie when you teach?

Come on, you can do better than that.
Is it because I'm black that makes me a threat?

D*mn, then why are you so upset
At the fact that I achieved far more than you could believe
In a nation where Blacks are considered failures?
So, is that why you deceive?

Our Value **By AW**

What is the value of Black Life?
About \$20
During slavery, a Black male was valued
At about \$100
In the criminal justice system
A Black male is worth
\$40,000 a year
While free, in society, his value
Is but \$20
Just ask George Floyd

Black Lives Matter Part 2 **By CB**

I never thought that I would see the day
That stealing would cost me my life
And if I knew
That death was the price to pay
I would've purchased life instead

I was being followed
But didn't make it that far
Because I was killed not more than ten
Feet away from the police car

Now don't hold no tears back
For what's about to take place
I'm a 12-year-old boy
That knew nothing about race

Not even knowing that this park wasn't safe
Playing a game of chase
That we kids call, "Cops and Robbers"

I was the cop with my toy gun
Running around and having fun
Not even knowing that a real cop
Was looking from afar

He parked on the side of the highway
And stood on the hood of his car
He didn't even say freeze
He just aimed and squeezed
Emptying his clip while I drop to my knees

Ain't that crazy?
They even killing our babies
But while you're taking a moment to reflect
Picture you're unable to move your neck
And they are saying that you're dead

Because you were placed in the back
Of a police van
Unbuckled
My neck and spine were damaged
Beyond repair, but the police don't care
They even tried to cover it up

And the jail is inhumane
I killed myself in a cell
After being arrested
And thrown to the ground
During a traffic stop for refusing
To put out my cigarette butt

Speaking of traffic stops
Where the police killed many
I was shot to death while my girlfriend
Live-streamed
It's like the police have gone insane
Because they killed me
In front of my 8-year-old nephew
For playing a video game
When they are supposed to serve
And protect
Because Black Lives Matter
And we deserve our respect

***Rest in Peace to Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray,
Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, and Atatiana Jefferson***

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Just Hear Me Out

By AH

This morning I woke up to the news of George Floyd being murdered by the police
And I immediately felt *cold*
Not cold like a walk-in freezer or winter
Cold like dry ice
The type of cold that burns
And it made me ask myself, "*If life is so precious, why do the ones that are supposed to protect it Treat it as if it has no value?*"

Hold up
Maybe that question was too loud, so let me turn down the volume
I wouldn't want to bust the speakers that give my words sound
Yet, I can't escape from up under this dark cloud
It's hanging over my head
Forcing me to acknowledge that it's there
So without fear
I look up at the dark cloud and scream,
"I DO CARE"

George Floyd's spirit will forever burn within my chest
I just wish I was there to give him the breath he needed
When the officer had his knees in his neck
And since we talking about knees
The world needs more Kaepernicks
For he sacrificed his career to shine light
On what is happening
I just wish I was on the football field
With him so I could've told him that I understand
What his protest means
Yeah, I wish I was there
Before he got black balled from all 32 teams
And I hear America talking
But they can never feel my people's pain
For we were hunted down like prey
Chained together in boats while riding the ocean waves
Then brought to foreign land and put to work
So why is America even talking?
If it's not about my ancestors that were covered with its dirt
And they think they have the right to tell
My people what we need
When we just watched a Black man die after
Repeatedly telling America, "I Can't Breathe"
Are y'all serious?
Are y'all for real?
Maybe my people need to put America in a choke hold
So they can see how it feels



I Can't Breathe

By CM

Knee on my neck
Why?
Because I'm Black
I'm finally on the right track
Please don't send me back
I can't breathe
Cut me some slack
Once again it's whites killing Blacks
I'm not resisting
My hands are behind my back

8:46

By GD

8 minutes and 46 seconds, handcuffed and no weapon
Your fellow officer not helping
Instead, opts for looking out, while onlookers record
The death of George Floyd

Pleas for his life were null and void
Another Black life destroyed
By the hands of those sworn to protect us, but how
can we be protected
When we're constantly suspected, based on our complexion
And perpetually subjected to social injustice
Hundreds of years of oppression, yet we keep stepping
Just to get them thrown back by 8 minutes and 46 seconds

That knee is heavy! I can't BREATHE!
No! I can't believe that 2020 and 1920 have so much in common
From mass incarceration, to unmasking racism, it's alarming!
But they ostracized Colin for taking a knee, at least his was for peace
And not to cut off air supply of a helpless guy

Resisting arrest? No! Resisting his death!
But when viewed as a threat it's a safe bet that you won't get
Treated with respect
Now the world in protest and unrest
Because your blatant murder and disregard for Black lives is unjust
Change? We won't get change or progress until there's
a change in the
White House and Congress
Not just another political promise, but sufficient action
Because your current system shows that Black Lives Don't Matter

8 minutes and 46 seconds it took me to write this poem
Rest in Peace George Floyd, I wrote this for him

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

George Floyd
By SM

The country is in an uproar as I shed tears for the racial inequality of a broken system.
I cry tears of hurt... tears of pain... tears of suffering as I cry out... enough is ENOUGH!!!
My cry will be heard and justice shall be served.
Your bullets eat my flesh... your knee rests on my neck.
Don't shoot!... I can't breathe!
For 400 years you watched me bleed.
WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT?
Embedded in poverty, always the target.
1/8 of a man deemed property...
Who am I?
13th Amendment set me free but am I really free?
Dying under the pressure of your knee begging to breathe...
Is like having a noose around my neck hanging from a tree.
AM I FREE?
Caught in the web of the system fighting for my life
You feed on my blood and floss with my bones.
Flesh of my flesh... Blood of my blood.
Handcuffed face down on the cement.
Video footage for the world to see...
Your hands were in your pockets while you squeezed the life out of me.
Protests turned upside down because of YOU.
All I want is CHANGE.
Do I live for the freedom?...
Or do I live for the struggle?
CIVIL RIGHTS!
Million man march for equal opportunity
Being a victim of the system is nothing new to me.
Blood in my eyes as I risk my life.
The clock is ticking... The time is NOW!
If not now, then when?
If not me, then who?
BLACK LIVES MATTER!!!

Eight Minutes Forty Six Seconds
By VH

Aren't police here to protect and serve?
Why kill? Because you think you have the nerve?
George Floyd lost his life after being kned,
eight minutes forty-six seconds
No matter the race or skin color

We feel for George's family during this painful time
Do you think they'll serve for their crime?

Hands up don't shoot, I don't have a gun
Why do they continue to do this? I'm a loving mother's son

"We thought he was trying to commit robbery"
That ended the life of an innocent jogger Ahmaud Arbery
I mean, did we forget about Trayvon Martin
For this has to stop, we'll continue marching

George loses his life for no given reason, do you
know what he was saying?
He was cuffed, "I can't breathe" and calling for
his mom before dying
This system is messed up, life is not fair
I think about the monument, why is it there?

Rest in Peace, those innocent lives lost

Gone in Body, Spirit Never to be Forgotten
By SE

(NOTE: As the nation grapples with who deserves to be memorialized through statues and monuments, I would choose to build a wall with all the names and pictures of the African American people who have been unjustly murdered by the police, government, and anyone else who has killed in the name of white supremacy. Any name can be added, expanding over the 401 years this has happened in this country.)

They try to make you think, you have died in silence
But your blood cries out to the Most High God
A body taken, never to grow old, but
A soul awakened, never to grow cold
Who are they to tell you your place is beneath them
Because your skin and philosophies can compete
with theirs
Is it really the statues you worry about?
Is it really the history you're trying to preserve?
You'd be lying if you answered yes
For we all know, once those statues start coming down
You will be so afraid too many of us will rise up
So quick to change the outcome of the war
The war your forefather fought
Praising an army who conspired in his very home
In his very bedroom, stealing his life and presidency
See, unlike you, we honor those who fall
in righteousness
Unlike you, we celebrate the freedom the
Union brought
So you can keep killing the body
Because one day, God is going to show you
It is YOUR spirit that will soon be FORGOTTEN

A man in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, stops to take a photo of a painting of Antwon Rose stops to take a photo Tuesday, June 9, 2020, of a painting of Antwon Rose, a 17-year-old African American who was fatally shot in East Pittsburgh on June 19, 2018 by an East Pittsburgh Police officer. The portraits, also include Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, and in addition to a 300 ft x 12 ft Black Lives Matter mural painted by some two dozen Pittsburgh artists and passers-by over the weekend along the Three Rivers Heritage trail along the Allegheny River in downtown Pittsburgh. (Photo credit: AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar)



THE WRITE WAY: AFROFUTURISM

The column where writers share writing tips and prompts to inspire your creativity

By Julia

Hey, Free Minds readers and writers! Way back in 2015, I wrote a piece in the *Connect* about a concept called **Afrofuturism**, and I wanted to bring it back for this issue. How many of you like to read or write science fiction? I have been a big fan of sci-fi since I was a kid, and a few years back I was introduced to this particular subgenre of sci-fi.

Afrofuturism is a style of writing that explores issues relating to the African American experience through science fiction, often using visions of the future or technology. Hopefully you all had a chance to read *Kindred* by Octavia Butler, in which Dana, a contemporary African American woman, travels back in time and meets the white man who owned her ancestors. Octavia Butler was and is a big influence in science fiction and Afrofuturism; in fact, some people call her the godmother of Afrofuturism! (Fun fact: this last summer, 14 years after Butler's death, her novel *Parable of the Sower* was on the *New York Times* bestseller list.)

One example of Afrofuturism is music by the singer Janelle Monae, who created several albums telling the story of an android (robot) named Cindi Mayweather. The Cindi Mayweather story is set in a future society where androids are treated like second-class citizens, and the Cindi character is fighting to free her people. Another example of Afrofuturism is the Marvel comic book series (and movie) *Black Panther*, about T'Challa, a superhero from the fictional African nation Wakanda, which is the most technologically advanced country in the world. In the *Black Panther* comics, the writers imagine what could have happened if African countries like the fictional Wakanda were never colonized by Europe – and Wakanda became a very powerful and wealthy country.

A podcast (radio show) that I listen to called *This American Life* did a great episode in 2017 all about Afrofuturism, produced by correspondent Neil Drumming. Here's Drumming on what Afrofuturism means to him:

"It's like this way of talking about Black people in a way that's really hopeful. It's this idea that we would be engaged in the same kinds of things that, you know, science fiction writers have always talked about – that we would be engaged with technology, that we would have a future in space, that we would master time travel, that we would have a future in Utopian or Dystopian landscapes...

"One of the things that's sort of really specific about Afrofuturism that I like is that it takes into account the past in a lot of ways. It imagines that, you know, Black people have forms of survival through, you know, the slave trade, through persecution, that that's almost a technology in itself, the ways in which we've come through those things... And that **everything that's been a part of our culture has made it possible for us to pave the way for the future. That's the thing that I like about it, I think – the feeling like, despite whatever trials or travails you've come through, that you will exist in the future. That just kind of makes me – it makes me kind of, like, love being Black.** It makes me feel what I love about being Black-like, oh yeah, you know, we can get through this."

Are there things that you've read that make you feel this joy and hope and possibility that Neil Drumming feels when he reads Afrofuturist literature? Today, I want to focus on that: possibility. In writing and art, anything is possible. We can be heroes, or androids; we can travel through space or time. We can go to other worlds. We can create the future or change the past. There are no limits to our imagination, so please, imagine away.



Top: Janelle Monae as the android Cindi Mayweather
Bottom: The late Chadwick Boseman as King T'Challa in the film *Black Panther*

WRITING PROMPT

Create your own Afrofuturist vision, maybe 100 or 1,000 or more years into the future. What does the world look like in this vision? Who can you be in this Afrofuturist world? Use your imagination!

REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

Hello Family,

I greet you in peace and power! I love this month's theme because it's nothing but the truth: Black Lives Matter. It has been so surreal and incredible to literally watch the world acknowledge that. I have never in my ____ years of life witnessed the diverse love and solidarity that has transpired over the last five months in our country. I am still taking it all in! The only way to fully express how I feel is in true Free Minds fashion:

*They say all lives matter and I believe that is so
But all of a sudden the world seems to know
That those that have been last have been pushed to first
And this brand-new acknowledgment has soothed some of the hurt
A voice has been given and like a bird cries have flown
And a proverbial trumpet has been blown
To announce the worth, the beauty the rebirth
Of a people whose origins were the first in the Earth
The ancestors feel this shift as well
So long they have waited*

*Their souls they have compelled
To patiently endure until this present age
When all would see and amends be made
For their lives and our lives and the lives to come
Because most definitely our lives are one
The time is here, the time is now
To proclaim that true and sweet sound
That Black lives do matter and matter indeed
And of a truth
The world had now taken heed*

Thanks for allowing me to grace you guys with this piece; I hope you enjoyed it! Now for some helpful resources!

Baltimore-DC Building Trades runs a construction apprenticeship program focused on getting its graduates into the construction union upon completion of the program. Here's a brief description taken from their website:

"In short, our unions, and our industry, are now looking for workers to enter apprenticeships. And we are placing a strong emphasis upon building bridges for minorities, women, and military veterans to gain access to these opportunities that will place them on a trajectory towards a stable, secure middle-class life."

In order to be considered for Baltimore-DC Building Trades one must:

- Be able to pass a drug test
- Be physically able to perform the work
- Have at least an 8th grade math and reading score on the CASA test

Baltimore-DC Building Trades is located at 815 16th Street NW, Washington DC 20006. They can be reached at 301-899-8134.

Until we *Connect* again,
Ms. Keela



SPOTLIGHT ON PUBLISHED AUTHOR

Many of our Free Minds members have published books and we'd like to celebrate their accomplishments! If you have published a book, please send us the title and a short description that we can print in an upcoming issue of the Connect. All books must be available in paperback on Amazon.com. Free Minds will not list books that include explicit sexual material, gratuitous violence, or discrimination against any group of people based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, or disability.

***Dear Mama: The Life and Struggles of A Single Mother* by Bobby Bostic**

Enter the life of Diane "Dee-Dee" Brown, a woman who tried to overcome all the struggles, heartache, and pain of being a single mother. Read about the life of a girl who turned into a woman before she ever even saw the "real world." Here for the first time, Diane's personal story is told by her dear son, vividly detailing her life and day-to-day existence. Dear Mama chronicles the life of Diane, her family, and all others whom she loved and cared for. Dear Mama is a must-read book for every mother and child, because everyone can relate to this story.



POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

A Protest is Coming! ***Screaming Black Lives Matter!***

By HC

A protest is coming like a New York subway train
All races, ages on board united as one
from all around the world
Screaming, "I can't breathe! No justice, no peace!"
"No more Black bodies murdered by the hands of the police!"

A protest is coming speaking truth to power
A protest is coming screaming Black Lives Matter!

A Protest is coming led by you
A protest is coming led by the youth
A protest is coming haven't you heard?
A protest is coming so spread the word!

The world saw him handcuffed and dying
In the street begging for his life
"Please I can't breathe... Don't kill me... I can't breathe ... Mama"
These are the last words George Floyd uttered as he suffered
Before he died with a police officer's knee on his neck
Sending thousands into the streets in protest!

A protest is coming speaking truth to power
A protest is coming screaming Black Lives Matter!

A protest is coming led by you
A protest is coming led by the youth
A protest is coming haven't you heard?
A protest is coming so spread the word!

This is the movement we have been waiting for, led by you
The youth fearless and not afraid to speak the truth
No shackles or ties to political agendas you can't be brought
because you stand on the shoulder of those who fought
The black power movement gave birth to Black Lives Matter
Your minds are free because you know your history
You are not enslaved by fear or lack of knowledge
Your voices can be heard in the streets as well as in college!

A protest is coming speaking truth to power
A protest is coming screaming Black Lives Matter!

This pain is too deep, too real for the world
Not to feel Black mothers crying... screaming
They are tired of seeing their Black babies dying
Silence is no longer an option

The electricity is in the air
expressing fear, outrage, anger and despair
creating the climate for change

So, we are not going to let the news media try to change the subject
Talking about the looting... no!
This protest is going to keep the focus
On the police's murderous shootings!

A protest is coming like the New York subway train
All races, ages on board united as one
from all around the world
Screaming, "I can't breathe! No justice, no peace!"
"No more Black bodies murdered by the hands of the police!"
A protest is coming speaking truth to power

A protest is coming screaming Black Lives Matter!

This nation is torn apart,
The police shooting must stop!
So, stand with us.
So you can feel what is in our hearts
March with us.
So you can hear with your ears what we have been going
through for years
And see with your eyes the injustice against us.
This nation is torn apart,
But together we can mend hearts.

A protest is coming speaking truth to power
A protest is coming screaming Black Lives Matter!

A protest is coming haven't you heard?
A protest is coming so spread the word!

God is raining down tears from the universe,
So, you can feel this pain and taste the hurt
From the Black blood soaked into this earth
Giving birth to this movement has awakened our minds,
Screaming now is the time to come together
And breathe as one...
Like the breath of life that God breathed in us all as one!

So, it is a blessing to see other races
Finally get onboard this train towards change
However, this ride wasn't free
It started way back with Harriet Tubman and the
Underground Railroad
Fighting to be free
giving voice to you and me.
But George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery
and many others
Paid the automatic price for you and me
So may they finally breathe in peace
As they look down from heaven.
And see their death wasn't in vain
And know that they were the fuel to the engine of this
subway train towards change!

A protest is coming haven't you heard,
A protest is coming so spread the word!
BLACK LIVES MATTER



POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

#BlackLivesMatter
By MP

They masquerade their images, just to get accepted in
the government world
Then soon, when they think eyes are not looking, they
show their racism on colored boys and girls
They couldn't care less about Blacks' feelings, our tears
bring joy to their eyes
They'll just get a slap on the wrist, if that, because the
judges, chiefs of police, and prosecutors are all on the
same side
They shoot us, they just defending
We shoot them, they label us a menace
We are all equal, color or race don't make a difference
They get caught inside the gates of the White House,
roaming without permission
They get probation and say he was probably just visiting
But a Black woman with a baby in the car, fighting
mental illness?
She gets multiple shots and killed for driving a little
reckless behind the wheel
You all can take off the uniforms, the badges, and
the masquerades
Because your skin color alone will protect you from
your rightful fate.
The lord knows all, so you can stop trying to hide it,
Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, and Mike Brown in my soul
I'm my brothers' keeper, and **BLACK LIVES MATTER!!!**

Untitled
By MS

They're still killing princes and princesses, kings,
and queens y'all
Is this the 1960s?
It's open season on melanin-ed (brown-skinned)
peoples... y'all
8 shot... 8 closer to 9 minutes, we all saw
a brother (again) professing to the world
that he can't breathe!
Tell me what this means... y'all
Hauntingly history seems to be
repeating itself,
So does this mean that we are
stuck in a chattel nightmare,
or have we finally awakened from
the theory of Martin Luther King's dream?
Y'all
Authority corrupted them boys in blue
Channeling their inner lynch mob,
Your life doesn't matter to them,
So you could be targeted: father, mother,
Sister, brother...
The person of color next door could
Be next... y'all
Change akin to growing pains
Group consciousness
residential memories at the end of
compliance enforced at the end of slave masters
Nooses and bullwhips,
Chattel commerce
Transported in the bowels of coffin
ships, y'all
Who and what are you going to be?
Flames and destruction can go but so
far,
What of our ancestors? Contemporaries
have died for you
Became carrion for you,
Dreamt for you,
They may choose to dehumanize us
and do what nightmare creatures do,
But you are greater than the sum of your
parts
Who are you?
the hope of countless generations,
...y'all



MEDITATION: BLACK LIVES MATTER MEDITATION FOR HEALING AND TRAUMA

by Kelli

The killing of unarmed Black citizens at the hands of police causes trauma not just to the victims themselves, but to all people of color. It's easy to forget about the importance of self-care during these times of crisis.

Psychologist and University of Kentucky professor Candice Nicole recognized this back in 2016, after the killings by police of Philando Castille and Alton Sterling, when she launched the Black Lives Matter Meditations for Healing and Trauma. The project isn't formally affiliated with the BLM movement, but sadly, the meditations are more needed now than ever. According to Dr. Nicole, guided meditation is one powerful way to calm ourselves during a heightened state of distress, affirming our value and humanity.

Dr. Nicole has created audio recordings of the meditations and made them available to the public for free on the internet. The text of one of these meditations is below. As always, if you have a partner that can read the script aloud to you, that will allow you to close your eyes and follow along. But if that's not possible, just read through the script a couple of times and then close your eyes and meditate on the parts that you can remember.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

You can choose to meditate while sitting or lying down. We'll begin by getting into a comfortable position and relaxing your body. Please, close your eyes. Notice what is going on in your body. Notice your breath. The way your abdomen rises and falls as you inhale and exhale. Rather than trying to change your breath, simply notice it for a moment. Now focus on your mind. Allow your thoughts to flow through your mind. Notice your thoughts as if they were clouds passing by. Rather than trying to focus on a thought, let it come... and go.

Right now, your humanity is not in question. Right now, you matter. Right now, you do not have to justify anything to anyone. Right now,

you... can... breathe. Right now, you can be imperfect. Right now, you are not being judged. Right now, you do not represent your entire race. Right now, you can feel any emotion that comes to you. Right now, you belong. Right now, you... are... loved. Right now, you are safe. Right now, you can be yourself. Right now, Black Lives Matter.

Notice the middle of your chest. The area surrounding your heart. Allow love to fill your heart. Think of someone or something you love. And continue filling your heart. As your heart fills with love, notice the warmth in your body.

Repeat silently to yourself: May I be happy. May Black people be happy. May we be happy. Black Lives Matter.

May I be well. May Black people be well. May we be well. Black Lives Matter!

May I have peace. May Black people have peace. May we have peace. Black Lives Matter!

May I feel safe. May Black people feel safe. May we feel safe. Black Lives Matter!

May I be loved. May Black people be loved. May we be loved. Black Lives Matter!

As you continue to meditate. Open yourself to healing and loving energy... Feel the warmth in and around you. Receive the repair and restoration you desire and deserve. Feel your heart, mind, body, and soul receiving healing.

Black Lives Matter!

Black Lives Matter!

Black Lives Matter!



DC PHOTOS *By Shannon*



The new Black Lives Matter Plaza in downtown DC (this is on 16th Street, where it meets Lafayette Square, the park directly in front of the White House). Activists added the words "DEFUND THE POLICE" to the street, but city officials painted over this addition.



Artwork and protest signs near Black Lives Matter Plaza

continued on page 33

Have a request for the next issue's DC Photos?
Write us at 1816 12th St NW, Washington, DC 20009 and let us know what you'd like to see!

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

We Are All Kin By QS

You are our sons and daughters
Whether we birth you into this world or not

That's what the elders would say to the babies
While telling ancient stories around the village cooking pot

Our ancestors, when I close my eyes, I see and talk
with them
Praying when I reach the promised land I'm worthy to
walk with them

Never forget where you come from
The blood that runs through your veins

Beware, the white man will try to make you believe we
are different
When genetically we are all the same

You must know the truth to free yourselves
Don't be fooled by the pale man's old divide and conquer game

Go research your history books
Uncover the lies they've been telling you
And when you find out the truth for yourself
You'll realize the jewels I've dropped on you are true

Use your mind!
Stand up and be counted, Black man
No one will do it for you
Only the man looking back at you in the mirror can

They hear the war cries (fear of the Black Planet)
The white man's greatest nightmare has come

All the beautiful shades of Blackness once separated by lies
Now united by truth, marching as one

I said it before and I'll say it again
Once we take the mental blindfold off our third eye
That's the moment we will realize
We are all kin



A Message To The Community: A Letter From Prison by RW

I offer my condolences to the families who have lost loved ones
And become victims of the violence

I offer my apologies for having been derelict in my duty
and responsibility as a man
In not being the guardian, educator, and leader my
communities needed
In order to be vital and life-affirming

I want to inform you that it is my goal to counteract
the insanity of the destructive mindset
And I do not embrace those who prey upon any people
But particularly, my people

I want my voice to be heard:
Let the violence, drug dealing, physical, and spiritual
abuse of the communities stop

As a man, I want it to be known that I have come
to value and recognize
That the children need and deserve a safe and secure
environment in which to grow and develop,
Be educated, have access to equal opportunities to excel,
And become who the Creator intended them to be

I ask that everyone reading or hearing this looks at a child
Whether at home, school, at play, in church, or mosque, and
consider these words:

I am the African child

The whole world awaits my coming, all the earth watches
with interest
To see what I shall become
Civilization hangs in the balance; for what I am,
the world of tomorrow will be

I am the African child

You have brought me into this, about which I
know nothing
You hold in your hand my destiny
You determine whether I shall succeed or fail
Give me, I beg you, a world where I can walk tall
and proud
Train me, as is your duty unto me
To love myself, and my people
And to build and maintain a great nation
It is I who proclaim

I am the African child

The whole world awaits my coming, I shall not delay it
For I too have a dream

3. Ona feared that by seeking freedom, she would be mis-labeled and perceived as a "criminal" (page 112). How is the word "criminal" used to mis-label people today?
4. What are some **characteristics** (a distinguishing feature that describes a person, place, or thing) about George Washington that we are often told? How does this book challenge those?
5. On page 137, Dunbar emphasizes that "small tokens of kindness" towards enslaved people did not matter. In any situation an enslaved person preferred freedom. Why do you think it was so difficult for Washington to understand that even if Ona was "treated well," she still wished for freedom?

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: PURPOSE (VOLUME 9, ISSUE 5)

Hey, family! The theme of next issue's *Connect* is Purpose. Not "purpose" in the sense of what is the purpose *of* something, but what is *your* purpose in life? Everyone has a unique purpose; for instance, a doctor might find their purpose to be healing others, and a teacher's purpose might be to help others learn. This series of writing prompts will be led by five guiding questions to help you find *your* purpose. Who knows, you might find more than one!

Here's a preview of Volume 10, Issue 1: We want to make sure people have time to write in with their submissions, so here's a heads up for the next-next issue. We'll be starting 2021 with the theme *Renewal*.

(1)

SELF DISCOVERY

WHAT QUESTIONS DO I NEED ANSWERED?

What questions in life do you need answers to? An example question is, "What is most important to me?" or "How can I help my loved ones feel better?" For this writing prompt, write a series of questions you need answered in life, and write them along the path to self-discovery pictured here. Begin with a question you want answered the most, and end with a question you want answered the least. Try making each question rhyme!



(2)

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I LOST MYSELF IN _____. WHAT DO I FIND MYSELF IN NOW?

As children, we'd often lose ourselves in our favorite Scooby-Doo episode, a comic book, or a game of freeze tag. As adults, the same activities we enjoyed as kids may no longer apply. Under the outline of the young boy, write a poem from your point of view as a child about things you lost yourself in. Then under the outline of the young man, write a poem from your current point of view about things you *find* yourself in: activities, people, hobbies that leave you feeling fulfilled.



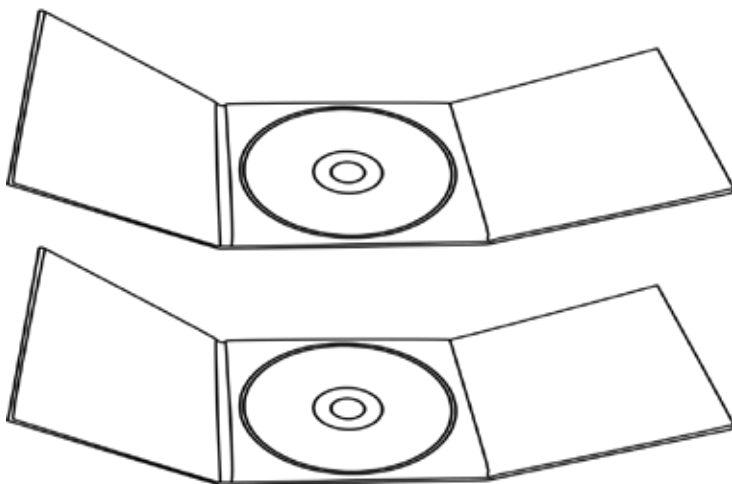


(3)

WHAT UNIQUE QUALITIES DO I HAVE?

Create an album for your life where the title of each song is a unique quality you have, and the lyrics are a description of that quality. What's your favorite song off your album?

What is the name of your album? What is the purpose of having these specific qualities? Lastly, how can your unique talents help serve humanity? Write your songs on the cover of the CDs!



(4)

WHAT FULFILLS ME?

As mentioned earlier, some doctors are internally fulfilled or satisfied from helping others, and teachers from teaching others. Finding what *fulfills* you can help lead you to your purpose. Scenario: Imagine a refillable bowl such as the one below. No matter how much water you put in it, it never empties. What is one thing in life that genuinely fulfills you, that you can never have enough of? Write a story about that thing. Imagine it filling this bowl, which is you.



(5)

WHAT IS MY PURPOSE?

Hopefully these guiding questions have helped bring you closer to discovering your purpose. If not, not worries—you will get there! Life may lead us down paths we don't want to take, but every path has its unique purpose. For this last writing prompt, write your name vertically and for each letter, begin with a word that matches your purpose and matches you as an individual. Using Free Minds as an example:

FREEDOM

READING

EVOLVING

EAGERNESS

MINDS

INSPIRATION

NUMINOUS

DETERMINATION

SOLIDARITY

NOW, TRY WITH YOUR OWN NAME!

MEMBERS CONNECT: BLACK LIVES MATTER

Cause and Effect
By BH

The greatest fear of racist America is the unity of all the races: people standing together against their hate.

Good white, Black, brown, and Asian people united together for justice and equality for all Americans is the only way this country can truly begin to heal – to crack the racist bedrock on which this great nation was founded.

President Trump speaks of law and order in response to people who are protesting, rioting, and looting in the streets. These people are expressing their pain in response to the continued inequalities and unlawful murders of human beings like George Floyd and others, along with the simplistic racism that has lived in this country since the white Founding Fathers founded this nation; President George Washington owned 123 slaves.

Along with the mistreatment of America's own citizens of all skin complexions, even white people, at the hands of corrupt law enforcement officers and elected officials who only talk about change, these same people walk away worth millions at the end of their terms – off the backs of tax-paying Americans, while the rest of us remain poor.

The real power within this country is not the president; it is we the people. So when we the people demand change, the president and our elected officials should listen to the voices of the people and create change. America is not a dictatorship – at least not yet.

So, Mr. Donald J Trump, here's some advice, since you enjoy talking about law and order!

Let's start by creating legislation holding every American, including members of law enforcement, Congress, and other



civil service officials, to the same standards and laws that govern the rest of us. If all the officers who murdered Mr. George Floyd and others across this country would have been immediately arrested, maybe you wouldn't have this uprising on your hands. All it takes is probable cause in order to make an arrest, and it wasn't used to enforce the laws against first-degree murder in the case of Mr. Floyd.

People have a right to be outraged, and neither you as president nor any other law enforcement personnel or agency can tell citizens to abide by the laws of this country when the criminal justice system is not enforcing laws equally.

Do I agree with the looting of our great nation and communities? No. But I understand peoples' pain. No amount of property is worth more than one single American life.

And I also understand the word of God, Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3, verse 1 – 8. But really, Mr. President, you should read the entire chapter.

A Black Lives Matter Lesson Plan By MB

If I were a teacher and had to teach a class of high schoolers about the Black Lives Matter movement...

First, I would begin my lesson by explaining the hard true American history of how the US was created, and the terrible things that white men did to attain this land and their wealth. I would have to explain those things in order for this generation to understand why "some" white people feel entitled or some sense of superiority over other races. Being as though white parents don't talk to their children about the way Blacks have been wronged or about white privilege, I feel that addressing the past is important. So, because of racial divide and the obvious gap in upbringing, I would pair the students first by race until I can't. Then I would pair the rest by gender, boys together and girls together.

I would have the students share their everyday life and surroundings with one another. I would do this so they could learn the differences or similarities in the way they are raised, where they live or the hardships they may have. This will give students who aren't Black a better understanding of why people are protesting, marching, and demanding change in a country that they may not see as bad at all.

I would make each student write an essay about their partner and explain the most surprising thing they learned.

Lastly, I would make the class tell me everything that makes a human being human. The purpose would be to show them that God created us all the same. I would tell them all to close their eyes and talk to their partner, just to prove that if we didn't have eye sight as one of our senses we would see everyone the same, and that's how we should live our lives.

The Black Panthers, also known as the Black Panther Party, was a political organization founded in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale to challenge police brutality against the African American community.



MEMBERS CONNECT: BLACK LIVES MATTER

Untitled
By KB

Any progressive discussion about the future of racial equality must speak to Black poverty and Black identity. There can be no progressive politics without the help of our local enraged, grassroots activists who are on the front lines.

It's not solely on white America to help save America and bring about racial equality. Black America must do more. We must do our part as well. What I mean by this is that I am not hearing the Black Lives Matter movement talk publicly enough about the part Black leaders and Black people played in all of this, in a way that examines the dynamics of our victimization (slavery + Jim Crow), but doesn't make Black people look or see ourselves as simply victims. A lot of the laws that were passed on the local and state level that help contribute to police brutality, criminal injustice, and mass incarceration of Blacks were voted for and legislated by a majority Black establishment in many major American cities.

A book I read called *Locking Up Our Own* (thanks to Free Minds) by James Forman, Jr. best captures this. In his book, Foreman describes how the first substantial cohort of Black mayors, judges, and police chiefs took office amid a surge in crime and drug addiction, and thus embraced tough-on-crime measures that had unforeseen, but devastating, consequences for Black America.

So, if we as a nation are going to save ourselves, then Black people must step it up as individuals and as a unit. We must stop with racial reasoning and speak out against Black elected officials who are unqualified for certain positions. An example of this is when the first Bush administration nominated Clarence Thomas to be a Supreme Court Justice, saying he was the best qualified judge for the position. This was a lie. History shows Mr. Thomas's previous professional career as one of mediocrity. Black leaders didn't have the courage to publicly speak on Mr. Thomas's mediocrity, even though Bush's selection of Thomas was an act of cynical tokenism concealed by lies about Thomas being the most qualified candidate. Black leaders' silence on this showed how Black leaders were (and most still are) held captive to white racist stereotypes about Black intellectual talent. I saw this same racial reasoning with Obama, whose administration authorized numerous attacks on innocent women and children in the Middle East. We don't talk about this the same

way we do when other presidents do it. Because it was Obama.

Our Black leaders, those who want to help save America, must go into the closet and – if necessary, and it seems necessary – hash out whatever differences they have, the ones they've been carrying since the days of the civil rights and Black liberation movements.

From there, as a unit, we must come up with a new program. One that will help determine whether a multi-racial democracy can be created and sustained in today's new reality.

I hear that there was a moment during the sixties when we decided as a nation to overcome the racial divide and declare war on poverty. Legal barriers to Black civil and voting rights were erased and half of America's poor people were lifted out of poverty. The number of poor old people was cut by more than half. We as a nation confronted racial hierarchy and the maldistribution of wealth and power.

Somehow though, following the assassination of Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Dr. King, the nation has gone away from this course. I wonder if this moment during the sixties is what President Trump means by "let's make America great again!" Some Americans—Blacks and whites, Asians and Latinos – respond to this by asking, "Well, when was America ever great?" But if history serves us, then we see a piece of that greatness during moments of the sixties.

It seems that the crisis in Black leadership has created a political cynicism among Americans, especially young Black men, which encourages the idea that we cannot make a difference in changing our society. It is my view that what we are witnessing today with groups like Black Lives Matter, which have sprung up very quickly from the grassroots level to a national and international level, stamp out the political cynicism among Americans.

Together we must realize the fire of our enraged local, grassroots activists, who have for decades made a difference by forming principled coalitions that bring power and pressure to bear on specific issues. We need to get back to that, and it is my belief that the Black Lives Matter movement is the bridge, and/or vehicle, to get us there. But I must say that I do not think at the moment that the Black Lives Matter movement is the solution, or that it alone will bring about the solution to our problems.

Right now, I'm hearing about two bills on police reform. One by Senator Tim Scott, and another bill, the BREATHE Act, that was supported by the Movement for Black Lives and Democratic Representatives Ayanna Pressley and Rashida Tlaib, but has not gained much traction in the House of Representatives. What's confusing is that Senator Scott appears to be struggling to be heard on his bill, yet the Movement for Black Lives organizers are focusing on trying to be heard on another bill. Perhaps it's a political strategy to show our organizational strength and abilities. Or maybe not. Maybe we're just wasting energy and resources trying to be heard on a bill that Congress won't seriously entertain. Maybe we should be trying to draw more public attention to Congress dragging its feet on Senator Scott's Bill, and/or consider consolidating the two bills.

Like I said: there are no quick and easy answers to the question of how to save America. But it is everyone's responsibility to attempt to answer such questions and create discussions until we find some solutions.



Black Lives Matter Founders

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Hidden Within the 13th

By KW

One word killed the Eric Garners and George Floyds of America.
One word deprived them of life and happiness.
One word hinders African Americans from the sweet joy of liberty.
One word denies us our equality.
One word allows injustices to go unchecked.
One word permits the violation of our rights.
One word created mass incarceration.
One word killed the Sandra Blands and Breonna Taylors of America.
One word will keep Black lives inferior.
One word.
The word... "except."

Amendment XIII Slavery Abolished

[Proposed by Congress Jan. 31, 1865; ratified Dec. 6, 1865]
Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, **except**
as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have
been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or
any place subject to their jurisdiction.

"I will never forget what a great shock this was to me...
here for the first time I was made aware of the existence of a
race problem."

– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
1929-1968

Lady Liberty

By MV

Lady Liberty must be asleep
Or maybe she turned her back
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Or maybe she doesn't care
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Or maybe she's in on it too
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Because there's millions of people in a cage
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Because innocents are dying every day
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Because those guilty remain free
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Or maybe she's racist too
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Or maybe she just can't see
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Or maybe she's just a disguise
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Because we're still waiting for justice
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Because we're focused on the wrong things
Lady Liberty must be asleep
Because no one follows her values
Lady Liberty must be asleep

Trayvon, Tamir, Michael, Eric, Breonna, etc.
The list is long, now Ahmaud and George

May you rest in peace
With Lady Liberty

Quintessence of African American

By PJ

My country...
'Tis of thee.
Bittersweet land, apparition of liberty.
So long withheld from me...

Of thee I see
Land where my fathers died,
Land where the pilgrims cried.
A pretense of courtesy,
But held disdain deep.
Likewise, today people in positions of authority
And opportunity.

My country...
When will you unchain the shackles: mentally
Historically, and physically
That bind us
Civilly to hypocrisy.



POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

America the Beautiful by AC

America, today is another glorious day
the cloudless skies shine bright up there
helping us feel we'll be alright, for one more night
as the sun keeps storms away.

America, one of your children went to jail today
forced to get by without a job,
living hungry with no food to feed his boys,
giving in to doing the only thing he knows
no matter what it costs.

America, a woman screamed today
claiming a man was threatening her way
though the only evidence she had
was the color of his skin
and the things she planned to say.

America, I am saying this today
because I know you are America the Beautiful
from sea to shining sea,
Land of the Free and Home of the Brave,
where we hold truths to be self-evident
that all men are created equal,
that we are one nation, indivisible,
with liberty and justice for all.

So America please tell me,
what do you have to say?

About this poem: "America" = We The People, and I ask the questions and speak of some issues, although I already know the answer. But I plant it in such a way that it should make us all feel ashamed that these things take place in this beautiful country. These things should not be happening. There should be no man lying on the street anywhere, begging an officer of the law to please let him live, and yet things like these still happen here. I purposely omitted mention of George Floyd, to allow us to focus on "shame" rather than anger or outrage, which automatically come at the mention of George Floyd. If you felt some kind of shame after reading this poem, that's a good thing. It means you are a human being with a good heart. And as long as there are good human beings like you, there is still hope for America.

Dear AmeriKKKa By MF

Now is the time to unify.
Justice for ALL, do or die.
Solidify
as one nation,
march in congregations,
and stand tall.
They claim this is the land of the FREE?
Be FREE with your mind,
equality for ALL!

I speak to you, oh AmeriKKKa
from the soul of a child who once was lost.
Blinded by racism and bias laws,
that was created by those who swore
to protect us ALL.
But AmeriKKKa, I can see now!
The truth was revealed, chains broken,
and minds are FREE now.
So we fight for those who can't.
We fight beside those who can.
Dear AmeriKKKa,
divided we fall and
UNITED we'll stand.

An Untitled Quatrain Poem By TG

My white cousins, my brown nephews,
My Black brothers, I speak to you.
The time has come to take a stand
And make our world a better land.

Our forefathers said they found it to be true,
We're all equal, that's me and you.
Yet in the soil, we find Black bodies,
Immigrant families deported home.

Upon our NECKS the U.S. was built.
Calls for justice found no guilt.
My brown nephews, we labored cheap.
Share in our DREAM and wake up from sleep.

My white cousins, that may sound strange,
But I can see your hearts have changed.
In unity you stand beside.
For TEARS OF THEE your eyes have cried.

My Black brothers and sisters too,
Our ancestors' past has strengthened you.
Our blood was shed in EVERY street.
We shook the world off of her feet.

Where symbols STOOD in the dark past,
Let FREEDOM RING we're free at last.
Straight or queer, healthy or lame,
We'll walk with you, there is no shame.

Now to those LOVED who brought us here.
We chant your names like a sacred prayer.
Upon this earth you left your mark,
Both on our souls and in our hearts.

Black Lives Matter raise your fist high.
DACA matters let your voice rise.
LGBTQ+ matter we stand in mass.
Our votes matter. The die is cast!

IN THE NEWS By John, FM Friend

DEEP DIVE: ACTIVISTS CALL TO DEFUND THE POLICE

In every issue, we will bring you an in-depth analysis of a particular topic.

On May 25, 2020, Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin pressed his boot into the neck of George Floyd while his fellow officers looked on. Floyd's murder, which these officers now will stand trial for, sparked a national movement and discussion about racism in general and more specifically, the role of law enforcement in America. From this racial reckoning rose a call from some activists to "defund the police" in America, and start to envision a country with far less armed surveillance of its people.

For some, this means the actual abolition of police forces, which in many communities are tasked with solving crimes and patrolling streets, but also with responding when citizens are experiencing mental health crises or are in need of general assistance. The funds and resources currently invested in policing could be redistributed to community-based support systems with the goal of preventing harm and making police forces unnecessary. The prevailing position is that police forces can be downsized, and the government savings from doing so can be used to invest in other services to help communities.

The Movement for Black Lives describes this agenda well in its platform statement:

"We demand investments in the education, health and safety of Black people, instead of investments in the criminalizing, caging, and harming of Black

people. We want investments in Black communities, determined by Black communities, and divestment from exploitative forces including prisons, fossil fuels, police, surveillance and exploitative corporations."

This includes, the Movement for Black Lives continues, "A reallocation of funds... from policing and incarceration... to long-term safety strategies such as education, local restorative justice services, and employment programs."

One of the more compelling arguments for this concept is that data shows the vast majority of calls to 911 do not involve violence, and that surely, some of the responses to these calls could be made by unarmed social workers or other entities that might be better equipped to simply offer help, or defuse a situation rather than heighten tension with the presence of a gun and handcuffs.

There is perhaps no more complex country in the world when it comes to policing than the United States. We are home to about 700,000 officers working for about 18,000 different law enforcement agencies. Some are part of the federal government, and each state operates a police force, but the majority of these agencies serve a single town, city or county.

By comparison, Germany has 18 law enforcement agencies and the United Kingdom has 43. China has an estimated 2 million police officers, but most of them work for the same unified force.

This makes any effort to create a sea of change in the way law enforcement works extremely difficult; it is an entirely decentralized network of forces.

But legislators and mayors in several major American cities have acted to shift money and responsibilities outside of the police department since the wave of protests began this summer. Los Angeles, which was planning to increase the police budget by \$120 million, instead cut it by about \$150 million. Austin, Texas also cut its police budget by \$150 million, moving half of that money to alternative forms of public safety and to community health services.



IN THE NEWS (CONTINUED)

By John, FM Friend

WORLD

The entire globe continues to be impacted by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, with many cold-weather countries beginning to experience a significant second wave of cases as flu season begins and people are relegated to the indoors, where it is much more likely to catch the dangerous illness from a contagious person.

As we wrote this in early November, America has posted its highest daily cases for three straight weeks. And while the medical field has dramatically improved our ability to treat those who are hospitalized with COVID-19, and prevent death, daily deaths are also on the rise here.

There is room for optimism in that several pharmaceutical companies have moved into what's called a Phase Three Trial for possible vaccines that would help to inoculate people to the virus. These trials involve thousands and thousands of volunteers, some of whom receive the vaccine and others who receive a placebo instead. Once one or more vaccines are approved for use, the U.S. and other countries will begin the hard work of manufacturing and safely distributing the vaccine to the population.

NATIONAL

We are writing this news update on the day of the 2020 election, which will decide if America has chosen to give Donald Trump another four years or make him a one-term president in favor of Joe Biden, former vice president to Barack Obama. The polls have shown Biden with a significant lead in most battleground states, and even a few states that are usually solid Republican bases. But as



Cold-weather countries are beginning to experience a significant second wave of coronavirus cases as flu season begins.



Optimism is on the rise as several coronavirus vaccine candidates head to Phase Three Trials.

most everyone is aware, President Trump was widely expected to lose in 2016 and emerged victorious with narrow wins in states like Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.

Whoever wins this election will inherit a nation in a great state of uncertainty. People are afraid for their health and that of their loved ones, especially the elderly, who are highly prone to serious risk from coronavirus. At the same time there is a great desire to get back to normal, to open up restaurants and office buildings and spend holidays with family. Voters will expect the next president to have a plan for combating the virus, keeping people safe, and getting America back to business.

IN THE NEWS (CONTINUED)

By John, FM Friend

SPORTS

2020 will undoubtedly be remembered as the strangest sports year of all time, with most of the games played in front of either sparse crowds or empty stands. Nevertheless, the major sports leagues have figured out ways to keep the welcome distraction of sports going as the country deals with one of its darkest hours.

The National Basketball Association and the National Hockey League played out the ends of their respective seasons in what became known as a "bubble," a self-contained sports planet where players and management lived and competed with very few outsiders permitted to enter. From those playoffs emerged two victors: the Los Angeles Lakers, led by another brilliant season from LeBron James and his new partner in crime, Anthony Davis, and the Stanley Cup champions Tampa Bay Lightning.

The World Series also featured those cities, with the Tampa Bay Rays squaring off against the Los Angeles Dodgers, and the Dodgers emerged victorious. But Tampa may have another shot at a title soon: the Buccaneers, led by quarterback Tom Brady, have emerged as a team to beat in the NFC.



Depending on the state, some sports stadiums have been able to welcome back fans at a very limited capacity.

DC PHOTOS *By Shannon*

continued from page 19



A political banner near Black Lives Matter Plaza



The National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC)



The Martin Luther King, Jr., Monument in downtown DC

Have a request for the next issue's DC Photos?
Write us at 1816 12th St NW, Washington, DC 20009 and let us know what you'd like to see!



DID YOU KNOW?

By Shannon

In this issue's "Did You Know?", I will be discussing the impact and relevance of Black Lives Matter, a social movement fighting to achieve the goal of racial equity.

When and Why Did Black Lives Matter Start?

In 2013, three radical Black organizers, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi created Black Lives Matter (BLM). This Black-centered organization was created in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who stalked, harassed and killed Trayvon Martin, a Black teenager while he was walking in a suburban area in Florida. BLM is an evolving grassroots organization that challenges the system's antiquated policies and laws at all levels of the government. BLM demands social justice by supporting policy reforms like the Movement for Black Lives' BREATHE Act, a proposed bill which honors the lives of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and all Black lives lost at the hands of the police. BLM is a strong advocate for this bill, which seeks to divest money away from policing and invest it instead into community-based programs that support public safety. In addition to fighting to end the violence imposed on Black communities, BLM centers and celebrates Black joy and success. They are also committed to representing the Black lives that are often omitted within the conversation about racial equity, including disabled lives, undocumented lives, women, and queer and trans lives. For example, the DC chapter of Black Lives Matter hosts regular events dedicated to Black joy and liberation, and supports the Black community in DC in many ways, including advocating for a range of community-based support services.



How Large is BLM?

Black Lives Matter believes that in order to win and bring true liberation to the Black community, as many people have to join the movement as possible. Because of this, they have expanded to a member-led global network of more than 40 chapters in countries around the world from Australia, to Denmark, to Canada. Australia formed its chapter after the death of Ms Dhu, a 22-year old Aboriginal (native people of Australia) woman who died in police custody. While the Australia chapter fights for Black lives too, it also focuses on the mistreatment of Aboriginal people by the government. The BLM chapter in Denmark (in northern Europe) was founded by Bwalya Sørensen, an immigrant from Zambia (in the center of southern Africa). Denmark's chapter focuses on fighting for the equity of asylum seekers and refugees. Canada's chapter also fights against the unjust killing of Black people, rallying together to demand justice for the lives of Andrew Loku and Jermaine Carby, two Black men shot and killed by police in Toronto. BLM continues to grow while encouraging local organizers to work with everyday people and to be inclusive and understanding of the need for leadership from those who are disenfranchised. By the people for the people, BLM is composed of millions of participants around the world who all seek to stop systemic biases.

What Historical Movement Has Influenced BLM?

The Black Panther Party was a revolutionary organization founded in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton, who pushed Malcolm X's slogan (adopted from French West Indian philosopher Frantz Fanon), "Freedom by any means necessary" and Stokely Carmichael's popularized rallying cry, "Black Power!" The Black Panther's campaign for African American equality had a lasting impact on Black empowerment and its influence continues in current social movements like BLM. The Black Panther Party was notable for various social programs such as free breakfast and medical



Members of the Black Panther Party

clinics. BLM also continues the legacy of historical men and women like Martin Luther King Jr. who was president of the civil rights organization the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Harriet Tubman, an abolitionist who escaped slavery and freed approximately 70 enslaved people through the Underground Railroad. BLM has also had an impact on other movements, including the recent #EndSARS protests in Nigeria. These ongoing protests demand the disbanding of the country's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) which has been criticized for the extortion of citizens, kidnappings, illegal arrests and killings.

Why "Black Lives"? Why Not Just "All Lives"?

My answer to this is that all lives are not valued the same. History has proven this time and again, beginning with slavery up until today's new Jim Crow era where Black lives are disproportionately and systematically targeted in a manner that shows an inherent bias towards Black lives. This results in unfair treatment in everything from buying a home to incarceration rates. All lives are not subjected to this because all lives do not have to wake up in fear of encountering a police officer and it turning into a death sentence due to your race and their hate. BLM is a movement that's fighting against this kind of bigotry with an inclusiveness that prioritizes Black lives but excludes no one because the value of life and liberty is equal to all.

REAL WORLD OF WORK: PROFILE OF GARY, FM MEMBER

By Kelli

It has long been the position of many in the medical profession that gun violence is a public health issue – one that has become an epidemic – and that just like the COVID pandemic, violence should be treated as a public health crisis. Just as we are spending government money to fund the search for a vaccine to stop COVID, they believe we need to commit sufficient resources towards addressing and stopping the bloodshed, violence, and suffering in our communities.

Our very own Free Minds member Gary is at the forefront of this movement, through his work as a treatment navigator for Medstar Hospital's Community Violence Intervention program in Washington, DC. Recently, Kelli sat down and talked with Gary about his job.



KELLI: Tell me more about the program?

GARY: Well, the purpose of the program is to reduce and prevent new injuries and retaliatory violence by promoting an improved sense of self. Our goal is to help survivors during their recovery by reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors through the keys of engagement, empowerment, support, and advocacy. I'm part of a five-person team: trauma surgeon, Dr. Hall; team lead and social worker, Millie; team social worker Tionna; and James and myself, who are both treatment navigators. Every one of us plays a critical role!

KELLI: And what do you do specifically?

GARY: So first we deal with the immediate needs. If we are in the hospital when a violence victim comes in, we will respond to the code yellow. We check to see if they have family members, assess the situation, and schedule a time to see them the next day. We connect them with everything they may need in the moment, including crime victims' services. These are individuals who have suffered enormous trauma, so our social worker offers one-on-one therapy sessions with patients that request it. But since the goal is longer-term, we give them hands-on case management for a year. That's the only way that we can really help stop the recidivism of violence and injury. Ultimately, we want to offer them something that works, so they won't be just standing outside to get shot or injured again. You have guys who get shot and two months later they get stabbed. It's because they have nowhere else to go, so they go back to their old neighborhoods and the same thing happens again.

Through our intervention, we're seeking to change the whole dynamic, and get a different – and this time *positive* – outcome.

KELLI: Why did you want to do this work?

GARY: I wanted to give back. When I was 17 years old, I was charged and incarcerated as an adult under Title 16. I did 6 ½ years in federal prison and came home in 2013. It feels good to help other young guys, because I am in a position to catch them when they're down at their worst. I find that I can give them encouraging words or that my own experience can be

encouragement, so they'll say, *Damn, I can get out, or I can change. Or there is a different way.*

What I've been through myself is what makes me good at my job. I'll run into guys I knew growing up, and they say things like, "I can't believe you're doing this kind of work!" They tell me they're proud of me and that I inspire them to see that you can actually change, because I did. A lot of people say they're going to change when they're down, and I tell them I'll wait to see it. It's easy to say anything when you're in a messed up situation, and then soon as you're alright, you go right back out there doing the same thing. I always challenge them: don't tell me, show me!

KELLI: What is the hardest part of your job?

Without a doubt, it's seeing some of the young guys die. Hearing the mothers go through that pain, when the doctor comes in the room to tell them that their child didn't make it. It's like this high-pitched cry. All the mothers have it. All of them sound exactly the same. I've been doing this job for three years and I've lost a lot of kids.

KELLI: What has this job taught you?



GARY: It's taught me a lot about vicarious trauma – how you can experience the trauma of someone else, even if you weren't there when something happened. To be honest, helping others cope with anxiety has helped me cope with my own anxiety. Sometimes you don't really adopt habits until you have to teach them to someone else. So the advice I'm giving others, it helps me too.

KELLI: How do you deal with all of that vicarious trauma?

GARY: I deal with a lot of stress and anxiety in this job, so to stay healthy, I keep reading and writing. I talk to people, and I vent when I have to. I also play football. I was playing for Baltimore's arena football team before the pandemic hit. Now we're just practicing, but football is definitely the biggest outlet for me to stay mentally, physically, and emotionally healthy.

KELLI: Which cases stick with you the most?

GARY: There is one young guy that I was able to help get into a GED and housing program. He's only 19 years old and just had his first baby. Being able to talk with him and hear how excited he is about life and how good he's doing, after being shot twice on two different occasions, it's just like, *Wow!* I also have been working with a guy who got shot and no longer can walk, and yet he's so motivated to work and get a job and that just feels good.

KELLI: What do you believe we can and should do as a society to address the epidemic of Black victims of violence (both by police and by others)?

GARY: I really believe we've got to start it at home and within our communities. We need to start policing our own communities. The police are not going to respect us if we don't respect ourselves. If we want to stop the senseless shootings and senseless beefs between the young kids, we've really got to get on top of them and teach them all sorts of different things. Because right now, the young'uns are willing to risk everything. They don't know their self-worth because they don't truly know who they are yet. If you ask most of these young guys, "Who are you?" They don't know. And you have to learn who you are before you can learn self-value.

Now, I know I could be out here seeing things and saying, "Oh, I'll mind my own business." No! There's not no "mind my own business" anymore! We've got to talk to the young'uns and tell them what we've learned. We know from our own experiences. We've got to tell them, "Don't do it, Dawg. It's not worth it! You and your life are too valuable!"

KELLI: What advice would you give our readers who might want to work with youth when they come home?

GARY: I'd tell them to think hard about it and make sure. There's no "straddling the fence" in this type of work. But if you decide this is what you want to do, then go for it, and don't let anyone else lead you off of your path.

The Free Minds Family is so proud of Gary for the amazing contribution he is making to our community!

CONVERSATION WITH JAMEON

Greetings to all my comrades in the struggle. My name is Jameon, and as you may know I'm the new Free Minds Congressman John Lewis Fellow. While I sit here and jot these words on the page in the Free Minds office, I'm honestly lonely compared to how things were before COVID-19. The normal scene in the Free Minds office is very lively, with the staff plus the FM brothers dropping in; it's really never a dull moment. I can't wait to welcome you all home and be a part of your experience once you return back to society.

In this issue, we are talking about the Black Lives Matter movement. When I hear that slogan, *Black Lives Matter*, the first thing that pops into my head is that our Black lives have to matter the most to ourselves. I think that until we are marching for every senseless murder in our neighborhoods (not just those perpetrated by law enforcement); and until our Black lives mean enough that we stop destroying Black families while chasing monetary gain; then essentially we march without substance, and the march dies when the march is over. I think that we have to value ourselves more as Black individuals connected to Black people inside of the Black cause challenging the Black problems. My point is that, until we value ourselves more, we will continue to be underserved and undervalued by other races, and we will remain in dire situations within our own communities.



BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

The Free Minds long-distance book club

Kindred

with Neely



Hello, Free Minds readers – or should I say wise, insightful intellectuals? We received so many of your thought-provoking and enlightening responses to *Kindred* by Octavia Butler! *Kindred* follows Dana, an African American woman from 1970s California, on her involuntary time travel to the Maryland plantation of her white grandfather. Thank you to everyone who wrote in; your responses were powerful! Here is what some of you had to say:

1. Do you think Dana changes over the course of the novel? If so, how and why?

RB: Dana's core principles of integrity, justice, and fairness

did not change, but she did have to adjust her behavior to survive the difficulties of her environment. She realized that she could be of assistance to others if she was patient and willing to endure some suffering.

BK: Absolutely. She began to embrace her unsolicited power and also characterized it as a calling to make sure her lineage, including herself, existed. Albeit, not all of her changes depict bravery. Dana alters her interactions with "white folks," including Rufus, by so-called "falling in line."

JL: Dana begins to become somewhat institutionalized within the slave society in order to survive. She goes from being a struggling author in the 1970's to becoming minutely slave-minded so that she and the slaves around her could be safe. Dana's witnessing slavery firsthand definitely brought about a change in her. She even begins to see the Weylin plantation as a second home.

MH: Yes, she did during her travels. Her normal way of life changed suddenly, both physically and psychologically. A world she had never been to, but knew from history through reading the stories of those who lived it. But reading about or hearing of these stories is completely different than living them. Such tragedies will forever affect and change the lives of those who experience them.

2. Why do you think Octavia Butler decided to make Kevin white? How do you think this impacted his

relationship with Dana and what they experienced together in the novel?

SM: I think it was great that Butler made Kevin white, so Dana could experience interacting with a white man in 1976 as her husband and then interact with the slave owners in the antebellum south. It impacted their relationship multiple ways: Dana's experience on the plantation acting as Kevin's slave, the slave owners looking at Kevin not being hard enough on Dana, and the mental state they were in going back and forth.

AH: I think the author decided to make Kevin white to create a different narrative to the story. She was writing to show how you wouldn't have seen this type of relationship in the times of slavery, but also to engage the readers as to how their relationship will grow or change over time.

BK: I think Butler decided to make Kevin white to provide an example to Rufus that racial equality is feasible and inevitable in the future, and to also compare and contrast Dana and Kevin's relationship with Alice and Rufus. I think Kevin's race impacted his relationship with Dana and what they experienced together in the novel by testing how far he would go to prove his disapproval of racial superiority and slavery.

QS: I believe it was to bring an irony to what was then and what is now in relation to the relationship between the white man (slave master) and the Black woman (slave) dynamic and the sense of dominance as opposed to freely choosing to have a relationship with a white man. The experience forces the two of them to stop and truly look at the history of their respective race's painful past and what their relationship represents.

3. The word “kindred” refers to one’s family and relations. What are some of the ways family relations are explored in this book? Do you think the title of the book is “ironic” (something that is contrary to what we expect); “literal” (something that fits our expectations exactly), or both?

TG: The title I feel does not encapsulate the full essence of the book. However, it created an idea that a relation can be achieved through a shared experience.

DS: I think the title of the book is ironic, because when you think of kindred, most people are thinking about one’s cousin whom they may have things in common and similar interests with. Not the slavemaster who fathered your grandmother.

AH: I do think the title is ironic since beginning this book I didn’t expect the route it would take, until you got to the middle of the story. It did not fit my expectations.

QS: Family relations are explored through the everyday life struggle for the slaves on the Weylin plantation: the mixing of the white man’s blood with the rape of slave women, then the heartless selling of those children. I don’t believe it’s ironic when it comes to what our ancestor’s experienced during slavery.

AC: I noticed the only time the word “kindred” is used is when Dana explains what Kevin is to her. Her Black relatives thought she was too white, her white relatives thought she was too Black, and in her mind the only thing that grounded/anchored her “home” was Kevin. Butler really threw a curveball with that title.

4. On page 252, Dana talks about how she sometimes writes when she can’t sort out her feelings – and then throws away the writing because it was for her, no one else. Do you ever write just for yourself, with the expectation that no one will read what you write? If so, how does that help you process your thoughts?

AC: I have written my feelings on paper before that not a person got to see, but I do confess that my intentions were to express those thoughts and I simply changed my mind at the last second. I believe that the beauty of language is that it was meant to be shared. That’s just my personal opinion of course.

MH: Yes, I actually have been doing that a lot lately when I get angry, so I write some of what I think of certain things to release my anger, even when it’s just broken sentences. I also do it when I feel sad or even when I want to imagine a different world.

DS: Writing is a passion I never knew I possessed until I came to prison. I started off writing to myself. It’s not always good to voice your opinion in this environment. It helps my thought process by enabling me to express myself without worrying about what anyone else thinks. Writing to yourself helps you to better examine situations by putting them in the forefront of your mind.

5. Octavia Butler once said in reference to Dana losing her arm, “I couldn’t really let Dana come all the way back... antebellum [pre-Civil War] slavery didn’t really leave people quite whole.” Do you think if Dana had not lost her arm, she would have ever been able to fully recover? Why or why not?

AH: I think she would have been able to fully recover had she not lost her arm, since she had a lot of other experiences of this time that had never happened to her that she had to overcome and learn from.

RB: There’s no way to “fully recover” from that level of experience. There’s not a single character in the book of any race that wasn’t completely disfigured. The drama today is a result of traumatic stress disorder from the slavery era which was created on previous periods of human suffering that we’ve forgotten. If we could show the mental disfigurement of our minds the world would appear to be a leper colony, limbs missing everywhere you look.

SM: I would say yes because even though she endured harsh conditions, Dana showed she was mentally strong with the help of temporary relief. Being that she was able to escape back to 1976 in her own home, she could have recovered – but what she endured would have been in her subconscious.

JL: Dana probably would not have fully recovered whether she lost an arm or not. When called to the antebellum south of the 1800’s, Dana wasn’t a person on the sidelines merely watching the occurrences of the time. Although considering herself privileged, Dana still was a slave at that time who endured fears, beatings, and whippings, which left her scarred both physically and mentally. Scars have a way of reminding a person how and when the scars got there. So I doubt Dana would have been able to forget her slave experience and fully recover or feel quite whole.

AROUND THE WORLD: ANTI-RACISM MOVEMENTS ACROSS THE GLOBE

By Neely

rallied together to stand in solidarity with George Floyd and the fight for racial equity. In over 60 countries, people from all different cultures and backgrounds took to the streets, donning both their face masks and signs demanding an end to police brutality. Not only were they saying the name of George Floyd, but the names of their own fellow citizens who have fallen to police brutality too. Because if anything, anti-racism is a global movement and people all around the world are mobilizing together to demand an end to racial inequality. Although these protests were sparked by police brutality, protesters are calling for an end to all forms of racial injustice, and many are rallying around the campaign to reallocate resources from policing and incarceration to community-based support systems.

In South America, protesters took to the streets in countries like Argentina and Brazil. Dealing with their own economic and racial inequality, many saw this opportunity to unite in opposition against oppression in the United States and within their own countries. Both Argentina and Brazil have histories of military dictatorships which have resulted in mass disappearances and killings at the hands of oppressive governments. Brazil was the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery and, like the United States during Jim Crow, failed to end segregation and provide Black Brazilians the same access to opportunities as white Brazilians. Black Brazilians are also disproportionately targeted by police. The George Floyd protests coincided with their protests demanding justice for João Pedro Pinto, a 14-year-old Black teenager from Rio de Janeiro who in May was shot and killed in his home during a police raid.



Protesters in Cologne, Germany.

In this issue we are taking you around the world in a different way: through anti-racism movements across the globe. From the coast of Brazil in South America to the shores of Senegal in West Africa to the deserts of Syria in the Middle East, people across every continent have



A protester holds a sign in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, that reads, "#stopkillingus!".



Protesters in Seoul, South Korea.

In Senegal, a West African country, people gathered together to face the Atlantic Ocean, the body of water that separates Africa from North America. Senegal was part of a larger movement of African countries to join the #AfricaForBlackLives movement, a collective to mobilize support for Black lives across the continent. In countries like South Africa, where Black South Africans were legally segregated from white South Africans and subjected to terror and violence until 1994, the demand for equity and justice resonates all too well. The Economic Freedom Fighters, a **pan-African** (the movement to uplift and unite all people of African descent) political party, took to the streets to show their support.



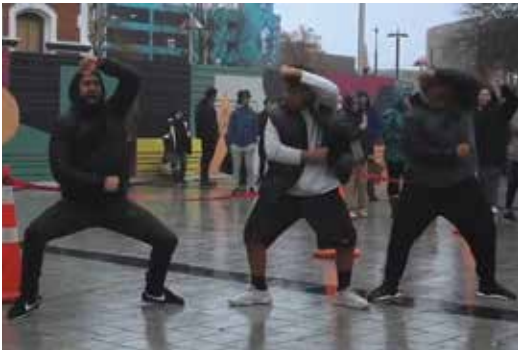
Senegalese protesters in the capital, Dakar, hold up signs. The one in the middle says, in French, "Enough is enough."

Countries of the South Pacific Ocean's Oceania rallied together to protest the legacy of colonialism, racism, and discrimination towards **indigenous** (native) people. For instance, Aboriginals, the indigenous people of Australia, make up just 3% of the population, but represent 30% of the incarcerated population—the highest rate of incarceration by percentage of population in the world. Māoris, the indigenous people of New Zealand who are also disproportionately targeted by police and incarcerated, gathered to perform a haka at protests. The haka is a traditional ceremonial dance used when two parties meet each other, whether before a wedding or war. It is also used to show solidarity and support for each other.



A protester wearing the black, red, and yellow Aboriginal flag in Sydney, Australia.

In Eastern Asia, South Koreans rallied together to support Black Lives Matter and condemn racism. Koreans, along with other Asians, have experienced a sharp increase in race-based violence and hate crimes due to COVID-19. In Syria, amidst a civil war and a government that has left thousands dead and forced thousands more to flee to other countries, artists came together to stand in solidarity with George Floyd.



Māori protesters performing the haka in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Protests were widespread across Europe as well, with countries like France and Germany demanding that police look at their own history of racial profiling and police brutality. In France, the murder of George Floyd fueled prior protests that demanded justice for 24-year-old Adama Traoré. Traoré died in police custody, many believe due to a chokehold in which he also could not breathe. In Germany, protesters have tied anti-Black racism to their role in the Holocaust and its history with Nazism, with many protesters chanting, "Germany is not innocent."



Artists Aziz Asmar and Anis Hamdoun next to their painting in Idlib, Syria.

This does not even begin to touch on the thousands of protests that millions of people participated in around the world. And while it points to large-scale social injustices, it also points to a global movement of unity and hope. Because Black Lives Matter, and there are 6,500 different languages on earth to say that in.

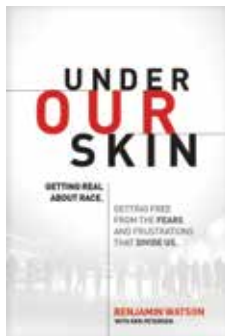
WHAT WE'RE READING

With Neely

Black Lives Matter – and that includes Black authors too. This issue we are highlighting books written by Black authors that celebrate Black success, joy, and grief. Have you recently read a book by a Black author that left an impression on you, good or bad? We want to hear about it! Send us your thoughts (approximately 100 words) and we may feature your book in the next “What We’re Reading.”

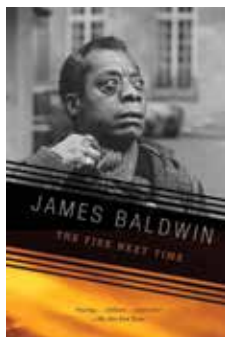
- **VC: *Under Our Skin* by Benjamin Watson**

Under Our Skin illustrates insights into what keeps “us” [races/humanity] angry, frustrated, fearful, and universally divided regarding our views on injustice and justice. I admire how unbiased the author is as he exercises positive attitudes, willingness, caring, open-mindedness, and objectivity, just to name a few. The introspection he used to address the issue was contagious enough for me to challenge my own thoughts, in an endeavor to recognize how I may be enforcing/influencing the segregation within my personal encounters in ways I don’t realize. In a nutshell, *Under Our Skin* is a heart-opener.



- **Emily: *Men We Reaped* by Jesmyn Ward**

I recently finished *Men We Reaped*, a memoir by Jesmyn Ward. Ward that many of you might have also read as it was a book club selection. The book explores what it is like to be a Black man in the south via detailing the lives and deaths of five young Black men that she grew up with. The chapters alternate going backwards and forwards in time; the first chapter describes her parents’ upbringing and the next chapter talks about her friend who most recently passed away. This pattern continues until she eventually works back to her brother’s tragic death in 2000. I found *Men We Reaped* to be insightful, heartbreaking, and an excellent read.



- **Kelli: *Memorial Drive* by Natasha Trethewey**

Natasha Trethewey’s haunting memoir, *Memorial Drive*, is named for the street where the author grew up, and where her former stepfather murdered her mother when Trethewey was just 19. This story is so much more than a tragic homicide though. It looks at the pain inflicted on a biracial girl growing up amidst racism in the American south and how that experience initially shaped her as a woman. And yet, with the transformative power of art and writing, Trethewey is ultimately able to break free of the labels that society tried to place upon her. It’s a really empowering story!

- **Tara: *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin**

I read this a long time ago and re-reading it now, I realize how different a book can be when you are older and have additional life experiences. With the current Black Lives Matter movement, Baldwin is more searing and relevant than ever before. The book consists of two essays: “My Dungeon Shook: Letter to my Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation,” where he talks about America’s brutalization of Black men, and “Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region of My Mind,” which focuses on race and religion, specifically Baldwin’s experiences in the Christian church growing up, meeting Elijah Muhammad, and his ideas about Islam. Published in 1963, it is considered to be one of the most influential books about race relations. In my opinion, Baldwin is one of the all time greatest writers.

- **Julia: *Telephone* by Percival Everett**

I love *Telephone* by Percival Everett. This novel is about a man grappling with the loss of a loved one, and the sometimes strange actions he takes to deal (or not deal) with his grief. I’ve read a few books by this author and I find them all really fascinating and moving; this book was no exception. But you want to know the weirdest thing? Percival Everett actually wrote and published three versions of this book, all under the same title but with just slightly different covers, so every time you order a copy of this book, you don’t know which version you might receive! After reading the copy of the book that I got, I want to track down the two other versions so I can see how they compare!

LEGAL PAD

COMPASSION IS THE KEY: TIPS ON FILING A COMPASSIONATE RELEASE MOTION

By DJ, Free Minds member

Compassion is as essential to existence as the air we breathe or the water we drink. Without its presence in the world, how long could humanity have existed? Picture a world without the inspiration of Gandhi, John Lewis, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, or Oprah Winfrey. That picture is unimaginable to say the least. As for the overall idea of compassion in the world we live in every day, it is only uncloaked by the good deeds we do and the things we say to each other. Since it has the power to bring forth courageous acts, without a doubt it inspires myriad positive behaviors that have individual and societal perks.

This philosophy was brought to the forefront earlier this year: the DC City Council passed an emergency bill in April, authorizing the local DC Courts to consider vulnerable inmates for early release, given the dangers COVID-19 has presented for many who reside in prisons around the nation. It's hard to believe that a government could have compassion. But, since it is a direct creation of the people itself, it's only realistic that it displays some vestige of compassion, in the same way that human hearts would feel for the difficulties of another person.

The District of Columbia COVID-19 Response Supplemental Emergency Act of 2020 is now codified under District of Columbia law as DC Code section 24-403.04. The law allows for inmates who have been in prison for over twenty years to receive good time credits at a rate of 54 days per year starting from when they were arrested on the offense they are serving time for. The sentence must have been imposed by a judge of the DC Superior Court. The law also permits a DC Code offender who has served at least twenty-five years to file a motion asking to be released early if he or she suffers from certain medical conditions that cause them to be vulnerable to COVID-19 related illnesses. You can also file a motion for early release if you are sixty years old or above.

When you file your motion, there is a lot the judge would take into consideration apart from your medical hardships. For example, the judge would also consider your institutional behavior; programs you participated in; and even the nature of your offense. Because of such considerations and the amount of medical records that are examined, it is wise to write the judge first and ask them to appoint an attorney for you to present your case for early compassionate release under the law. This way all the necessary evidence is presented effectively, in order to give you the best chance for release. If the judge denies your request for an attorney to help, you can write to attorneys directly and ask for assistance. If this fails, you can file the motion yourself or get the best person in the law library at your facility to help you.

Remember that society is waking up and second chances are a very important concept right now. People in our communities are realizing that compassion is a necessary requisite for worthwhile living and freedom. Your belief in compassion itself could only surge the energy of compassion that is needed in this world. Who knows, the judge may feel exactly where you are coming from and recycle that same compassionate energy to the circumstances of your case.

Be well, and keep your mind free!!

DJ, Free Minds member

REENTRY PROFILE

continued from page 7

the time we should have seen change on a large scale. But what changed? Nothing. A man in Wisconsin still gets shot in the back seven times by the police. It's ridiculous.

It feels like it's just at a standstill right now. I'm not saying I don't have hope, but it will take a huge fight. I'm talking about boycotting companies, not going to work, things

that a lot of people of color aren't willing to do. But no question I'll keep fighting. I want better for me. I want better for my son. I want better for the people who fought before me. I'm worried that it won't happen in my lifetime, but that doesn't mean I'm going to give up. I'll never give up.

KELLI: What is it that gives you hope, despite the fact that there is still so much racism in this country?

KALEF: What gives me hope is there are a lot of conscious and smart people who are willing to take a stand, willing to do the right thing, and willing to sacrifice. During those first days of the protests, there were people from every background down there all day long, standing arm in arm, in front of the Capitol Police, in front of the FBI, in front of Homeland Security. And everybody was down there for a purpose. And people really believed that what we were doing would make a change. There's a lot of people, hundreds of thousands of us, that will continue to fight at any cost and any risk. That gives me hope.

FREE MINDS BOOK CLUB & WRITING WORKSHOP

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NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: PURPOSE

After the rich conversation we had about the book *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl, FM member RS's idea of *Purpose* for a *Connect* theme seemed perfect. So for the next issue, that's what we'll be talking about – where do you find a sense of purpose or meaning? Your purpose could be supporting your family, starting a career, freeing your mind... there are all sorts of places where a person can find meaning and fulfillment.

But your purpose can also be something as deceptively simple as feeling joy, or helping others to feel joy. It could be as simple as waking up the next day. And your purpose can change from year to year, day to day, moment to moment. What motivates or energizes you now? As Imanee asks in her thought-provoking writing prompts on page 23, what fulfills you? Has that sense of purpose helped you through difficult times? Has it ever changed, as you changed, or has this drive been a constant for you? We can't wait to hear all about it.

Until then, take care and **KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!**



Give us a call when you get out: (202) 758-0829