



Victims to
VICTORS

Reflections on *Come On People*

By

Bill Cosby & Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D.

By

Incarcerated New Mexicans

This publication is the result of a project conducted in the New Mexico adult prison system. Residents were given a chance to read *Come On, People* by **Bill Cosby and Dr. Alvin F Poussaint M.D.** and discuss what they learned as a group. Education staff members dedicated their time and talents to help incarcerated men and women discover their path to victory. We want to thank those dedicated staff members for their time. We also want to thank the residents and staff who participated and shared their experiences. We especially want to thank Bill Cosby and Dr. Poussaint for providing the books that made this project possible and the Corrections Education Association for developing the partnership that got it all started.

Any opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the New Mexico Corrections Department, Bill Cosby, or Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint M.D.

Cover Art by Dion Henderson 45774

First Place Essay

Author Jerrica Sanders 68937

As I began to read this book, I said to myself, “This is just another one of those self-help books that promises to make a difference in your life if you follow a few steps.” I started chapter one and realized that this book could be not only an inspiration to me, but it could help me realize things from a perspective I’ve never known.

The section titled, “What’s Going on with Black Men” opened my eyes to facts that I was aware of, but I never seemed to understand why. The chapter’s questions have always lingered in the back of my mind. Why are there so many black men in prison? Why are they so insecure and determined that they are predestined for failure? I never realized that a father could be so fundamental in raising a child.

I was raised in a single parent home, but one that’s not common. I was raised by my father. Though things were far from perfect I can see how they could have been a lot different without him. I believe that fatherhood training programs would be a great thing for my boys. It wouldn’t be such a bad idea to start them in counseling now while they’re young, because they are currently in a single parent home.

They do have their grandfather as a role model. I never knew how much not having a positive full time male role model could affect them until now. As an African American female I know all too well how our culture can belittle black men. I too believe that anyone deserves a second chance at being a parent, if they have good intentions and have made positive progress in parenthood.

Positive role models are hard to come by in my community, and I believe that we should have more shows like the Cosby Show. We need more information on how to get involved in positive activities. I believe this chapter helped me to understand what my children will need as young black men and how I can help to ensure they have the things they need to become strong black men.

Slavery is something I know really happened, but I seldom think about it; especially the suffering that a slave actually had to endure, I don’t believe black families talk about slavery and its effects enough. I’m sure my family didn’t. Slavery has always been something like a myth to me. They say it happened but I’ve never seen that type of thing. It is unimaginable that anyone could actually believe that people could be happy while enduring torture. I don’t understand how anyone could believe that just because a person’s skin tone was a few shades darker they weren’t human.

I have used the black card. I have thought that to be successful you either have to be white or be very well acquainted with someone white. I never really acknowledged the fact that if I worked hard and pressed forward even I could be successful. I believe that not only was my family still mentally in bondage to the “white man”, but they were also very prejudiced. This attitude was crippling because they tried to make me believe not only was I going to fail because I was black but they held racist attitudes thinking things like, “Mexicans ain’t worth nothing either,” which had a very negative affect on me as a child.

I never knew what the term “victim mentality” was referring to until very recently, but I have been letting it affect me for many years. I have been allowing myself to live in self-destruct mode for about ten years now and I am only 27 years old. I felt hopeless. Instead of trying to find a way to overcome I began to let society eat me up. I belittled and degraded myself until the Lord decided to put me here to give me time to look at the path that I was on. He pushed me toward the path I needed to be on.

I guess I haven’t found those doors of opportunity that the authors are referring to, because I haven’t spent enough energy searching for them. I plan on changing that very soon. I’ve never imagined I could make a difference in anything. If I were to try to get up and form a group or even help my own children that is more positive than sitting in front of the television watching other people make a change. I always thought you had to be a part of some secret club like The Nation or The Black Panthers to make a difference in black communities.

I’ve never pictured what people like Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth actually went through to fight for us. I haven’t done my part in fulfilling the dream they dreamt. I am ashamed that I haven’t tried or even taught my children about these extraordinary men and women.

I must fight back by overcoming all of the obstacles that have held me back and kept me from being a mother to my children and a positive force in my community. I have to win the war against my addictions for things like fast money, sex and drugs. I am more certain now than ever before that I have the ability to overcome. This book has instilled in me the importance of perseverance. If I can’t then my children may decide they can’t either. I will not allow my three boys and two girls to feel trapped in poverty like I have for so long!

I am certain that drugs destroyed my life even before I began using. When I was only dealing, I destroyed many other lives too. At the same time, I believe the penalties for drug crimes are a little intense. I don’t understand why am I getting more time for my drug charge than pedophiles and rapist get for their crimes. That makes no sense to me. I also believe there should be more “stings” for those type of repeat offenders. I don’t believe that drug dealers should “get off”, but I do believe that while they’re incarcerated they should be provided with proper life skills. They shouldn’t just be locked up and released to do the same thing over again.

I wasn’t raised in a family or a community where drugs were all I knew. I wasn’t raised around drugs at all. I’ve seen success both legally and illegally gotten. When I was on my own I chose the ghetto lifestyle. I ran away at seventeen. The only people who are successful in the ghetto are the “Ballers” or the people who sell the most drugs. The dream of a lot of the children in those neighborhoods was to become a “Baller”. The truth is that drug dealers help to keep poor communities in poverty. I’ve seen a lot of them try to give back to the communities the best way they know how. Not all drug dealers are bad people they are just misguided souls.

I gave birth to my first child at the age of sixteen and it was not a planned pregnancy. It might

have subconsciously been one of those traps the authors are referring to. Prenatal care has always been vitally important to me as a mother of five. A lot of women are afraid to seek prenatal care because of drug abuse and unwillingness to quit. I believe there should be more programs to address that issue and reach out to those women.

I never realized that “whupping” a child could cause so many problems. I thought everyone got whupped. I chose not to “whupp” my children. The most I’ve ever had to do is raise my voice or smack a hand. I believe that all children who are talked to and have things explained to them are more well behaved. I never imagined that a child could have a mental disorder. I guess they start somewhere but I couldn’t imagine my child needing to see a psychologist.

I was raised believing that the “white man” just wants to give you medication to make you crazy. I’ve only recently realized that mental disorders are very real and they can cause functioning problems. In prison a lot of the women have serious problems. I often feel like I’m in an overcrowded asylum. I believe these women, including me, should receive more mental health attention, be properly medicated and given proper treatment when they are released. That could prevent some of us from coming back.

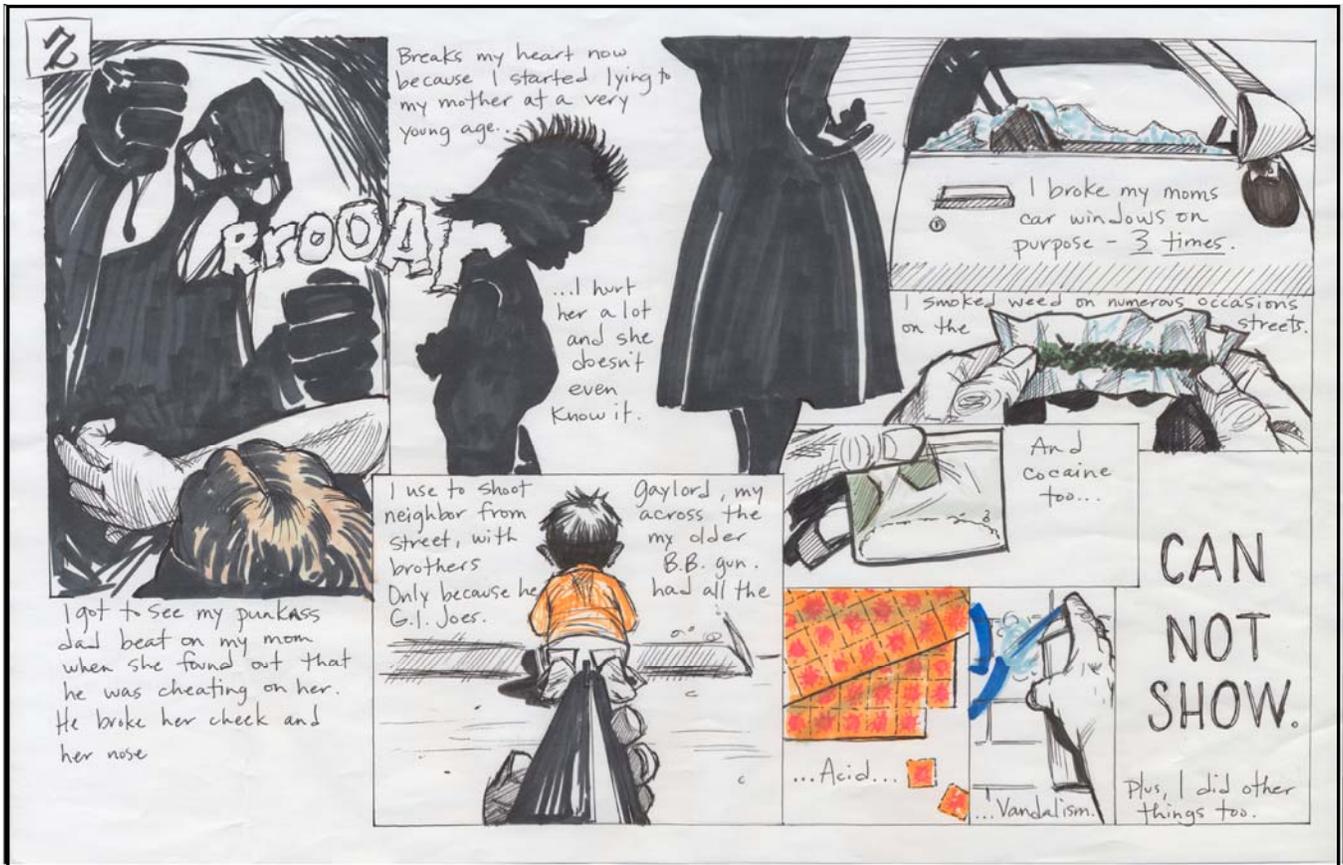
I am familiar with the effects that sexual abuse can have on a child. I believe that being raised in a sheltered environment and being taught to obey and trust my elders may have caused me to be naïve. I may have trusted people too much with my children. They may have been subjected to the same abuse I vowed to keep them from.

Though I’m not certain anything ever occurred I now know that it is okay to talk about it. Parents have to find out and continue to talk about it until it is resolved or at least bearable. I used to think it could only cause problems, but by bringing it up parents can ease the pain rather than leave scars.

This book is an instruction manual on how to bring up and protect our youth. To some these things may come natural and without thought. I am one of the few who needed, enjoyed and received the entire lesson inside this book. I appreciate the day I walked through the hall and saw the sign that read, “Bill Cosby Essay Writing Contest”. I was expecting a comical book. I never expected it to change my thought process and through that my life.

This book has inspired me to become an influential African American woman and raise my children to become strong black men and women. I will no longer be afraid to help my neighbor because now I’m aware of how fundamental it is for “our people” to finally overcome.

First Place Art
Artist Dion Henderson 45774



3



I had this .22 from when I was really young.

I got a hold of this .22 from an ex-con.

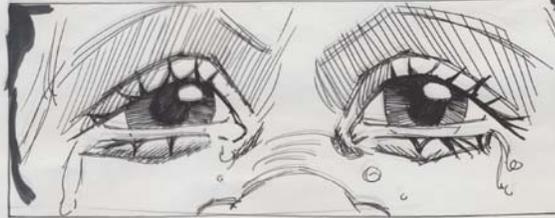
Then I bought this .357 because I wanted it.

PARTY + BOOZE, DRUGS



"G" for gangsta.

This adds up to many things but for me, I just think I pressed my luck one too many times.



I wonder, if I knew what was going to happen-would I have done things differently?

4



I don't know.

Second Place Essay

Roberta Martinez 68634

On The Path From Victim to Victors

At some point in our lives, we may all feel more like victims than victors. Society has put us in the category of victim simply because of who we may be; woman, Hispanic, African American, Native American. We need to stop putting down entire cultures. We must separate the good from the bad by treating all communities and cultures with respect.

Many of us play on that victim mentality because it is easier to justify our personal failures. We feel hopeless at times and tend to do self destructive things that make our lives even worse.

Unlike our parents, the majority of us were raised in a single parent home. And in turn our children are being raised not only by a single parent but by extended family members. Statistics show that there are more and more grandparents that are stepping up and raising their grandchildren.

Parenting works best when both a mother and a father participate. Single mother can do it on their own, but there are times when help is needed. Often pride or even shame makes it hard to ask for that help. There are many different reasons why a father is not active in his children's lives. Unfortunately there are a great number of these men that are incarcerated either for short periods of time in our county jails or for long stretches of time in our many penitentiaries.

Homes should be a sanctuary for love and peace, not a hot bed of anger and violence. Our generation was taught to obey through emotional, mental and physical abuse. Did it help us in the long run? No! Our scars within never heal. Bruises to the soul are not as visible but they are just as painful.

There are many of us that swore to ourselves that we would never do that to our children. Some of us we were able to break the cycle, but for others it repeated itself. Victorious children are kids who live happy, healthy, loving, and cooperative lives. They don't get that way by themselves. Each of us; parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, and positive adults has an opportunity to inspire them to victory.

If we express confidence in the children around us they will have confidence in themselves and overcome whatever obstacles life throws their way. When Children do not receive that confidence and have to search it out elsewhere, most often they turn to the streets.

While we are so consumed by thinking about the enemy outside we tend to forget about the enemy that is within. If each of us lets someone else handle all the problems, no one handles anything. If we don't speak out for ourselves, who will? If we don't believe there is a better and brighter tomorrow, who will? If we want to make a change in our lives and the lives of the people around us, it is God that will give us the strength to do it.

We are a village and we need to speak out and stand up. When people do things to hold us back and mark us victims that is when we know that the devil is trying his hardest to break us. We can overcome the odds that are stacked up against us and succeed in spite of the obstacles placed in our paths, but first we need to try. We are resilient people and we will overcome.

We need to have a vision of a better life. We need to see things differently and know that all our hopes and dreams for that life are possible. We have the will to win, the will to get better and we are armed with the knowledge that we need to move forward. Taking action to succeed and reclaiming our dignity is a lot like love; it is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all.

The culture of imprisonment devastates families. We must make an effort to keep our children out of jail. An evil institution can produce no pure good. Society needs to stop glamorizing prison and step up the efforts to rehabilitate inmates both in prison and after they are released. Prison will not fix a soul that is hurting. There are no failures in prison because God did not create any of us to fail. As long as we have people that love us, believe in us and support us, we are one step closer to finding the path from victims to victors.

Third Place Essay

Author Susan Myers 61347

My name is Susan Myers and I have read “Come On, People” by Bill Cosby and Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D. This book is enlightening as it encourages adults to become leaders in the proper upbringing of African American children. This book educates people about how the stereotyping of African Americans is affecting the world. I feel that Mr. Cosby and Dr. Poussaint are inspiring people to come together as a society to make their communities a better place to exist.

The authors believe that both parents need to be present in their children’s lives to nurture them. Parents who are there for their children could wean their children from what the young African American generation is becoming. Parents need to be present throughout their children’s lives to listen, educate, discipline without using violence, and nourish.

Mr. Cosby and Dr. Poussaint believe that even if you are not a parent, nurturing other African American children will make a big difference in those children’s lives.

The authors of this book believe adults also need to teach the young generation proper English. Today a lot of African Americans only speak slang that keeps them from receiving respectable jobs and from prospering. The authors in this book believe that parents need to encourage their children and praise or reward them for fulfilling responsibilities. The authors believe that if we as a community become positive care takers it will make this world safer for the young African Americans generation.

In today’s young, African American generation rap is very popular. The majority of the lyrics in rap songs glamorize violence, drug use, and the degradation of women. A lot of the rap music in this generation influences people and encourages the stereotyping of African Americans as irresponsible and violent. There are many other forms of entertainment such as movies, television shows, and plays that also promote stereotyping. A great deal of this entertainment teaches children that using the “N-word” is acceptable and that abusing drugs and using violence against others is okay. The way the entertainment business deals with African Americans today leads many other races into stereotyping African Americans. This book has me perceiving rap in another manner. I never before saw rap as degrading the African American race. I now understand what this book has taught me about rap music. It encourages young African Americans to use derogatory terms to refer to themselves and their friends. I once heard a woman tell another woman, “Hey nigga! What’s up?” They used the “N-word” like it was not degrading, but more like a greeting. This defies what African Americans have been standing against for decades. A couple of days ago a girl told me a joke. The girl said, “What does an Owl say?” I said, “Hoot!” Then she said, “What does a black owl say?” I said, “ I don’t know?” Then she said “Whodat?”

The joke made me think of when Mr. Cosby pointed out that most African Americans cannot speak proper English. This joke is stereotypical and degrading and illustrates Mr. Cosby’s point very well.

In some cases teachers stereotype African American students by thinking that they're all alike and don't deserve a chance. Some teachers degrade African American students due to negative things they believe about African Americans. Things like the disadvantaged financial status of African Americans or even that African Americans have lower learning abilities. Stereotyping can also bring a lot of violence into communities and help create hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Stereotyping makes the lives of African Americans more difficult and makes it harder for them to aspire to greater things.

Another known problem, especially in the city, is not taking care of poor African American communities. Instead of maintaining these neighborhoods the city allows them to decay and they are filled with alcohol stores and billboards. The problem is that people complain about issues within their community such as too much violence, drugs, and destruction, but no one seems to be doing anything about it.

In order to aide the African American people we need to come together as a society. Mr. Cosby and Dr. Poussaint believe even just one voice will make a difference. Take the time today to make a difference and help make this world a place where African American children can aspire to be anything they want to be.

First Honorable Mention Essay

Author Rawle Nicholas 68588

A Real Man

In Mr. Bill Cosby's book, *Come On People*, he indicates that it is time for black men to step up and take full fatherly responsibilities for their families and children. This book has made me reflect and ponder on the qualities of a real man. In this essay I would like to discuss in detail what positive traits I believe a responsible man should possess in words and actions.

During my childhood, adolescence, and manhood I did not spend quality time with my father. My knowledge and understanding of what makes a real man is something I have learned through my own experience over the years. I have also seen examples in other families in the community. All I have experienced and learned I try to teach my children so they will know what to expect from a father. The fatherly influence and support I did not have is something I want my children to have.

Not having a father present when I was growing up, caused some disadvantages in my maturing stages and has prevented me from reaching my full potential in education, family life, and economic status. No child should be left unsupported by their father. A father's presence is essential for children. His presence can help them to become successful men and women in communities and in societies. Each child has a God-given right to develop their abilities to the extent they are able. A father's absence from a home should be for work assignments or other duties to support his family. He should not abandon his family because of difficulties with his spouse. Fathers should have perseverance to undertake any family challenge and weather the storms of life without running away. By learning to overcome what hardships life has placed in his path, a father can teach his children to be problem solvers.

Black men should be more consistent in their actions as fathers, providers, protectors, teachers, communicators and advisors. They need to be firm and positive role models that their children can adapt to and always look up to. They should become successful parents without illegal careers.

Family values learned by fathers, should always be passed down and instilled in the hearts and minds of impressionable, vulnerable children. Their fragile hearts and minds should be protected to prevent them from being corrupted by society's ills. It should be our goal to set a positive standard of living, or at least try to pave the way for our children to live a decent and productive life.

A real man encourages and supports his children with their education. He helps them consistently with their homework and discusses clearly the real benefits of having an education. He talks about not quitting when you commit yourself to something and about self-discipline to accomplish goals in life. He talks to his children in the hope that they will pass on knowledge to their own children, so they too can reap the same family benefits.

Children need to know about the importance of having a successful career or profession. This will not only help them, but will keep them out of debt. They need to complete high school then attend a college or university to obtain degrees. They can pursue careers in any profession when they have an education. Finishing school will allow them to have some certification in their chosen trades and careers. A responsible father can help by participating and helping in the community. His children will look up to him and learn about service to others.

A responsible, dedicated man works and shows positive examples of how to support a family. He leads by example and helps with family chores. He does not physically or mentally abuse himself, his significant other or his children. He is honest, faithful, supportive, protective, courageous, hard working, and strong.

Fathers should make time to talk to their children about violence, sex, and health in the home. Fathers should inform their children that getting involved in gangs and illegal drugs can lead to death or prison. Fathers need to talk about the hazards of engaging in unprotected sexual activities, which can result in teen pregnancy, incurable life changing disease or disabilities. They should teach their children good health practices such as exercising and eating healthy and leading a productive and fruitful life with their family. Fathers need to discuss how the excessive use of alcohol can result in tragic life altering results or possibly death. Injury from such human habits can bring excessive strain on a family emotionally, spiritually and economically.

He should teach his children to have good spiritual beliefs without forcing them to believe what he believes. Teach them good morals and to respect others. These teachings should start at home and continue into the community around them. Hopefully children will become upstanding citizens and effective positive role models.

A father should spend quality time with his family participating in reading, playing games, traveling, and listening to music. By reading to his children a father helps them learn to read and provides them with useful life information they may not be aware of or clearly understand. Fathers should encourage their children to participate in various sports for the health benefit, to teach them good sportsmanship, and encourage them to pursue possible careers. A father should also take trips or participate in outdoor activities such as: hiking, camping, fishing, and picnicking. These trips can help children learn different ways to protect the environment around them. These activities can also open their eyes to the beauty of nature. They should be made aware of the different animals, trees, and places that are to be enjoyed and discovered. Sometimes men should sit and listen to music with their kids. They should explain to them the experience they are having when they hear a certain song, and the good and bad memories it evokes. Fathers need to instruct their children about songs with bad lyrics, they should not be listening to music that promotes violence and cussing.

The topics of race and culture should be discussed in the home and explained without prejudice. It is of paramount importance to teach your children not to hate any race. Racism, if not the worst, is one of the most repulsive ills of our society. It destroys families and communities. It can create unrest, wars, and instability in the world. Every-one's culture should always be respected regardless of whether it

involves political or religious issues. It is always the choices we make that shows whether we are responsible men and women in our society. Cultural differences are not readily accepted by all people, but it certainly does not give one the right to destroy another person's culture or way of living. They can learn from other cultures or even adapt to them with knowledge and time.

They should be advised about places and people in their community they should avoid. Also children need to confirm facts on all matters before advancing when they decide to peruse any given self-interest. They should always have their guard up so they are not misled by anyone. Being misled could have devastating results.

Our children should be taught to support local businesses, because community business can be supportive when it comes to sponsoring basketball tournaments, little leagues baseball, and boys and girls scouts camps. These same businesses also provide employment for community members. Community businesses are a good source of family support. They are also convenient, competitive, and provide good services.

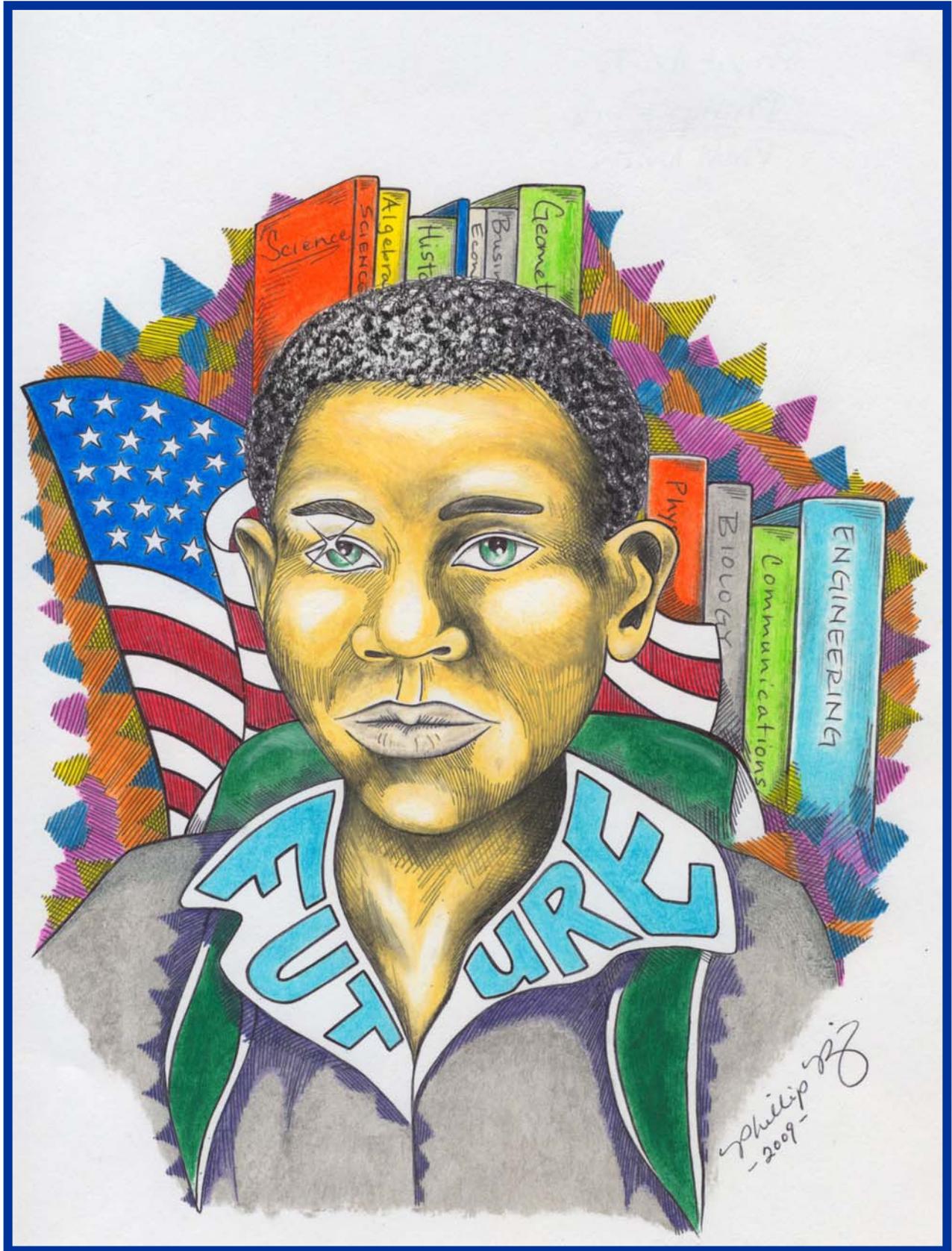
A real man listens to his children's opinions with care and interest. His support can help his children to successfully develop into the men or women Mother Nature has created; spiritually, emotionally, physically and academically. Their life success should be a top priority for him from birth until they leave the nest and beyond.

Children should be shown love at home and away from home. The love a real man shows his wife should be a positive model from which his children can pattern their lives. They in turn will be able to show their children what to expect from their spouse when they get married and raise their own family.

A real man educates himself to teach his children. He teaches them to take care of financial matters, invest in people and invest in the community. He models how to be a good effective leader.

In closing if we as fathers would faithfully follow through on all that I have mentioned then black homes and black communities will get better. I think this is how a real man should be for his family and for his community.

Second Place Art
Artist Philip Ruiz 39821



Second Honorable Mention Essay
Authors Clinton Hodges 66991, Joseph F. Montoya 54518,
Adam T. McVeay 60942, David Navares 62505 &
Creighton George 64602

Life is a process of making mistakes, learning from them, and trying to make wiser choices. Change is possible, especially if we open our minds and hearts and are ready for this positive transition. Black America is at the core of “Come On, People” But the problems they face are similar to those of all poor and alienated groups, regardless of race. We can learn from each other’s mistakes and downfalls. To become better people throughout the United States, I feel that education, family, and avoiding risky behavior are three major factors in individual progress.

Research shows that a person with a better education is more likely to stay out of prison and succeed. By the time they reach their mid-thirties, six out of ten black high school dropouts have been incarcerated. The more a person learns the more likely they are to stay out of trouble, and the higher the level of education the better the chances they will land a good job. Malcolm X stated, “Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.” A year of college at a state school costs the state about ten thousand dollars; a year in jail costs about twenty-five thousand dollars. Educated kids usually pay the state back. Ex-inmates rarely do. The main point to remember is no one can stop you from getting education other than yourself. The word must be spread throughout the black community that education is paramount.

There is a very strong statistic in “Come On, People” that captures the bleakness and rawness of not having a two-parent home. In the 1950s five out of six black children were born into a two-parent home. Today that number is less than two out of six. In poor communities that number is still lower. (2) A two-parent home is less likely to be poor, and the children it produces are much less likely to end up in prison. If, a generation from now, every black child grew up in a functional, two-parent home the problems of crime and poverty in black communities would greatly diminish. It cannot be stressed enough how paramount it is for a kid to have two parents in the home; for love, support, direction, discipline, and to raise a victor.

We need to instill accomplishment into our children and inspire them to feel the thrill of victory and success. We need to tell them to take risks without fear of failure or making a mistake, because we all fail at something and no one person is perfect. We must teach our kids, work with our kids, and guide them to never give up. Push them to be resilient. A kid’s upbringing and background is one of the most important building blocks for a good life.

Some serious issues that affect our kids the most are risky behaviors like, sex, violence, drugs, and alcohol. Avoiding all of these vices is easier said than done, but they are at the root of many of our

nation's problems. Addictions are a hard cycle to break; a cycle that has been going on for generations.

Another problem is teen sex and unprotected sex regardless of age. People need to become more educated about sex including the usages of contraceptives and the dangers of unprotected sex like contracting a sexually transmitted disease. Abstinence is the best policy, but let's face it – more and more kids are having sex at a young age and having it more often with more partners. We need to be more open about the long-term struggles and responsibilities of having a kid and the dangers of catching a disease.

The best way to protect our kids in this world is to parent them; ask them questions about their friends, where they go and what they do. We must discipline them; and try to understand the pressures and temptations of being young in a fast and crazy world.

Parents need to be disciplinarians adamant about getting a good education and living a responsible life. Parents need to push forward regardless of the obstacles or trials they may face, because our future depends on how we teach and guide our children today. And most importantly, parents need to parent their children. Come On, People! Educate and Love.

Third Honorable Mention Essay

Author Michael Dewey Coelho 53504

“It’s Time To Believe”

Here I find myself searching the book “Come On people” for something that applies to my psyche. I found three subjects that summarize the essentials that are needed to give our children the opportunity to be successful in life. They are; keep kids in school, out of prison and help them keep the faith.

First of all we got to keep our youth in school. The fact that there is a 50% high school drop-out rate among blacks should cause some kind of concern. Yet each year the number seems to rise, while our government swears that they’ve pumped millions of dollars into our education system. But still we find ourselves whining about where the money has gone, or that they’re just trying to hold us down when in fact we are giving them the power by reducing ourselves to a bunch of whiners. It’s up to us, as individuals, to change the statistics for our forgotten youth. It’s time to take a chance on those who will follow in our footsteps because it’s time to believe in our youth who have gone unnoticed far too long.

The second subject we need to be aware of is keeping our youth out of prison. All this begins with our education processes that are designed for our youth to be taught from the knowledge and experience of elders. We need to change the stupid decisions our kids make that lead to overflowing jails across America. We tend to forget that we were in the same situations growing up. Why do we feel that we have so much to complain about? We are the ones who do so little to change our kids’ lives in order to keep them out of prison. Remember, it’s time to believe that we can help make a change.

Last, but surely not the least is keeping the faith in god. Our children need supporters while they learn how to build a solid foundation and better themselves. Each small step of faith is a giant step of growth. Thank you Jesus! It’s time to believe in our children’s future.

These three subjects are ways to build strong bodies and minds for our children. They are essential to the learning processes that help our kids become successful adults. Learning how to keep kids in school, out of prison and strong in the faith benefits everyone. We can learn to make the most of today by keeping eternity in mind, a smile on our faces and a helping hand to lead our youth down the right path. Its time to believe in those who look up to us; our youth!

Fourth Honorable Mention Essay

Author Dennis Petsche 46543

A lot of what the authors wrote has happened to me. At times I wondered if it is too late. I'm 48 and I have been trying to forget my past so I can start a new future. It seems like I get up and then something new kicks me down, but I'm willing to keep getting up. I have faced the challenges of poor male role models and alcohol abuse in my life, but they cannot keep me down.

The book talks about the impact of poor role models. I can relate because I had a step-dad who was mean and very abusive to my brothers and I. I was the youngest and when the older boys got into trouble, I was often drug along with them. I remember lots of times when bad things happened to me. I saw the things that happened to my mom that kept her from saying anything to him. He got mad at her when she stuck up for us so we didn't go to her for fear he would hurt her. He told me that I would never amount to anything. When I was on trial, mom could have kept me from coming to prison, but he made her lie about me. I don't hate my mother for what happened I just didn't want her to get hurt so I didn't say anything.

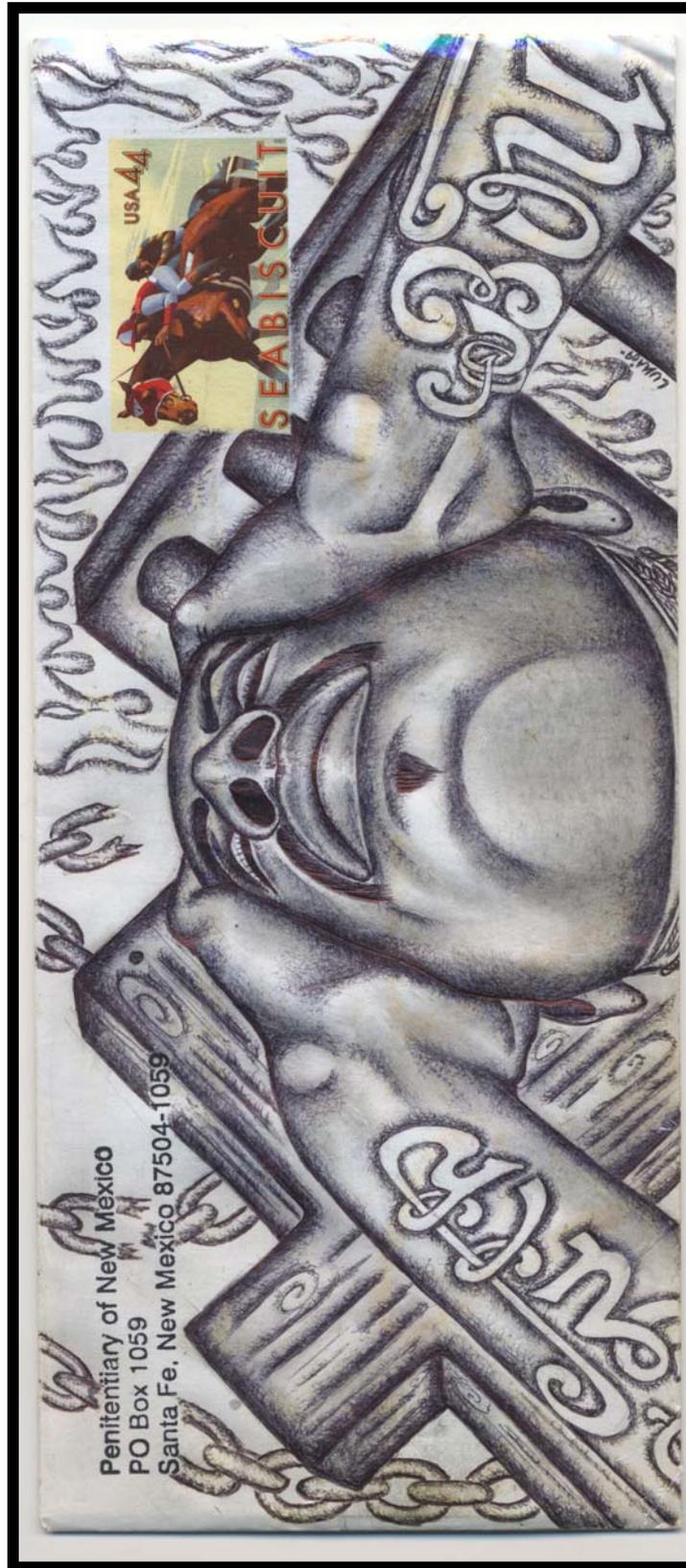
Luckily, I did have some positive role models. My mom's dad and brothers tried their hardest to keep me going the right way. My granddad and I were very close and even though he is gone now I remember and love him as a father-figure. Even with all the jokes he pulled he took the time to teach me how to treat other people. He taught me not to make fun of people just because they aren't like you. Grandpa told me that if I ever hit a woman out of anger, I would stop being a man. Yes, I can relate to the importance of having good role models.

The authors also talk about drug and alcohol problems. My problem was drinking. I wasn't a mean drunk and I didn't drive, but when I drank I forgot things. While I was drinking I wasn't paying attention to what was going on around me and someone took advantage of me. Now I'm fighting to get my life back. If I hadn't been throwing a pity party and avoiding my past, I wouldn't be here. I understand what the authors are saying. They ask readers not to abandon the drug and alcohol users like me. We need to own our part of our problems, but there are some of us who need a little help and I'm one of them. I am asking for help facing my problems head on as the authors suggest.

I am going to try to leave my past behind. I hope that everyone else can too. I recommend that we forget about what has happened in the past and work on a happy future. Get help from the right people and let the past be the past. We can all heal the wounds of the past and stop the hate and pain. This was the central message of *Come On People*, and it is the message I am committed to living in my life.

Third Place Art

Artist Jesse Luna 48380



Honorable Mention Essay

Author Dana LaMonda 44428

There are many key points in this book that have affected me very personally. I would very much like to share some of my personal issues and how this book has helped to shed some light on my situation. It has motivated me to change my life.

Chapter 1 discusses giving father hood a second chance. I do not have a positive relationship with the mother of my children. We are separated and in the process of divorce. We have many problems due to mutual criminal behaviors, incarceration, drug use, infidelity, and lack of trust, lack of respect and anger issues. We have argued and been mentally, emotionally and physically abusive in front of the children. She has used them to control our relationship with threats of custody and visitation rights. Through our problems, neither of us thought about our children and how it would affect their lives in the future. This chapter has given me some direction on how to approach our relationship in positive ways for all of us.

I'm not there for my children and I haven't been responsible. Not because I don't claim them or want to be a part of their lives, but because of the choices I've made. I was selfish and never considered how I was affecting them, their lives and their futures. Cosby and Pouissant point out that my children may be blaming themselves for my incarceration. They may be thinking that I left them for something they did. They may be feeling that I don't love them for who they are. This prompted me to talk to my children and become involved in their thoughts and feelings. They needed to know that they have no fault in my situation.

In chapter 3, the authors gave the percentage of people who have been victims of abuse. They also talked about how victims often repeat the cycle so that our children end up in the same place we are. I grew up in an abusive home where my father was physically abusive to my mother. That environment had a very negative effect on me. I became abusive in my adult relationships because I thought it was acceptable behavior. It was much worse when I was abusing drugs and alcohol. This chapter raised my awareness about the need to build my children up mentally and emotionally by offering praise at every opportunity. I am also aware that I need to change my attitudes and behaviors so that I can teach them right and wrong by example. I want them to know that abuse of any kind is never a solution. It is imperative that I provide a home where we can always practice open communication to build healthy minds and emotions. Through continual self improvement I can lead by example to help my children get positive results.

Chapters 4 and 5 are all about protecting our children from the media. We must teach them that violence, mistreatment of women, and gangs are not socially acceptable. We must teach them respect for others morals and values

Finally, chapter 7 was probably the most important and beneficial to me. I have made nearly every mistake discussed in this chapter: gun violence, gang membership, running the streets looking for acceptance, drug addiction and ending up in prison. I MUST use my experiences to stop the cycle with my children. This book showed me many ways I can accomplish this. By becoming involved in the community and helping others, together we can have a positive bonding experience. Sharing that service will instill values and moral responsibility in my children. It will teach them to be positive and successful in life.

This book has been of great benefit to me, because it opened my eyes and heart to the many things that I must change. It made me aware of the importance of teaching and caring for my children. The most important lesson I received from this book is that I need to be the best I can be for my children. I need to lead and teach by example. Now I know that they are the highest priorities in my life!

Honorable Mention Essay

Author Kera McQueary 61866

On the Path From Victim to Victor

Who am I to say whether someone is a victim or not? All I can really do is state my opinion. What if the victims of my crimes were already victims before I condemned them to be? What if they were already victims of tragedy or the things in life we are burdened with just because we live?

I'm here to speak of "victim to victor". I was a victim of myself, what I had become, and the justice system. Who is a judge to judge if the justice he has given needs reason to be justified? Why couldn't my judge look me in the eyes and see that I was dying inside? How could he not see that I needed the influence of the good light in life; to be brought back from the hell I was in? If he could have seen this, then I wouldn't have been forced to stand before him and be judged. I was a known drug addict that needed help, not someone who needed to carry a sentence of 18 years. At age 19, I was sent to prison, not to be taught a lesson, but to grow up. When I compare my sentence to the sentence of the man who killed my father, I see the result of an unjust system, and I'm sure I'm not alone. I don't speak of this because I think it was unfair, I speak of this because nothing is fair and I know this from experience. I speak of this because I was made a victim. No one offered me help in my grief, pain and addiction but "so-well." When I say "so-well", it is a combination of so what and oh well. In other words what's done is done, get over it and move on. I'm grown now and I see the revolution of my cause.

It wasn't prison that woke me up; it was the suffering of innocent people who were once so alive. Now those innocent people sit and rot in prison because they were the backyard population of an ignorant society. An ignorant society that was blind to other people's pain and couldn't offer a hand to help them to their feet. I see the beauty in life and even in things that some people never see. Perhaps they only see beauty in the things they've destroyed and by then it's too late. They've killed it, or made it ugly. This is why people are victims of themselves.

The world is so easily influenced. People's minds are so easily weaved into trickery. They'd follow a thunder cloud that threatened to drown the whole world if it had the right dance move. People wonder why the world is the way it is. They would never think to blame themselves, even though the pattern is clear. The pawn shop clerk sold the man a gun and the man shot and killed the bank teller for foreclosing on his house while his ex-wife refused to let him see his kids, because he failed to make his child support payment. I was once told that out of ninety percent of what the world does, ten percent you react. All in that ten percent how you react determines how ninety percent reacts back.

The United States of America is the land of the free, one nation under god, indivisible with justice and liberty. Together we could stand as one if we practiced what we preach. Not one of us is better than

the other. We are the killers, we are the killed, we are the crazy, we are the sick, we are the world.

The world suffers from a closed mindedness that spreads as if it were a disease. It has even become a threat to those who hold a cure because they are not robots, unconscious to the fact that they are individuals and can go their own way. In being your own person you have victory over yourself and over our follow-the-leader society.

Do you ever ask yourself, “What am I doing here? Why am I still alive? What is my purpose on this earth?” If you have ever asked yourself these questions then you, my friend, are no different than I was when I was lost and the victim of a cruel, hateful, and unjust society. Our world is a beautiful and wondrous world filled with amazing things. It’s too bad you can’t see it through my eyes.

I have won a battle you may not know existed. I won the battle of the mind. I no longer live with regrets. I’m happy with who I’ve become today. I thank my old self for my past because it is now the foundation where I will build my future. Even though I am a minor hum in a world of greater noise, and the music of my words cannot be heard, I have been fed the fruit of epiphany. I am no longer a victim of a closed minded disease in an unjust world. As for the conditions I am in and the time I am losing to experience life, I am obedient and I will do what is asked of me, whether it is forced or not. Serving time is only a small fraction of the pain I have inflicted on the victims of my crimes; people who were already victims and burdened with life. Thank you. I have something most of the world will probably never have; the gold medal of self discovery.

Honorable Mention Essay

Author Arnold C. Keith 57508

I chose the last chapter in the book titled “From Poverty to Prosperity”. The first section of the chapter talks about how we all need education in our lives regardless of the problems we face or where we came from. Gaining a high school diploma or getting a GED can make a difference in life. It is a start that opens doors and opportunities in the employment field. Having a job is important because money is a need for survival. A job also helps gain self esteem and build character. It is important to develop as an individual and show that you care and want to better yourself.

The authors also discuss the importance of maintaining independence in the section titled, “Beware the Trap”. In America we all have equal opportunities to succeed regardless of creed, color, or orientation. Having a low income should not be an excuse to live as a failure. It is better to barely stay afloat and learn the value of self sufficiency than to live on government welfare. In the section titled, “Getting Control of Your Finances” the authors point out that even though it maybe nice to live in the lap of luxury it is better to work for your dreams. Indulging in material things without earning them makes them valueless.

Another issue is addressed in the section “Help the Poor, Help Themselves”. The poor can take advantage of resources, try to better the government system and work to do their part to change their circumstances. Getting involved in changing laws or supporting particular groups are just a few ways they can make a difference.

Getting an education, staying independent, and working for what you want are all important things to do. Everyone should want to do these things and work hard to make their dreams come true. Then victory really belongs to them.

First Honorable Mention Art

Artist Cornell Smith 47951



Honorable Mention Essay

Author Phillip Ruiz 39821

My name is Phillip Ruiz. I'm a 37 year old Spanish-American male who has been locked up for three years. I still have two years until I'm eligible for parole. Back in August of 2006, I was given a nine- year sentence here in New Mexico for an aggravated residential burglary charge. Less than a week later, I ended up losing custody of my two daughters. I knew at that point I needed to make some major changes in my life.

I'm now involved in a program called Project A.C.T., an acronym for Awareness Commitment, and Transcendence. This is how I was introduced to Mr. Cosby's and Dr. Poussaint's book, *Come On, People*. First of all, I'd like to start out by thanking these two authors for sharing such knowledgeable and guiding words. I have taken into account several key points of the book that made an impression on me, so I'll be sharing a little about what I've taken from the book concerning government assistance, parenting, education, and taking back our communities.

I'll begin with government assistance programs. I am familiar with black and Hispanic families who have sought government assistance and those who have become dependant on these programs. I realize it's okay to take advantage of these programs if there is a real need. As Mr. Cosby pointed out, total dependency on government programs should not become a way of life. I know friends and family that are so accustomed to living off welfare that they are unwilling to break loose from the cycle. What I've learned from reading the book, *Come On, People*, is that this is what cripples the lower and middle classes of America. Especially when people "think" that they are beating the system by doing this. Bill Cosby and Mr. Poussaint were very direct and practical about cutting free from government assistance. I'm going to encourage my friends and family to move on to bigger and better things and to enjoy being independent members of society.

I also connected with the part of the book where the writers speak about parenting and family values. This was important to me because it showed me how uninvolved I was as a parent with my children and how unconcerned I was with family values. I no longer have custody of my daughters, because I'm unable to care for them, and I have a long history of substance abuse.

The authors mention the significance of a structured home and about the importance of being consistent with firm discipline for bad behavior and praise when kids are well- behaved. As I reflect on those words, I know that I was fairly consistent in the discipline department; however, praising my children was something that I never did. I didn't understand that part of parenting the way I do now. I know now the importance of praise and the role it plays in any family.

A good example of this occurred when I sent my kids in to clean their rooms and I went in to see if they were clean. At their ages, I should have praised them for doing a good job, but the way they were cleaned was never good enough for me. Praising my kids for cleaning their rooms was never good

enough for me. It was outside the ordinary. Today, acknowledging my children with a little bit of praise for doing a good job has become a part of me.

I learned from what the authors said about parents knowing where their children and teenagers are at all times and being knowledgeable about who their friends are. After reading the book *Come On, People*, I've added this aspect of parenting into my practice because it shows everyone around me that I care for my children and that I am protecting them from negative influences.

The book *Come On, People*, has also pointed out to me the value of initiating positive relationships with my children's teachers including involvement in parent teacher conferences. This was a new concept I gained from the book. I see how attending to my children's school experiences shows them how much I value their educational growth. I see that it is important to ensure that their needs are being met in the classroom. I have been given a whole new level of parenting to reach for.

Plus in the book Bill Cosby and Dr. Poussaint direct parents to take time each evening to sit down at the dinner table as a family. It gives parents time to talk to their kids and ask them simple questions like, "How has your day been? What are you learning at school? Is your homework done?"

The book allowed me to see that by doing this, children feel appreciated by their parents. I see how effective parenting like this can be. *Come On, People*, has motivated me to excel at being a stronger and better parent with more family values that I had in the past.

Another key ingredient in the book that I found to be of quintessential importance is education. Bill Cosby accentuated the higher level of annual income for people with at least two years of college and an even bigger increase in income for anyone continuing on to receive a bachelor's or higher degree. I liked how he encouraged anyone reading his book to further their education with at least two years into college and to take advantage of local community colleges.

This hit me like a ton of gold bricks, because I have future aspirations of being a small business owner. After receiving knowledge from the book about what two years of college can do for my annual income, I've made the decision to bring up my reading level on the standard tests so that I can enroll in business courses, I am working steadfastly to advance my goals for the future, and feel truly blessed to have had the opportunity to read Cosby's book.

The final point that openly moved me was how Bill Cosby and Mr. Poussaint wrote about taking back our communities, taking them back from drug dealers and young thugs who terrorize good citizens with criminal intent. The authors wrote about how upper-class Americans utilize law enforcement without hesitation to keep crime rates down in upper class communities. They argued that lower and middle class Americans should do the same. The authors even recommend taking part in local neighborhood watch programs.

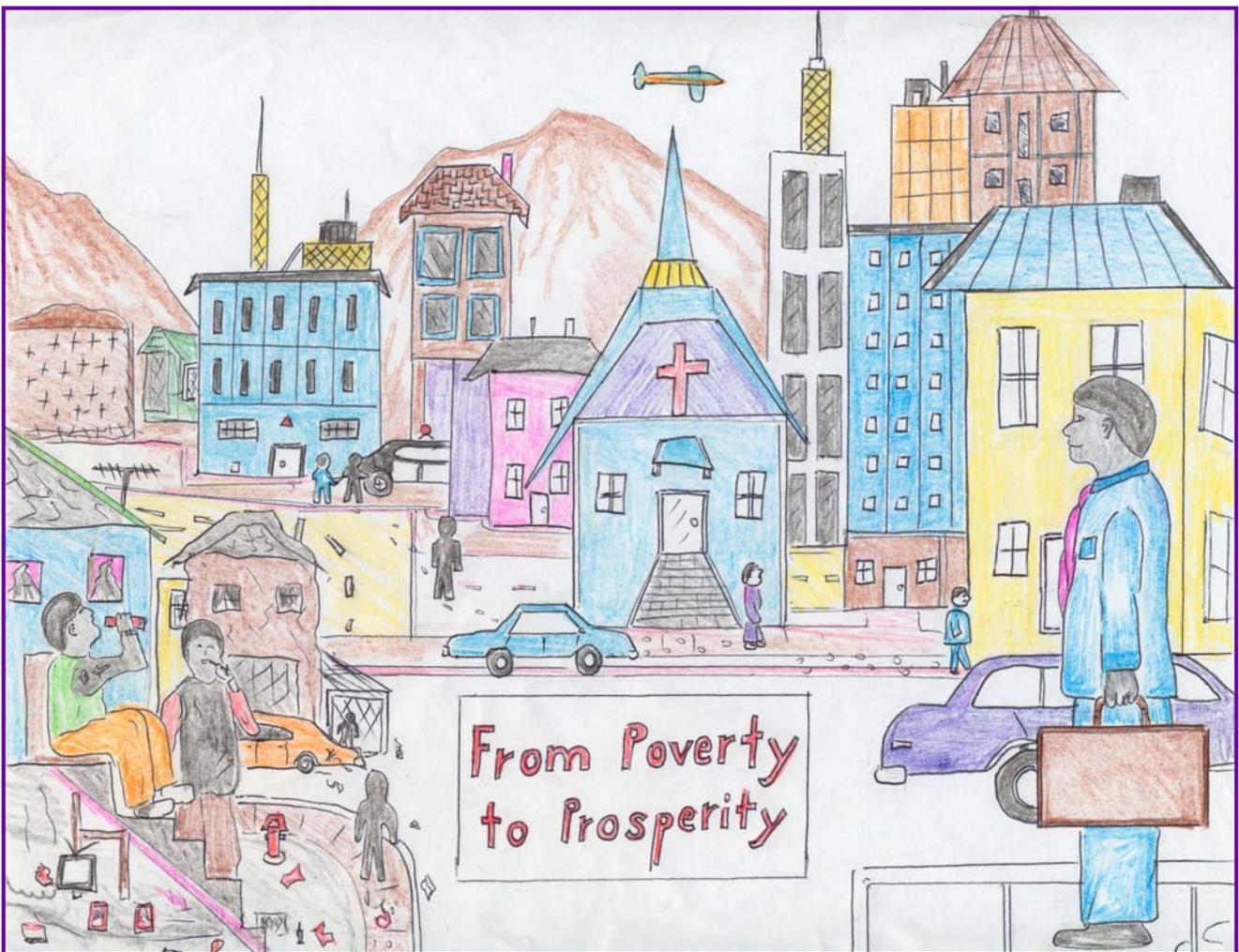
This book showed me that taking back our communities means something to me. The reason it matters is because I have always had it in me to do the right thing, but I never did. Why? Because I was too afraid of what others might think of me. At the same time I didn't know what it meant to be a good citizen, or how to be one in any community—especially my own. I grew up as a young gang member. Mr.

Cosby and Dr. Poussaint opened my eyes to this. They showed me that I can make a difference in any community I choose to live in and that I don't have to be afraid to be a good citizen. I want to see my community from the eyes of an honest citizen and a good neighbor, not the eyes of a young thug who doesn't know the truth.

I hope that I shared enough about what the book; *Come On, People* has done for me. I was truly moved and inspired to be a better person after reading the book. It broadened my views on government assistance, parenting, education, and taking back our communities. I understand the essence in these three words "Come On, People!" Thank you, Mr. Cosby and Dr. Poussaint, for the heartwarming journey through your book. Also thank you for making a difference in just one person's life...mine.

Second Honorable Mention Art

Artist Christopher Joe 46407



Honorable Mention Essay

Author Derrick Hart 59146

Come On, People is a superb guide for all people to stop making excuses and make a better life for themselves, their families and their communities. Not only does the book talk about the crisis that is brewing among the alienated in America, more importantly it delivers a step by step remedy plan. For example, education is something Drs. Cosby and Poussaint strongly support and urge us as parents and students to take seriously because without it, most of us would still be struggling in society.

Education has become extremely important to me personally. When I was younger, I misunderstood the power of education and I decided to drop out of high school to become a drug dealer. During this time the only education I thought I needed was “street knowledge”. Boy was I wrong! After a long period of drug dealing and undercover stings I ended up in jail. Somewhere in the back of my mind I could hear my homeroom teacher telling me, “In order to be a productive person in society you *must* have an education...or you’ll become a nobody.” Back then, that statement meant nothing to me. It was just a bunch of airy words. Now, having landed in prison, for the first time in my life I started taking that statement to heart, and I started paying attention to my education.

At the beginning of this journey into education, my primary objective was simply to study for and pass the GED tests. I remember when I was out in society and I filled out job applications. I started with my confidence sky high until I got to the part where it says, “What was the highest grade level you completed? Do you have your High School Diploma or GED?” These questions alone would shatter my confidence and eliminate any possibility of getting the job I was applying for. Pretty soon I didn’t even want to fill out an application. The good news is that after thirty-five years I finally earned my High School Diploma. Now when I get out of prison, I can finally face the once dreadful question I used to avoid, and I can face it with pride.

Earning my GED was just the first stop on my journey into education. Once I went that far, I wanted to go farther. Since earning my GED, I have been trying to seize every opportunity I can to obtain as much knowledge as possible. For example, I recently completed a new educational program here at the Penitentiary of New Mexico called Project A.C.T. (Awareness, Community and Transcendence). This program was entirely voluntary, and I jumped on board as soon as the opportunity was offered to me. The purpose of this program is to raise awareness about habit patterns that keep us stuck in self destructive, narrow, unhappy places. It also provides alternatives to these patterns. I have embraced many such alternatives, such as reading countless books. There is one in particular that I read for Project A.C.T. that will forever be branded into my brain. The name of this book is *Martin Eden*, by Jack London. London took me on a journey where I had the privilege of traveling first-class through the mind of Martin Eden. I felt in tune with this character not only because I am involved in the journey of trying to further my education like Martin was, but also because I am trying to win the hand of the love of my life. I *am* Martin in so many ways, and much of this I owe to following the path of learning.

Today when it comes to my education, I feel like a child opening his presents on Christmas morning. I am going to be released from prison in two years. As a result of tending to my education while I was incarcerated, I strongly feel that I have a chance to earn my place in society. I'll use my education to get a worthwhile job, and beyond this to become a mentor to troubled youth. I will encourage them to get involved in after school programs and praise them for the good things they do. I'll volunteer my time in tutoring programs and share my life experiences with youth who may be headed down the road to self-destruction. If I can turn my own life around—they can too.

The best way for us to get through to our youth is to lead by example. After graduating from Project A.C.T., I took the initiative to enroll in my first college course because I wanted to take my education even further. I am doing well as I near the end of the course. I have already started looking into Federal Financial Aid and making an action plan to attend a local community college when I get out of prison. In this way, I will become a stronger person and a stronger role model for our youth.

In conclusion, one of the reasons Drs. Cosby & Poussaint wrote this book was in the hope that it would help our youth brighten the world. The youth must embrace the author's words as they strive to overcome hurdles to achieve the best education possible. We all must. Education holds more hope for the ordinary American than any career path alone, so no more excuses and no more delays. *Come On, People!*

Honorable Mention Essay

Author Johnny Fulton 69648

What's Going On With Black Men?

I am a long-time admirer of Bill Cosby and his work, and I was actually interested in hearing what he had to say. After reading his book, I can honestly say that I was unimpressed. Most of what was discussed was nothing more than percentages and outdated ideals based on a media-driven agenda. I feel that the only way to get to the root of the problem is to understand the logic behind it, and then come to a positive solution is to get more personally involved with that demographic and not just look through the looking glass. As a young, black male with a criminal record, I don't feel that Mr. Cosby is as in tune as he would like to think he is.

One section in particular that I would like to address is "Don't Count Out the Ex-Offenders." I think his idea of a system for those who want help to go to a community college and get a two-year degree to become a "psychological behavior technician" is great. What they forgot is that no one wants to hire an ex-con and that a job like that probably doesn't pay very much. Society has made it perfectly clear that a long prison sentence followed by parole with parole officers who can't wait to send you back to prison is not enough to consider your debt to society paid. Most states don't give grants to ex-cons. Yes, we can still attend college, but our degrees would go to waste because no one will hire a man (especially a black man) who has a felony. To top it off, as black ex-cons, unless we get into good construction jobs, we'll be lucky to earn double digit per hour pay in any available profession.

How much of a chance does a black man have with a public defender that can't even tell him what he's in court for until he sits in front of the judge? How about getting the statistics on our conviction rates and starting there? Very few black males can afford an attorney much less the high priced bonds that the courts impose. Then we're placed in a system where the people who operate it make every attempt to strip us of our dignity. We're placed in a system like this for years and we're expected to come home with a better outlook on the society that placed us here. We're supposed to develop false hope for a good paying job that we'll never get. We are not always our own worst enemy.

Besides our president, how often do we hear success stories of prominent black men who aren't musicians, athletes, or entertainers? Remember, an entertainer wrote this book. Bill Cosby isn't a success because of his degree; he's a success because of his various cartoons and television shows. If society wants us to decrease our negative behavior and hostile demeanor, they first need to stop surrounding us with negativity and hostility. Every man, woman, and child is a product of his/her environment, and African Americans are no different.

The absence of black fathers is not solely because of irresponsibility. The blame also falls on the women. A television show paternity test scenario was mentioned in this book, and the reactions of the two men on stage were detailed. What wasn't mentioned was the young girl's reaction. The first and only response is always child-support. There are too many women of all races having kids with black men because of our sexual reputation, or because they want a black child. But they do it in hopes that a better, wealthier man will come along and play daddy; leaving the baby's father to pay child-support that the child will never benefit from. Most of these women don't want the fathers around. They hope the next man will be better, and as a result you end up with a woman who has several different baby daddies. If any man has to go on national television because a girl was sleeping with two, three, or more different men at the same time, what would motivate him to want to raise a family with that kind of a girl?

I think that the authors of this book should have actually researched African Americans in our own environments, and learned from them personally, instead of basing their opinions on what they see on television and statistics that they read on charts. I don't respect Bill Cosby any less because of his opinions. In fact, I respect him even more for his efforts in making African Americans aware of the staggering statistics. The sad reality is that our people will never grow to levels that we want to reach until society gives us room to do so.

Winning Staff Essay
Michelle Ribeiro
Cognitive Teacher Penitentiary of New Mexico North

Good Job, People!

I think it would be pretty safe to say that my students don't think of me as necessarily "simple" or "straightforward." When I'm working with people on learning new skills, I do try to keep my explanations clear and concise, and sometimes I actually succeed – especially when it comes to things like math that I can navigate only on an elementary level. It's easy for me to give simple, easy-to-understand explanations about things like dividing fractions; my knowledge and enthusiasm are limited. When it comes to talking about things like identity, cognition, or writing, though: Watch out. I get so excited that I find it very difficult to stay within the city limits of a single topic. Relishing in the glory of all the connections and possibilities for exploration, I start dancing around the globe, dizzy with delight. Talk to me about human potential for growth and change, or creativity and consciousness, or about the swing and swirl of words on the page, and I'm a goner.

(The word 'circumlocution' leaps to mind here.)

Ask my students. They've witnessed what might be described as temporary possession when I talk about, say, poetry. My eyes grow wide. Pupils become dilated. My hair is either sticking out in all directions from another recent flurry of activity, or it's yanked back into a crude ponytail; I'm usually too busy to be bothered much with my hair. My arms start waving around wildly as I pour my passion for the subject out in colorful tongues. Inevitably, some bit of observed humor creeps in and my head flies back, nostrils flaring, and soon I'm letting go with that raucous laugh I inherited from the Johnson side of my family, along with the nostrils. I have actually caught myself hopping up and down on occasion when I get really worked up about a beloved topic, and once I pounded on a student's cell door with enough force to make him jump in order emphasize a point I was making.

I don't think I'm known as the quietest person in the pods.

Somewhere in the middle of spells like these I usually break into what I call a "metacognitive moment." I get a glimpse of myself and the scene around me as if I were watching it on the big screen at a movie theater, observing myself just like I'm coaching my students to do in order to heighten their awareness and monitor their own thoughts, emotions, and actions. I step back and see myself in the situation, and I see the student looking back at me, taking it all in...Perhaps looking quite startled and confused; perhaps looking equally wide-eyed, excited, and amused. It depends on the student – and of course on how far I've gone off the deep end on the subject, how many different countries and curiosities I've visited in a single breath.

When I coach relatively inexperienced writers on how to write an essay, I try to keep it pretty simple. I start by highlighting the purpose for an essay and how that legislates form, which, I tell them, generally follows the “Introduction, Body, Conclusion” structure – just like good speeches. I give them the “why’s” and demonstrate how helpful it is to be taken on a step-by-step guided tour of an author’s mind and thoughts on a topic, which of course points to the definition of the word ‘essay’: A short literary composition expressing the author’s viewpoint on a subject. I tell the student that the standard essay format can basically be boiled down to this: Tell folks what you want to talk about and why; then talk about it; then remind them what you talked about and put an unforgettable final flourish on it all.

Early on in my talks with students about writing, however, I’ll point out that there are always exceptions to any “rule,” that while fragments are a big no-no in Standard American English, for example, they are nonetheless used meaningfully and consciously by fine writers worldwide who *know* they are violating standard convention and are doing it on purpose, hopefully in a way that serves their intended aims and heightens the effectiveness of their work. Fragments have become quite fashionable, actually. So has doing away with quotation marks in fiction. Similarly, not all well-written essays deal with a single, narrow topic and follow the simple “Introduction, Body, Conclusion” formula, with one paragraph serving as the introduction, another for the conclusion, and two or three body paragraphs in between...like a nice neat little sandwich. Real life is not so neat, and neither is real writing. Club sandwiches have *three* layers of bread, not two, and open-faced sandwiches exist. Sometimes the best sandwiches have great big globs of mayo or oily grilled onions spilling out all over the place, and aren’t homemade enchiladas *fabulous*?!

(Good grief. Who *is* this person? Is there a central thesis or point anywhere in our future?!)

I am the facilitator of a cognitive-behavioral education program called Project A.C.T. at the Level VI maximum-security facility in the Penitentiary of New Mexico complex. All of the participants in this program recently read *Come On, People*, and all of them wrote a personal response paper as an assignment. Most of them chose to submit their work in a statewide essay contest. I am submitting this essay along with those of my students, though I am not writing exclusively about my reaction to the book. Instead of reacting only to the book itself, I wanted to also write about my reaction to the students’ reactions, and in particular about the quality of their thought and the work they put in to processing what the authors had to say, relating it to their own lives, and attempting to communicate some of their thoughts both verbally to me and on paper in their essays.

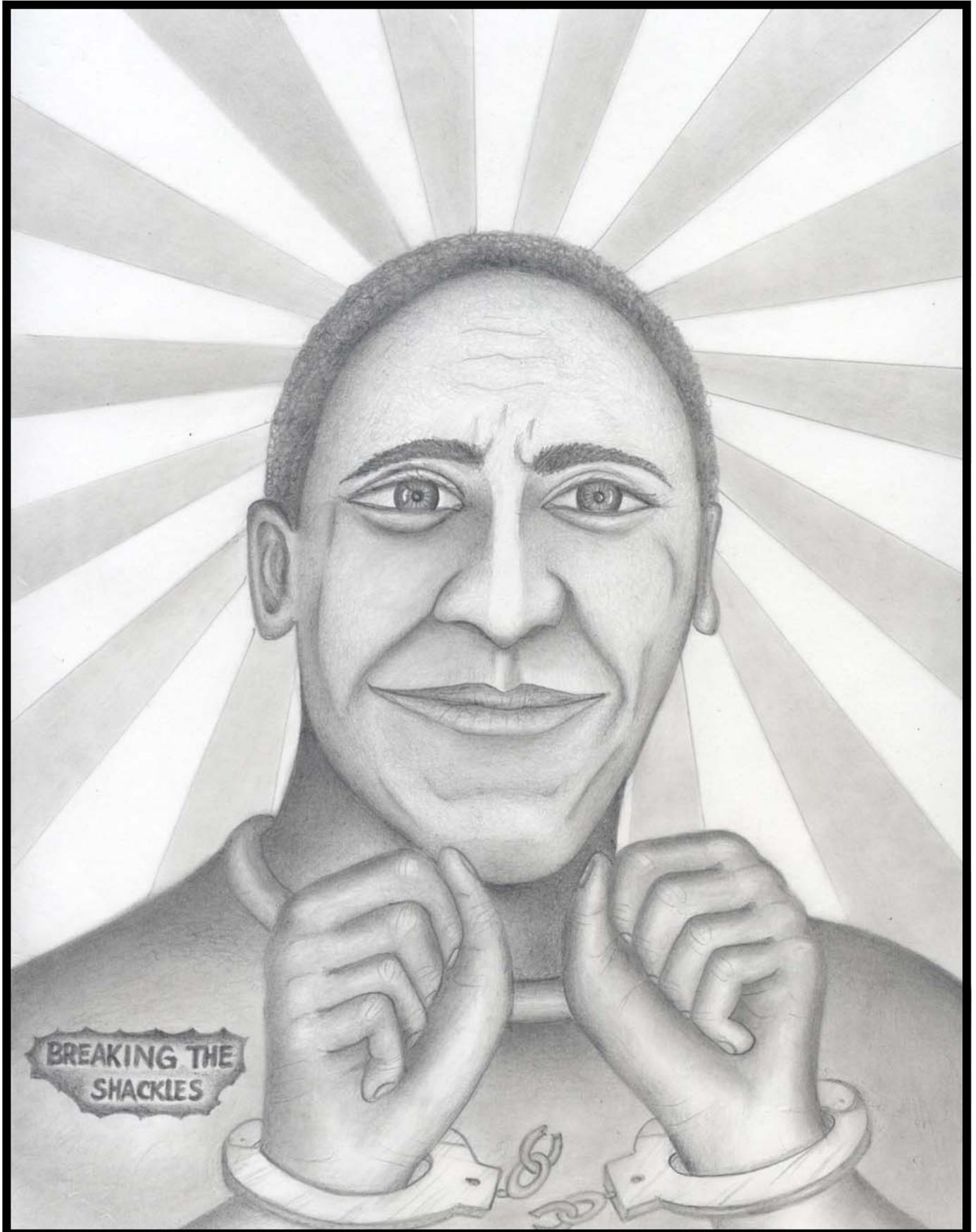
To these students I want to say this: **Good job.**

I greatly respect the effort so many of them put in to this essay, and to all of their work for Project A.C.T. so far. We are over three months into the program, and given the extreme challenges programming (with me!) in a maximum security facility in the middle of a crippling budget crisis and staff shortage, the progress I have seen participants make on so many levels is truly inspiring. If we had more resources and I had more time to spend with each of them, I can scarcely imagine what could be accomplished; every one of them is more than willing to learn new skills, embrace feedback, work hard, and take their lives to a new level. This is not a hope or a guess; I experience it concretely and

consistently. In line with the central message of Dr. Cosby and Poussaint's book, the participants in the Project A.C.T. program are working hard not to fall prey to the trap of victimhood. I see them regularly embracing opportunities to grow and become better human beings, fathers, husbands, co-workers, neighbors, students, and members of their many communities.

Second Honorable Mention Art

Artist Shawn Ural 42030



Staff Honorable Mention Essay

Sarah Clawson, Cosby Project Coordinator

The Individual Amid Social Ills:

Personal Responsibility for the Resolution of Social Calamity

It strikes me how adequately the title of this book expresses what Cosby and Poussaint want to say. Like so many Americans, they feel like the only sane people tossed about in a crazy sea. They ask themselves, “How is it that no one else can see? Why don’t they do something about it?” The answer is stunningly simple, but solutions are far more complicated.

Philosophers, theologians, psychologists, sociologists, and everyday people have long contemplated the resolution of a myriad of social ills from poverty to crime, from war to disease and far beyond. Four hundred years before the meridian of time, Plato claimed that specialization of classes would balance out social ills. In the seventeenth century John Locke proposed that the social contract was the key. Still other sages, prophets, and teachers propose a religious path that leads each individual to seek a higher form of themselves that then resolves social ills. Buddha proposed enlightenment by following the path, Jesus Christ offered up the path of discipleship, and Muhammad provided the law.

It is in such company that Cosby and Poussaint find themselves, attempting to weigh in with common sense answers for a specific societal sub-group. I would like to broaden the scope of their message and address my remarks to all American citizens as I consider the responsibility of individuals in the face of social ills. “Society” is a figurative group composed of many individuals and may refer to any variety of actual groups. In the United States, society is made up of some 300 million individuals of varying age, race, gender, religious orientation, ethnicity, and occupation. A mere few of this vast number are elected, or put in positions of power. It is a great misconception that elections to political office, possession of wealth or acquisition of power are accompanied by a responsibility to resolve social ills.

The founding documents of the United States purport that individuals are endowed with rights by a benevolent creator and that government is established to uphold those rights by the consent of the governed. Under this premise, *the people* are the government and rights are inextricably tied to individual responsibility. The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, written in 1948, states in its preamble that:

All men are born free and equal, in dignity and in rights, and, being endowed by nature with reason and conscience, they should conduct themselves as brothers one to another.

It later delineates an individual duty to conduct oneself in a manner that will not interfere with the development of another’s personality. The responsibility to live a “good” life is clearly documented.

The complication arises, then, in prevailing upon individuals to live a “good” life, one that does not interfere with the development of others. The life lived for “good” does not rely on the rule of law

alone to govern conduct. In an age when institutions and structures that teach and monitor the “good” life are weakening, it becomes increasingly difficult to produce individuals willing to live a “good” life.

The Citizen’s Rule Book, written not long after the conclusion of the Second World War by Charles R. Olsen, outlines an interesting process of which we are beginning to witness the full effects. Freedom leads to abundance and, when abundance persists, it leads to complacency. When complacency festers, it gives birth to apathy and apathy leads to a surrendering of rights and responsibilities until dependency is all that remains. The citizens of the United States have truly experienced abundance and have fallen prey to this awful cycle. The general social ills that engulf us have a great deal to do with what has been surrendered in rights and responsibilities to various governing bodies.

Cosby and Poussaint endeavor to unfold how many areas of human life are still under individual control and how action in these areas can vastly affect outcomes—for the individual, for the family, and, ultimately, for society as a whole. Their proposition is not far fetched and, if tested by a significant number of individuals, could produce social change. I hope that such change is a possibility; however, a part of me worries that complacency and apathy have too great a hold on the American people.

In the introduction of, *Come On, People!*, Bill Cosby describes his recent admission to the “black club”, a concept that is preposterous at its very foundation. The concept that “black” is a state of mind, instead of a skin color is laughable, yet such concepts flourish in a day when logic is studied only by college students from a select group of majors. Such fallacious logic flows freely from the mouths and minds of a dependent, apathetic populace that does not want to be told of its shortcomings. This faceless mass seems to say, “Sing my praises or offer me free help, but don’t tell me I have the power to fix it myself.” With Cosby and Poussaint, I speak to the faceless crowd and say, “You have the power inside of you to change your world!”

I would be a true hypocrite if I did not claim my own part in the social ills I see. I too fall short of the “good” life from time to time. It is not perfection that is required to bring greater peace to American life, it is consistent striving—to seek out weaknesses and systematically endeavor to eliminate them and to identify and reach for an ever higher standard. I cannot promise great immediate results because the outcome depends so much on multiple individual efforts. It has to be enough that each individual knows he or she is doing what is best and that best must be its own reward.

In the post-modern, digital, 4G world where *right now* is king—the “good” life is a nearly impossible sell. Powerful voices tread lightly in pursuit of perfect *pc* (politically correct) conduct and say, effectively, nothing. Voices of substance tip toe to preserve the pride and too-tender feelings of the collective hearer. Cosby and Poussaint have written something that speaks firmly without shouting, calling individuals to claim the might that is already theirs. They call on the black community to shoulder the responsibility that will take them from victimhood to victory. I affirm that the power lies within all American citizens to affect social change by being the good they want to see in their world. Cosby states his expectation with eloquence and I echo the sentiment:

“We can change things we have control over if we accept personal responsibility and embrace self-help.” (p. xviii)

