COVER ART DRAWN BY ALFRED ELLIOTT

Humanities Behind Bars
www.facebook.com/humanitiesbehindbars

Tidewater Industrial Workers of the World
www.facebook.com/tidewaterIWW
To treat us this way is wrong, evil and unsustainable socially. Stand with us. Lend your voices, your labor, and your ideas to this historical work. We can win, but only with you all by our sides. In the final analysis, this is a struggle to determine the nature of humanity itself... Until we win or don’t lose.
- Dorough, Denham, and Robinson, SF Bay View, (2012)

Welcome to the first edition of Breaking Bars, a collection of poetry, prose, art, accounts of prison/jail conditions, reportbacks, analyses, and other writings by incarcerated people of Virginia. We are a coalition of workers on the inside and outside organizing for the abolition of prisons and police in Virginia. The purpose of this publication is to give a platform to incarcerated people, create an outlet for their creativity and analyses, spread awareness of the deadly and dangerous conditions they face, and spread solidarity between the free world working class and the incarcerated working class.

We didn’t see prisoners as a divided class, but as one class of oppressed people no matter who they were. If they were in prison, they were apart of our system. I hate when activists attempt to classify us by our politics in order to divide us. If women, queers, etc. who are incarcerated are not represented inside the movement, that is b/a. Because we are fighting for the end of prison oppression and the end to prisons period, where humans are held indefinitely for a profit. So, any achievements affect all prisoners, not just a select few. So, the answer to this question is yes we reached out to every prison state nationwide!!! We did it by educating them to their rights as a human being. - All Power to the People, Mutopé Duguma, co-founder of George Jackson University

“Savage”
By Derek James
Formerly Incarcerated Activist

The meaning of savage explains itself; fierce, untamed, and barbarous. See, one thing I realize as a human being is that we each have an animal instinct, an inborn tendency to behave in a way or by characteristics of an animal; the ability to adapt to any surrounding and any circumstance. A lot of us will argue on this statement because we don’t want to accept our savage ways. But think about it, when we are pushed to the limit or feel threatened in any way, what results... we will destroy and rip apart anything that stands in our way, that’s only by our pure instinct. We become the animal when we feel that our backs are against the wall with no way out. And this is just something we cannot neglect or control. In so many ways we can be a brutal or crude person because of our selfishness and that causes us to hurt the ones that we love. Why is this untamed ability in our nature? I guess that’s just something we will never know... that darkness that’s living inside of us when we awaken it brings forth that savagery, the monster inside that makes us a Savage!
“This Prison is not My Place”
By Derek James
Formerly Incarcerated Activist

I have been trapped behind bars
like a caged animal
no longer connected to society
As if I was out of space in Mars
disconnected with the human race

But This Prison is not My Place

I am talked down upon and mistreated
as if I wasn’t a human
I was abandoned, left stranded
by the ones who claim they love me
Which puts frowns upon my face

But This Prison is not My Place

My heart has been broken
in desperate need to feel wanted and not
borrowed
as if I was a prize taken
hidden along the base

But This Prison is not My Place

I am free of everything
free of pain, free of sorrow
which in all I have gained
but this is no longer the case

By Hassan Adams
Norfolk City Jail

Black Lives Matter!!! But who’s really around to listen?

Yelling that is just a whisper in this
fucked up system.

They tell us, “We got you. Just hold on.
Wait.”

Just to talk amongst themselves saying,
We’ve won. Checkmate!”

What are we waiting for? What is there to
hold on to?

For them to tell us “Sorry. We regret to inform you
There’s nothing we can do to bring anyone back.”

Hoping our anger will subside and fade to black

But we won’t budge. We want Our Peace!
So they say, “Okay, we’ll take them down at
the knees!
We’ll find a way to ensure they all have a
record
And you penalize each one of them we find
with a weapon.
Then we’ll come up with a plan to make the
rest feel equal.

But we really know we don’t care about
black people.

You hear them yelling as if anyone is
listening?
We’ll keep them at bay through Our Justice System.
Paradox Odyssey  
By Hakim Trent  
SBCC

I was walking around blindfolded  
These blockers are blindfolds  
Searching for the answers of the questions  
Untold  
Peace  
My mind grasp gradually  
Actually this country plus Trump doesn’t equal  
Common sense mathematically  
The system captured me  
Placed me on the plantation  
Forced minimum wages subtracted more wages  
And trapped me in these cages  
Non education  
They teach me to chase dreams  
They teach me about C-R-E-A-M  
They teach me cash rules everything and me  
I wonder what that really means  
We commit acts over paper  
They build ships to go to mars  
While in the streets people starve  
Then get thrown behind bars  
I wonder why is life so hard?  
Full of smoke  
They send me up shit creek and poke a hole in the boat  
When it’s cold we receive no coats  
No paddles for the float  
I’m wishing in the wishing well  
I’m wishing that they give me hell  
And next time I’m in a cell  
That the judge will give me bail...

By Brandon

Hampton Roads Regional Jail

Ua eye for an eye  
That’s the way life goes  
If you can trick ‘em - you can beat um  

Ua broken vase ua red rose  
And while the river over flow’s  
The world’s on Edge  
Six feet in the ground  
I guess that mean’s your dead  
And no one’s never came back  
To prove there’s life after death  
One wrong move in this life  
Can be your last step  
But hell look at the bright side  
Bar-B-Ques and ball game’s  
And if you make it far enough in life  
Someone might no your name  
My mom’s favorite line  
The world will no you for what you are  
When it get’s dark in the day time  
You can see the moon and star’s...
Invisible
By Eugene McNeil
Norfolk City Jail

My eyes are open wide but I cannot see
No color; no hues; no pigment to describe me
Who I am I really can’t explain?
There are no lies or labels that truly give me my name...
Perplexed; Stripped and Abused.
Beaten; Raped and Accused.
Sold for nothing and traded my Hope in for Despair..
Watching humanity pass me by without a care.
I know you see me! I see your face
As you hide behind your denials.
I know you hear me! My voice crying out
But getting no sympathy from your mask
full of smiles.
Justifying murder at an alarming rate;
Statues of Slavery and Confederacy in debate..
Absence of Love can only be Hate...
A human being ERASED; left invisible, devoid of Fate!!

Sweet Dreams
By Eugene McNeil
Norfolk City Jail

I used to have DREAMS instead of nightmares
Visions of Unity; Patriotism; & ol’ school Everybody Cares
There were sweet sounds and melodies;
Silky voices; bass lines and harmonies..
Everybody I know swayed in unison to these rhythmic sounds;
Snapping our fingers & tapping our feet;
feeling of joy being passed around.
Heartfelt laughter and giggles filled this space

Important conversations; manners; amens & saying grace
Historical pride in this country; land and nation born.
Freedom fighters; abolitionist & activist martyrs we mourn

The music of festivity morphs and fades.
Replaced by screams & horrors and deception like a masquerade..

My eyes tear up not wanting me to see,
My mind is assaulted; ambushed and deceived.
Systematic oppression and economic genocide;
Or great American in turmoil; divided by racist pride

Unhealing sores infected with pus.
Lying politician motivated by lust.
My DREAMS are living nightmares now..
I wake up in prison shackled and bound.
Understanding that my dreams are realities found..
FREEDOM
By Dom Roscoe
Norfolk City Jail

At night when I close my eyes, I see visions of freedom...
I see me in a better place, better position, and a better state of mind.
I see vivid thoughts of happiness, mixed with lustful sins intertwined.
I’ve seen me winning again. Winning in a never ending race, of greed and selfishness.
I see myself as the Kingdom, In a landfall of happiness… Though I’m stuck, still asking, who is to play jester?
When I am feeling a little bit foolish, And still can’t help but ask the questions-
Why am I pondering on who has the answers, And wondering why I am lost in deep thought? Why I need to awaken, and free my mind,
Plus free myself from being sought. Because I am taught, with no more chains, and no more bars, This freedom won’t be fought… Then I’m free!

“Oh: Say Can You See?”
By Eugene McNeil
Norfolk City Jail

I do not march to the drums of the same systematic beat,
Instead I now take a kneel to the anthem; choosing to stay in my seat.
How can the greatest country known to man allow such inequality to seductively thrive;
Keeping racism undercover and oppression alive.
Home of the Free and Land of the Brave;
Over 50 years of Emancipation Proclamation yet still I’m a slave?
To protest and serve is what our police are trained;
Senseless killing of Black Youths never knowing their name.
Filling up jails and prison is at an all-time high;
Scare tactics and fake news; believing a lie?

Burying bodies one victim of many,
Mandatory minimum victimized plenty,
You think you know the truth being spoken behind closed doors;
Laws created to kill the impoverished children, my child or yours?

More gun rights and building a border wall and even wasted money on travel bans;
Let’s divide America, drawing more lines in the sand.
Redistricting and election polls based on wealth;
Repeal and replace Obamacare let millions die without health.
New leaders in politics only thinking about “self.”
**Life the Teacher**  
**By Johnny Dance**  
**Norfolk City Jail**

Even though you know the lie has been told,  
Refuse to fold, remain bold  
Someone have to stand up, don’t let life  
Turn you “cold,” don’t freeze up,  
Rise up, “Elevate, Rise; There is a Prize.”

Fight for your Family, live for Humanity,  
Create Harmony, Develop the “might”  
To carry on the Fight,  
Refuse not to see the Light, but  
Take your stand in this “Plight,”  
Live Life with all your might,  
Soar to Reach your Heights,  
Elevation and Determination  
Will help you reach your Destination.  
Be Real, “Ignorance” can Kill,  
Knowledge in Power don’t “Fold”  
Like a flower  
“Rise” awake your mind  
Survival is at stake, thrive to Survive  
Don’t Lie Down, Stand Up  
Rise to the Occasion no matter what  
“Persuasion” Life could be a “Dream”  
If you want to stay “Clean”!!  
Don’t let Life give you a Nightmare,  
Get Wisdom and Understanding,  
Knowledge will keep it all Fair,  
If you Apply those Principles and Remain  
Sensible!  
Life can be Rough Sometimes.  
I got to keep from going under,  
Life can be a “Jungle”  
Sometimes I got to keep from going under!!  
You need unity in your community,  
Let’s live in Harmonics.

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**By Larry S. Monroe**  
**Formerly Incarcerated Activist**

More white police are killing Black men  
every day and walk away as free men. What  
is being done about police officer  
killings? Black people get lost in the  
prison system. Once a black man is  
released from prison, he can’t adapt to  
living righteously. Most black men go  
back to what they know best—killing each  
other, selling drugs, killing the police.  
Poor education, poor skills for work.  
When a black man is released from prison,  
nobody wants to be around them because  
they are felons.  
Employers are scared because of their  
past record. Ninety percent of black  
males are incarcerated and there are more  
drug convictions among black males.  
Still, we are prisoners of our own minds.  
We, as Black people, were never free,  
even today. The legal system is fixed on  
poor communities, unemployment, social  
eglect, economic abandonment, and  
intense police surveillance. The  
difference today is that Black people are  
not in chains and on lockdown, but we as  
African Americans can’t forget the past.  
As African Americans we need unity, love,  
peace, understanding of one another and  
to build a strong foundation.
The Beautiful Struggle  
By Troy R. Sanders  
Norfolk City Jail

In reading this book, I enjoyed growing up with Ta-Nehisi Coates. It took me back to remembering growing up in my old neighborhood, listening to some of the same music and going through some of the same situations. These things are what helped bring this reading to life. Ta-Nehisi Coates was very informative on conscious book titles, even those that were taken out of print. Through this reading you could see Ta-Nehisi transitioning from a child to a teenager going into adulthood. His maturity comes as he starts to become conscious and hungry for the knowledge and understanding of his culture as well as himself. The Beautiful Struggle is a beautiful read and should be a required reading for children of our culture and race.

Mind without Body  
By Kenneth Chappell  
Norfolk City Jail

Chosen by body unheard of by mind, Silenced without voice, new caste made by choice, Hidden from the naked eye, indelible invention or urban lie. Mentally weakened, physically dependent, social political decision Trapped with rebellious tunnel-vision.