

Hard Climb Journal



CELEBRATING AMERICA-250

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

pollenpress.org

Est. 2021

America 250’ Includes Black History

By: Kannon Chambers
Editor-in-Chief
HCJ

In the United States and elsewhere, the post-slavery era introduced new forms of systematic discrimination, including segregation and disenfranchisement. Despite these barriers, black communities built institutions, businesses, and cultural movements that strengthened their collective identity.

The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920’s emerged as a powerful cultural awakening, producing influential artists, musicians, and writers who challenged racial stereotypes and celebrated black life. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s further transformed the social and political landscape. Through non-violent protest, legal challenges, and grassroots organizing, activist fought for an end of segregation and protection of voting rights. Leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcom X became global symbols of resistance, while countless organizers worked behind the scene to create lasting change. Their efforts resulted in landmark legislation that reshaped democratic participation.

Today, black history continues to be written. Black leaders, scientist, athletes, and artist are breaking barriers and redefining excellence in their fields. At the same time, ongoing movements addressing inequality, policing, healthcare disparities, and education, draw direct connection to historical injustices. Educators and advocates stress that learning black history is not only about understanding the present. By exploring historical patterns of resistance and resilience, communities gain tools to address modern challenges.

As institutions expand efforts to preserve black history through museums, awareness and public dialogue, many see this work as essential to building a more inclusive future. Black history, experts agree, is not a separate narrative-it is a central thread in the story of America’s 250 years.



Hard Climb Journal Rocks!!!!

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“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.”

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Editorial

By Kannon Chambers
HCJ Editor-in-Chief

As the new Editor-in-Chief of the Hard Climb Journal, I would like to formally introduce myself and share a couple of thoughts. First, I would like to thank God, who is the head of my life for his all-sustaining grace. Many times on this journey, obstacles sought to deter his work, but he has proven to be more than enough, willing and able to finish what he has started.

I would like to thank Administrative Staff here at CCI for believing that the stories of the incarcerated are worth investing in. Without the backing of Warden Cates, PIO Harrison, AW Amos, Captain Bonffil, Lt.

Robinson and Ms. Hammonds, none of this would be possible. Jessie Vasquez and the Pollen Initiative have continued to be supportive since my journey with them began at San Quentin. I truly believed that their motivation is birthed from a genuine regard for investing in us, while redefining the narrative concerning those that are incarcerated.

As you know Hard Climb Journal is now in 1800 institutions, available to over 800,000 incarcerated residents on the Edovo App, as well as Pollenpress.org, which recently recorded 1.8 million views. Our transformation of available spacing on Facility A is currently in the works and we have secured funding, from the Pollen Initiative, to provide a fully operational newsroom and media center. Don't worry Facility C, we got you. As soon as everything is established up here, we will be looking to expand our infrastructure, staffing opportunities and journalism society down there as well, and then to Facility B.

What we are dealing with is one of the most powerful

forces in all of history, the power of a story. This is what makes all of this possible. Our ability to go find stories that are impactful, authentic, truly capturing the heart of the incarcerated, will be the difference between our success and failure. Media can be a powerful thing when done right. I've personally seen, as a staff writer for San Quentin News, how view points changed concerning our community.

As the IAC Chairman of San Quentin from 2022-2024, I had a front row seat to the systemic changes, which have taken place in CDCR. What I learned while sitting in think tanks, helping to provide input on policy from an incarcerated perspective, town halls with hundreds of correctional officers, is that being willing to form community and partnerships is the building blocks of any great task. I've met with the Governor, collaborated with the Director of Adult Institutions, the Secretary of Corrections, District Attorneys, Mayors, Senators and Congressmen, Victims Rights Advocacy groups, even

the President of the CCPOA. One thing that was constant in all of that-media. Media not only covers the stories, it covers the process.

I thank San Quentin News for giving me a shot. I never envisioned doing this type of work, but with the training and support, I've found a new passion. My vision for CCI is to continue the work of the Hard Climb Journal, utilizing the training and relationships I formed at Quentin to improve CCI in whatever way I can. The change we cover has to be real, or at the very least, in process. I believe that CCI has the potential to produce even more success stories, innovative programming, fostering partnerships with organizations such as the Pollen Initiative, as well as others, which can bring much needed resources and lasting change. I'm excited about the Hard Climb Journal's future...youshouldbetoo.

Real Stories
from
Real People

Revive@ CCI Media Program

By: Cedric C. Woods
HCJ-Contributing Writer

In may 2023, Lt. James Robinson, together with inmates Ricardo Gutierrez and Brandon W. Rackliffe founded a prison media program with a simple but powerful mission: to give a voice to the incarcerated community while helping create a safer and more positive environment for both the incarcerated and staff. They expressed that the program was built around the belief that communication, accountability, and creativity can play an important role in rehabilitation and personal growth. Since its creation, the Revive@ Media Program has provided incarcerated individuals with the opportunity to share their experiences, tell meaningful stories, and highlight the positive changes taking place within CCI Tehachapi. Through interviews, articles, videos, photography, and other creative projects, the participants have been able to express themselves in constructive ways while learning valuable skills



such as teamwork, leadership, communication, and responsibility.

Revive@ also promotes pro-social behavior by encouraging inmates to focus on growth, education, and rehabilitation rather than negative conflict. Participants work together to create projects that inspire hope and show that change is possible when individuals are given support, guidance, and purpose. Many of the projects have highlighted education-

al achievements, vocational training, self-help groups, and rehabilitative programs that are helping inmates prepare for successful re-entry into society. Staff members have also recognized the positive impact the program has had on the facility's environment. By encouraging mutual respect, communication, and collaboration, the program has helped strengthen relationships between staff and inmates while promoting a more constructive atmosphere throughout the insti-

tution.

What began as an idea to give inmates a voice has evolved into a meaningful platform for change. The success that Revive@ Media Program continues to demonstrate is rehabilitation is possible and that providing opportunities for self-expression and personal development can benefit not only the incarcerated population, but the entire facility's community.



The HCJ Journalism Society

Community

Christopher Corbit
HCJ Society Chair

A cohort of eight community members has embarked as the third cohort of a 20-week journalism education course on Facility A.

The topics covered range from newsroom basics, news judgment, and the how and what to write about when it comes to journalism.

“It was an experience of growth, and to be honest it made me a better writer,” said Ivan Morales, a graduate of the second cohort when asked about his experience.

Ivan spoke about how he learned to “stick to the facts” and to reduce his bias. He also went on to share how this experience is transferable into the career he plans on getting into. Remaining objective and open-minded are both practices he has learned to put into practice as a journalist.



David Muegge, a current student of the Journalism Society, expressed his enjoyment of the class stating, “It’s been eye opening. There’s a lot that goes into the conveyance of information that I didn’t see at first glance.” He noted that having to be more thoughtful about the way he sees things and how he conveys them

is life changing. David said that he would recommend for others to reap the benefits and contribute stories or just simply read the Hard Climb Journal.

Are you up to the task of contributing to positive programming and changing the culture at CCI just like our newspapers founder Benjamin Norton did in

2021? His vision was to highlight the positive here at Tehachapi in spite of all the negativity. If you would like to sign up for the next cohort, applications are available in the Facility A library upon request and can be turned in to the media room. The Hard Climb Journal will soon be creating a correspondence course for B and

C Yard that can be viewed on our REVIVE@ institutional channel 19. On behalf of the HCJ staff we hope to see your applications.



Joseph Miller
HCJ-Journalism Vice Chair



Chris Corbit
HCJ Journalism Chair

Hope on Facility B

Community

By Luis Perez
Facility B Resident

My name is Luis Perez and I’m a resident of CCI’s Facility B, and I’ve been incarcerated for 14 years.

I’m very grateful for the opportunity to write something for the Hard Climb Journal. I’ll begin by reiterating what the men before me have conveyed: CCI is a prison of opportunity to embark on a journey of recovery.

Although, I must rein-

force the idea to those seeking rehabilitation that real recovery is only obtained through your personal given effort.

I grew up in a dysfunctional household where our needs went unmet. Gangs, drugs, and violence were prevalent, now and through previous generations in my family.

Today, I choose to live a different lifestyle. I’ve started to address my troubling past and shortcomings to guide me on a positive and honest path. Arriving here at CCI in 2022, I’ve man-

aged to obtain my GED, as well as complete ISUDT, ARC, DEFY Ventures, and other groups during my time at this prison. It’s allowed me to challenge myself and has given me new life skills and coping mechanisms to uplift others and myself.

I’m currently a mentor in the PLMP program and helping others to reach their educational goals. There’s a community of awesome people that make rehabilitation possible.

This upcoming spring semester, I will be starting col-

lege. This is something I could have never envisioned for myself in my destructive past. Today, I’m driven through goals and have a purpose in my life. I’m constantly finding new ways to pass on what has been passed on to me. This is a testimony to all the incarcerated that change is possible. It applies to all who are not afraid to take the necessary steps in making the world a better place.

Hard Climb Journal would like to congratulate Luis Perez on his growth.



Luis Perez
&
Defy Mentor

IAC UPDATE FROM TEHACHAPI

Service

Albert Campos
Facility A- IAC Chairman

We would like to ask Facilities A, B, and C a question: what are you doing to better your community? Here on Facility A, we are working together with the Community Resource Manager on how we can bring more programs to this Facility.

We have been able to establish a brand-new working Executive and MAC Body within the last year and have had Kern Valley State Prison’s Administration come to learn how we established our IAC.

We have been able to host several events such as KIROs, ARC’s Ball Out, and DEFY Ventures coaching event. The Hard Climb Journal has graduated two cohorts of the Hard Climb Journalist Society’s School of Journalism. We have had two Marley’s Mutt’s cohorts graduate. OMCP graduated cohort four and has cohort five in education. We have hosted High School, College, and a Vocation graduation.

Facility A has been able to establish the Peer-to-Peer



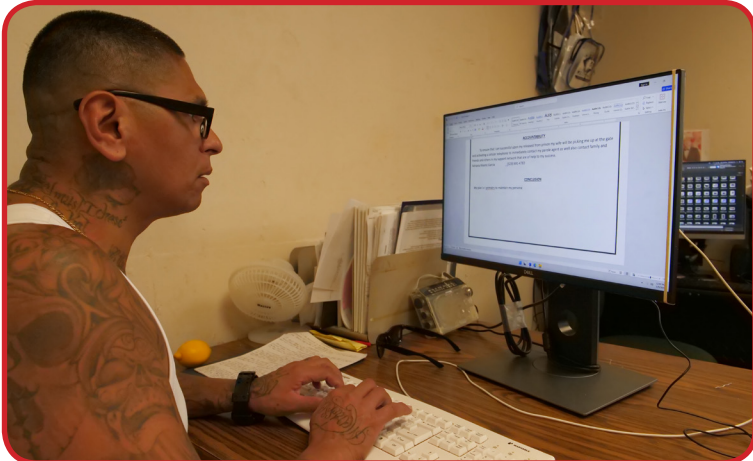
Left to Right: Chairman A. Campos, Vice Chairman J. Bonilla, Parliamentarian D. Goodwin, Sgt @ Arms H. Jenks, Secretary G. Campos

Executive Body Facility A

Community Support Liaison Team, as well as “Awakening Conflict Resolution” for our E.O.P Community members. The Revive@ Media Project is in full swing creating content for the entire institution as well as DRP. We would like to encourage and challenge Facility B and C’s IAC to update the entire institution on their progress as well.



Facility A Captain, D. Bonfill



C Yard Residents Give Back & Win Big

I want to extend personal gratitude towards the Facility C incarcerated population who helped deliver an AWESOME float during the City of Tehachapi's Christmas Parade last December. This parade was the last one Warden B. Cates participated in, and we're pleased to announce that we received an award for the best float in the "Miscellaneous" category. Facility C will receive the certificate and trophy so that they may keep it in their woodshop as a reminder of the great work they've done to help make the night a great one for CCI staff and the city folks. Thanks again, and great job.

-Lieutenant T. Harrison,
Public Information Officer



Float designed by C-Yard Residents



Transformation Through Visitation



Correctional Officer L. Ayala
PROFILE

By: Andrew Salas
HCJ Journalist Society Writer

Facility A Correctional Officer L. Ayala speaks about how visiting is making positive changes within the incarcerated

population and their families.

Officer Ayala mentioned that the attitudes of the incarcerated could shift once sitting with their loved ones by providing them a place to escape their reality. Having visitation through the tablet is great, but having their family's physical presence that increases

the emotional connection that both parties are seeking. He goes on to mention that having in person visits not only gives the residents something to look forward to, but their families as well.

Officer Ayala mentioned that one of the benefits families get from visitation is the ability to resolve past trauma. Having time to spend together brings forth hope which serves as a positive reinforcement for families to keep striving forward.

"Yeah you are here, yeah you have time, but it's how you do it (time) that matters," said Ayala

Ayala expressed how visitation could create a stronger bond between fathers and their children fostering a safe environment to communicate. Fathers are willing to talk to their children about positive values that can help guide them.

Father's day is another occasion to create memories, which can be captured by photographs. Fathers even give their children donated stuffed animals as a way

to show their love. Administrative staff has previously taken part in these experiences as well by giving donations of their own. Ayala acknowledged the emotional connections, which often take place during visiting hours. Some of the residents haven't seen their families in years, and when they do, it is often accompanied with tears of joy and long embraces. He often expresses the same joy for them from a distance hoping that these moments encourage the incarcerated to reflect on their families and be motivated to get out and stay with them.

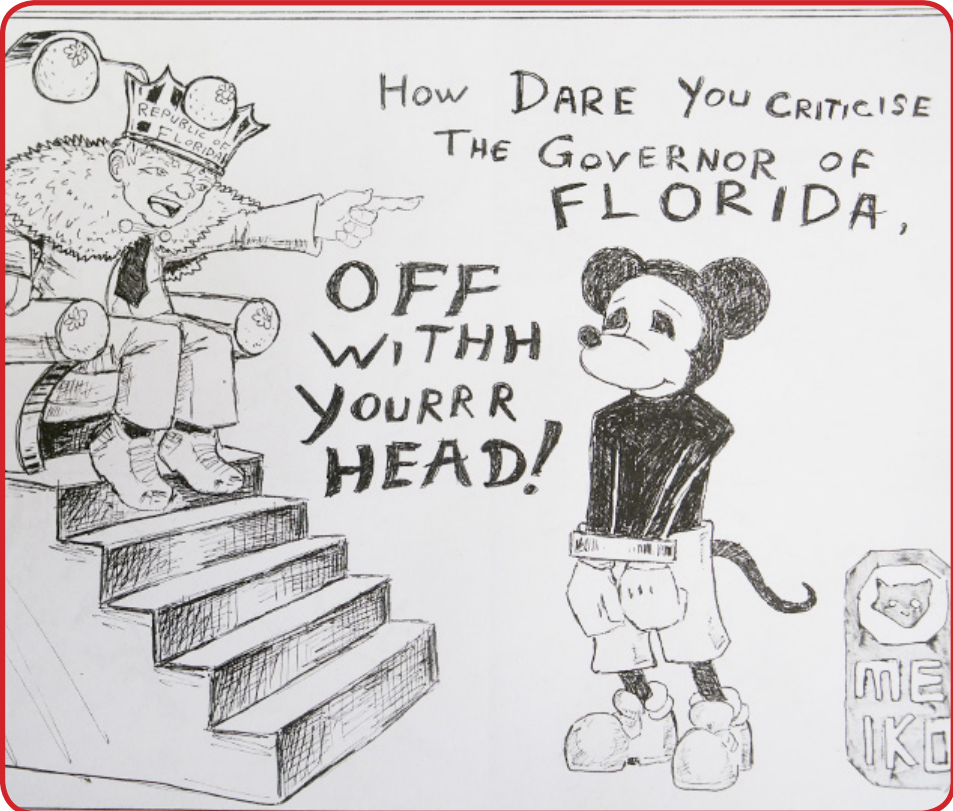
Norix: Study Shows Increasing Prisoner Visitation Reduces Inmate Recidivism stated, "For inmates who had visitors, they saw a 13% reduction in felony convictions, and a 25% reduction in technical violations." Ayala included that he saw firsthand how visits impact the resident's efforts toward rehabilitation, benefitting their families as well.

In a study of 414 males incarcerated in state prison, those who received more frequent visits

and visits more people, perceived less weakening in their bonds with family and friends during incarceration; those who received more visits by children and other family were more likely to report having post-release employment opportunity," said the National Library of Medicine.

Being able to see their children and sustain a healthy relationship can motivate people to be productive and positive. Ayala talked about how visits can bring out a different side of the residents, which he supervises. Prison has a way of causing some to suppress their true self, but in visiting you see the smiles, the emotion, and authenticity.[]

"Yeah you are here,
yeah you have time,
but it's how you do it (time)
that matters,"



COMICS

