

Hard Climb Journal



CELEBRATING AMERICA'S 250 YEARS

pollenpress.org

The Hard Climb Journal provides real news from real people: Changing the narrative concerning the incarcerated. We are committed to highlighting prosocial positivity, while improving communities, one story at a time.

Est. 2021

A New Type of Criminality by Rick Gutierrez and Kannon Chambers



Rick Gutierrez
Editorial Advisor
HCJ

A new form of Criminal Thinking, A call for authentic transformation

Pseudo Programmers



The following narrative isn't exclusively directed at a specific person or group of people per say, but the reality of this phenomenon is real and a systemic problem throughout CDCR. The Hard Climb Journal is committed to covering the incarcerated and tackling tough topics. The last thing we want to do is present a picture that everything is always peachy clean in the struggle towards rehabilitation, it's not, and any attempt to do so is inauthentic. One thing I appreciate at Tehachapi, even though we may not have all the money that other prisons have...we keep it real. And we are supported in that.

Within the California prison system there are recent policy initiatives, which have created the opportunity for the incarcerated to be released back into society. However, amidst all this glorious change lies

a new type of criminality, which has paved the way to a profound and consequential divide, one defined by intention, character, and truth.

On one side are incarcerated individuals who are genuinely committed to change, people who pursue growth with a community-oriented mentality, and a deep sense of humble amends. These individuals recognize the harm they have caused their victims, families, communities, and to society overall. Their actions are driven by accountability rather than optics, service rather than status, and change rather than power and control.

On the other side are individuals who believe or present themselves as believing that they are rehabilitated. They attend programs, hold trusted positions, they always find a way to hook themselves and

their crew up, nepotism is their middle name. Instead of lifting up others, they find ways to exclude people from resources. All the while, even when they think others have no clue, they are involved in just as much treachery as individuals on the yard who are active in criminality. They speak the language of growth yet remain driven by unresolved character defects and distorted belief systems. These defects and beliefs often include an unhealthy need for power and control, an unhealthy hunger for validation, and an evolved subtle approach that enables the continuation of criminal addictive thinking patterns. Instead of substances they now use influence, recognition, and trusted community leadership roles to satisfy the same internal compulsions that once fueled their criminal behavior. This new form of criminal thinking

while less visible is no less destructive. It breeds disorder, conflict, and dissension within incarcerated communities and undermines the very foundation of rehabilitation.

Sincere rehabilitation is not defined by how many programs one completes, how many certificates one collects, or how eloquently one can speak about change. Rehabilitation is an internal process before it is ever an external one. It requires a fundamental shift in identity, values, and motivation. At its core, it demands humility, acknowledging past harm without minimizing, justifying, or shifting blame. It requires a willingness to accept feedback, and to relinquish the ego-driven need to be seen as important or

...continued on pg 4

Mass Incarceration

Ivan Morales
Staff Writer
HCJ

The rise of mass incarceration in the United States was not accidental, it was the result of deliberate policy choices. While often associated with conservative politics, many of the most consequential "tough on crime" laws were championed and enacted by Democrats, particularly during the 1980's and 90's. The policies which include sentence enhancements and repeat offender's laws, such as California's Three Strikes Law, played a central role in dramatically expanding the prison population...

continued on PG. 3

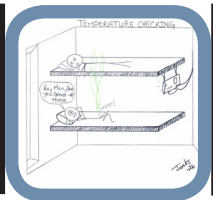
Easter Sunday –

Keenan Todd
Photographer

The first full moon following the Spring Equinox brings us the holiday known as Easter, when Christians celebrate the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Believe it or not, the word "Easter" isn't connected to Christianity at all. It stems from the pagan goddess Eostre, or as she is called in Germany, Ostara, who is celebrated in the springtime...

continued on PG. 3

COMIC
PG.2



O.M.C.P.
BILL
PG.5



Food Sale
Facility
A
PG. 7



Art
Show Case
PG. 9



Langston
Hughes
The American
Dream
PG. 10

Editor-in-Chief
Kannon Chambers

Layout & Design:
Howard Jenks

Society Chair:
Christopher Corbit

Vice Chair:
Joseph D. Miller

Staff Writers
Luis Alvarez
Ivan Morales
Aaron Modisett
Darius Goodwin

Photographers:
Albert Campos
Keenan Todd

Advisors:
Rick Gutierrez I/P

Hard Climb Journal
M. Hammonds,
Journalist Society
Lieutenant J. Robinson,

Public Information Officer
T. Harrison

Chief Deputy Warden
N. Welch

Warden
T. Valdez

Pollen Initiative:
Jessie Vasquez
Executive Director

Kate McQueen
Editorial Director

Meredith Ackley
Operations Coordinator

Veronica Roseharough
Communication Coordinator

“The Hard Climb Journal invites the incarcerated, custody, free staff, volunteers, and members of the community to submit articles, art, and poetry. Contributors retain their intellectual property, but all submissions become property of The Hard Climb Journal and may be edited.”

Permission is granted to reprint articles appearing in The Hard Climb Journal, provided credit is given to the author and this publication, except for the articles reprinted herein from other publications. The opinions herein are of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of The Hard Climb Journal, The Pollen Initiative, or The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

What happens next?.....



Kannon Chambers
Editor-in-Chief
Hard Climb Journal

The justice system in the state of California has changed dramatically during Governor Newsom’s term in office and many are wondering what is coming next after his departure.

Since Gov. Newsom’s arrival he has called for the closing of numerous prisons, enacted bold policy initiatives with leading progressive minds, as well as being directly responsible for eradicating California’s death row at San Quentin.

Many people are wondering within the prison system if the person who is to be elected will continue on this path.

“In my experience, the pendulum always shifts around every twenty years or so. We are about due for things to swing back to a “tough on crime” approach in response to all the stuff Newsom has done,” said a resident of C.C.I.

There are those that

say, “California will never elect a Republican governor.” Really?

I believe that is “hope” talking, because it sure isn’t fact. Fact is, just 2 governors ago, we had a republican governor. If that was broken down into a fraction that would be: 1/3. Or, one out of every three governors in California is republican. Since the last 2 were both far left democrats, I’d say the numbers lean in a republican’s direction.

Now, it just so happens that CBS, The L.A. Times, News Week, pretty much everyone has the republicans leading in the race right now, weeks from ballot mail in. That’s also called facts. The top two leading candidates, regardless of party, determine California’s election primary. As it stands right now, the Democrats are climbing up hill.

Here’s what is not facts, these are called feelings: I really want to go home, so there’s no way we can get a republican governor. Well, I really do emphathize with you, but the fact remains that if we get a republican governor, huge changes will take place, including who, and how frequently lifers are paroled.

This is what happens when you swing the policy bat all the way to extremes, it will feel like a wrecking ball when it swings in the other direction.

Several Christian brothers and I have recently been labeled as having false nobility when we make comments like “My priority is not to go home, but to honor God,” or “if they let me out one day that’s fine, but I accept the sentnece.” The inference is that we are not being real. No, thats exactly what we are being. Our priority is God and change, not going home, not our families, not going to the beach and finally touching the sand. None of that stuff will keep you. You see our change didn’t come from N.A., C. G.A., or any other A, it came from God. So it will still be there even if the prospects of going home is swept off the table, like they are likely to be in a couple months. I would rather have a republican who can restore some sanity back to the state, combat this sinful and depraved disaster we call California, over me being able to go home. For one, it isn’t all about me.

It reminds me of that line in the movie “A Few Good Men” when Tom Cruise is telling the Marine to take the deal. “I will not disrespect my self, my unit, or the Corps, so I can go home in six months...Sir.” God is first in my life, period.

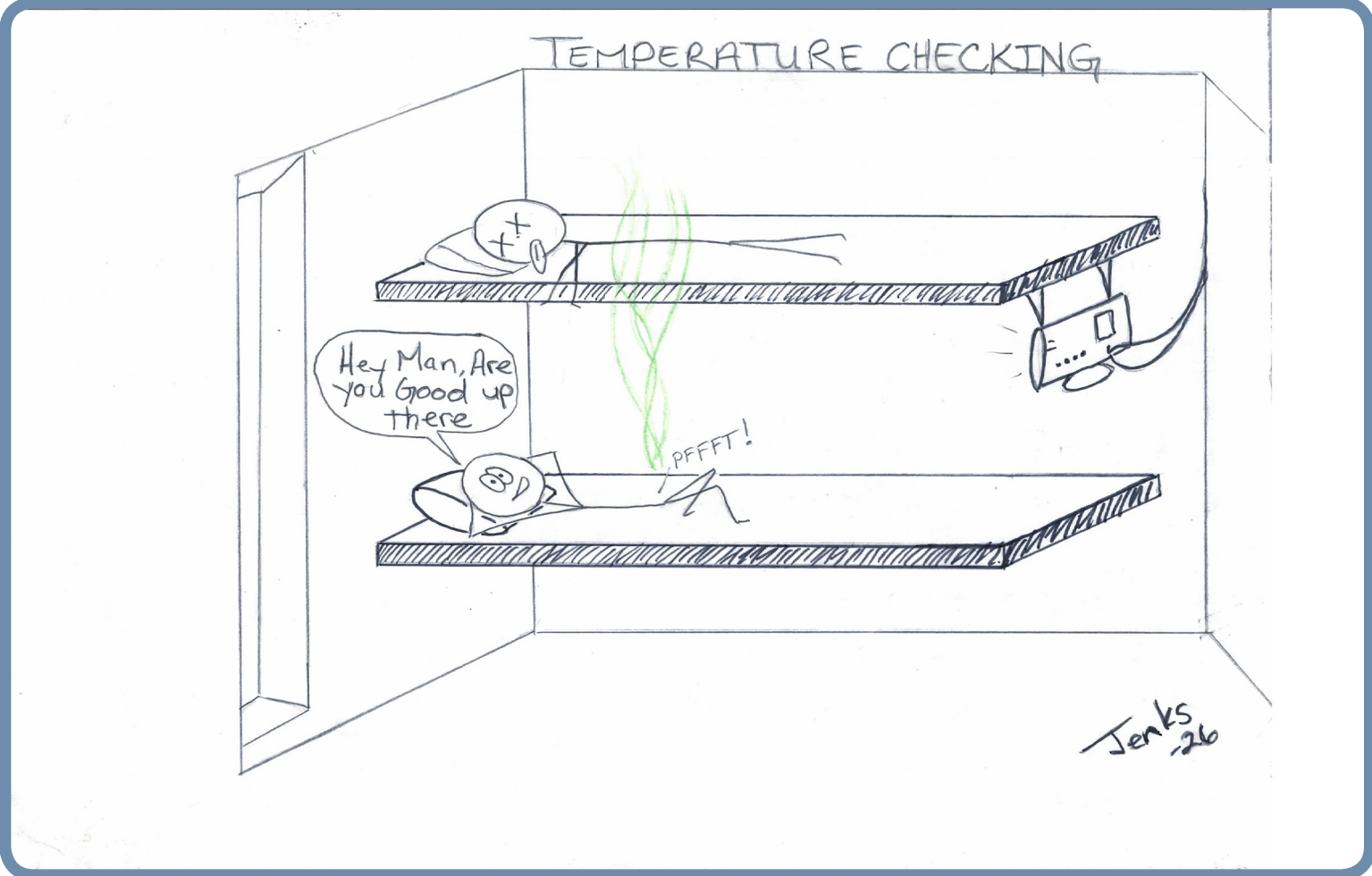
I wonder how many “programmers” who speak about remorse, empathy, accountability, insight...I wonder how many will gradually

go back to criminality if we get a republican. Stay encouraged my brothers, don’t give up on the progress you’ve made just because change is coming. The change was the miracle, not you being rewarded for it.

One of the board questions often sighted is: do you deserve to go home? When I talk to men about their fears concerning getting a republican governor, it’s all about the work they have put in and how they feel that their entitled to a release, and how a republican is going to wreck all of that. Chad Bianco toured San Quentin a couple of weeks ago with Jessie Vasquez, the Hard Climb Journal’s outside sponsor. Bianco spoke about understanding that rehabilitation is needed and he is all for it. Thats all he said.

Its times like these that I personally have to stay victim centered. When I start thinking about all the stuff “I think” a republican is going to take away, I say: I took something away that can never be gained back, a life. Who am I to complain about anything? The feelings many are expressing are understandable. People that I do care about in the system may be impacted and that sucks. At the same time, I think we keep pushing in the right direction, positivity, change, and rehabilitation. I mean, that’s what we were in it for in the first place...right?

Comic.....



check us out on Edovo

“Tough on Crime Policies” & Mass Incarceration



continued from PG. 1

“I think mass incarceration is a horrible way of dealing with people, treating your fellow man as a monster. Granted, I only say that now, because I understand the power of rehabilitation. Before I was that monster, I understand the way that law and order treated me,” said a resident of the California Correctional Institution. This resident is currently sentenced to life based on harsh sentencing practices.

Faced with rising crime and political pressure, Democratic leaders increasingly embrace punitive approaches to criminal justice. The most significant example was the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, supported by then president Bill Clinton and passed with strong democratic backing. The law encouraged states to adopt “truth in sentencing” policies, which required individuals to serve most of their prison terms, and



Facility A California Correctional Institution

provided funding for prison expansion. This legislation marked a turning point, accelerating incarceration and normalizing longer sentences.

At the state level, California became a leading example of how these policies reshaped the justice system. Democratic lawmakers supported these initiatives like the 1988 Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (STEP), which introduced broad sentencing enhancements tied to alleged gang involvement. These enhancements allowed prosecutors to add years or even decades to prison sentences, often based on loosely defined associations. Over time such enhancements became rou-

“In recent years, many Democrats have acknowledged the harmful consequences of these policies”

tine, significantly increasing the length of sentences across the state.

Perhaps the most controversial policy was California’s 1994 Three

Strike Law. While signed by Republican Governor Pete Wilson, it was passed with bipartisan support, including many Democrats responding to the fear of crime. The law mandated a sentence of 25 years to life for individuals convicted of a third felony, even if the offense was relatively minor. This rigid structure removed judicial discretion and led to thousands of people receiving life sentences for non-violent offenses.

Supporters of these policies argued they were necessary to deter crime. However, evidence suggests that they contributed more to prison growth than to public safety. Research indicates that sentence enhancements and Three Strikes

laws disproportionately impacted communities of color and low-income populations. In California, a significant portion of incarcerated individuals received enhanced sentences, often for non-violent offenses, raising serious questions about fairness and proportionality.

In recent years, many Democrats have acknowledged the harmful consequences of these policies and have supported reforms. Measures such as California’s proposition 36 scaled back the “Three Strikes Law” by limiting life sentences to serious offenses. These reforms reflect a broader shift in public opinion, recognizing that punitive policies of the past contribute to an unsustainable and inequitable system.

Ultimately, while mass incarceration was the product of bipartisan decisions, Democratic leadership played a crucial role in advancing the policies that fueled it. Understanding this history is essential to ensuring that future reforms address not only symptoms, but also the political choices that created the problem. []

Easter



continued from PG. 1

...However, churches use Easter Sunday to honor God for raising Christ from the dead and to recognize those who have given their lives for the Christian faith. The actual date of Jesus’ resurrection was not recorded so there is no fixed date for this holiday. The same goes for Christ’s birth, so its true beginnings are unknown.

Easter is linked to the Passover festival, a Jewish celebration that also occurred during Christ’s death.

Lunar cycles are what dictate the start of Passover so this resulted in

Easter Sunday falling anytime between March 22nd and April 25th. The church leaders of the 4th century agreed on referring to the mathematically calculated “Paschal” full moon which doesn’t always match when the moon appears full in the sky. To add to the complexity, 18th century Eastern and Western (Orthodox) Christian churches decided to abide by different calendars, which meant different Easters. Both churches and governments have attempted to settle on a specific date but an agreement has yet to be reached

Although this holiday is recognized as a religious one, certain themes such as painted eggs, children’s events, and the Easter Bunny continue to be at the forefront. There has never been a proven connection



tion between such themes and Christianity but it is believed that they symbolize the season of spring. This season represents new beginnings and fresh starts so hopefully the residents and staff here at CCI receive just that. []

Happy Resurrection Day CCI

Psuedo Programmers

superior. Most importantly it is community-centered rather than self-centered. It asks, “How do my actions affect others?” rather than “How does this benefit me?”

Those who are righteously on a rehabilitative path often move quietly while they help their community and those in it. They do not seek praise or titles unless they know they can provide a positive contribution to their community. They show consistency in their appropriate conduct within the function of those positions, titles, and overall especially when no one is watching. They support others without expecting loyalty, admiration, or influence in return. Their leadership, when it exists, is rooted in service rather than power or control.

In contrast, this growing phenomenon within the prison system’s programming facilities and among programming incarcerated individuals, “The illusion of rehabilitation”, assists persons, who are still actively embracing criminal minded concepts, to outwardly adopt the behaviors associated with reform, but internally remain governed by the same thinking patterns that led to their incarceration. In order to disassociate from their own reality of being incarcerated, a “position” now makes this person say “Hey, I’m not like these other people...I’m not an inmate...I’m an IAC Executive Body Member, or a Captain’s Clerk, a Facilitator, a Mentor etc... I’m special”. Imagine that this person interprets their interactions with staff as a validation of the worth they feel they have deserved for so long. “By Golly, I’m wonderful because staff speak to me”. The attention they get is as addictive as the drugs they once used. This is a very clear reminder that criminal thinking does not disappear simply because circumstances change. If left unexamined it adapts. Where manipulation once occurred through force or intimidation, it now occurs through unhealthy persuasion, reputation, and access. Where addiction once

found satisfaction through drugs or illicit activity, it now finds satisfaction through attention, authority, and influence over others.

“I’ve experienced this same thing at various institutions and I’ve come to the conclusion that these incarcerated individuals serve themselves and everyone knows it,” said a resident who wished to remain anonymous.

These individuals often gravitate toward trusted positions, peer motivators, community mentors, facilitators, community representatives, or informal leaders. While these roles are intended to empower positive influence, they can be misused when held by individuals who seek power rather than healthy responsibility. They fight to stay in power because to feel good about themselves they need power. It is said by some “they NEED power, because they don’t HAVE any true power”. In such cases, leadership and the position of a community advocate become tools for self-validation rather than community uplift.

The need for power, control, and validation can be as addictive as any substance. For individuals with unresolved trauma, insecurity, or narcissistic tendencies, influence over others provides a temporary sense of worth and identity. Praise becomes a drug. Recognition becomes a fix. Control becomes a substitute for self-esteem. when these needs go unchecked they manifest in subtle but harmful ways. Gate keeping access to programs, manipulating narratives, fostering dependency, spreading division, gossip, or positioning oneself as morally or intellectually superior. These behaviors may be cloaked in the language of rehabilitation, but their effects are unmistakably destructive.

Instead of fostering unity they create factions. Instead of encouraging growth they promote dissent. Instead of modeling accountability they avoid self-examination. This dynamic corrodes trust and poisons the rehabilitative

environment making it harder for genuinely committed individuals to thrive. The harm caused by this new form of criminal and addictive thinking extends beyond individual behavior. It damages the credibility of programming, undermines institutional trust, and weakens the collective effort toward reform. When incarcerated individuals exploit positive initiatives for personal gain, even when they are not fully aware of it, it reinforces skepticism among staff administrators and policy makers, ultimately jeopardizing opportunities for everyone. More importantly it inflicts real harm on fellow incarcerated people. Vulnerable individuals seeking guidance may be manipulated. Conflict may be escalated rather than resolved. Important and impactful voices may be silenced rather than heard and allowed to make a real difference. The result is a community that mirrors dysfunction rather than transcending it. Rehabilitation is not meant to reproduce old hierarchies in new forms. It is meant to

dismantle them.

I write this not to condemn anyone but to challenge all. Growth begins with one of the most difficult things to embrace, due to the fact that it is one of the most frightening things to abide by, honesty. Honesty requires humble courage. For those who recognize themselves I offer this critique, the invitation is simple but demanding, be better! There are very good IAC Body’s, Educational, Captain, and Chapel Clerks, Cooks, Porters, T.A’s, OMCP, YOP, PLMP Mentors, and Media Workers. (I mention these positions, not because there is anything wrong with these positions or organizations, but because the list is exhaustive). For it’s the principle of holding ANY position and the unhealthy assumption of power that it brings for SOME, that is the problem. If you’re one of the good ones, which is the majority, then I’m not talking about you. I mention these spots because throughout my stay in many institutions these spots are the most vulnerable to this disease, and if incarcerated residents aren’t careful, they too can allow the “position” to go to their heads... Again, not all people associated with the above-mentioned spots are caught in this two-sided anti-social cycle.

Ask yourself difficult questions. Why do I seek this role? Why do I want to create this group? Why do I want to participate in this program? Why do I want to participate in this program? Why am I opposing leadership? Why am I opposing an idea? Why does recognition matter so much to me? How do I respond when my authority is questioned? Do I truly listen to others? Do I retaliate? Am I serving the community, or am I feeding my ego?

Authentic rehabilitation requires surrendering the need to control situations and others, instead of mastering oneself. It requires replacing validation seeking with self-respect earned through consistent ethical thinking and behavior. It requires understanding that leadership is not about be-

ing seen, but about creating space for others to grow. Every incarcerated individual engaged in rehabilitation carries a responsibility, not only to themselves, but also to the community around them. Choices matter. Intentions matter. Impact matters. You can contribute to your community’s healing or to its destruction. You can be a stabilizing presence or a source of chaos. You can model accountability or perpetuate manipulation under a new name.

The path of true rehabilitation is not glamorous. It does not guarantee recognition but it does offer something far more valuable, integrity. Its been very hard for some to excel in prison and there are several great opportunities that others had to let go of because they were unwilling to be cut throat or play the game, but they chose integrity. In spite of the hardships they faced, they were able to let their work and ethics elevate them. Leadership is not about your ability to stand out while giving managerial structure. Great leaders leave a legacy of making others better, being an example of humility and progressive consistency.

The California prison system is filled with individuals capable of profound transformation. Many are already walking that path with sincerity, humility, and a genuine desire to make amends. They deserve an environment that protects and honors authentic growth. At the same time, the system, and those within it must be willing to confront uncomfortable truths. Rehabilitation is not proven by participation alone, but character. Positive programming should not become a stage for unresolved criminal thinking, nor should leadership be used as a substitute for inner healing.

To those utilizing a new form of criminal thinking under the guise of rehabilitation, the call is clear. Be honest. Be accountable. Be better. Contribute not to your community’s disorder, but to its health. The future of rehabilitation depends on you. []

The need for power, control, and validation can be as addictive as any substance.

New Legislation



O.M.C.P. RESENTENCING

-THIS BILL WOULD: Authorize the court to resentence incarcerated individuals through two avenues:

- 1) A motion to the court by the incarcerated person.
- 2) An “Automatic Review” of the incarcerated person’s central file by CDCR officials, in favor of a recommendation for resentencing for those who:
 - (a) Have been incarcerated for 10 years on their current offense (*Indeterminate 1170.03*), or have at least served 7 years on their current offense (*determinant*).
 - (b) Have completed the OMCP program or are in the processes of completing their internship hours, and meet already established criteria for resentencing.

-THIS BILL WOULD: Recognize OMCP Mentors as premier programmers, possessing extraordinary rehabilitative insight, establishing them as essential workers treating substance use disorders within CDCR. This recognition would increase pay for OMCP Mentors from \$2.00-\$3.00 per hour.

I _____

Am in support of this Bill and would like my government official to draft, support, and advance this bill through the legislative process for approval.

Signature	Date
* Mail to: Senator Josh Becker 1021 O St. suite 6520 Sacramento California, 95814	

What Is O.M.C.P.?

The Occupational Mentor Certification Program provides incarcerated individuals with the training and education necessary to become Certified Substance Use Disorder Counselors. Upon completion of the program, these incarcerated counselors’ work alongside non-incarcerated counselors, helping them to treat those with substance use disorders in CDCR’s ISUDT program. OMCP Mentors have the lowest recidivism rates, high employment placement upon parole, and are strongly supported by leading professionals and organizations in the addiction treatment field.

Upon acceptance to the program the mentors must:

Accept housing at one of six training facilities

Complete Intensive Substance Use Disorder Treatment Program

Complete 350 hours of classroom education taught by leading professionals in the field

Pass certifying exam through credentialed organization

Complete over 2000 hours of internship at CDCR institution

From C.C.I.

AMENDMENT 1:
FREEDOM OF RELIGION, PRESS, AND EXPRESSION

“CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW RESPECTING AN ESTABLISHMENT OF RELIGION, OR PROHIBITING THE FREE EXERCISE THEREOF; OR ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS; OR THE PEOPLE PEACEABLY TO ASSEMBLE, AND TO PETITION THE GOVERNMENT FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES.”

1st Amendment



Chris Corbit
Society Chair-HCJ

The American Library Association has been fighting on behalf of Americans and their rights under the first amendment for a long time now. This battle has been fought over topics directly and indirectly protected under the First Amendment. Topics such as censorship, academic freedom, and the freedom of information just to name a few. The first Amendment protects our rights to religion, speech, press, and the right to peacefully assemble and petition our



government. What this means is that everyone who resides in the United States has the right to hear every side of an issue without government intrusion or restrictions. The First Amendment has been widely interpreted as a way to protect our publications like books, magazines, music, films, newspaper and more. Another protection

clarified by the Supreme Court, as well as other courts, is that the right to receive information is just as equal as the right to speak. This notion was explained by Justice William Brennan in the case of *Lamont v. Postmaster General*, 381 U.S. 301 (1965). The American Library Association quotes the Justice in their article *First Amendment*

and Censorship, in a part of the quote he says, “I think the right to receive publications is such a fundamental right. The dissemination of ideas can accomplish nothing if otherwise willing addressees are not free to receive and consider them.” Public institutions like schools and libraries have fought for and against censorship, and the ban-

ning of or preservation of books. Under the protection of this amendment, critical rights are clearly underlined. Government officials are restricted from regulating speech that criticizes government or politics that advances one’s values and beliefs. There are categories not protected such as obscenity, child pornography, defamatory speech, false advertising, true threats, and fighting words. The rest of the decisions on what is or is not protected are decided in the court of law. It is great to live in a country with liberties like the First Amendment and greater to have associations like the ALA to champion on our behalf. Happy 250th Birthday America! []

98th Academy Awards Show



Keenan Todd
Photographer
HCJ

It was an evening to remember at Dolby Theatre for Hollywood’s biggest night. The red carpet was a sea of fashion that included glamorous Gucci gowns and designer tuxes with refreshments served courtesy of Wolfgang Puck. There were appearances by legends such as Kathy Bates, Steven Spielberg, and even Buddy Guy. Oscars host, Conan O’Brien, began the ceremony with a comical skit then jumped straight into the awards presentation. One of the first

And the Oscar Goes To...

Best Supporting Actress:	Amy Madigan	Weapons
Best Animated Feature & Best Original Song	KPop Demon Hunters	Kpop Demon Hunters
Best Lead Actress	Jessie Buckley	Hamnet
Best Lead Actor	Michael B. Jordan	Sinners

categories was Best Supporting Actress won by Amy Madigan for her role in *Weapons*. Her win set an Oscars record for the longest duration between a first-time nomination and an official victory. The show went on but not before Conan took shots at actor Timothee Chalamet for his recent critiques of Opera and Ballet. Since music is also a staple of the Academy, performances of the nominated songs, “I Lied to You” from

Sinners and “Golden” from *KPop Demon Hunters* had the crowd on their feet. The Korean based film earned two Oscars for Best Animated Feature and Best Original Song, which is a first for the KPop genre. Happiness pulsed throughout the venue until the tribute portion where the lives of deceased stars such as Rob Reiner, Catherine O’Hara, Diane Keaton, Robert Duvall, and Val Kilmer

were celebrated. Actress and singer Barbara Streisand sang an emotional track in remembrance of Robert Redford. As award disbursement continued, Jessie Buckley was recognized as Best Lead Actress for her role in *Hamnet*. Then, Sean Penn was awarded Best Supporting Actor for *One Battle After Another*, which received 6 total Oscars including Best Picture. Like the 68th Grammys, some winners used the moment to take

a stance during chaotic times; uttering phrases such as: “Stop the War”, and “Free Palestine”. Near the event’s end, Ryan Coogler’s *Sinners* won Best Lead Actor for Michael B. Jordan’s role as twins, Smoke and Stack; the victory was a first for Jordan. For the 98th Oscars, viewers tuned in from 38 countries across 6 different continents once again proving that art and entertainment can result in positive collaboration amongst other feats []



Food Sale....

Little Caesars
Pizza Pizza



Facility A
Donates to the Community

By Staff Writer: Aaron Modisett-Holly

On February 19th & 20th, Facility-A had their First Quarter food sale from the well-known pizza establishment that is famous for their catchy slogan “Pizza-Pizza” and the guarantee of it being hot and ready. Early that morning, anybody could feel the tension of the anticipation of what was to come. As soon as the van arrived on the yard and parked at the entrance to the gymnasium, the “bubble of excited tension burst”, as expressed by Louie Lopez, one of the many patrons. Countless residents observed the IAC carrying the merchandise inside while smelling the many aromas of different pizzas and breadsticks that were bought, as well as brownies and wings. I can guarantee that no one escaped having a salivating mouth with all the new smells coming from the gym. This food sale donation was to the Tehachapi Bulldogs Baseball Team. The incentive of being able to participate in this food sale was both, being 8 months disciplinary free, and having the appropriate funds. Fortunately, I was able to make it myself, and purchased two pizzas, buffalo chicken wings, crazy bread sticks, and a two-liter Mountain Dew. Let me tell you, I was in za heaven. Being present for a few moments, seeing my fellow peers go and receive their own purchases, they had nothing but joy and happiness on their faces. Talking to my close friends on the yard, Keenan Todd, and Lorenzo Hutchins, they both offered me two thumbs up on their order, signaling that their taste buds and stomachs were sufficiently satisfied. []



Story of Transformaiton



Profile
Jamie Estrada
HCJ Contributor

The Hard Climb Journal recently sat down with one of California Correctional Institutions proگرامing population, Mr. Richard Ruiz. The interview conducted provides insight into the reality of lives being changed here at CCI. “I was prison raised! When I came to prison, I thought to myself my life is over”, said Richie during his interview. He thought how could a 16 year old convicted of murder survive in a world of adult convicts that don’t care about life? Richie was practically raised by the system. Incarcerated at age 13, he joined a gang soon after and was eventually shot twice by rival gang members. Like most juveniles Richie was searching for acceptance, love, and belonging. While going in and out of juvenile hall, a judge attempted to persuade him to turn his life around by explaining to a young man in need, that if he ever saw Mr. Ruiz in front of him again, he would send him

to the California Youth Authority. Three months later he was in front of that same judge for a juvenile murder case.

Richie was now 16, in an empty cell sitting on his bunk in YA wearing state blues, he said to himself, “I made it”. Ruiz talked about feeling a badge of honor and a sense of accomplishment for his pride and loyalty to the gang. Richie thought prison was going to be like the movies. He was soon convicted and transferred to state prison with 50 other juveniles who were transferred as adults.

Richie’s first cellmate was an old convict who told him in order to gain respect he would have to do time in the SHU. Richie and 50 other juveniles were now competing to earn a reputation and impress the gang. He was in and out of the hole and SHU, rising in the world of prison politics. In this world his juvenile mind shifted to that of a hardcore criminal. He craved the power and reputation as a validated gang member.

During that time Richie felt he had lost all hope. Richie’s mother had lost her baby boy to prison and the dark world that comes with it. Until this very day his Mom cries just thinking about the moment he was sen-



Top Left: Juvenile Hall



Top Center: Camp



Top Right: Pelican Bay

Bottom Right: CCI



Richard Ruiz, CCI Facility A

tenced. After doing eight years in the SHU without a visit, his mother finally came to see him at Pelican Bay State Prison. “My heart broke, Mom looked old and wrinkly,” said Ruiz. He still remembers his mother saying to him that she needed her only child home. Richie recounted a seed being planted in him through her words. He was faced with the choice of dropping out of his gang or continue hurting his mother. “It wasn’t easy,”



Richie stated.

Richie grew up in prison and didn’t know how to love himself. When he arrived on a Sensitive Needs Yard he thought he had made a mistake. He tried to assimilate by straddling the fence not knowing how to change or let go. Chasing criminality, drugs and the lifestyle that all that behavior comes with was all Richie knew. Finally Richie started thinking about his choices. That’s when he made a true commitment to change.

Richie had nothing to show for the many years in prison, except for a raging addiction to heroin. “Rehabilitation has been the hardest thing I’ve ever

faced,” said Richie. Ruiz spoke about the sanity and the peace accompanied with the life of sobriety. He expressed his gratitude for his pro-social lifestyle, his decision to change, and the willingness to become the new him. A program that contributed greatly to Richie’s change was CGA. It provided the foundation and now he has dozens of certificates including being a registered substance abuse counselor, as well as a relapse prevention specialist. Ruiz is also currently excelling in his college courses through Cerro Coso. “If a lost juvenile like me can make it, anyone can,” says Ruiz. []

Tittle Time



Tyrone Tittle

Quote:

If You Woke Up Above Ground
You Have One More Chance
To make A Choice
To Make A Change

Art Showcase by: Gillian Zinser



Langston Hughes: The American Dream

By Kannon Chambers
HCJ Editor-in-Chief

The American Dream has long been defined as the belief that anyone, regardless of background, can achieve success through hard work, determination and perseverance. Rooted in the ideas of freedom, equality and opportunity, the dream has shaped American identity for generations. While the concept promises prosperity and social mobility, the reality has often fallen short for marginalized communities. Writers and poets have repeatedly examined this tension, exposing the gap between the idealized dream and lived experience. Among the voices, Langston

Hughes stands out for his powerful critique of the American Dream and his insistence that has yet to be realized. Through his poetry, Hughes reveals how the dream has been deferred, denied, and distorted, particularly for African Americans.

Hughes also critiques how economic exploitation undermines the dream. In “Let America Be America Again,” he portrays America as a



place where the poor are trapped in a cycle of labor without reward. The dream promises wealth through hard work, yet Hughes reveals that efforts do not guarantee success when systems are designed to benefit only a few. This contradiction exposes the American Dream as exclusive rather than inclusive. Hughes’s poem insists that the dream cannot exist authentically until it belongs to everyone.

Another of Hughes’s most famous poems, “Harlem” examines the emotional and psychological consequences of a dream. The poet opens with the haunting ques-

tion: “What happens to a dream deferred?” Rather than offering a single answer, Hughes presents a series of unsettling possibilities, comparing the dream to rotting meat, a fostering sore, or an explosive. These images suggest that denying people opportunity led not to science but to decay and unrest. Hughes implies that postponing justice and equality threatens the stability of society itself.

Together, these poems reveal Hughes’s complex relationship with the American Dream. He does not reject the dream entirely; instead, he exposes how it has been

corrupted through racism and economic inequality. Hughes believes in the idea of America, but not in the version that excludes large portions of its population. His work demands accountability, urging the nation to live up to its own ideas. For Hughes the dream is not dead, it is finished.

In contemporary society, Hughes’s reviews remain strikingly relevant. Wage gaps, housing discrimination, and unequal access to education continue to limit those who can achieve the dream. While progress has been made since Hughes’s time the fundamental question persists: Is

the American Dream truly accessible to all? Hughes’s poetry suggests that until systemic barriers are dismantled, the dream will remain deferred to many.

Ultimately, The American Dream is both a promise and a challenge. It represents hope, ambition, and hope in a better future. Langston Hughes’s poetry forces readers to confront these contradictions and reconsider what the dream should mean. By giving voice to those excluded from the dream, Hughes reminds us that America cannot be fully realized until opportunity and dignity are extended to us all. His work challenges future generations to transform the dream from illusion into a shared reality. []

The
American
Dream
is Both A
Promise
and
A
Challenge



MR.



L o r e n z o

Quote:

The world has plenty
of copies,
but few originals.
My question is
which one are you?

ART NEEDED!!!

HARD CLIMB ART

IF YOU ARE CREATIVE LET US
KNOW SO WE CAN SHOW
YOUR ART OFF TO THE
POPULATION

COME
SEE US AT
THE OFFICE ON A-YARD
SO WE CAN PUBLISH YOUR POSITIVE
ART WORK !!!

OR SEND IT IN AN ENVELOPE TO A-YARD
MS. HAMMONDS CLASS ROOM 1



Got a Story?

Attention Facility A, B, & C!!!

If you have an article you would like to submit to The Hard Climb Journal we would love to hear from you. You can send them via institutional mail to:

**The Hard Climb Journal
C/O Ms. Hammonds Facility A Dining Hall 1**

All articles will be reviewed by the HCJ Editorial Board for content and clarity.

** stories may be edited*

The Hard Climb Journal