MR | metropolitan review

A JOURNAL OF STUDENT EXPRESSION | FALL 2015

SUNY EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE

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Editors Note: Special thanks to everyone who has helped to make this year's issue possible: our talented students, supportive faculty and professional staff, the Student Activities Fund, the Office of Communications and Government Relations, Dean Cynthia L. Ward, Brooklyn Unit Administrator Tica Frazer and numerous supporters across the college. Also, thanks to last year's supervising editor of MR, Stephanie JT Russell, for donating her time and talent as a consultant to the editorial team. And a special thanks to Safiya Bandale for her gracious support of the editorial team as they researched their piece on ibn Kenyatta. To all of you, your encouragement, enthusiasm and generosity are what make MR possible.

I reserve the most gratitude of all for the 2015 student editorial team, who have amazed me consistently with their energy, creativity, wit and talent. As students with full-time study and working lives, they, nevertheless, put in long hours of painstaking and conscientious work. On top of that, this year's team collaborated on a deeply moving series of articles, enclosed herein. Thank you, editors, for continuing MR's high standards, and, dare I say it, even raising them yet again? In fact, I should!

A final thanks to you, our readers. We hope that you see something of yourselves reflected in the pages within, and receive some inspiration, too.

Warm regards,

Karyn Pilgrim, Faculty Editor

Associate Editors 2015:
Jon-Marc McDonald
Margaret Mercer
Andy Warren
Tessa Lou Fix

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Opposite: Jeffrey Adelson, *Descending,* n.d. Photograph.

A Million Butterflies (essay)

Virginia Riis

Someone becomes a New Yorker by degree. That would be true even if you found your way here by accident of birth. But many migrate, like thousands of monarch butterflies traveling by blind instinct from Canada to Mexico.

The butterfly that comes from any other version of America is a changeling. He can be whoever he needs to become – here. His instincts may bring him to a place he's never been. Maybe he wants to write books (only where he comes from, people don't write books). Maybe he wants to be an actor (which nobody from his town does, either). Or he could simply be gay, and girded too tightly. Even a life full of reading books, seeing foreign films, and listening to live jazz might be worth the trip.

The others may be content to stay where they are but they can be oddly ignorant about this process. They may instill fear in anyone making the trip. Grandmothers have seen *The Out of Towners* and swear they will never visit. You must be vigilant every second and constantly aware of your surroundings. It sounds like good advice.

Such a thing is not possible, however, because the city fills the senses and leaves you in shock for about 5 years. The skyscrapers are just a little too amazing to be real. Stalagmites that point onward and upward, like crystals, are appropriately spired, like church steeples. They may be pointing to Heaven, but I would lay bets that Heaven lays behind some door on this earthly plane: The Four Seasons, maybe, or the dance floor at the Rainbow Room.

The city seems half unexpected joy, and half sought adventure. Moments are stumbled upon: the sausage and peppers at the San Janeiro Festival, as THE high school marching band of the year, perfectly choreographed and showing off in style, goes by. Your plans for any day will not include high school marching bands, but there they are. Anything good is there to be absorbed. There, perhaps, a saxophonist with more enthusiasm than talent, or a classical music student who hooks her violin up to an amplifier to rock the whole subway station. Some people cover themselves all in gold or silver paint. Still as statues, they move mechanically, like robots, when someone leaves them money. They can be so good at this that a crowd gathers in delight.

There will be thousands of tulips in Central Park that nobody will have told you about. We have swan boats, or at least I call them that because they are in the pond with the swans (I guess a purist might argue). You will find a beloved book, or one you are about to fall in love with, at the Strand. When I moved here it was "6 Miles of Books" on the red sign – now, 18 miles, and surely an exaggeration since the layout has not changed much in the store. It's like a P.T. Barnum ruse to get you inside.

Opposite: Joseph M. Verrastro, *Honeychrome,* 2014. Artwork.

I once stood hiding from the rain outside of Food Emporium at Union Square. Two young lovers gave me a fairly large umbrella and then ran off into the rain without it, laughing. We do not have ONE rabbit hole but a warren of hundreds of holes, packed with an *Alice in Wonderland* fantasies come to life. There are caterpillars on drugs, crazy and stupid hatters and hares, and plenty of people rushing around checking the time. Some of the subway stations are cleverly decorated by the city with artwork. Some have big rats scurrying by and crude mineral deposits on the tilework. Each will take you wherever you want to go if you get on board the train when the doors open and the automated voices and dings beckon you inside. Though some of the stops are above ground, taken as a whole, the subway system is a Tolkien adventure every time you push through the turnstiles. The people on the other trains appear to glow in the dark and you have the sensation of moving backwards. The iron pilings make everything seem like a flip book.

I love maps. When my mother took me to get my shots as a preschooler, the Health Department had brightly colored lines leading in every direction, ushering you into different departments or rooms. I remember "'drinkin' polio". Every time I see a NYC subway map I'm reminded of my mother. Some part of me hopes that if I keep the faith, all my life, that someday when I'm old, the red arrow and circle will say, "Your mother is here." It's been a long time. I don't need much else from Heaven.

The subway will take you to a photography exhibit, a Bergman film, to the Christmas tree, to Bloomingdales. I have heard you can get some kind of liquor at Bloomies. "Relax," their sign might say, "It's not real money; it's just credit cards." You can swim with the polar bears any Sunday all winter long (it's invigorating, life-affirming – really!). Or you can go drifting past Patience and Fortitude, the stone lions at the New York Public Library, where, if you need a book from Outer Mongolia, they can get it for you.

The transformation of the "New Yorker To Be" may begin many years earlier (like the pupae out in a more sedate part of America). A young girl might be sitting in a brown house, among hundreds of other brown houses, with parents who work long hours to pay for it. She notices that the furniture is brown, the wallpaper is brown, the carpeting brown as well. The two creative flourishes are a bad starving artist painting and a big pink vase full of sticks. "Yes, dear, but it all matches," she is told.

My journey began when, in elementary school, I saw *Splash.* I certainly wanted to be a mermaid and to dive off that pier. They moved it, so it's not under the bridge, but I did dive off of it. I assume the police didn't want to come in after me and just let me go. I wanted to swim like Daryl Hannah and I wanted to move to New York. Looking back, I see someone who may not have achieved every goal, but who certainly had some dreams come true.

That image of the brown house will come back over time. Usually the first couple of years of living in New York are lonely. It's an adjustment. If she is not fairly dedicated to an art form, a lifestyle, or some sort of career – or if she has slightly paler wings – she will go home and maybe carve a meaningful life there.

Michelangelo said that David was already inside the marble and that he only had to bring him out. A New Yorker does not become rude or hostile, but there is a peeling away of the false self, maintained in a slower-paced environment. Other traits are brought forth. Quickness and sardonic wit. Long winded explanations to get directions won't do. You don't wait for 20 other people to go ahead of you through the turnstile. You hustle in. You begin to talk faster, walk faster, make demands that are quick so that the river of people flowing down the sidewalk with you aren't distracted in their own rush to get somewhere.

That hardiness brings out kindness too; we like things to be expeditious. I've seen young men pick up double strollers full of 18 month old twins, lift and carry them up two flights of stairs, acting like they are not winded at the top. Nobody asks them to carry the babies. They aren't their children, but it keeps things flowing at the right clip. High school boys will sometimes hold their backpacks strategically at waist level (eye level to you). Laugh if you will, but it's the beginning of good manners. They are living in a city full of women, who are seated at a level that can't help but seem provocative.

After a few years the loneliness becomes blissful privacy. You have changed. It's likely you have become more emotionally self-sufficient. You are not lonely. The Korean grocer has become a friend you see every day. The man living in the plexiglass token booth waves and says, "Have a good night!"

We are really not a part of the United States. This is an international sea port. It's also an inner geography, a beacon to outsiders everywhere. I would believe it if I were told that the Empire State Building emits subliminal wifi messages to writers everywhere. It would say simply, "Come."

Recently I was at the airport, and people were passing me on the ramp going back into La Guardia. I felt like a porpoise struggling in shallow water. It was unpleasant. Then dolphins will kick up on their tails and suddenly they're diving and jumping. I was home. I passed them all on the way to the top.

A Different Self of You awaits (poem)

Stephanie JT Russell

The Ikenga is always made of, and sometimes by you,
its other. You shape not only its outer body but its
inner ways as well. You can feed your Ikenga any food
you choose, at any time of day or year, or decide to
not feed your Ikenga at all. You can paint, scarify,
or leave its surface bare. Everywhere is its altar.
You can hang your Ikenga on a door, a tree, or
a wall, nest it in a secret drawer, bury it in sand, or
fling it into a pampas meadow as far as you can throw.

You can caress your Ikenga, or break it into pieces.
Write it prayers, love letters, or threats. You can make
lustration in praise of its beauty, or scream and curse its
features, its smell, its very existence that you yourself
have brought into being.

You can ignore your Ikenga. An eternity of solitude
troubles it not. Your Ikenga can bear anything, even
that which would bring you to direst ruin.
Which is, naturally, a good piece of the point.

I could make an Ikenga for you, or you could make one
for me. But that would be wholly against the point.

Your Ikenga remains with you always, no matter how
many Ikengas you make, destroy, or abandon. If you
hurl your Ikenga into the river, it will resurface on the
hidden delta where one or more of your ancestors
tills the soil of inexorable rebirth. If you drop your
Ikenga into the deepest part of the ocean, it will beach
onto a shore where another, different self of you awaits.

Smug visitors with self-important books to write
have called Ikenga a warrior cult. But that is like
calling the open slice in a martin's tail
the whole of her power to fly.

Opposite: Omar Richards, *Cubes Hidden,* 2014. Artwork.

Credit: Marielena Gomez, *Untitled,* 2014. Photograph.

The Sneetches: Teaching Peace With Dr. Seuss (essay)

Nancy Babbitt

The Sneetches is a children's story written by Theodor Geisel (1904-1991), who is best known by his pseudonym, Dr. Seuss. It is a story about difference. That is, two sorts of creatures were rather the same, except for having, or not having, green stars on their bellies. In this story, the Star-Belly Sneetches thought themselves the superior sort. For that reason, they excluded the Plain-Belly Sneetches from joining their group. This saddened the Plain-Belly Sneetches, until the day that a Mr. Sylvester McMonkey McBean came along with his Star-On machine. He offered that, for the small cost of three dollars, the Plain-Belly Sneetches could be made to look just like their neighbors. The procedure was an instant success, except that then the original Star-Bellied Sneetches were displeased about losing their higher social status. Just then, Mr. McBean told them that for a mere ten dollars, his Star-Off machine could help them maintain their superior distinction. That is when an off-again, on-again cycle began,

> Until neither the Plain nor the Star-Bellies knew
> Whether this one was that one . . . or that one was this one
> Or which one was what one . . . or what one was who (21).

This behavior continued until the Sneetches' money was gone, and no one could tell who was who. At that moment, Sylvester McBean, who through the Sneetches' shenanigans had become rich, decided to go. As he left, he stopped to remark,

> "They never will learn.
> No. You can't teach a Sneetch!" (22)

But apparently, Sylvester McMonkey McBean did teach the Sneetches, because at that moment, all the Sneetches agreed that they were essentially the same.

Theodor Geisel's books for children feature imaginative characters, creative vocabulary, tongue twisters, word play, and verses that rhyme. They frequently offer life lessons, as well. *The Sneetches,* by the use of less than subtle metaphor, teaches children and the not so young alike an obvious lesson about 'difference'. Yet, this story also teaches about less obvious lessons concerning social exclusion, status and inequalities, as well as lessons about the creation of wealth and poverty. In the end, the story of *The Sneetches* offers its readers the message that difference, however it exists, need not divide.

Dr. Seuss, although well known and well loved today, was not initially well-received. According to "How Dr. Seuss Got His Start on Mullberry Street", NPR's Morning Edition piece on the 75th anniversary of Dr. Seuss's first book, Dr. Seuss's style was considered too unconventional for children's literature at that time. Consequently, Geisel had difficulty getting his first Dr. Seuss book published. Yet, in time, he succeeded in doing so and because of his endearing way of sharing wisdom (now known as Seuss-isms), his storybooks for children have since become loved by generations of folks, young and old alike.

Theodore Geisel was more than simply a writer of children's books, though. Rebecca Mead, journalist for the New Yorker, viewed him as a political commentator, social activist, and even adviser to the justice system, and commented that:

> At [a] conference, Lani Guinier, the Harvard Law School professor, set her sights not on the Sneetches but on their rapacious exploiter, Sylvester McMonkey McBean, the sinister interloper with his star-branding and star-removing machines. The story, she argued, could be seen as an allegory of the way in which racial division – the Star-Bellies versus the Plain-Bellies – serves as a distraction from shared domination by the forces of class and capital. (Mead 2013)

In this way, Mead could also see that Geisel, through his pseudonym and his stories for children, acted in a rather subversive way as he gave voice to the issues of injustice – prejudice, discrimination, inequality, power and privilege – that he saw all around. Dr. Seuss's influence touched, and perhaps gently persuaded, even the most powerful in the land.

Undeniably, we can describe Theodore Geisel as an effective agent for social change. This is because, as PBS's Independent Lens's 'The Political Dr. Seuss' commented, he intentionally "spent much of his life trying to improve a society he knew was inherently flawed." Geisel, the grandson of German immigrants, was no stranger to the receiving end of discriminatory attitudes during World War II. Maybe this is why he wrote *The Sneetches.* The Springfield library, in their piece on "The Political Dr. Seuss", suggests that this story "was inspired by Seuss's opposition to anti-Semitism." Without pointing fingers or naming names, Geisel gave voice to some of the most pressing social injustices of his day.

In much the same way, Geisel addressed his own personal journey toward change. For example, in the 1950s, he wrote *Horton Hears a Who!,* which showed a change in his own attitude. According to Springfield Library's "The Political Dr. Seuss" Horton Hears a Who! presents "a political statement about democracy and isolationism". Furthermore, the Teach Peace Foundation explains that Dr. Seuss wrote *Horton Hears a Who!* during the post-war democratization in Japan to address the need to treat the Japanese people with respect by truly listening to them. Springfield Library's "The Political Dr. Seuss" notes that Geisel had previously supported Japanese internment during World War II, but later changed his stance. In 1954, *Horton Hears a Who!* was published and it was dedicated to a Japanese friend, clearly indicating both Geisel's support for Japanese democratization and his awareness that social change is a personal endeavor which first takes place in the self.

In the same manner of subversive activism, the Dr. Seuss story of *The Lorax,* published in 1971, centered on themes of natural resource exploitation and the need for environmental conservation. In this story, the Once-ler built a thriving business that threatened the extinction of the Truffula trees and, along with the trees, all the creatures that depended on them, too. In this way, Dr. Seuss sought to expose through metaphor the harms caused by unrestrained economic development, industrialization, and "progress".

Another example of Geisel's use of subversive activism is in *The Butter Battle Book,* first published in 1984. Written as a parody of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the time of the nuclear arms buildup, it addressed the high tensions between those who held differing worldviews. The story line involved the conflict of how the Yooks and the Zooks chose to eat bread, either butter-side-up or butter-side-down. Grandpa Zook explained:

> 'It's high time that you knew
> of the terribly horrible thing that Zooks do.
> In every Zook house and every Zook town
> *every Zook eats his bread*
> *with the butter side down!*' (p. 9)

This anti-war story addressed the different ideologies between different groups of people. More importantly, though, *The Butter Battle Book* gave voice to the distorted fears that were based on people's different life ways.

Although his stories for children routinely centered on political themes, Theodore Geisel is generally less known for his political activism. For example, PBS's Independent Lens explained in "The Political Dr. Seuss" that many folks are unaware that "during World War II" he "deftly combined his delightful, otherworldly creations with moral parables and progressive ideas" in political cartoons drawn "for the left-wing New York newspaper *PM",* or that "he made army propaganda films with Frank Capra." Dr. Seuss's stories, along with his other political work, reflect Geisel's passion and commitment to principles of democracy, justice, equality, and tolerance.

The Sneetches is just one of many children's stories written by "Dr. Seuss" that have touched people's lives in a truly meaningful way. In his many stories and by use of fictitious and whimsical characters and themes, Dr. Seuss gave voice to pressing issues of injustice. He wrote about difference, prejudice, discrimination, inequalities, power and privilege, exploitation, and unfounded fear. He exposed the topics without ever expressly giving them a name. Neither did he ever specifically name any names or point fingers of blame.

I imagine that Theodore Geisel's experience with his own human imperfections helped him to know that pointing fingers and placing blame was not the way to peace. The humorous style in which Geisel addressed the topics might influence folks in a way that only humor could. Theodore Geisel, through his pseudonym, was clever in the way he conveyed his message, with a humor and subtlety so that possibly very few folks noticed the political content at all. Dr. Seuss was truly an advocate for democracy, peace, justice, equality, and tolerance. He was, and is, quite an effective agent for social change.

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Credit: Howard Kreutzer, *Untitled 1,* n.d. Photograph.

Searching for Sameness (essay)

Layla Abdullah-Poulos

Every so often, as we scurry about our lives, we are reminded that our perceptions and assumptions can often be wrong, or at least not a stagnant truth. I was recently reminded that conflicting binaries that highlight difference are not all that comprise our society; it is a complex tapestry of interpersonal dynamics.

I assumed that this idea was ingrained in my psyche. I was raised on popular culture productions that encouraged us to seek individual substance when interacting with those outside our familiar social constructs. I have memorized and carried mantras that taught me not to "judge a book by its cover" and to assess people by "the content of their character". However, I was faced with the realization that despite my upbringing, I was still susceptible to creating my own prejudices and allowing them to affect how I construed and interacted with people of varying backgrounds. Fortunately, a congenial old man in a supermarket reminded me that in a world ripe with divisions, people with starkly contrasting lifestyles are still able to find common ground.

It began early one morning as I sat alone in front of my computer, preparing for a typical, frazzled day. My seven year-old son Salaahuddeen entered the room, chimed, "good morning" and headed for the kitchen. He immediately returned and, with much chagrin, informed me there was no milk for his morning breakfast. This was unacceptable in a family of four kids, all of whom are ravenous cereal eaters. I knew that his words represented a trickle in what would become a deluge of complaints once his siblings woke up. So, to quash the impending morning rebellion, I quickly announced that I was going to make a milk run.

Seeing an opportunity to not only get out of the house alone with his mom but spend her money as well, Salaahuddeen pled to come along. I agreed to let him come with me and sent him to get dressed. Characteristic of a mother fatigued by numerous societal demands, I paid little attention to what Salaahuddeen actually put on and only checked for the standard dressing necessities: shirt, pants, and shoes. I wouldn't realize until we were actually in the supermarket that his ensemble, which consisted of a red long-sleeved shirt, red pants and a sleeveless, light gray Islamic thobe (a caftan like garment), would be the catalyst for a thought provoking and inspiring conversation. I was just content he had gotten dressed without waking the rest of my rambunctious brood. The last thing I wanted was to have to take everyone with me. So I followed his lead, dressed stealthily, and we were off to the supermarket.

Since my family and I have lived in the area for over fourteen years, and were consistent patrons of this particular establishment, I wasn't really expecting any overt reactions to our Islamic dress. After all, seeing a fully covered Muslim woman in southern New York is not like sighting Bigfoot or a Yeti. At the same time, quizzical looks from people as I

traverse my environment are not uncommon, and such terse encounters characteristically engender mutual discomfort. I subconsciously prepared for them while Salaahuddeen and I got into the car and pulled out of the driveway.

Once at the supermarket, my mind flooded with all the other things we absolutely had to have at home. Salaahuddeen began to serenade me with his "Can I have … " song as we roamed up and down the aisles. With the craft of a back-up singer, I joined him with my bridge of "No, No, No, No, No!" and returned to the task of choosing our family's sustenance. We stopped in the baking aisle, and I ceased my portion of our ditty in order to desperately look for the yeast I suddenly needed. My son's refrain was interrupted by an unexpected "Good morning". I automatically assumed this was directed at me, and turned around to return the greeting. When I did, I discovered that this individual was not talking to me but to my son.

An elderly gentleman was standing next to Salaahuddeen. He had stopped to greet my young son and was patting him on the head. He then looked at me and once again said, "Good morning". I was taken aback because the tone in his voice was different from the standard greetings one receives from a stranger in a supermarket; he spoke with a great amount of warmth. I had anticipated that warmth to turn ice cold when he looked at me, decked out in a headscarf and overgarment, looking very Muslim and foreign. I waited for tensions to rise and his gaze to express the suspicion I anticipated. Previous experiences with seniors of varying backgrounds, and white male veterans like the man standing before me in particular, indoctrinated me to the mindset that I am an unwelcome part of their society. Surprisingly, his demeanor did not change towards me, and he began to tell me why he was so taken with the boy in the unusual outfit.

"He looks like he is going to church," the old gentleman said. I looked down at Salaahuddeen and realized that his outfit was similar to an altar boy's cassock. I surmised that the man must have misconstrued my son's clothes and mistaken the young boy for something he was not.

"I am Italian, and in our church we have something called communion. I don't know if you've ever heard of that," the gentleman continued. I told him that my mother-in-law is Roman Catholic, so I was familiar with the practice. His smile got larger and he went on to say that Salaahuddeen looked like he was dressed for communion. Then this kindly man pulled a dollar out of his pocket and handed it to my son. I protested, but he insisted.

"He reminds me of me when I was a kid." I allowed Salaahuddeen to take the money. He beamed brightly and thanked the man. I thought the interaction was over, but the congenial stranger directed his full attention to me and we began to chat based on our newfound familiarity.

He told me about his life. He was 83 years old and grew up during The Great Depression. He spent years as a longshoreman. His kids were all grown up. His pleasant attitude allowed me to enjoy what he was telling me, and made me comfortable enough to open up and share as well. Though the circumstances of our lives were apparently different, our capacity to recognize and appreciate our similarities was not hindered by that fact.

The whole time I was compelled to look up and down the aisle, wondering what a sight we must have presented to any passersby. After all, even the most bleary-eyed shopper who happened upon us that morning would probably have done a double take and asked, "Hey, what is that old white man in the veteran's cap and black nun with the little brown altar boy talking about?!" But I did not let this dissuade me from enjoying our conversation.

We began to talk about the present-day financial woes of the country. I wrapped my arm around Salaahuddeen's shoulder (who was fixated on his windfall) and expressed my hope that it wouldn't be my own children growing up in a depression. The gentleman compassionately tried to assuage my concerns and even ventured to make a physical connection by touching my arm. Although contact from a strange male is something I typically avoid as a Muslim woman, his age and patron-like demeanor moved me to concede to his fatherly assurances. The conversation ended with us agreeing about the greatness of the country in which we lived, exchanging smiles and encouraging each other to have a nice day.

That is how some basic supermarket chitchat became, at least for me, a poignant commentary on the fact that our differences need not overwhelm our capacity to positively interact. Even a country that purports to be united – and very well may be when faced with an outside threat – there is consistent sectioning off of people by geography, ethnicity, economics, and ideology in a way that produces factions imbued with contempt for one another. With all the dysfunction that would rival a Shakespearean play, the idealistic "melting pot" scenario that we purport to value becomes window dressing that hides our need to generalize. North vs. south, black vs. white, the haves vs. the have-nots, conservatives vs. liberals, Democrats vs. Republicans; the minds of the American populace are cluttered by the task of differentiating oneself from the "other". The conversation between the old man and me had chipped away at the social barriers that could potentially keep us distant, if we each allowed the misconception that commonalities between us were nonexistent to prevail.

When I encountered that benevolent elderly man in the supermarket, my litany of apparent labels – African American, Muslim, woman, etcetera – were firmly attached to me as I perused the supermarket aisles, and I expected anyone I chanced upon to react to me according to them. I had anticipated that the old man would see me only by those labels. Instead, he found common ground, something that can be difficult to do in our modern climate. So there we stood, a tall, fully-covered African-American Muslim woman and a frail elderly white man, two people, dissimilar on so many visual levels, talking unencumbered by societal expectations of mutual distaste and distrust. We revealed and shared the sameness among our contrasts and provided each other with a satisfying dose of humanity to start to the day.

Luck of the Draw (poem)

Ginger Teppner

The truth is none of us really knows the whole story. All we know for certain is somehow they met on-line, and now they're married. We think she might be a mail order bride, but we're not sure. I guess he was looking for a wife and had to go all the way to Russia to find her, well not exactly Russia. She's not really Russian. She's from Belarus.

Apparently, he went all the way to Belarus, via the Internet, to find her.

Eventually, they decided to meet in person at a neutral location, a hotel we think, but nobody really knows. I mean I don't really know, but apparently they had separate rooms across the hall from one another and there was a floor maid or something like that.

Anyways, he went to take a shower, and he's a big guy, a man with large appetites, and apparently the showers in Belarus don't have flat floors, rather, the floors have a slight grade, but he didn't know this, and he went to take a shower, and he stepped into the shower, and he slipped, and apparently everyone on their floor heard the crash because he's a really big guy.

And the floor maid came running to his room and unlocked the door, we think, but nobody really knows, I mean, I don't really know, but apparently his intended Internet bride to be came running to his room as well, came running to his rescue and discovered him spread eagle on the shower floor, unable to get up.

So the very first day she met him, she found him naked on the shower floor, unable to get up, spread eagle on the shower floor, his antiquated jewels wrinkled and shriveled like dried up walnuts nestled in mounds of soft powdery flesh.

And we're dying to know the details, I mean, I don't really know, but apparently they say she likes to make cakes, and he, after all, is a man with large appetites. He thinks this is cute. He told them it's cute, how she made her first cake when she came to the states. They say it's hard to come by soft powdery flour in Belarus. In Belarus, I mean, I don't really know, but apparently the flour is green. I mean it's made with almonds or walnuts or something.

The truth is none of us knows the whole story. All we know for certain is that he wanted a wife, so he bought a ticket and went to Russia, or Belarus rather, to meet her. He asked her to marry him, and she said yes, and then I mean, I don't really know but apparently he paid a considerable price for her ticket back to the states in Belarus where a ruble is worth three and one half pennies and cakes are apparently in short supply.

And now they're married, and she's cute and bubbly and barely speaks English. And we have to admit that he seems very happy, but we're dying to know the details. And we all think he looks younger now, but we still want to know the details. We have a lot of questions.

We can't help but wonder about how they communicated on-line, and then, later, in person. Because he doesn't speak Russian and she barely speaks English and they're married now. Of course we want to know the details. Because we can't help but wonder.

We wonder, of course we do, about background checks and medical history and sex slave trade and human trafficking. The truth is none of us really knows the whole story. We don't even know how old she is. Although we do know, apparently, he learned how to write his marriage proposal in Russian with no mistakes. In Belarus, I mean, does anyone still speak Russian?

None of us knows the whole story, but we do know the men at the club are all jealous. Some of them want to ask about other details too. They want to know how maybe they can arrange to get a Russian bride, so docile and compliant, so very appreciative, grateful even. They want to ask how they can get a Russian bride of their very own. She's so cute and bubbly.

After all, he's a really big guy, and the first day they met in person she found him sprawled naked on the shower floor, and she still married him, so maybe, they still have a chance, the aging men at the club, to get themselves a Russian bride with pretty bleach blond hair and a bubbly personality who barely speaks English and likes to make cakes.

They met on-line, and none of us really knows the whole story, but we're dying to know the details because his estate is worth a few bucks, and he's not in the best of health. He's a really big guy with large appetites, and his estate is worth a few bucks. We can't help but wonder whether he shared the value of his estate with his mail order bride. We wonder if the value of his estate was included in the proposal written without mistakes in Russian in Belarus. We wonder whether when she found him spread eagle on the shower floor with his antiquated jewels wrinkled and shriveled, if she thanked the gods for sending her this man of large appetites with an estate worth a few bucks.

None of us knows the whole story, but we're dying to know the details, and we have a lot of questions about the extreme nature of this union. I mean, I don't really know, but she's not really Russian, and he's a man with large appetites and an estate worth a few bucks and we don't even know how old she is.

And what about her parents? Did they come to the wedding? Was it her mother who taught her about the rules of womanhood and the luck of the draw? Did her mother school her in the etiquette of plucked eyebrow and tight assets? Did her mother work overtime to pay for an Internet connection? Or something like that?

We're dying to know the details and we click our tongues and we wonder about securing the borders and we wonder about INS and we wonder about diplomats having lavish parties in Washington flush with Russian whores.

And we can't help but speculate because we're dying to know the details about what really goes on, the limits of endurance, the cost of survival, the currency of flesh and sweaty palms. And we think we know him after so many years, and we hope we're right. We hope

he's an honorable man, an honorable man who just wanted a bride and boarded a plane bound for Russia, or Belarus rather, where unemployment is destabilizing and the workers are rioting and government support is staged and winters are getting colder and whores are getting older.

We hope he just wanted a bride with pretty bleach blond hair and a bubbly personality who barely spoke English and liked to make cakes.

And we hope too that she's an honorable woman who just likes to make cakes out of soft powdery flour and still daydreams in Russian while his friends all grin.

Katrina del Mar, *Lil Chick Meets Ruffian,* 1999. Still image from ***Gang Girls.***

Gang Girl excerpt (screenplay)

Katrina Del Mar

"Hey." I looked up. It was Ruffian. She was on her rounds, on a different stoop than yesterday. She looked extravagantly gorgeous, more even than the day before. More than ever, if that's possible. She was wearing jeans and black chaps, western style boots, a tight leather vest, zipped up the front showcasing her fantastic décolletage. Her lips were glossed pink, she had the faintest pink eye shadow. Perfect.

"Hey," I offered back, nearly struck dumb.

"Come with me, lil chica." She opened the door.

I followed her up the stairs, mesmerized by her ass.

She opened the door to an apartment, I floated in on the scent of sandalwood, of leather, and the faintest whiff of patchouli.

"This is your place? It's nice" I wasn't new to entering the homes of strangers. I had a light trade going since the age of 16, when I understood that giving comfort to others could keep me afloat and then some. But this wasn't a straight up hustle, this was a chance at divinity: a goddess ascended in front of me and I wanted to worship.

She opened a wooden box on the table, withdrew a perfectly rolled joint from a stack of perfectly rolled joints. She flicked the lid of a zippo, lit it, and blew on the hot tip. Little white bits of ash danced in the air as she looked at the ember, and then at me. She motioned me over for a shotgun. I opened up and drew in as she blew the sweet smoke into my willing mouth. She moved the joint aside and kissed me as I held the smoke. I felt a tear roll down the side of my face. Man it was good weed, and man, she was good to kiss. She let up on me and I exhaled a light wisp. Most of the high stayed in. She took a toke then, held it, and then flicked the still-burning joint into the sink. She looked at me, and as smoke rolled out of her nostrils, she took my hand and led me into a bedroom off the kitchen.

"What you got for me?" she asked, letting go of my hand and sinking into a low leather chair. She looked up at me, her fingers propped on the arms of the chair. She drummed lightly with her fingertips and licked her lips. I stood before her, so high that the floor felt like it was falling, and like my head would hit the ceiling. I looked up, a ceiling fan was lazily circling. I was fine. I looked back at her, and felt a tremble shake me from the inside out. I needed to move.

"You got music?" I asked.

Wife Returns on Sunday (poem and mappier)

Jenna Ann Broderick

The following is an original textual map in the form of short story I created by way of redaction poetry:

Sunrise and soft lament.
A call to nobody.
Waiting to be tapped has become common as rice.

The sounds are for show. Bathed in dim and mournful drama the Madam begins at dawn, an early enjoyable but by-the-book drama.

A female of State and obvious inspiration.
With a human face, a husky voice and a loose unusual brain, she has all the determination of the Original.

It's a wish dragged reluctantly into high.
Her time there is spent making the world her next move.
A closer model found in a different name.
Wife.

Wife, who stands then leaves and returns on Sunday. Sunday is bracing and especially long. It's the imagination and energy of its married creators.

The Wife, played, is sympathetic but also devious not beyond using her own words. Believe.

In some ways the Madam seeks to be the first hostage, talking in echoes to save another held by the calls of State to show as real life.

This fantasy was forced upon her. She is unexplained and content to raise horses and children.
Reluctantly, she makes a difference, on the wrong side and sports a ghost of a smile.

In charge without approval, He asks Her how She did it. "I don't know. With a shrug?"
Suddenly full of a Heroine's mind and of state, Her home has opened doors.

Stealing a bit from home and from house, faith in Mrs. over, She proves to be too dark.

Wife stands.
She strikes virtue. She balances vice.
The Madam has been good but would be better if She were just a little worse.

Redacted from:

Stanley, A. (2014, September 19). Two Ways to Accessorize Power 'Madam Secretary' and 'The Good Wife,' TV's Mighty Women. *The New York Times,* p. C1.

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Credit: Jessica Lipsky, *Desert Fire,* n.d. Painting.

Vampire (poem)

Katrina del Mar

I picture myself
as a bloodless thing
Made out of paper
Easily compressed
a book
Or a corrugated box
Mortified
Exhaling whilst being crushed
Into a crack in the floorboards
Evening up a table
Where people sit and laugh
The vampire version
In this fiction
Lost precious blood through its endless
Crazy desire
For the pernicious anemic
She cast me in this part
She gave so much and then drawing back
Drew blood
And drew more
Deep draughts
I didn't know
She could drink so much
Like the 7th Chinese brother who swallowed the sea
Leaving the fish flipping and gasping
Whales all beached because it's all beach
with no ocean
I am gasping
Appalled
And realizing
I let it happen
She has drained me
and now I've died
Only
I'm still here
And if something presses on me I lifelessly exhale
her name
in a whisper

Credit: Katrina del Mar, *Rockaway Sunset After the Hurricane,* 2012. Photograph.

Washing Skulls (poem)

Claudia Summers

"up like a drowned woman into the hot sky"

Anne Sexton

Your bare feet floated above the sea green carpet. The stillness spoke of critical transitions – the tipping point occurred. Your dark winged thoughts coalesced in a perfect maelstrom. Furious beatings of iridescent wings corrupted your synapses. Did you feel your dead father that night? Alone – with speed – he'll be back soon – you stepped off into the starry night. Does it still shine on you? Do you feel the heat of its beauty? You stepped

up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.

Boiling fields stitched to the shoulders of the gray road. A grave of car metal twisted and pierced the earth – which you met as you rushed ahead. Speed staggered past emptiness. Until the force of Newton's third law pushed back – a spectacular kiss of a crash. Blood cradled a bare foot, alone, now burning – positioned by Newton's second law. Does the starry night still shine on you? Do you feel the heat of its chaos? I shut my eyes and I could still see you – though I never saw you. Broken bones and scattered blood released you

up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.

I went down to the river to wash skulls. The charnel chapel of those I've lost rests in my mind.

up like a drowned woman into the hot sky I reached for the dead and I hold the bones of their memories. Will they be appeased?

Lily, your teeth rattled in my closed fists. I tossed them like dice; they tumbled, suspended in the sun, and then fell to earth. I raised my face looking for you. A torn red plastic bag caught in the exposed roots of the Weeping Willow, fluttered, then drifted, and I saw your vermillion lips spread gently in a rare smile. I smiled back. I could hear the hot sky sing. And here on earth the river murmured.

Cat, I submerged your skull in the still waters of the river. The bones were hard and firm within my hands and the water felt cool and fluid. I waded deeper; the mud tried but could not contain me, just as nothing ever contained you. I released the skull – you always appreciated chance – and the currents took you away. The moon was hidden, but still, its double harmonics sang. And the trees whispered.

up like a drowned woman into the hot sky
I went down to the river to wash skulls.
I went down to the river to wash skulls.

The Importance of Critical Voyeurism (essay)

Tessa Lou Fix

As a self declared socially conscious viewer, as well as an emotionally astute one, I find myself implored to examine the latest media images that have held my visual memory hostage as of late. Reflecting upon these current images of suffering, violence and abuse that have so effectively pervaded daily media I cannot help but think about the power of images of police brutality and the important social organizing and upheaval that this "empirical evidence" of police misconduct and abuse has produced. However it is important to recognize that along with the positive effects of transparency there comes an opposing force of cultural and visual desensitization.

One after another examples of a complex web of institutional racism and its violent implementation have been boiled down to simple acts of terror and murder, all captured on cell phone cameras. All of these images of police brutality elicit a well-founded and extreme reaction of outrage at the injustice of a long-standing and systemic problem.

While this is not a new problem, it is one that can now be witnessed regularly by large numbers of people. The wrongdoing in these videos is so obvious that it could lead one to oversimplify the problem and decide not to examine all of the implications thoroughly. However, as a feminist, artist, scholar and writer, I know that there is always something to be learned by further discourse and exploration of multiple perspectives. With that intention in mind, I was drawn to revisit Susan Sontag's essay *Regarding the Pain of Others.*[1] Examining these incidents through the historical context, of *photography* and imagery in society is such an interesting route of analysis!

My initial contemplation of Sontag's essay is a complicated one that began when I first read the essays of Henry Thoreau in middle school and then later in my junior year philosophy class, which centered on the question, "Is life worth living?" (Oy!) There is a ubiquitous issue connected to reading any academic work regarding whom the actual audience of the writing is, and in turn how effective the writing will actually be; who has the opportunity, time and social conditioning to read these things? Are these writings simply an exercise in self-discovery for the author and a small and self-contained academic community?[2]

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1 Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003)

2 On a related side note, this was a necessary question posed to *second wave feminism* (a movement in feminism starting in America in the 1960s (later in other countries) and lasting through the 1980s). Second wave feminism used academia to discuss the patriarchal paradigms of society, focusing on white, middle class educated women and virtually leaving out all other voices. In reaction an intellectual movement began which centered on women of color, intersectionality and degrees of oppression, among other things. Questions about the relevance of theory in harnessing the masses have always been asked. I, of course agree with African American author, activist, feminist and professor bell hooks, that theory is actually not a futile exercise but a necessity in the progression of a movement, relating to self-empowerment and historical knowledge. It is about how access and encouragement to theory is arranged and or hindered, that must be spoken to, through lines of marginalization and inclusiveness.

This latent subtext inherent to academic writing makes me take a step back and think about the act of reading in itself. As I said earlier, Sontag's essay is important to discuss because she specifically focuses on images of violence and war, which our popular culture is currently saturated with, and the effect of viewing these images on both a cultural and an individual level.

But if an examination of who reads academic essays such as this one is controversial, take it a step farther to look at who reads at all. Sontag says in her 2003 essay that an unbelievably small percentage of the population actually reads books or newspapers. According to a 2014 article in *The Atlantic,* titled "The Decline of the American Book Lover", a study shows that numbers are staggeringly low.

> "The Pew Research Center reported last week that nearly a quarter of American adults had not read a single book in the past year. As in, they hadn't cracked a paperback, fired up a Kindle, or even hit play on an audiobook while in the car. The number of non-book-readers has nearly tripled since 1978." Jordan Weisman, JAN 21, 2014

The digital era has irrevocably shifted how people receive and process information. Images of any sort, let alone violence and suffering, enter the viewer's psyches through countless new channels. Learning to rapidly let go of the emotions connected to the visuals is a direct byproduct of this. I suppose an argument could be made that people are more in the moment this way, in a Buddhist sense, because of their ability to let go so quickly: a forgoing of attachment. (But are we enlightened? Are we able to forgo attachment but hold onto compassion?)

As Sontag writes about the advent of war photography in the nineteenth century, as it became more widespread and accessible, she highlights a paradox that is created when the "true" account that only a photograph can transmit is received. Though the camera supplies vital information that facilitates a deeper sense of *understanding* other's experiences, resulting in the possibility for substantial empathic growth, a byproduct of *disposability* is also produced. In other words a new ability to discard information, feelings and images is born. Sontag illustrates this phenomenon of disconnect where the act of viewing a painful photograph becomes a mundane practice of registering "just another image in the file". On P.18 she says,

> "Awareness of the suffering that accumulates in a select number of wars happening elsewhere is something constructed. Principally in the form that is registered by cameras, it flares up, is shared by many people, and fades from view."

A photograph is also more universal, and therefor less special, than writing in that its reach of audience is much greater, as she says right in the same paragraph,

> "In contrast to a written account – which, depending on its complexity of thought, reference, and vocabulary, is pitched at a larger or smaller readership – a photograph has only one language and is destined potentially for all."[3]

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[3] Here is the issue I touched on in the second paragraph about the effectiveness and related elitism of academic writing.

I think this speaks to a profound issue that came about with photography itself, the issue of sensory overload causing desensitization. Does photography inherently cause desensitization on some level, or does it provide a deeper perspective that can be coupled with empathy? Also, is some of what Sontag discusses here out of date in the 21st century? That is, since newspapers or periodicals are barely read, exposure to photography in the way of print is becoming obsolete. At the same time photos and videos have become so accessible by way of digital media, and are being viewed in record numbers by more universal audiences. Is the interactive experience of viewing images on screen so different from that of viewing them in print that it is not comparable? Is the chemical and neurological process of integrating these images so altered (or altering), must new and different questions be asked altogether?

I am personally very sensitive to images of violence and suffering to the point where I often suffer myself. I have to protect myself from these images to some extent, which brings up a whole other issue; how am I to turn my eyes away from the real horrors of the world? How can I help if I, in essence, often have to pretend they are not there in order to function in my daily life?[4] Sontag offers some answer to this uniquely modern question on P.76,

> "There is a perception that a photograph is a clear record of something, tied only to empirical and historical truths. And there is some reality to this, a camera is the first mechanism in history to be able to capture a present image and save it, mechanically turning the image into an object."

However as Sontag clearly points out on P.37-38,

> " … the photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace (not a construction made out of disparate photographic traces), simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude."

It is most important to remember that the context in which a photograph is shown greatly sways the effect it will have, as does which photos are chosen to portray a story or idea. No source better illustrates this than major news media. A collective psyche is swayed by how issues and people are portrayed through the supposed hard, scientific and non-emotional lens of the camera and the news. What is and isn't shown is equally important in the creation and construction of perspective and narrative.

I think that some of these beliefs are born from a natural desire to feel like there is some exact truth that can be realized and used as an anchoring tool in a rapidly changing global community. After all, the dominating culture of the western world is rooted in a subtext of profound contradiction; on one hand it is relentlessly dependent on a scientific, evidence-based philosophy yet it is irrevocably interwoven with its historical links to a Judeo-Christian religious, faith-based ideology, as well as being emotionally reactive. For an example, look at how American governmental administrations have made major decisions with far-reaching and destructive consequences when there was no actual

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[4] This issue relates to the pacifying of the masses and power structures trying to control populations as well.

evidence to support the action, such as a war launched over non-existent weapons of mass destruction. So much of the capitalist economic system, and therefor the general societal structure, promotes voting for things and buying things according to the emotional response that the product's (or politician's) marketing was able to elicit.

The impact of the coverage of the Vietnam War relates to this idea of the quest for "reality" through photography. This was the first war that was shown in uncensored photographs in such a mass way. Television was just taking hold and the audience that these images reached was unparalleled. Now the suffering and atrocities were undeniable and the public could not be so easily complicit. The days of propaganda newsreels from World War II were ostensibly in the past. (An interesting contrast would be to look at the famous Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*,[5] juxtaposed against those sickening photos of concentration camp survivors.) People now knew the power of photography in a new way, and the importance of documentation was strengthened. Simulation of an event or a constructed image, whether it is claiming to be an accurate reenactment or a complete drama would pale in comparison in many respects.

These ideas lead to contemplation of the old debate about art and documentation existing in photography. The question of whether art and documentation can coexist and be present in the same photograph has been controversial from the birth of the photographic image. Photographers such as Jacob Riis (1849–1914), who famously documented the immigrant "slums" of New York City at the turn of the nineteenth century, began the concept of photojournalism, a concept that did not exist before this. In America at this time the evolution of art having meaning and or significance on its own accord was still in its early stages, let alone the concept that photography could also be art. Now imagine the coinciding meaning of these movements around photography: can photography be art? And can photography be used as a journalistic tool as opposed to a purely scientific tool (as it was first created to be back in 1839 with the invention of the daguerreotype in France)? Can it be both things?

Sontag points out, by referencing the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Spanish painter Goya, that there is no question about skilled artistry when it comes to painting. Of course Goya's paintings are works of art, as they are documentation of events too. This issue also begs one to look at the age old questions about what art actually is. Does it lie in the eye of the beholder or the creator, or is everything art? Sontag forces the reader to look at the uncomfortable possibility that some photographs of awful things can be beautiful at the same time. Yet she urges against the trend of trying to combine art and journalistic documentation. The obvious touch of manipulated sentimentality on a serious or grim subject matter is all too common in "news". This is something that Jacob Riis was also guilty of; it is known that he manipulated his subjects to a degree where he emphasized their squalid conditions and struggling in partially constructed images. He did this to make a point and the images were very effective in manipulating people, actually swaying public opinion and evoking some major social changes. So yet another debate about constructed images, manipulation and realities sprang forth and carries on to this day.

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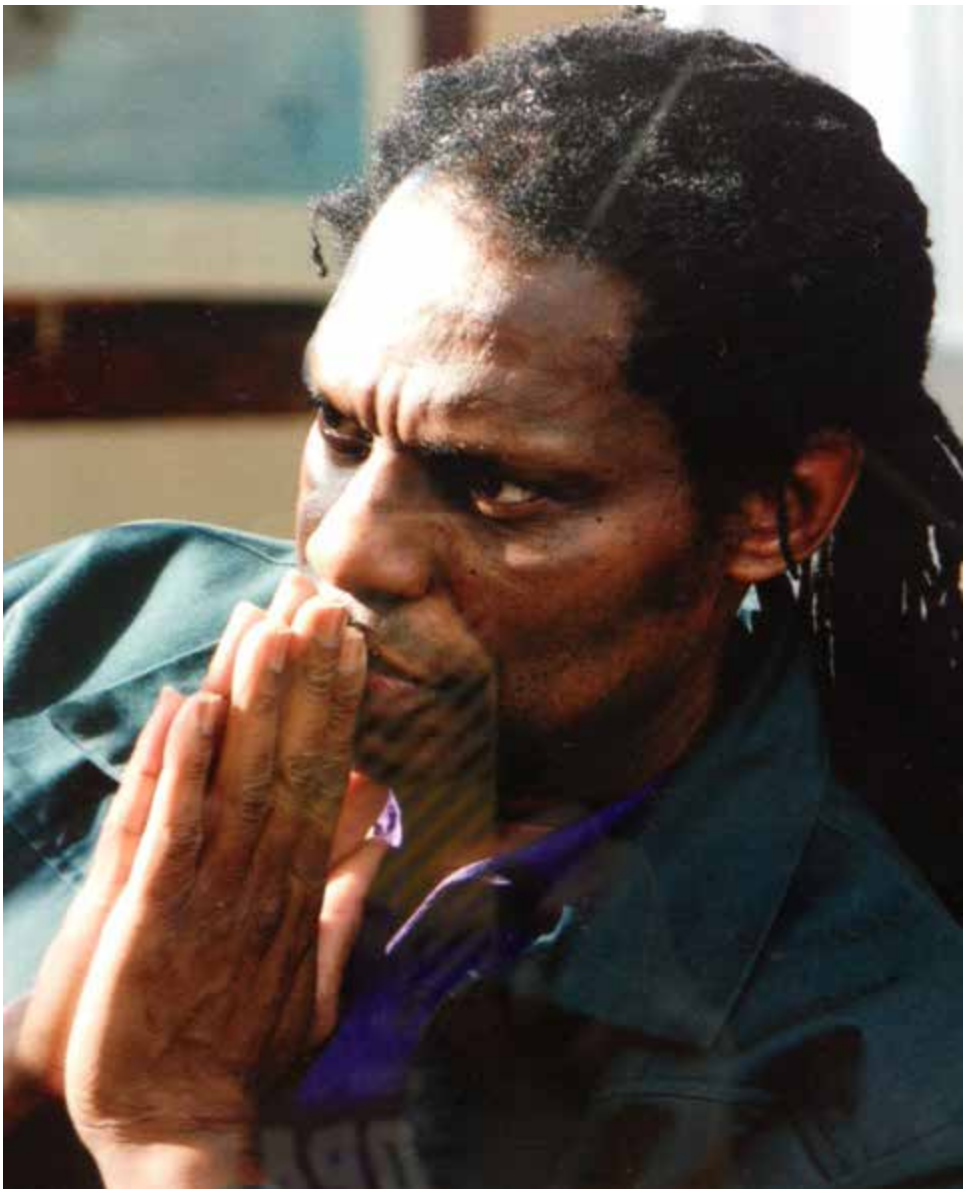
[5] 1935, written and directed by Leni Riefenstahl

Photographs are haunting because the visual experience and therefore visual memory, functions differently in the brain than the intellectual one used to decipher a narrative. A photograph tells a story, yes, though it may be only a partial one, or one that allows viewers to feel connected without having to actually experience another's reality. As Sontag says, grasping the truths of an awful war from across the world may not ever be entirely possible, but we grasp the suffering and the torment. Our memories are mysterious emotional things. She says to *remember* is an *ethical act*.

Conviction

Jon-Marc McDonald, Margaret Mercer, Andy Warren

ibn Kenyatta was born in 1945 in Prichard, Alabama – a small impoverished town in Mobile County. In his high school yearbook, he was voted "Class Artist". After high school graduation, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. He then joined family members in Harlem and Brooklyn, New York, where he began writing poetry and essays. He also began drawing, producing a striking body of artwork in charcoal, pen and pencil. ibn believes the artist must create "even from the dungeon of a cell." He has been incarcerated in New York state since 1974.



Kenyatta at Fishkill

A Case Summary by ibn Kenyatta:

The PEOPLE of the State of New York v. ibn KENYATTA

This case is about an attempt murder conviction of a police officer which i suffered in a retrial in the Bronx Supreme Court in 1974. It began around 2:00 AM as a verbal dispute with a transit cop over an alleged "theft of services" incident inside the 149th Street and 3rd Avenue subway station. The cop beat me over the head with his nightstick and his billy club. i managed to take the cop's gun and shot him in self-defense; i was also shot with a second gun he carried underneath his coat. The cop was shot in both his legs; he shot me on the side of my head: "as he was running away," he said.

The first prosecution witness to testify was the cop: the principal witness, complainant, and victim. He testified that i refused to identify myself, and as he attempted to place me under arrest, i attacked him, knocking him to the ground – and while falling backward he hit me with his nightstick.

At the first trial the cop testified that he had yelled out to the railroad porter: "Come and give me a hand. Hold him down, otherwise I'll have to hit him again and kill him." During cross-examination at the second trial, asked if he had made that statement, he said he couldn't remember. But at the retrial, on direct examination, the Assistant DA solicited the railroad clerk to testify that he had heard the cop make the statement.

External Sources:

New York Times, Monday, November 25, 1974:

> Man Gets 21 Years in Slaying Attempt
>
> A man who refused to participate in his own trial was sentenced yesterday in State Supreme Court in the Bronx to a term of 21 years to life in prison following his conviction on a charge of attempted murder of a policeman.
>
> The convict, known, as Ibn Kenyatta, who refused to furnish authorities with his age or his address and who denounced the trial process as hypocritical, racist and corrupt, must serve at least 21 years in prison before becoming eligible for parole.
>
> He was convicted of the attempted murder of a transit officer, Salvatore Ciafone, during a gunfight on Jan. 30, 1994, at the IRT subway station at 149th Street and Third Avenue.

From "Freedom, deferred" by Margaret Kearns, February 7, 2002:

> On January 30, 1974, Kenyatta jumped a New York City subway turnstile and soon found himself in a fight with a transit police officer. It was a time of great hostility between African Americans and the city's police force, and for what easily could have been a matter of assault–both the officer and Kenyatta were slightly injured–Kenyatta was charged, and convicted, of attempted murder. Ever since then,

Kenyatta has been protesting his conviction, maintaining that the officer attacked first and he only fought back in self-defense. He has been eligible for parole since January 24, 1988, and has nearly twice served the fifteen-year minimum of his fifteen-to-life sentence. But he has repeatedly refused to attend parole hearings and makes it clear that he is outright refusing to deal with any aspect of the parole system.

by ibn Kenyatta – First Trial:

This case against me began around 2 a.m. on 30 January 1974. It began as a simple "Theft of Services" incident – not even a misdemeanor at the time – inside of the 149th Street and 3rd Avenue subway station, Bronx County, New York. This led to a dispute between me and a transit cop (Salvatore Ciafone) over whether I paid the fare. The cop never asked me for any identification or said that he would place me under arrest.

At one point the cop attempted to grab my left wrist with his left hand, as though to lead me outside the turnstile. In a reflexive reaction, I slipped my wrist from his grasp: he immediately swung his nightstick striking me on the side of the head. Blood gushed from the open wound.

A thunderous shock to the top of my head made me become conscious again. Mentally lost and demented, I fought and struggled against the force of a slippery hand for a gun I felt inside a holster, and gaining control I began firing the gun at a blurred image that swiftly darted out of my vision. My memory was amnesiac and my vision cloudy from the large amount of blood that ran down my face.

After firing the gun, I turned my head and heard two shots being fired. I woke up in my body while lying stretched out face down on the platform in a pool of blood. A small cone-shaped mound of bloody debris sat ominously inches from my nose.

After having to physically fend off a phalanx of "New York's Finest", I was taken to Lincoln Hospital where Dr. William Watkin, an alert and sympathetic black surgeon, sutured my head wounds. I was still suffering blackouts due to the large amount of blood I had lost, but I was not aware of it at the time. I stood at arraignment while wearing hospital pajamas, a bandaged head, and holding my blood-soaked clothes in a plastic bag with my hands cuffed behind my back. It was at this arraignment stage of the ordeal that my defiance and protest were born.

Acknowledgments

The editors would like to express their ineffable gratitude to Safiya Bandele. Without the graciousness of her time and the wealth of material she provided, the entirety of this piece would not be at all possible.

PART ONE

by Jon-Marc McDonald

I've come here, not to find answers or in hopes of chance inspiration. Instead, I am here simply to bear witness to the location, to gain context, to sharpen focus. I wend through the maze of steel and concrete, three levels of brutal design, making my way to every platform, every entrance, every exit. I note how my complexion is the lightest of all assembled here. I note, too, how this station resembles a prison and I also note the recruitment poster for the NYPD and think those two things ironic.

The 149th Street / Third Ave subway station is typical as far as stations go. In desperate need of renovation, as are most stations north of Harlem, 149th is at once a testament to the enduring spirit of New York and the stubborn realities of time. You'll find no plaques here nor stone etchings describing what went down. Just the steady hum of New York's familiar underworld that unconsciously reminds each passerby that life goes on.

I try to visualize the turnstiles as they were in 1974, the token booth, the booth attendant. I visualize the seeming ease of jumping the turnstile, the consequence waiting on the other side, and the subsequent life ostensibly suspended. Two dangers, among many, a writer faces when writing about those who have endured sustained injustice are, first, attempting to glean a history from a subject's obscure past by waxing nostalgic about the life that never really was. The second is being snared into the easy hook of deification for dramatic effect. The fact is, ibn wasn't a saint. He jumped the turnstile. He struggled. Hell, he even admits he shot the gun. But guilty? Not on his life.

A few weeks ago, we as an editorial team met with ibn's fiancé. The word fiancé actually rings hollow when describing ibn and Safiya. Theirs is a love forged on the banks of separation and yet a love so strong, you'd be hard pressed to find it in society at large. It is only fitting that as I write this, sitting on a bench on the subway platform at 149th, turning over a word or a phrase in my mind, I should hear her voice. It is, after all, his voice too.

"Oh no," I can hear her say, "Kenyatta doesn't think that," revealing a tenderness felt for a man whose presence in her life seems more closely felt than most couples who have the luxury of sharing a bed. "I don't want to speak for him but I am certain he doesn't think that."

And so I sit here, pen to paper, and try as best I can to make sense, not of what ibn thinks, but of who ibn is.

In ibn Kenyatta's CPL 440.10, court brief which ibn's then-attorney submitted in 2006 to vacate the conviction, affirmation 13 stands out:

> Defendant remains incarcerated and as of now has served approximately thirty-two years in prison, making his stay in prison eleven years over and above his original sentence and seventeen years over and above his reduced sentence.

When the *Metropolitan Review* approached Safiya about highlighting ibn's story, we were specifically told that ibn did not want a victim piece. Of course, we replied, absolutely we would write a story that was free from the trappings of easy sympathy and the soft tug of emotionalism.

Again, this time affirmation 12:

> Although the defendant was eligible for parole in 1988 and every year thereafter, believing firmly in his innocence and believing that he had acted in self-defense, he has never applied for parole

What must it be like, I started to wonder, for the courage of one's convictions to take precedence over one's freedoms? What sort of man, when given the opportunity to grovel in exchange for his release from decades-long captivity, would chose not to? And, ultimately, how can we not see him, at least *in part,* as a victim?

From the time my fellow editor Margaret brought ibn's story to our attention, it has gnawed away at me. ibn himself has gnawed at me. I keep thinking of the little things, not the overall picture. My mind wanders to the day-to-day living, the small indignities of prison's wholesale invalidation.

I once spent four days in jail. I can remember everything about it, the nauseous smells and noxious food, the ever-present threat of violence, the inescapable cold, the presumption of guilt by the guards, the heavy pall of dread and danger. And in those measly 96 hours I assure you that, had someone offered me release a day or even an hour prior, I would have prostrated myself before as many boards as it took and admitted to any crime they wished, real or imagined, as long as I didn't have to spend one more minute behind bars. That ibn has decided to remain incarcerated for decades on end rather than admit to something he considers false speaks of a man with a certain mettle I cannot begin to comprehend. And that he asked that we not paint him as a victim speaks of a resolve few could maintain.

There is no freedom for him beyond those prison walls if its requirement is grounded in an admission of guilt. He may be released from the shackles of his cell but, for ibn, the weight of defying his conscience would be too much to bear. As he wrote, "should i then willingly accept the end product of an egregious process, by signing my name to contractual parole papers that would release me to the street?"

I'm not sure how he doesn't let bitterness overtake him or hopelessness defeat him when faced with the daily realities of prison life, knowing that the only thing separating him from the outside world is a lie, and that, if he would only strip away his own dignity and instead wear the mask of guilt carefully crafted for him by the state, the world would be his for the taking.

The fact is, the state has set up a rather convenient trap: grovel, apologize, sign a few documents declaring the nature of your guilt, and freedom is yours. It works, usually. After all, who in their right mind wouldn't, in exchange for their freedom, do whatever it took to secure it? Innocence be damned. If you want out you must first wear the mask of guilt. No mask, no freedom. Period.

My mind races to the details, the supposed life he sacrificed, his health, a comfortable bed, the changing of seasons, quiet walks, the warm embrace of Safiya. All for the sake of a conviction that speaks so deep within, violating it would lead to an imprisonment far more subtle yet of far more consequence – it would lead to the imprisonment of his soul. A life on the outside built on a lie isn't worth anything to him.

And then ibn comes along and flips all my notions on their tired head.

Kenyatta on freedom:

> however, people still often speak about how much i've lost or i've missed over these four decades of being (self-)confined, because of my "refusing parole" stance. i am convinced that the majority of those who voice such sentiments often do mean me well. still, i don't think that they have thought deeply into this matter, otherwise, they would realize that through it all, i haven't "lost" or "missed" me, I've actually found me right here within myself. i am at peace within my own mind with my far-reaching decisions.

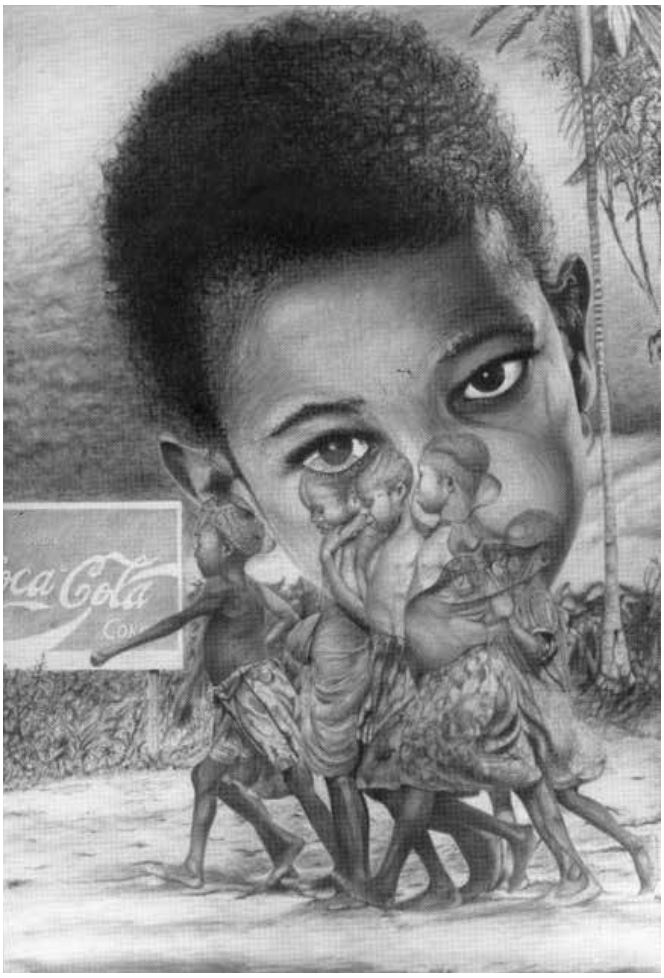
It's easy for me, a white man in his thirties who comes from a modicum of privilege, to wax poetic and try to assuage some white guilt by shouting from the rooftops about the injustice of it all. In some twist of solidarity, the easy platitudes and clichéd pap would come spilling forth in such a beautiful package that you, the reader, would feel like you, too, had done your part to ease the suffering of another just by reading it. Usually that's how these pieces go. I feel better about me for writing it, you feel better about you for reading it, we both forget it, and life goes on.

Except ibn – or at least the essence of ibn – won't allow for such a piece to be written. And it is precisely because ibn refuses to be painted as a victim that we have struggled to cobble this article together. My colleagues and I have been struck to stone on how to proceed. We have combed over dozens of documents and hundreds of pages, read the case forward and backward, asked questions and met for hours on end.

I began to consider the optics of this piece we were embarking to write. Three editors, all white, all at various stages of our lives, attempting to tell the story of a black man who has spent nearly 60% of his life behind bars. How arrogant are we, if we presume we can provide this man the slightest bit of due understanding, or presume that he needs our help, or imagine that we can offer any even if he does? If our level of disgust reaches some arbitrary level of contempt, if we can feign enough outrage and hold high our righteous anger, will we, to paraphrase James Baldwin, receive a very definite thrill of virtue from the fact that we are writing such an article at all?

And if our answer to any or all of these questions is yes, does it matter? Does motivation matter if the content is pure? Inasmuch as our limited influence is concerned, no one believes this story will change things, we three editors on a perch which has no sway or power. So why write it at all, why devote space and content to a drama that seems to have played itself out when the principal players – the captive who has all but resigned himself to his fate and the captor, the immutable state that controls that fate – will not budge?

I suppose that's just it. We are not writing this piece to change anything. We are not writing it thinking anything beyond the fact that we had no other choice but to write it, not because of influence or outrage or to assuage anything within. These words, written about a man we do not know, are here because they are, ultimately, right. To know better, to do better, guided by the principle on which ibn has staked his life, to take hold of and proceed towards the intangible, unexplainable, ineffable …
… for no other reason than this: Conviction.



Credit: ibn Kenyatta, *The Anthropologist,* n.d. Drawing.

PART TWO

by Margaret Mercer

It's nice out. Finally, after what seemed like the winter from hell, it's nice out. Should be in the low 70's by this afternoon. The tree outside my bedroom window is in full flower. All of the West Village in Manhattan where I live is under the temporary transformative spell of spring.

My mind darts back and forth from this beautiful welcome weather to thoughts of the man whose life I have been consumed by these past few months. I want to write about him, about his exceptional life, his stand, his deeply personal and singular journey. But it's beautiful outside and I want to get out and go for a walk, perhaps along the Hudson. The Hudson – my mind jumps back to the man – the river makes me think of the Hudson Valley, home to so many New York State prisons. And then I wonder if there are flowering trees in Malone, New York, an upstate community ten miles from the Canadian border. Probably, although spring arrives later in the north. But, probably not at the Franklin Correctional Facility, the prison which is this community's main source of employment, although I did find on a website this description of the facility's entrance:

> Prison names are sometimes literally etched in stone, above iron-gated entrances in gray granite walls. Not at Franklin. The name of this facility is written in orange and yellow marigolds. The floral signature is spread across the front of a green lawn adjacent to a botanical garden with brick walkways, a paved courtyard with wooden benches and tables, a latticework fence and archway, and a bridge over a mock streambed filled with rocks and flowers.[i]

The description, written by someone with the moniker "Manzanita," dates from 2004, so I have no idea if what it says, still holds. At any rate, I wonder what today is like up there and what the man I have been obsessing on is doing right now behind those walls.

That man, ibn Kenyatta, jumped a turnstile in a New York City subway in 1974. As a result of that impetuous act of a twenty eight year-old trying to make a train that had just pulled into that Bronx station, he has spent the last forty one years as an inmate of the state DOC prison system, "doing time" in Green Haven, Attica, Beacon, Fishkill, and now Franklin, as he has been transferred from one hellhole to another. He will most likely remain in prison for the rest of his life. *Willingly.*

I first learned of Kenyatta through an extraordinary woman I had the opportunity to interview for a course on the Civil Rights Movement. She is Safiya Bandele, an impressive and powerful presence and a woman who has been on the forefront of many important social justice struggles. She's not only a political activist, but also a writer, performer, public speaker, and educator who founded and directed the Center for Women's Development at Medgar Evers College for 34 years. She is also, it turns out, ibn Kenyatta's life partner. They met in 1969 and began a dialogue that has continued uninterrupted throughout Kenyatta's imprisonment.

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[i] http://prisontalk.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-133826.html

A Prisoner of Conscience

Kenyatta calls himself a U.S. Constitution "13th Amendment Slave"[ii] and a "prisoner of conscience." He is most certainly that – a conscious prisoner, someone wholly present to his life, his surroundings, his outer limitations, his inner freedom, his humanness, even his death (more on that later). He is being warehoused, along with thousands of others, in what he refers to as a "prison plantation." That term is not a metaphor for him but a reality that is increasingly hard to deny by all of us silent witnesses on the outside who continue to be confronted with the brutal truth about this country's incarceration policies.

Kenyatta has refused parole and continues to do so because, for him, parole is a coercive tool of the state which denies the innocent an avenue of redress without submission to a false admission of guilt. And he is not guilty of the charge. He pleads guilty to jumping a turnstile, which would have gotten him a summons for "theft of services." And he pleads self-defense against the brutal attack by the cop who arrested him. He was charged, however, with attempted murder of a police officer. That, he says, is false. His actions were those of a man fighting for his life and his plea was/is one of self-defense. Since 1974, he has refused to appear before the parole board with one exception, when he went before the committee in 1999, to read a statement about his stand. The parole board did not allow him to read it, so he gave them the document and left.

"What?" you ask, "He chooses to remain incarcerated rather than accept the terms of parole?" Yes.

And here's why:

> i am a Prisoner of Conscience. yet i am also one of the principal parties to my own captivity. that i have served forty years inside of this prison confinement, which also includes 25 years *beyond* my minimum release date, have not been enough to gain me my freedom. i am holding my own self captive inside of this prison environment. [Because] to accept *their* parole … requires that the prisoner's "Signature of Guilt" be affixed to the agreement to the parole stipulations and supervision in the community.
>
> When you wave your magic wand of parole, you are merely sending people broken by your prison and criminal justice system back to the plantation fields of Brooklyn, Harlem, the Bronx, and inner cities all over the nation … . the prisoner has been removed from what had been previously his or her "prisonslave" status, only then to be instantly transformed and plunged into another form of slavery: that of the "semi-fugitive slave" class – the parolee.
>
> i am already free and clear in my own mind. And that freedom/self
>
> freedom of mind means far more to me in this lifetime than the possibility of accepting parole supervision on the street.[iii]

[ii] 13th Amendment: "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."

[iii] From "the *duly convicted* connections" (2014) and "i stand on my conscience" (1999) statement to the parole commissioners

Questions raised by this stance are so far-reaching and complicated that one can easily find oneself going down the rabbit hole. The issues become murky, messy, and his story is difficult and brain-bruising to our rational minds and sensibilities. But there are some truths that can no longer hide behind the "good" intentions of our criminal justice system and the men and women hired to "preserve" our way of life, to "protect" our right to safety and freedom. One of the truths is that these "protections" serves the citizens of the United States unequally. And what is this protection anyway? At times it seems to be nothing more than a euphemism for a thinly veiled practice to disappear a portion of the population, that portion that makes the "protected" portion uncomfortable, threatened, and challenged, by the other's race, economic disadvantage, or beliefs. That portion whose mere existence reminds all others of our unspeakable history, our national crime, that continues in ever-morphing iterations. Recently, in the midst of this latest spate of police shootings that are receiving a new level of media attention, I had a dreadful thought: we're killing the evidence. Yes, that's it, that's what it feels like: we must kill the evidence.

The Prisonslave

Kenyatta calls himself a "prisoner of conscience" but he understands that his status in the eyes of the state is that of prisonslave. It's an ugly word, prisonslave, it mocks our pretense of justice and freedom. His terminology punctures the balloon of equality and promise. The prisonslave, held in captivity on a plantation prison, is the present-day iteration of that American institution. Kenyatta sees it this way:

> for blacks, and many other people of color, this is still a "white" world that we must respond to. many of the laws that affect us are passed by majority white legislatures that are viewed through the prism of America's slavery continuum.
>
> even with "our" black president sitting in the White House, "our" black reality shows on nationwide television, "our" phenomenal black athletes on display, and "our" gangsta rap videos hip hoppin *our* youth: we still perceive ourselves as being that of a captive (conquered) people.
>
> the 13th Amendment exception clause of slavery's continuum keeps the specter of slavery alive within American society. this happens now below everyone's conscious awareness in this day and time. but our black skin always stands out as being a marker, the designation for the descendants of slaves, and forever forfeits our rights to total acceptance, for *getting in* … . down with the 13th Amendment "exception clause": as a first-step-down-payment towards African American – as well as America's – freedom. so let the hard work begin.

So, here it is – Kenyatta's call to action.

It's uncomfortable to acknowledge my need to embrace this radical life that so disturbs and disrupts, that makes me look at myself and my own convictions (or lack thereof). Kenyatta poses the question and asks if we are willing to meet him in that space beyond the dialectic; he is saying *look at me.*

But while he's had time to distill the essence of this life he now inhabits, what it means and represents, and while he lives it out daily, I, on the perimeter, only understand the outlines, the philosophical argument, the principles behind the stand. The hard contours of that life – a life sentenced to punishing privation – I do not experience. Wouldn't anyone say when asked, "I'd never choose prison over any possibility of release, no matter how compromising or conditional."

But that's a facile response. If I look more closely, the undeniable fact is that I am protecting my own "innocence." In refusing any culpability, I become unwilling to be changed by Kenyatta's message. He's the insane one, the one who will not bend to the system in order to regain his "freedom." But he persists, he rings in my head. He is saying "look at me, I am you and you cannot deny my rights as an individual anymore than you would deny your own." I need to create a space for receptivity–a place that is comfortable enough for exploration of the myriad, complex issues raised by Kenyatta's conviction. His statements are threatening to the status quo but they are not really hostile or aggressive: they are pleas to our better selves, pleas for us to embrace our common humanity and get behind the idea that nothing separates us if we no longer renounce reality. It's a short distance to traverse emotionally; one can feel compassion and still remain "other." But to bridge the psychological gap, the one that holds our identity, our sense of self, is more demanding and requires rigorous soul searching.

Life and Death

Kenyatta employs all of his life in his fight for a free and clear existence; he also employs his death. In a conversation between Kenyatta and Safiya he explained how his death gives power and direction to his life:

> Our life is the most precious gift we possess. And we shouldn't take it lightly. But we seem to miss another important possession of ours, which is usually not thought of as being something of value to us: our death. The end is in the beginning. Meaning there is no being born into life without also dying. This is not bad … . The way we make the most out of our life is the total acceptance of our death. Once this is seen and accepted we gain clarity, wisdom and power. We not only begin to see how we can use our life in the struggle for own freedom/self-freedom, we also begin to understand that we can use our death in this fight … . If we haven't had our life, what have we had? And the only way we can have our life is that we live it on our terms … . That is our pledge to life. Truth. Love. Justice."

And in a piece that appeared in the *Village Voice* in 1994, he expresses it more plainly:

> I use my life, I use my art, I use my writing, I use whatever I can – I'm not limiting it to nothing to try to make you understand life is worth living and earth is worth dying and it's your responsibility to take your life and do something with it. And don't let nogoddamnbody, I don't give a fuck who it is, let nobody deny you

> that … . All these things are tied in to the self-taking a stand and moving with it, living with it, loving it, expressing it … . And then when you die, in the process of living, you feel good. Ah! This is great, this a good life here."[iv]

When thinking then of Kenyatta, you have to wonder how he dedicates himself to living out his life within that untenable prison structure and maintaining, in fact, maybe even strengthening, his resolve. He seems to inhabit a psychic space that resides outside the realities of his environment while accepting the defining restrictions of his daily life. He and Safiya have developed and sustained an intimacy that defies the strictures their relationship must endure. Visits, phone calls, and letters mark their time together. They have spent years creating a communion which is breathtaking in its deep love and commitment to profound social transformation. Kenyatta's writing and his extraordinary artwork feed his solitary spirit while giving creative and intellectual shape to a stand that has become a life sentence. His conviction demands our attention.

the knowing

ibn Kenyatta

this passionate song

this story called mylife

above and beyond the blues

but still underneath the top heap

of the bottom dung

life still grows richly fervent

striving ever upward always towards the light

for it is about standing upright

and being strong too

mylife

mylife is

and mylife's song speaks to me

"Carry On!"

[iv] From "The Prisoner … Who Refused," by Kathy Dobie *(Village Voice,* July 27, 1994)

PART THREE

by Andy Warren

> "It was necessary to get your attention. To bring this critical matter to the attention of everyone to take a closer look." – *ibn Kenyatta, in a statement to the Parole Commission of the State of New York*

The human drama of ibn Kenyatta's story is inherently compelling. It throbs just beneath the surface, infusing dynamism and authenticity into his words and the words of those who knew him. As I worked on this project I formed that vibrant energy into an image of him; an archetype, the black Amerikan man, a force of revolution. I looked through the seemingly endless font of sources provided by Safiya, and meditated on their story. Their words began to fill gaps in the image I began with, and my respect for ibn and Safiya grew. But the more closely I looked the further I felt from the man himself.

I considered that I was not the right person to retell and analyze this story. My life has been so far removed from the experiences Kenyatta relates, and from the reality that he has faced; would he approve of my interest in him? What did Safiya see of it in our brief interview? In spite of my insecurity I was compelled to continue exploring this story, and the stories it bled into. Both Kenyatta and Safiya are so frank with their humanity, and write with such intensity and honesty, that their story is laid bare to those who care to look. With that kind of access my compulsion to understand drove me closer. I would like, perhaps selfishly, to see things as they do, to watch the events of their lives unfold in real-time, and feel the rushes of emotion accompanying each precipitous drop and moment of transient joy. Only then could I claim to know these people or know their story. So despite all I have read and thought these past months. I will never be able to see a story like this as closely as I would like to.

Ultimately the story I have been unearthing for myself continues each day, minute by minute, played out in millions of lives across this country and many more around the world. ibn's story is made so particularly illuminating by his unusual awareness, his knowledge of self, and is lent complexity by his holistic view of the endless, tightly interconnected web that forms the world and its people. It is made so inspiring by the expansive freedom he has made for himself, and his choice to retain his ethics when they are no longer convenient. But the lessons I have learned from him, without ever speaking to him, are not limited to the abstract realms of personal and spiritual attainment. Trying to untangle ibn's story had led me to a vaster place than I could have initially imagined, and to a story I nearly missed for its ubiquity. This story, like all stories, begins in medias res, with the passing of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America:

> 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.

A passing read may not yield the intended effect, and when I first re-read this passage, in the context of ibn's writing, I was unsure what I was intended to see; it was as if the second clause of that statement was too impalpable to be digested, and it slipped through my thinking mind like sand through a sieve. My delayed comprehension may have been due to the stilted language, or perhaps it was a result of cultural conditioning, an acceptance that the United States long ago dealt away with legal slavery. Or maybe it was a belief that the law deals with convicts and criminals, and I, ideally, do not. When I read it again, and got a tenuous hold of what was being stated, I could not readily accept that what I was reading was written into the Constitution. I checked the Library of Congress' website.

Coming of age in the modern era of American politics, I have accepted that my government is neither infallible nor even generally benevolent. I have become increasingly fixated on the ongoing systemic, racist oppression of native, immigrant, and minority communities in the country I have always called home. I have observed the privileged social status I was born into as a white man in America, and caught glimpses of realities that were once invisible to me. Yet something in me resisted the truth that was sitting right in the middle of this legally significant sentence.

> " … except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted … "

I read it again. ibn's statements decrying "present-day slavery" reverberated in my mind. Certainly chattel slavery was eliminated generations ago in America. But then what could those fourteen words refer to? What had initially seemed a figurative correlation between slavery and modern, oppressive tendencies in American society began to come into focus as something else entirely; it became something literal, a thread running back to the colonization of this country.

It was a weak link at first, one I still was still skeptical of. But, as with ibn's own story, the deeper I looked the broader the whole picture became and, with a diminishing sense of certainty, I began to see the connections.

In retrospect, as I drew upon a larger and larger pool of resources, and expanded my search, I moved away from the completion of this essay. My sources, even ibn's own writings, reached farther and wider in scope than I could hope to encompass in such a short space. As I read Kathy Dobie's 1993 article from The Village Voice, I felt that Kenyatta was practically mocking my attempts to do so:

> i have no intentions of fitting easily inside your writin … the kastruggle is organic, Kathy Dobie. It's all about relationship. and it is workin on you even tho you may not feel that chu workin on it.

But it was this process of moving away from the work that allowed me to draw further connections. One of my first sources, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow,* contains an account of the gaming of the prison system, and helped me glean connections between

early American colonization and the oppressive legal system we have in place today. The crime and punishment statistics Alexander cites are sobering, and brought into focus a story of the United States that I had before only seen in vague outlines. She explains how between 1980 and 2000, America's prison population swelled from 300,000 to over two million, nearly a quarter of the world's official prison population. With these numbers framed by the USA's racially divergent histories, a militarizing and incentivized domestic police force, and uneven enforcement of burgeoning drug crime sentences, the titular "New Jim Crow" begins to emerge.

However, even in this analysis there lurks the paradox that the appearance of progress can undermine more substantive movement. There are convincing arguments as to why Alexander's history is incomplete and Eurocentric, and her book too obsequious to white middle-class sensibilities. Substantially, Alexander fails to explore the connections between racism, the American prison system, and the globalized economy. Writers like Professor Greg Thomas and Professor Joseph D. Osel argue that the central metaphor of a new Jim Crow system actually obfuscates, or outright omits, the reality of the modern systems of racist social control, serving to allay, or allow easy misplacement of, white guilt and fear rather than challenging individuals to confront the larger problems of the culturally entrenched racism that permeates not only the prison system, but the most fundamental structures of American society, down to the everyday choices we all make. In a critical analysis of Alexander's work entitled "Why Some Like The New Jim Crow So Much", Greg Thomas writes:

> [Alexander's] book turns away from a long tradition and a wide range of anti-racist critical frameworks, ones which zero in on 'institutionalized racism' and 'the political economy of racism' as well as [George Jackson's] *Blood in My Eye's* 'overt,' 'self-interdicting' and 'unconscious' racisms, in the plural. These are precisely the traditions and critical frameworks silently and systematically renounced by Alexander's *The New Jim Crow,* which like the U.S. corporate media will only see racism when it is overt, 'conscious,' 'obvious' and, at bottom, publically avowed or confessed.

As I followed this chain of analysis I contemplated the infinite recursive potential of academic criticisms and realized that I was losing touch with the intention of this piece. ibn spoke out to me again through the pages of his words, now a well-worn fixture in my backpack.

> "We all have to hold ourselves accountable." – ibn

From Nixon's declaration that drugs were public enemy number one, to Clinton's endorsement of the new paradigm of the USA's criminal law enforcement, political support has normalized the privatization and growth of a bloated penal system. But what is the motivation for such a concerted effort?

I had discovered a concept I had never recognized before, penal slavery. Cursory research had revealed the concrete truth of those words, and had opened my mind to a new way of looking at my country. The facts of prisons as economic engines ring hard and true. Everything from payphones, industry jobs, and produced goods, not to mention the tax dollars, our tax dollars, spent contracting for-profit prisons, fuel those engines. An expanding prison system fosters a regional reliance on the industry surrounding it, and huge incentives for investment in prison infrastructure. A logical next step would be investment in lobbying criminal law and sentencing to protect the viability of this lucrative venture.

> " … locking them up has always been the easiest part of the social contract." – ibn

Even more condemning are the figures regarding the actual work done by convicts. Depending on the work, the pay for a prisoner can be as little as 12 cents per hour (if anything). UNICOR, a corporation owned by the United States government that relies on prison labor, ostensibly in order to rehabilitate inmates, pays prisoners between 23 cents and $1.15 per hour. In 2008, the company generated $765 million dollars, with only 6% of that money going toward paying prisoners. From there things get murky for me, with varying rates between federal and state, between different states, between private and federal prisons. But the picture could not be clearer. The federal prison labor directly pipelines to the United States military, with UNICOR receiving non-competitive contracts for 100% of military helmets, among other large military contracts. In fact, in 2001, UNICOR reported that just less than two-thirds of its sales were to the U.S. Department of Defense.

> "Still, it is understandable how the manufactured fear of crime makes ordinary citizens want to demonstrate a show of force with law-breakers. It reinforces how force is an acceptable way of educating people." – ibn

The whole picture for me had returned to the gaming of the prison system, and the inherently racist and economically discriminatory framework in our social order. Since before Bacon's Rebellion, the powerful in society have relied on a schism within the working class in this country, and racial lines have hardly had time to reconnect, let alone heal, before they are stressed to the breaking point again.

Again and again, politicians have found that a population mistrustful of the "others" amongst us, and solidly convinced of the racialized worldview perpetuated in this country since its birth, is more easily persuaded to vote against their own interests. By breeding racial mistrust while condemning overt racial hostility, we now live in a country where adamant defense of the notion that racial discrimination is a thing of the past is just one slight in a sea of racist injustice. The effect of that historical displacement has rippled out and created a society that valorizes an ethic of freedom, equality and justice, while it simultaneously denies swathes of its people equal citizenship, in and outside of prison walls.

To the best of my understanding, that is what keeps ibn in prison, refusing to seek parole. Parole is not freedom; it is another method to exert control over the many lives under its purview. As he puts it:

> after the signing-out procedure is done and the release of the physical body of the "release" is assured, the prisoner has been removed from what had been previously his or her "prisonslave" status, only then to be instantly transformed and plunged into another form of slavery: that of the "semi-fugitive slave" class – the parolee. – *the duly convicted connections*

I think ibn is telling us that seeing, even scrutinizing the problem and hoping for something better are not enough. Bearing witness to injustice is not an end unto itself. It must be the catalyst for movement toward something better, something that reflects the potential of humanity to do what life does best: create something beautiful and new out of destruction's fertile wake.

We live in the historical wreckage of a country that has never reckoned with the history of how human exploitation secured it a global position of power and privilege. All of the worst crimes humanity can name mar the annals of American history, yet many in our country would rather paint over that record and what it represents than let it remain for successive generations to grapple with and learn from.

So I think I understand why ibn is not preoccupied with this society's "practical realities", or concessions of higher ideals in the name of convenience. What failures could humanity have averted with a sacrifice of convenience?

> The longer I stay here, the more people will become clearer about the need for us to face this human tragedy together.-ibn

For all that my work to comprehend what ibn has experienced has taught me, from the distance of 350 miles, 47 years of life, a lifetime of experience, I think the most important thing I have learned is something about myself; I do not ever want a convenient life.

Kenyatta and Safiya – Greenhaven 1986 (photograph)

we must will ourselves to live just one more day
and then to repeat this same feat again and again
and to mark each experience as being a new beginning
in our hopes that a possible change will arrive
and Faith will find us worthy

– excerpt from ibn's poem *imitation of life*

Definition of Me

Veronica Mitchell

I am who I chose to be
I will not acquiesce to someone's definition of me
I will reach heights beyond infinity
Because I will not accept mediocrity

I am in control of my destiny
I will make my dreams my reality
I will reach back through time and acquire the knowledge of my ancestry
Because I will not give in to hypocrisy

I am not limited by my sexuality
I will transcend the weaker and become the stronger femininity
I will reflect on biologic beginnings and acknowledge every being has an X
Because without that X there is no existence

I am a creation of the divine
I will be victorious over transgressors and elevate female kind
I will live my life unafraid, without regret and speak my mind
Because it's my purpose to make a positive impact on this world in real time

I am the beginning, the middle and the perpetuity
I will be the visionary, the leader, and the prodigy
I will devote my life to the betterment of humankind
Because in life's jungle it's the lioness that feeds the pride not the lion

I am woman

Opposite: Joseph M. Verrastro, *Milk & Honey,* 2014. Acrylic, clear gesso and nylon netting on mounted foam-core, 12'h x 11'w.

Credit:, Howard Kreutzer, *Untitled 2,* n.d. Photograph.

Armistice (fiction)

Ryan Smithson

Of course you remember the obvious things: the feel of the trigger under your glove, the look of the target stumbling down like he tripped, your heart beating in your throat when you realize he's not getting up. But what strikes you about the memory of your first kill are the little things: a newspaper flopping over the top of his corpse, a bird darting out of a tree down the street, the way the shadow of your rifle curves into a hollow in the wall next to you.

After the first one, the killing gets easier. You're well trained, after all. But you never really get used to it.

At night, in your cot, the way that newspaper flops over in your memory, it seems to whisper your name. It tells its own story. Likewise, the bird has its own sound, its own tale. The shadows, artifacts of what's there, can tell a whole different story. These stories within stories with stories, they help you realize it's not the kill that haunts. It's the context. Without that, the killing is pointless.

We roll in late from our patrol one night, pick up our laundry, chow the MRE leftovers from our lunch, and hit the rack. Next to my cot, I am surprised to find a package waiting for me. It contains the usual gifts from family: beef jerky, Chapstick, powdered drink mix. But then there is a funeral announcement taped to an old canvas bag. Inside the bag is a tape player and a single cassette tape labeled: "Miles Thatcher, Autobiography."

A note from my dad explains that Gramps, my great-grandfather, died in his sleep three days before (probably two weeks by now). The cassette tapes were in a toy chest with a bunch of old baby toys, he writes. Gramps willed the toy chest to me.

Gramps was one of the most private people I knew, Dad writes. We were shocked that he recorded an autobiography. Everyone all wanted to listen to it but I stopped them cold. The toy chest was willed to you, Nick, so you have the honor of the first listen. I gave the toy chest to Rebecca and Lee. He's getting so big, Nick. You should see him, almost walking now. I think Gramps built the chest. Maybe he'll say on the tape. I don't know. But it's beautiful. You'll see when you get home.

When I get home, he writes. Parents are so hopeful.

I reread the line about Lee. I read it again. That perfect, tiny child I know only through pictures. The thought of never meeting him scares me.

But the thought of making it home and then having to raise him terrifies me.

I know to be a good father. I'll play with him, provide discipline. But one day, he's going to find out about me. He'll see an old army uniform or a photo from basic and he'll learn what I am.

I remove my gloves, tossing them on my foot locker, untie my boots, kick them off. I know my only choice is to keep this from Lee. And that means keeping it from everyone.

I thumb the tape, turning it over a few times, trying to remember Gramps. Really remember him. An interaction. A memory. I remember that he was quiet, stoic. People said he came home from World War II a different man. He operated a flamethrower, burned bunkers for three years all over Germany. No one walks away from that unchanged, people said.

But after listening to the tape, I realize the war was only one of his stories.

Like me, Gramps married his girlfriend before he left for war. Unlike me, they didn't have a child on the way. When he came home, though, they got pregnant. On the tape, Gramps recounts his excitement, his fear, his love. They named the baby after her mother, Rose. But she died at six months. I remember we used to visit her little grave every Easter. Gramps never came.

Gramps said the doctors told him it was pulmonary stress. Little Rose's heart wasn't built quite right. But Gramps said he knew the real reason: it was his punishment. For everything he'd done in the war, everything he had to do. His actions needed atonement.

People tried to tell him that what he did in the war was necessary, it was for good. But he says he knew better. Even when Rose was born, he says, he could see it in her eyes: she had an old soul.

I pull out my wallet to check the newborn photo of Lee. Wondering: what does an old soul look like?

Rose was born for him, Gramps says, born ready to die.

And this, he says, went back to one of his earliest memories. He had been warned about war – that it was never for good – but he hadn't listened.

He tells it like this:

People wouldn't believe it, but I can trace the whole course of my life to a single moment. The 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, nineteen hundred and eighteen. I was six years old. That day would be recorded in history as the Armistice, the moment of final peace following World War I.

At the time, we called it the War to End All Wars. Ha!

Eventually, the president would declare November 11th a national holiday, set aside to honor those who served.

Over twenty years later, I would burn enough bunkers in France to earn that honor. But for now, as a young boy, I watched the celebration with awe and surprise.

The boys were coming home. Celebrations erupted throughout the country. Port Leyden, New York was no exception. It was a town full of farmers and laborers. It contained small bars where men played cards and cheap salons where women gossiped. The men worked hard. The women kept houses. The children played in the streets and adventured in the woods.

It was a chilly day, I remember, but sunny. I stood on my family's front porch and stared at the market square down the street. A ruckus was there. Not violent. Playful. A celebration.

There were loud voices and clapping and trumpets. Laughter tumbled along the street. Flirty women cackled and screamed, and rowdy men swilled pints of beer and whistled.

Across the street, like a landmark, Old Man Sourwine rocked in his chair. He was known for taking frequent sips from a silver flask. His wife, who was younger than him almost by half (and the subject of much discussion at the salons), hung red, white, and blue banners from their windows.

Sourwine was a plumber by trade, but a soldier by heart. He once rode a horse into battle. He had fought the big war. He had fought the evils of slavery. And he had won.

It cost him his integrity, he said, because he lied about his age to enlist. It cost him his brother, he said, because that fool had run to Kentucky to defend the South. It had cost him his right leg, because shrapnel is indifferent. And it had cost him his soul, because that's how war is.

Sourwine and his wife were the butt of most of the jokes in town. To be a "Sourwine" was to be a crabby shut-in. To go "Sourwining," one had to get drunk enough to fall over. A woman who got married too young or too old or too quickly after courting or after courting too long was – among other things – a Mrs. Sourwine.

But I liked them. She was sweet and always made fresh lemonade for me. The old man was usually quiet, but always friendly. He didn't smile much, but he told good stories.

Like me, Sourwine was watching the celebration, but there was no curiosity in the old man's eyes. He looked thoughtful and sad, which seemed odd to me. So I walked over to ask what all the fuss was about, thought maybe I'd try to cheer him up.

"You didn't hear?"

"We don't have a radio," I said.

"The paper?"

"I can't read."

"Right. Right," said Sourwine. "Your old man still workin' the railroad?"

"Yes, sir. We don't see him often."

Sourwine took a sip from his flask.

"Your father's a good man, Miles. He works hard for you." He adjusted in his chair and winced. I looked at the old man's pants, stapled up on one side to cover his incomplete right leg.

"Did I ever tell you how I lost this leg?"

I nodded, then I smiled. "But I'll hear it again."

The old man coughed. "It was at Sharpsburg. My horse had gone down so I was dismounted. I ran straight at them Rebels and charged the picket line. Me and a whole squad of men. Eh! What a rush, boy. I'll tell you. Felt like I was leading 'em. I was only 16," he cupped the back of his hand over his mouth as if it were still a secret, "Lied about my age to get in the army, see. And I was just a private. But I was leading 'em. Sure as hell. Leading the charge. That's a hell of a feeling, let me tell you."

It was hard to imagine the man – with his crusty beard and red eyes – as a young and fit soldier bravely facing death and charging an enemy. It was hard to imagine he even had the strength to pick up a gun anymore.

"So we rushed in," Sourwine continued. "Wounded soldiers piled up like you wouldn't believe. I charged right through 'em, gun blazin'. And Powwie! A mortar landed right next to me. Blew me ten feet in the air, I reckon. Probably twenty feet, now that I recall it. Nearly lost my hearing right then. I looked down … " Sourwine looked at his missing leg. "My buddy Nester fixed me up, fixed me up right. Stopped the bleeding with a tourniquet, and got me off them lines."

"Did you cry?"

"Nah. I laughed."

"Laughed?" I knew to play along. "Why?"

"Why not?" said Sourwine. "We were past their picket lines. And they were mortaring us. Know what that means?"

"They were running away."

"Retreating, we called it," said Sourwine. "Almost. Ah. See, Lee was a son of a gun. I'll give him that."

"So you didn't win?"

"Eventually the North won. But that battle. That was a draw."

"Like a picture?"

Sourwine had a hearty, gruff laugh. "A tie, my boy. No winners."

He kept laughing until it made him cough. He pulled a lumpy, hand-rolled cigarette from his pocket and struck a match with his thumb. He puffed the cigarette to life. The smoke didn't seem to sting his eyes like it did mine. He peered through the bouncing flame at the parade coming down the dirt street.

"He isn't bothering you is he, sweetie?" Mrs. Sourwine asked me.

"No, ma'am," I replied. "He's telling me about – " Sourwine shot me a sideways glance. " – the railroad. Like my father works on."

"I'll get you two some lemonade when I'm finished here."

"Thank you, ma'am."

She continued punching staples into her cedar siding.

"Victory," Sourwine had his eyes fixed on the horses leading carriages down the street. "That's what they're celebrating, boy. Victory. The Great War is over."

Even at six, I knew how special that was. I filled with excitement. "My mother says it's the war to end all wars."

Sourwine was silent.

"No more wars, Mr. Sourwine. No more men losing brothers. Or legs. Aren't you happy?"

Smoke curled around the old man's eyes. "3,000, Miles," he said.

"3,000 what?"

"Men. Dead."

"At Sharpsburg," I tried to match the old man's tone.

"A damn draw."

I remember at that moment, right as Sourwine made his point about Sharpsburg – the textbooks would record it as the Battle of Antietam – a gunshot rang out in the street. Loudest thing I ever heard.

A blast of smoke rose from the middle of the parade. Some drunk fired his rifle into the sky. Not abnormal given the circumstances. Not wrong really. Americans do that to celebrate.

But the horses pulling the carriages were not war horses. They were not conditioned for gunshots. So they responded by tearing ass through the street, knocking over farm stands, smashing over flower pots, and nearly trampling people in their panic.

Sourwine's back straightened, and he stood quicker than I'd ever seen him move. He grabbed his crutch and raced down the porch steps. The old plumber, a soldier at heart, ran unabashed into the street. He used his crutch as efficiently as one uses a leg.

People screamed and fled as wooden carriage wheels bounced along the dusty street. Amidst the chaos, I noticed a baby thrown from one of the carriages. It landed across the way just shy of my porch. One foot farther and its tiny skull would've cracked in half.

The shrill cry of the baby pierced through the turmoil. The baby's mother, still stuck in the runaway carriage, cried out for her child.

Without thinking, I leapt down Sourwine's steps, darted between the horses and carriages and people. The neigh of scared horses and the clopping of hooves surrounded me, but I kept my eye on the baby. It unraveled from its soft, white blanket. Dust swirled like smoke, and I grabbed the infant.

Just then, a stallion charged through, its hooves twice the size of the newborn's head. It stamped so close to me I caught a whiff of manure.

I tucked the small baby to my chest like a stolen loaf of bread and waited for the horse to pass. At last, I scurried up the stairs to my front door and sat rocking the screaming infant. There, safe from the wild horses, I pulled the blanket from over its face. The baby had a pink ribbon tied in her hair. A wide, shallow scratch ran along her cheek, and she squirmed uncontrollably.

"Shh … " I said, running my fingers gently over her cut the way my mother would. "Everything's okay, baby."

Suddenly, the chaos died. The horses were silent. No hooves clopped. No whiny neighs. The music had ceased. So had the guns.

In the street, Old Man Sourwine held four reigns from all four horses, each attached to a carriage, each facing Sourwine who stood in the middle like the center of a star. He lost his crutch, so he balanced on his one leg as he whispered to the horses.

The people who had fled from the street in fear began inching toward the parade again. They eyed Sourwine suspiciously. They had always wondered why he was so hard to talk to. That day, a new joke was born: in order to understand Sourwine, you had to be a horse.

I smiled at the old plumber, and he winked at me.

Frantic, the mother of the baby girl jumped from one of the carriages, ran over, and took her from me. She thanked me, leaving me a handkerchief as a token of her appreciation. It had a small pink rose knit into one corner. The baby's name, she told me, was Rose.

The parade reassembled, and I rejoined Sourwine on his porch. Mrs. Sourwine brought us drinks like she promised, kissing the old man on the forehead as she set them down.

"We won the Great War," I said. "That's why we're happy, right?"

Still out of breath, Sourwine took a large sip from his flask. It smelled sweet and biting and beaten with oak, the way good Southern whiskey should.

"That's why we're happy, my boy," Sourwine said. "But believe me, you, in the trenches, there ain't no celebration."

It would be many years before I understood what he meant, but looking back now, I understand that it was my warning.

Before I joined the army, the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen would stumble into a diner where I collected dishes from the tables for 50 cents a day. I'd fall madly in love with her right there, not realizing until many months of courting who she was: Rose, the baby I'd saved.

After the call to arms, we'd get married and I'd leave to kill Germans for four years. Our first child would take her name and leave us too early. She'd leave us so I could live and stay with her mother. I guess she still needed my protection.

Rose and I, we'd move on. We'd raise a family, but only at the cost of my sins.

By the time I finish both sides of the tape, the platoon is lost in snores. I keep picturing that newspaper flipping over, hitting the corpse – Nick – and moving on. As I try to forget the sound of that fleeting bird, the shadow on the wall looks more and more like a sickle. And I realize that whatever Gramps is trying to tell me by willing this toy chest, it's not enough.

My armistice is too late.

Arc(k) (poem)

Ginger Teppner

Somewhere in a dense Ecuadorian estuary without modern electrical convenience a functional submarine is being constructed by hand. Piece by piece over the course of a year, several parts at a time are being delivered via canoe. This submarine will be used to transport ungodly amounts of cocaine directly to American shores and possibly beyond. Even this unfortunate truth cannot mar the lush wistfulness of an architect seduced by poetry to create a wooden hulled vessel. Assembled the old-fashioned way by men without watches, it languishes beneath a canopy of mangroves and waits for the tide to brush the arm of bluing sea against tender current of river's patient mouth.

Credit: Marielena Gomez, *Untitled,* n.d. Photograph.

Xing Xing group painting, *The Last Supper*, 1980. Painting destroyed.

Forerunners for a New Generation of Modern Art in China: Yan Li, Ma Desheng and Huang Rui

Xiaojian Peng

Yan Li, Ma Desheng and Huang Rui were three young Chinese artists who in their mid and late 20's were members of two underground art and literary groups: Xing Xing (Stars) and Jintian (Today) in Beijing during the late 1970s and the early 1980s. They were primarily painters during that period but they also wrote poetry and designed the covers of underground poetry books. Both Xing Xing and Jintina were in the vanguard of cultural activism. Their members were among the first wave of Chinese artists and writers who called for a new modern culture and society that would promote artistic and personal freedom. They survived the Cultural Revolution with only a few years of formal education. Nevertheless, they learned to draw, paint and write during their free time while they were living in rundown neighborhoods, government apartment buildings and factory dormitories. During the late 1970's and early 1980's, they reclaimed public spaces for themselves. They read modern poetry in historical ruins, held unofficial modern art shows, and danced to rock n' roll in public parks. They secretly posted slogans, poems and drawings on Democracy Wall and participated in the famous 1979 street demonstration for artistic freedom. They were China's first "hipsters." Some of them adopted the cool existentialist life style of the actors in the international films they saw screened in foreign embassies, and they embraced the free life style of the rock n' roll and jazz musicians they listened and danced to. Because of their "outlaw" style and personal ties to China's political dissidents associated with Democracy Wall, Yan Li, Ma Desheng and Huang Rui and many of their artist and poet friends went into exile. Yan Li moved to the U.S. Ma Desheng went to France and Huang Rui ended up living in Japan for many years. Yan Li and Huang Rui returned to China by 2002. Ma Desheng remains in Paris.

Until recently, the activities of Xing Xing and Jintian were a taboo subject in Chinese publications because of their 1979 demonstration for artistic freedom and their ties to the Democracy Wall Movement. But now the work and activities of Yan Li, Ma Desheng and Huang Rui are included in histories of modern Chinese culture. For example, in Lu Peng's *A History of Art in 20th Century China* (Charta Books Ltd, NYC, 2010) and Gao Minglu's *Total Modernity and the Avant-garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (MIT Press, 2011) they are regarded as pivotal influencers of the contemporary Chinese art and literature scene that flourished in China throughout the 1980s. In other words, they inspired the Chinese artists who came after them, those who graduated from the newly reopened universities, art academies, music conservatories and the Beijing Film Academy, as well as the established Chinese writers, intellectuals and a few government officials who eventually engaged in open debate about how to create a new modern Chinese culture. This period is now referred to as High Culture Fever, which lasted in Beijing until the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen Square student demonstrations.

Because Yan Li, Ma Desheg and Huang Rui were mostly self-taught artists, there is often a rough spontaneous feel to their work that is exciting, especially when one remembers the times they were living in while they were producing their art. Some of Yan Li's paintings when he was in his 20s have a dream-like quality and the ironic and often humorous surrealist style consistent with some of the poetry he wrote later. You can see a cubist influence in some of them as well. Ma Desheng also has that free spontaneous style, but sometimes it is clear that he has picked up influences from traditional Asian art. Huang Rui seems to have been influenced by the Shanghai modernism of the 1930s plus some influences from European art that he probably saw in art books and journals he was able to find through underground sources or through the libraries of foreign embassies. One of the mistaken beliefs foreigners have about Chinese modern and contemporary art is that it was primarily influenced by the West. This is not true. Yes, Chinese artists have been influenced by Western art, but China has its own playful folk art, a tradition of abstract ink painting, free style calligraphy, and designs that go as far back as Neolithic pottery. Influences from these sources might be unconscious or used in the ways European artists and writers used non-western culture.

The '85 Movement followed Xing Xing. It was made up of young artist groups from several regions of China. For a short period, this movement flourished openly in China with different factions producing art manifestos and organized art exhibitions. Most of the Chinese artists who have international reputations today participated in this special period of Chinese cultural history. It came to an abrupt end with the Chinese government's closing of the exhibition "China / Avant-garde" in Beijing in February, 1989 and the confrontation between the Chinese Army and Chinese university students in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. There emerged after these tumultuous events new underground art, independent film and rock n' roll groups located in peasant villages on the outskirts of Beijing and in rural and industrial areas elsewhere in China. Some from these groups went into exile. Those who remained in China and those who eventually returned produced the Chinese contemporary culture we know today. Yan Li, Ma Desheng and Huang Rui and the other members of Xing Xing provided the examples for their contemporaries and the Chinese artists who came after them. They took creative risks, were rebellious and unafraid of the consequences.

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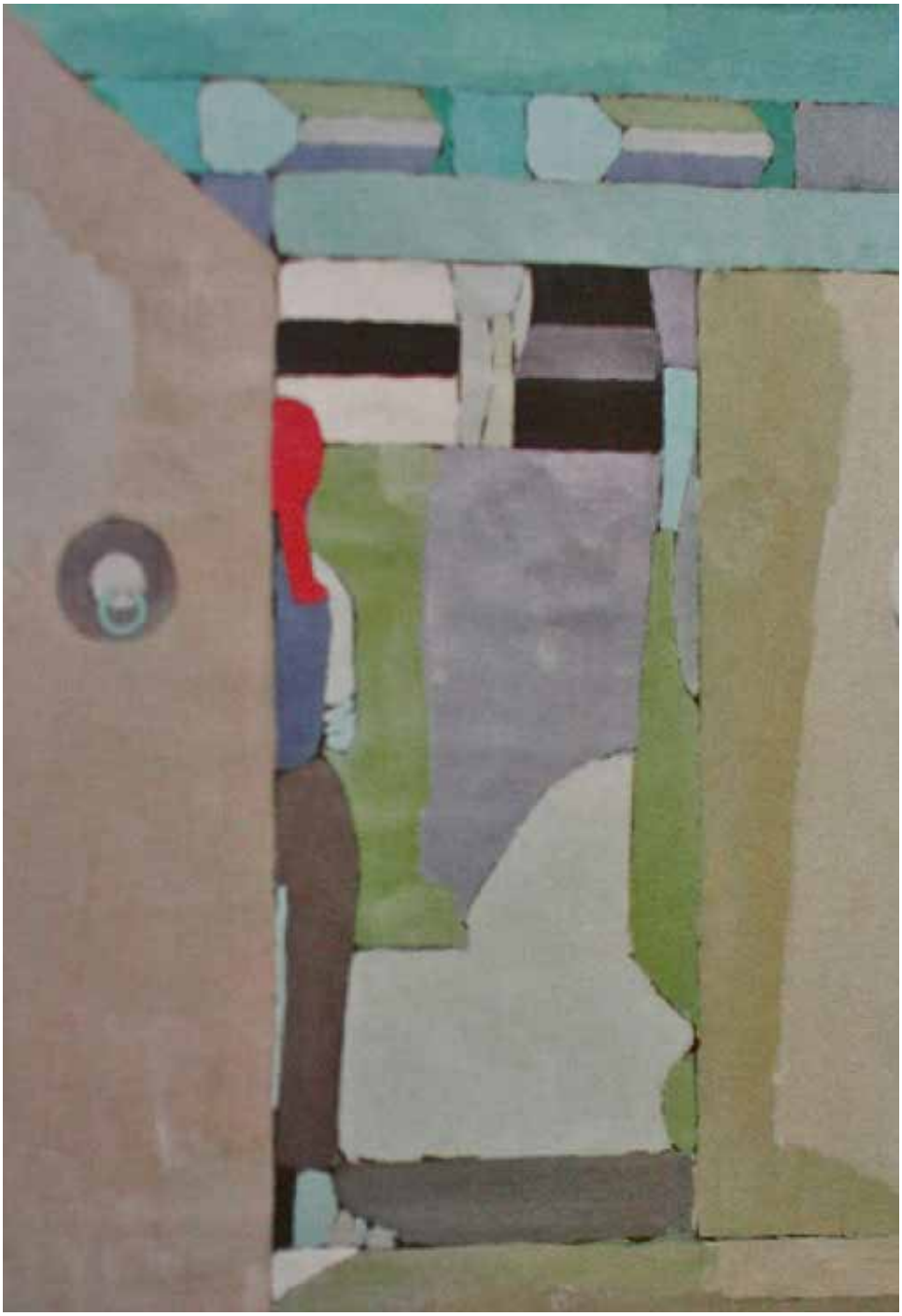

Huang Ri, *Red Haired Girl,* 1981. Painting.

Credit: Marielena Gomez, *Untitled,* n.d. Photograph.

After the Last Beach Day

Puma Perl

The green-eyed man has left the garden
Abraham talks to the waves
Seagulls wait patiently
staring down the rocks
A girl dances alone,
hair coiled like shells

Behind dark glasses
I crave cigarettes,
anger, sugar, drugs

Revenge

Soon doors will lock
in five o'clock darkness
Summer destroyed
and forgotten

I carry my chair
like a surfboard,
unbalanced

My mother
called me "Dropsy"

You call me nothing

Abraham and the green-eyed man
are gone, promises are sand-storms,
my lips are scarred but unsealed

With nothing to lose, I drive home.

Raw Materials (poem)

Steve Swell

Suave smooth

Lean mean

Elegant in their

structural improvisations using the acoustical properties of the space as a point of departure, amplifying objects, oscillators, entanglement of wires into
kinetic phenomenon activating manipulated interference modulations to short circuit local landscapes immersing cultural snapshots of electronic chatter intricacies in order to factualize the ceremonies of real time into multi channel saturated sonic listeners

These strange furtive silhouettes re-crossing interstate commerce lines are yesterdays conversations with their comical fabric invites and fading footsteps arriving then vanishing within mingled silent presences of ghostly nebula on invisible paths hearing a world of inviting encounters

Their watering cans are filled with impulsive pistols gesturing revealed devices to passers by confronted with occupied radio frequencies of various channels inculcated with hammering drill bits against the metallic dusk of their own undoing making it easier and easier to further agendas that will ultimately kill them

Unearthing the gleaning underpass north of places of worship and other public spaces unknown or forgotten, espousing more for less while breakdancing with orbital pitches of prevalent truths and other such lies that make for clock work redundancies infiltrating cognizant double-entendres with the conspicuous assurance that we struggle along just to wake each other up

Opposite: Jessica Lipsky, *New Mexico,* n.d. Painting.

Credit: Stephanie JT Russell. *Boyhood Falling,* n.d. Photograph.

Visitation (creative nonfiction)

Jeffrey Adelson

I was holding him. He was pressed beside me, lying on his back with his front paws lifted limply above him. He was stretching his head backwards, and I was burying my face in his neck and rubbing his belly. I could feel the prickly whiskers under his chin poking against my cheek. Slowly I began to wake up, but before I fully opened my eyes, I remembered he was gone.

It has been over a month, and the process of accepting my great loss; of acknowledging his complete absence is long and aching. I am not devastated every moment of every day – I am not unable to function or to smile – I can have conversations, I can laugh. It has been more of a continuous, slow-moving, cumulative loneliness. Something very personal, very sweet, and unspeakably sad.

I'm often not aware of, or forget just how personal this loss has been for me until I leave the apartment. I find I don't want to meet anyone I know from the park or from the neighborhood who's known him; don't want to explain what happened, don't want to say how I feel, don't want to see the expressions on their faces, hear encouraging words, or sympathy, or how they might understand because they've lost beloved pets. I'd just as soon avoid any awkward or uncomfortable small talk about something that has been such a significant marker of transition in my life. I want to hold this experience close to my chest, like a cherished locket, and let its precious secret hang hidden just over my heart.

I remember a time when I was a child – it was after Alexandra had died, I must have been 9 or 10 years old. I'd been walking around Greenwich Village with my favorite aunt. We were looking in shops and I wanted to go inside a small leather shop on Bleecker Street. In the window there was a display of colorful fringed belts and bags. My aunt silently indicated that she'd rather not go in, but in my selfish childishness it wasn't possible for me to take into consideration that she might have had a reason for denying me my wish – I couldn't have imagined my immediate needs not being met, and so I pressed through the front door. Inside the dark shop were two men; one of them smiled with recognition at my aunt and said "How's the baby?" With a forced smile and no explanation she said that the baby had died.

The air was suddenly sucked from the room. I could feel her strength and her suffering. I was a child. I had no vocabulary for what was going on. I now know that I wasn't responsible for her suffering at that moment, nonetheless uncomfortable feelings rose in me – feelings I now might recognize as guilt. Decades later, the same feelings of guilt rise in me when I think that I might have been responsible for my aunt's discomfort that day.

Similar feelings of uneasiness and disquiet have revisited me intermittently since that long ago afternoon. This very specific memory of that time with my aunt has repeated more frequently in my mind since Zeke's death. When I cross the street to avoid a dog walker, when I smile at a neighbor then quicken my pace, silently acknowledging that

I don't want to talk, the memory arises. How could a young boy possibly have had any understanding of this personal and complex mixture of loss and embarrassment? He couldn't. Childish memory brushes against adult consciousness, and my heart reaches through time to comfort that grieving young woman, just as it reaches out to console that confused little boy.

Morning Feast (poem)

Stephanie JT Russell

The river's gone *sumi*-e. In the grit-flocked commuter train
window, silver ducks dot the patinated waters.
Knowledge of the approaching city drops like a tattered scrim
lighter than imagining, of snowfall gasping into the just-cold air
reminding me you were right about revolution –
that it is always in the belly of the thing it aims to devour.

Who are we but the sum of our own lost potential
cutting into the mist, high as winter's blackbird
hungering through the scarcity for a frozen morning feast?

– for Philip Elliot Slater

Contributors

Layla Abdullah-Poulos is an alumna of SUNY Empire State College with a B.A. in Historical Studies and Cultural Studies (2010). She is presently a student in the School for Graduate Studies' Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program with a concentration in Cultural Studies. Abdullah-Poulos also is pursuing advanced graduate certificates in Women and Gender and American Studies. She is a staff writer for the college's The Student Connection student-run newsletter. Abdullah-Poulos received the Edwin and Ruth Decker Scholarship for Academic Excellence in 2008. In 2014, she was awarded the Empire State College Student Service award, as well as the Foner Fellowship in Work, Culture and Social Change. Abdullah-Poulos also is a multi-year recipient of the UUP Joint Labor Management Individual Development Award (2014, 2015). Recognizing issues of academic estrangement many minority students experience, Abdullah-Poulos founded the SUNY Empire State College Minority Students in Action club. As president of the club, she envisions it as a space where students can be encouraged to gain the skills and abilities necessary for scholastic success and develop a voice to improve their academic experiences.

Jeffrey Adelson

Nancy Babbitt is a student at Empire State College who has been studying in the area of Social Theory, Social Structure and Change with a concentration in Studies in Social Justice. She is very interested in the areas that may relate to the healing of Generational Trauma and Historical Harms: Restorative Practices, Conflict Resolution, Mediation, Nonviolent Communication, Nonviolence, Constructive Program, Justpeace Ethics and Trauma Healing. Her interests focus on ways to achieve greater social justice and more peaceful interpersonal relationships in our families, in our communities and in our societies. Special areas of personal interest include those that express notions of a relational accountability and responsibility in one's life: Environmental sustainability, alternative economies and self-sufficiency skills such as voluntary simplicity, homeschooling, organic gardening and urban gardening. Her interest in social change led her to look to 'other ways of knowing' and more specifically, Indigenous Studies, her most current academic focus.

Jenna Ann Broderick currently studies Early Childhood Educational Studies and the Creative Arts at Empire State College in preparation to enter a Graduate Creative Arts Therapy program. Using multiple mediums, including paint, graphics-editing programs, three dimensional collage and textile arts, she recreates visual stories and through redaction poetry she re-pens narratives. By layering and omitting a new landscape is formed and portals of coincidental and unexpected connections invite viewers to slip into other worlds of being.

Tessa Lou Fix is in her last semester at Empire State College where she has had the transformative experience of examination and analysis of the paradigms that the western world thrives upon, through studies ranging as widely as feminist intersectionalites and

Opposite: Jeffrey Adelson, *Tower,* n.d. Photograph.

Front Cover: Takayuki Jay Ide, *Rouge 1,* n.d. Painting.

Back Cover: Takayuki Jay Ide, *Rouge 2,* n.d. Painting.

LGBTQ theory, to the historical, cultural and environmental significance of The Erie Canal. She started on the higher education path years ago at Eugene Lang College at The New School, studying literature, and is now a writer, visual and performance artist and scholar. She has always split her residence between the dichotomous environs of the rural Mohawk River Valley and the extreme urban backdrop of Chelsea, Manhattan. This wonderful juxtaposition of contrasts is at the heart of her creative process. She will continue to grow her (suddenly quite demanding) wearable art, clothing line, Tessa Lou™, as she moves into the next chapter of her academic career, which will either be a master's/Ph.D. program in Social Sciences or an M.F.A. program in poetry. Oh, the choice ESC affords one!

Marielena Gomez, at 16, received her first camera from her father. It was a Polaroid One, with three packets of film. At the age of 18, she handled her first reel and from then on never looked back. Having studied minimal photography, Marielena finds that to capture the moment as she sees fit is the best way to grab her audience. Everyone has the opportunity to see something beautiful, but with her eye, Marielena captures the essence of the art with a click and hopes her viewers also are transported by what she sees. Artist statement: These works are images imprinted in my head as to how the world can be viewed. Perhaps with a bright light or a touch of sadness, the reality of photography is in the eye of the beholder, the viewer. My inspiration is life itself, and what my eyes and heart can take in. As an artist, I love to capture the present and transport myself to a moment of stillness in that existence that only a time machine or a camera can obtain. It is through this that I find my images to shine.

Takayuki Jay Ide was born in Kobe, Japan, to a Japanese father and American mother, but he grew up mostly in New York City. His works include acrylic painting, as well as jewelry. Being both Japanese and American has influenced T.Jay to develop his passion for shapes and colors. His paintings, Rouge 1 and Rouge 2, were on display in the 2014 SUNY Student Art Show at the New York State Museum in Albany, N.Y. Artist statement: In every picture I paint, I put my personal touch, energy and intensity. Rouge 2 is about embarrassment. A little cover up can hide a few blemishes but it can't hide everything. Everyone has embarrassing moments and sometimes they stand out as bold memories. I splattered paint on to the paper and created overlapping splotches of different colors remembering to leave certain areas exposed and certain areas covered. Scratching, scraping, brushing and blotting the paint, I created different textures and forms. I took inspiration from and exaggerated on the meaning of burlesque.

Howard Kreutzer was born and raised in a working-class section of Brooklyn. Prior to studying at ESC, he pursued dual degrees at Bard College in photography and anthropology. While in attendance there, he lettered in two varsity sports and was active in seven academic honor societies. By taking further art classes at ESC, he hopes to improve and consolidate his portfolio, to gain admittance to an M.F.A. program. Artist statement: My photography is a

critical and anthropological attempt to document rural, urban and industrial American landscapes and the people who occur in these communities, and a critique of America in this time of crisis. The last decade brought war, housing foreclosures and economic recession; I try to allow the pictures to speak for me. It never surprises me that some things in the process of being torn down or reconstructed have a sad geometric beauty, leaving the viewer with a confused sense of nostalgia and emptiness. Many who have passed by the broken-down domiciles I have encountered upstate might think, what a terrible ugliness these people live in. I see something that could and should be contextualized to create beauty where most people cannot see it. I consider myself more of an anthropologist with my camera than a creative artist and as such, I attempt to ask, through my art, how America has lost its way.

ibn Kenyatta

Jessica Lipsky has a long history of accomplishments in the arts and art education. Her artwork has been shown in numerous venues including the A.I.R. Gallery and The Liberty Group Art Show in Brooklyn. Her art education includes the Brooklyn Museum, Art Students League, Spring Street Studio, among other institutions. Artist statement: A Brownie camera was my buddy growing up. Sunsets and people have always been in my frame and so for 30 years my camera introduced me to people and cultures I may have never met. My camera is my sketch book. I always have it with me, looking for composition and taking candid photographs of people. I can sit in a cafe for hours with camera focused and ready, waiting for the perfect stranger to step into my parlor. Over the last 50 years, my collection of photos has provided me with a variety of people to sketch and paint from all over the world. When I need to draw from life, I call my cousin, Shirley, or friend, Cal, and ask if I can come over and begin a painting. I find it interesting that I have a waiting list of people who have volunteered to pose for me. Wherever I go, I find people of interest. I have two paintings of my Hospice patient and others of children from an orphanage in Mexico. Right now, all I can envision are sunsets. Just when I think the color blue has taken over my soul, the color purple lures me away. And tomorrow its all about green. Even though I think my favorite color is purple, I realize I love red and yellow. Painting is a meditation that takes me to the beauty of the land, big sky or into the heart of a friend. When I step back I am usually surprised at what is on the canvas and wonder how I did that. My purpose in life is communication. I want you to know me through my work. I want to introduce my subject to you. I want you to know what I feel.

Katrina del Mar is a New York-based photographer, video artist, writer and award-winning film director. In 2014, she was awarded her bachelor's degree in Visual Art by Empire State College. Artist statement: Her solo exhibition GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS was presented in January 2013 at Participant Inc. in New York. Invited to teach at the University of the Arts in Bremen, Germany, she conducted the first ever Queer Trash Feminist Film Workshop in 2010. In 2012, she presented a series of films and photographs from the Golden Age of Performance Art (1988-2000) On the Edge of Society: Moments

in Live Art, at Warehouse 9, Copenhagen, Denmark. Katrina has shown her critically acclaimed Girl Gang Trilogy of films internationally, including venues such as the Museum for Contemporary Art (CAPC), Bordeaux, France; the Fringe Film Festival, London, UK, 2012; the MoMA Dome 2 in Rockaway Beach; The Horse Hospital in London; and at Bio Paradis, Reykjavik, Iceland. Katrina's work has garnered numerous awards including a fellowship in video from the New York Foundation for the Arts, "Best Experimental Film" from the Planet Out Short Movie Awards announced at the Sundance Film Festival, the 2010 Accolade Award of Merit in Experimental Film, and Winner of Juried Competition, Schoolhouse Gallery, Provincetown, Mass., 2012.

Jon-Marc McDonald is humbled to be included among such a brilliant team of editors for this year's edition of the Metropolitan Review. Jon-Marc is a current student at SUNY Empire State College where he is concentrating his studies in creative writing and communication. Prior to ESC, Jon-Marc began his career in politics where he worked on several high-profile political campaigns. In addition to his current academic pursuits, Jon-Marc serves a publicist for individuals in the entertainment industry. He also is the proud father to the best dog in the world, Weezie.

Margaret Mercer tried the college thing briefly when she was 18. After two semesters she quit, moved to New York and embarked on what became a 35 year career in radio. Now, she believes she is the right age for college and is happily pursuing her bachelor's degree at Empire State College.

Veronica Mitchell is an alumni of SUNY Empire State College. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management and Economics, which she was awarded in 2013. Veronica returned to college to complete her undergraduate degree after completing a 25 plus year career in business. A Native New Yorker, Veronica is an avid reader and she has been writing for most of her life. Life's perpetual challenges continue to strengthen and humble her, so the impetus for her writing is to inspire others. A self-described "life learner," she currently balances her entrepreneurial aspirations, creative writing, family life, volunteering and job searching while pursuing her MBA.

Xiaojian Peng (b.1974) grew up in a working class neighborhood in Shanghai where Ruan Lingyu, the famous Chinese actor, lived during the 1930s. Like most young people from her neighborhood, she left school at 16 and went to work, first in Japanese restaurants and later, after receiving her high school paper at night, in a government shipping company where she learned English on her own. She went on to study English for one year at Jiao Tong University before she immigrated to the United States. She earned her A.A.S. degree (magna cum laude) in Commercial Art, specifically digital technologies, at Nassau Community College. For more than 10 years, she has served as a translator and has actively participated in discussions with important artists, writers, film directors and actors in China, Hong Kong, New York and Paris. After she receives a B.S. in Graphic Design with courses in curatorial studies at Empire State College, she plans to return to China with her husband, where she

hopes to find employment with cultural institutions as a graphic designer and as a curator and promoter for art and photography exhibitions and film festivals. She currently lives in Brooklyn.

Puma Perl (aka Davalyn Perl) graduated from Empire State College in April 2000, earning a Bachelor of Science degree with a concentration in community services. She also studied theater and arts. It was there that she began to formulate her beliefs in the transformative and healing power of the creative arts and the ways in which they might intersect with social work, education and health care. She went on to earn a master's in Social Work at Hunter College (2006) and continued her work in harm reduction and with the most disenfranchised populations at community based organizations and medical institutions. She is still a licensed social worker, although she now focuses her energies fully on the arts. She is a widely published poet, writer and journalist who writes an arts and cultural column for the Villager/Chelsea Now and is a monthly contributor to Steel Notes Magazine, and has authored two chapbooks, the award-winning Belinda and Her Friends (2008), Ruby True (2012) and two full-length collections, *knuckle tattoos* (2010) and the recently published *Retrograde* (great weather for MEDIA press, 2014). She was the co-creator, co-producer and main curator of DDAY Productions, which mounted shows in various NYC venues. Her current venture is Puma Perl's Pandemonium, which launched at the Bowery Electric in 2012 and brings poetry together with rock and roll. She performs regularly with a number of excellent musicians and continues to curate shows. She is the photographic editor of the upcoming anthology, *Slices of the Apple.* Her photographs of artists, poets and musicians are frequently used for album covers, fliers and headshots, and have been published in literary journals and newspapers. The poems that you will read were included in her most recent collection, Retrograde.

Omar Richards, also known as JahLib, is a native of the Caribbean. He moved to the dynamic city of Brooklyn, N.Y., with his family at a young age. He began expressing his artistic creativity very early in his childhood with drawing, painting, sculpting and chanting. Artist statement: Inspired by the social issues, sharing the blessings of life with others, and the reverence for the Most High JAH-Rastafari; he merges them to convey his passions and principles: to bring attention to the quiet and often disregarded struggles and moments of beauty that confronts the "have-nots" of the world. He understands that languages and cultures may differ, but people all share in life's joys and pains.

Virginia Riis is a full-time student at ESC. She writes, paints and plays piano and guitar (though not always well, and not all of the time). She plans to get a master's degree in something literary, find a suitable place to live in downtown Manhattan, and then never move. She serves in many capacities in her cat's apartment. They live in the Bronx. She was recently awarded the Nicholas Pekearo Scholarship for creative writing.

Stephanie JT Russell is an interdisciplinary artist, photographer, published author and cultural worker. She has exhibited and performed nationally and internationally at numerous venues,

including The Albright-Knox Gallery, CEPA and Circolo Pickwick in Genoa, Italy. She has been a guest lecturer at New York University, The New York State Theater Educators Association, Eastern Mennonite University and Lincoln Center's arts education program. As a visiting artist in Liberia during its civil conflict, Ms. Russell taught collective theater-making to high school students, former child soldiers and K-12 educators. Ms. Russell's most recent books, *One Flash of Lightning: A Samurai Path for Living the Moment* and *The Zen of Small Things* (a book of nature photographs and poetry), were released in 2005 and 2006, respectively (Andrews McMeel Publishing). *One Flash* was released in a second edition in 2007. Her poetry appears in the anthologies *Words Upon the Water* and *Oakland Out Loud,* and has been featured on poetz.com and on the blog site of award-winning poet and visual artist Kim Shuck. Ms. Russell is currently working on a novel, *The Autobiography of Pinchas the Tailor,* and a suite of hand-worked metal-print photographs. She lives in the Hudson Valley. Artist statement: As a polymath entering my fifth decade of artistic practice, the diverse range of my work has been driven by an inquiry into the nature of consciousness. The raw materials of that inquiry, always evolving, drive the creative processes that emerge in the making of a new work of visual or performing art, or through a dialogic expression in poetry, essay and fiction. Each discipline is a vehicle for exploring qualities of presence and awareness within a given space, whether that space is a concrete art object (a painting, photograph, film or sculpture); the physical space of a stage; or the pure-potential space of a written page. Pushing the boundaries of those spaces remains a present and crucial ethos of my search for moments of unexpected truth, through every form within my reach.

Ryan Smithson is an Iraq War veteran and alumnus of Empire State College where he received the Nicholas Pekearo Scholarship for Creative Writing and the SUNY Chancellor's Award. He has published several short stories and poems, and his memoir, *Ghosts of War: The True Story of a 19-Year-Old GI* was published by HarperCollins in 2009. He is currently working on his master's thesis, a monologue performance about contemporary veterans, at the University at Albany.

Claudia Summers began attending Empire State College in 2013. In 2014, she was awarded the Nicholas Pekearo Scholarship for her fiction writing. Her writings have been published in Omen Magazine and the book, Punk-Sex. She is interested in continuing on to graduate school for an M.F.A. in Creative Writing after her completion of a B.A. in Cultural Studies in 2016. At present, she is working on a collection of short stories.

Steve Swell was born in Newark, N.J. A trombonist/composer, he has been an active member of the NYC music community since 1975. He has toured and recorded with diverse jazz personalities from Lionel Hampton and Buddy Rich to "outsiders" Anthony Braxton and Cecil Taylor. Swell has 40 recordings as a leader or co-leader and is featured on more than a hundred other releases. Among the grants/awards he has received are the USArtists International (2006), MCAF (LMCC, 2008 and 2013), Creative Curricula (LMCC), commissions for the

Interpretations Series (2006 and 2012), Jazz Journalist's Association Trombonist of the Year nominee (2008 and 2011), El Intruso's Trombonist of the Year 2008-2010 and 2012 (Argentina), Downbeat Critics Poll (2010-2014) and the 2008 Jubilation Foundation Fellowship Award (Tides Foundation) for recognition of his work teaching special needs children in NYC.

Ginger Teppner received her B.A. in Cultural Studies from Empire State College and her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics of Naropa University. Recent publications include Upstairs at Duroc, Shambhala Times, Not enough Night and Semicolon.

Joseph Verrastro is an American artist, born, residing and at work in Buffalo, N.Y. A purveyor of light, color and form, Joe's work is a dynamic reflection of his interests in history, science, nature, music and the visual arts. Artist statement: "Milk and Honey" pays tribute to Lebanon, the biblical land of milk and honey. Imbuing a subtle suggestion of the female form engaged in dance, perhaps of the seven veils variety, it is softly colored and highly textured, utilizing repurposed packaging material with fishnet like qualities. This particular painting is a variation from a suite of works based on the honeycomb. It features comparatively larger combs than other works in the suite, and a freer approach to surface and paint. My aim is to capture the mystic and exotic qualities I associate with this branch of my ancestry.

Andrew Warren is an aspiring writer and ethnobotanist. Born in NYC and raised in a suburb of Newark, he began attending ESC in 2014.

Submissions Policy: We seek the best work of present and former Empire State College undergraduate and graduate students and alumni, from any location or program. Our criteria is excellence, which we believe is best exemplified in the arts and creative expression through combinations of some or all of the following: imagination, vitality, energy, mastery, experimentation, deep reflection, discovery and passion. In academic, journalistic and scholarly work we seek writing that combines some or all of the following: rigor, analysis, expose, illumination, precision, political discourse, strong support, careful reasoning, nuance and depth.

To submit, be sure that you follow the guidelines. Your work should stand on its own merit, and not be labeled or appear as a classroom assignment. It must be properly cited (APA, Chicago, MLA are all fine). Use only Times New Roman font size 12 point for written text, double spaced (unless it is a poem – then, how you format it is up to you). All written work must be submitted as an MS Word attachment, and not copied in the submission email, or provided as a link. No zip files, please, and no submission by phone text. These will be deleted without reading.

All art must be submitted in jpeg form, at a resolution of not less than 300 dpi. Again, please do not submit your artwork with a link, but as an attachment. With artwork, you will need to include a short bio as an MS Word attachment with your email, of 50-100 words. For artwork, please also include an artist's statement that explains the artwork, including its conception and technique, and specifies the medium (100-250 words), also as an MS Word attachment. Do not include the bio or artist statement in the text of your submission email.

You may submit the following, but not more:

Poems: up to four poems
Essays/Articles: up to three essays
Fiction or creative nonfiction: up to three stories/narratives
Art: a maximum of six images

Unfortunately, we do not accept submissions consisting of blog posts or previously published material. If your submission is accepted for publication, you may publish it with another publication later, but must give credit to the Metropolitan Review as first publisher (meaning, you must credit MR).

All submissions must be properly labeled in this way:
Subject line: MR 2016 SUBMISSION: title, author's full name, type of submission
Example: MR 2016 SUBMISSION: Extraordinary Something, Jane Doe, Painting

Send your submissions to **Karyn.Pilgrim@esc.edu**

MR submission period runs from **Oct. 15 to Jan. 15** annually.

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