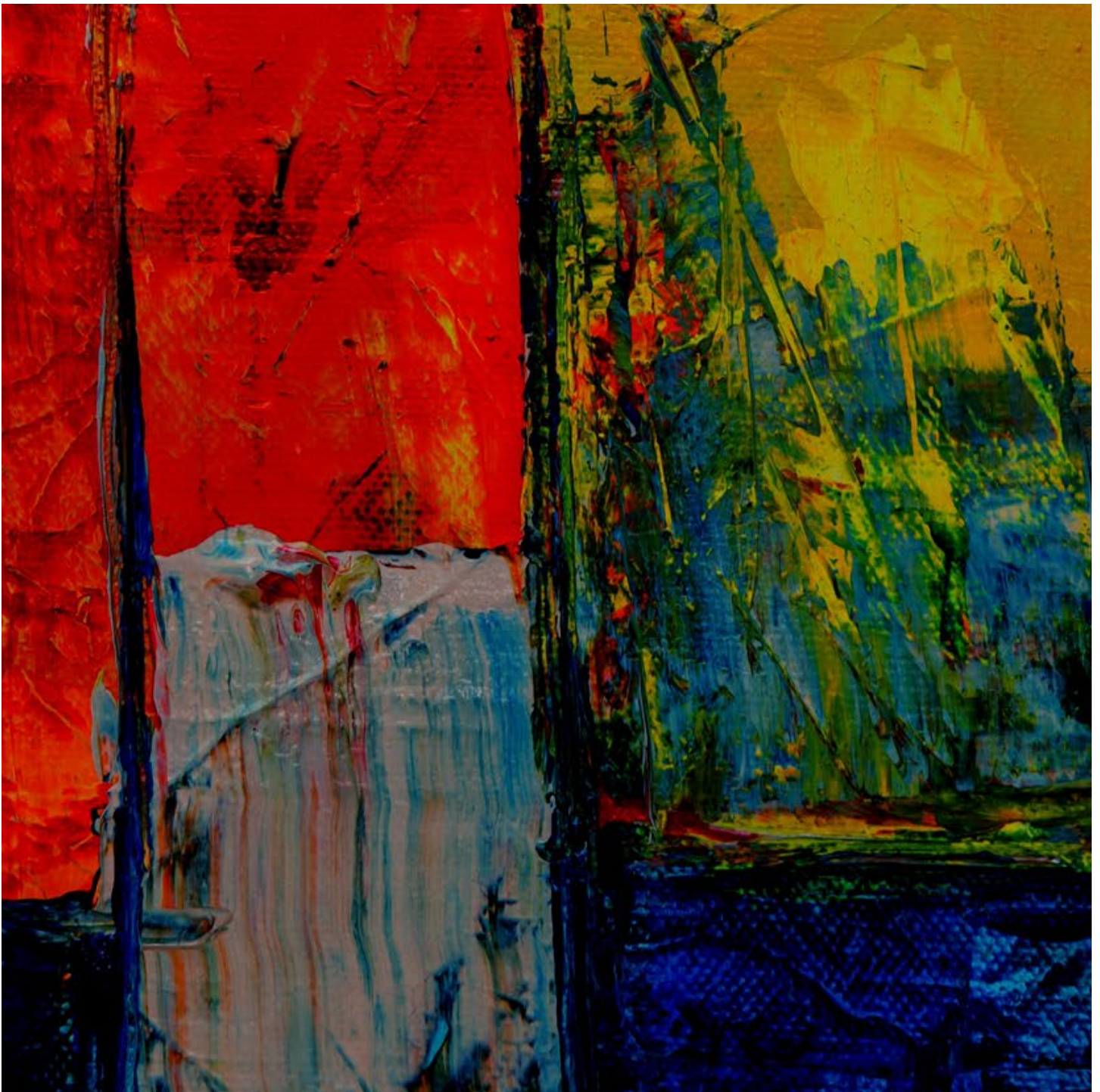


Abolition Night

The Book



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About

The following words and images provide a snapshot of the first annual ‘Abolition Night at the Strand’ in Rockland, Maine on November 5th, 2021.

The first annual Abolition Night at the Strand was born out of the combined efforts by the Opportunity Scholars of Maine, the Freedom and Captivity Project, the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, and the University of Maine at Augusta Prisoner Education Partnership. This event was featured among other public events in the Freedom and Captivity initiative. It serves as an invitation to explore the concept of abolition from the perspective of those with lived experiences within the Justice system and the role of education as a tool for liberation.

The night was filled with information, insights, and inspiration in the form of music, spoken word, poetry, and storytelling. All performers and many of the production crew were persons with lived experiences within the justice system, some actually incarcerated at time of the performance. This included a live broadcast performance from a resident at the Maine State Prison. The event was live streamed into the Maine Women’s Reentry Center and the Maine State Prison, as well as housing a sold out in person audience.

A panel discussion followed in which questions were fielded from the in house audience as well as those from those watching live stream broadcast in states across the country.

Partners

Center for Justice, Columbia University, Colby College, Freedom and Captivity Network, Helping Incarcerated Individuals Transition, Maine Department of Corrections, Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, Mellon Foundation Prison Education Partnership, University of Maine Augusta, Opportunity Scholars, University of Southern Maine, The Strand Theater, Rockland.



Powerful Emcees

Yolanda Johnson & Ali Ali



Yolanda reminds us to that there is life “Beyond the Bars” and to “keep hope alive.”

She also reminds us “Who you are and how you show up makes a difference—in the Movement.”



Ali Ali speaks truth to power, encouraging us all to explore our own vision and definition of abolition.



Did You Know?

Informational slides

Did you know that Maine's incarceration rate is increasing faster than its population? In the last 25 years Maine has grown 300% while Maine's population has grown 18%.

In the past 5 years at least **3,403 children** in Maine have had a parent in prison.

90% of women in Maine's prisons have experienced trauma.

30% of Maine adults have a record.

Higher education has a powerful impact: overall recidivism rates within 5 years of release 76.6% with an Associates 14%, B.S. 5.6%, Master's Degree 0%.

Maine has **101 students** in prison enrolled in colleges and universities across Maine as of January 2021.

Children who have an incarcerated parent are more likely to experience damaging impacts to health and wellbeing.

Maine transition aged youth need supportive connections to career, college, and belonging.

Young adults in Maine with direct experience in the justice system conduct research about the issues that impact their lives.

Go Free

Joseph Jackson

You know you
Done messed up
When you let
OG go free.

Not that high
School drop out
That was deaf,
Dumb, and Blind
Ignorant to
How the world
Judged me.

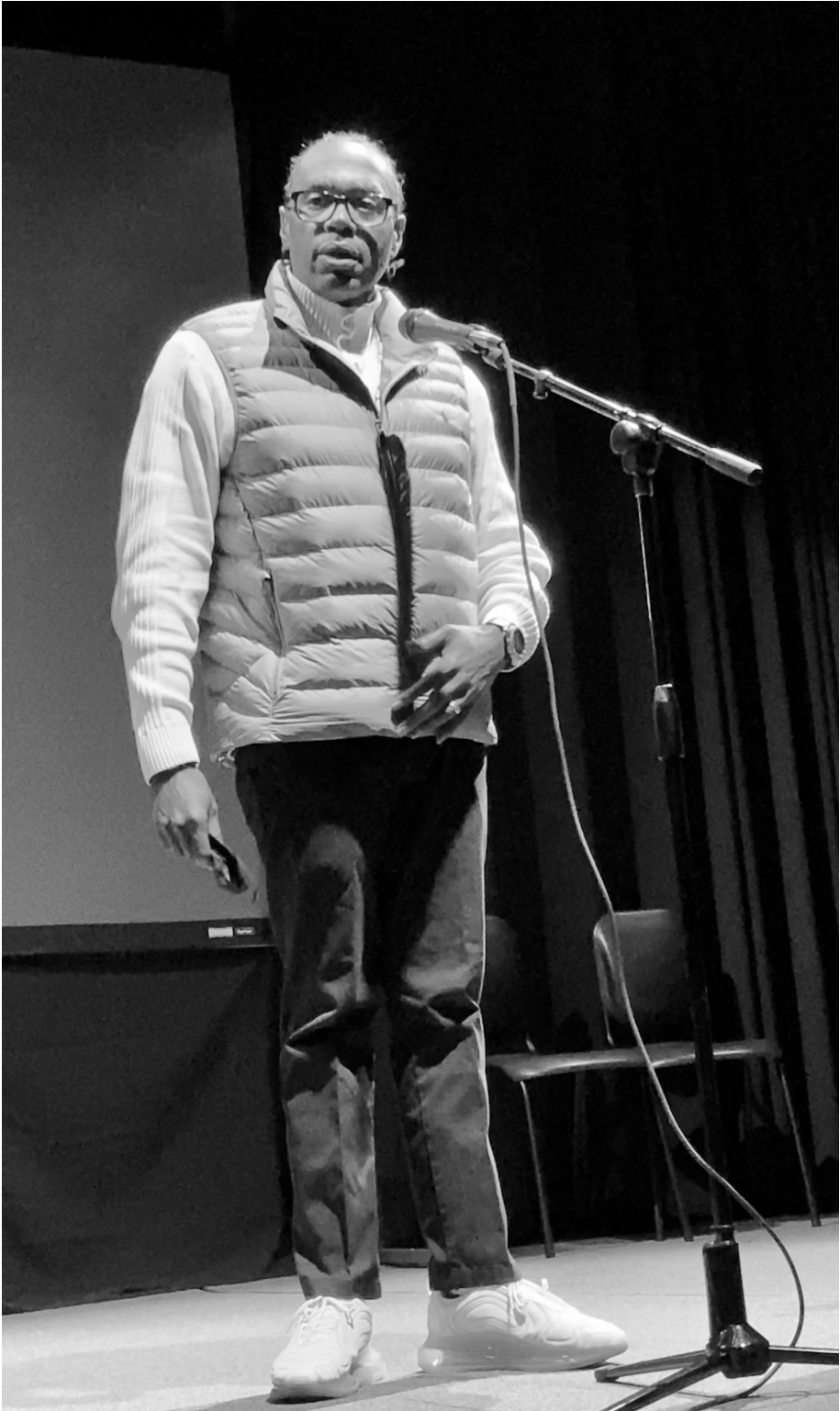
Discovered that justice
Wasn't blind, that
Despite the blindfold

She could see.

Caught me slipping
Past ain't worth mentioning
Like every other cat
enslaved or lynched
Condemned by white lenses.

Behind chain link fences
You're defenseless
Senseless to
Build your shield
On weight benches
Cause Boys in blue
Gang up like
They crippling.

Gone is the missus
Gone is the mistress
Cause even in visits



They take your kisses

The table or plexiglass barrier

keeping you distant.

No space on the wall

For family pictures

Or famous strippers.

When you knew

It was going to be

A bad day when

The pod officer

Comes in not chipper.

I use to use

Ultra bright

To polish the cell

Toilet till it was

Clearer than

The mirror.

My waxed floor

Gleaming like

Walden pond

Early morning

In the dead

Of winter.

My plastic mattress

Pressed my shirt

And britches.

OG creased up

In the chow-hall

Making the pots glisten

Back in the day

There was no pay

The incentive was

To make your own dishes.

Working on

my appeal

Appealing Grievances

In this oppressive

System like,

Pushing a boulder

Uphill like Sisyphus.

Black codes

Young man

Warden says

Rules for you

Are not for me

Understand?

You're a

Subtraction in this

Community census

Like three-fifths

Of a man.

My Staff

Can make you

strip and

Do a little dance.

Make you strip naked

Over and over

Doing Yoga

Under the Gaze

Of a uniformed man.

No taking knees

No begging please

Just strip until you're

Stripped of dignity,

No copping pleas.

For those still

Sitting in cells

Filled with grief.

Follow me ...

Put ya head in a book

Stack up degrees

Break psychological

Chains to discover
Another eye for which to see.

When you freed
Don't head back
to the streets.
Head to town hall
Seek to erase black codes.
Seek to create
A system that let
All of our brothers and sisters go.
OG has taken on that role.
Now it's your turn
When that gate opens
Get ready,
Get set,
And lets go.





Poem for Carceral Humanism

Ali Ali

While constantly being watched, And no options to evolve,
I see the chaos in the world around me, so I paused,
I had thoughts...
That making it out must be the best escape, But an invisible chain is instilled
in my fate, Man... Carceral humanism is a fucked up state.
But, With wealth and plans I must fluctuate, lead a positive trait,
to find a way out this empty space,
my result of anger as they ridicule, transform into energy physical,
not the arrogant result as stupid mule, but the motive to build up a stepping
stool,
to return and give back, what we once lacked,
educate and separate from what distracts, set a common goal as our mind
attracts,
cuz only the wolves are strongest while in a pack;
So I'm setting this movement of working together, to better our
circumstances here & forever, Well, Not just for us, but for our families too,
Loving brothers and sister that look like you,

Story of Repair

Megan Shockley

My story of repair would look like me making amends to everyone in my family that I have let down. I would make it a goal of mine to start work on improving myself. I am learning more and more about myself every day. I go to Narcotics Anonymous 3 times a week, as a group of women here at the re-entry center we get together and have our own meeting, and on Zoom we learn different ways to work the steps. Repair isn't one of them but amends is and repair is a huge part of making amends to whom you stole from or who you hurt in your process of destruction. I didn't think I hurt anyone besides myself but I was soon shown, as everyone shared their strength, hope, and knowledge in their stories of recovery. I will never say that I will never use it again, but I can for 100% say that just for today I am staying sober. These daily reminders are that an addict and a person incarcerated is a person. We all bleed the same, and although we may not look the same we feel the same way. We may all grieve differently, some things that make you happy might not make me happy, things that make me angry might not make you angry but in the end, we all still feel. My story isn't your story, and your story isn't mine. We have a full range of feelings and the same needs for love and kindness. My name is Megan Shockley and I refuse to be anonymous, I used to dream of living, now I'm living my dream, no matter what it takes, my goal is to die clean.





My Carrier Bag

Kerry Simes

My name is Kerry Lynn Simes, my DOC number is 113839. As I am typing this I realize that for the last ten years since my addiction took off all I have become to people is a number, a statistic, an inmate, a felon and an addict, that is not all I am, I am a women, and a college student that is in recovery and in the process of changing my life. This is not how my journey started, and this is not how I am going to let my journey end. I am going to tell you why it is important for my journey, success plan and Relapse plan be in My Carrier Bag. This is a bag of knowledge I will carry with me on my Journey...

...Success for myself is part of preventing myself from relapsing and turning back to drugs, alcohol, and crime. Success for myself is gaining an education, receiving my degree and beginning the career of my degree choice. I as well want to be part of my recovery community, giving back what I have to other addicts and helping them in their time of need.

...I will never again be just a number in a jail, prison, or a rising recidivism statistic. I will be a daughter, granddaughter, mother, grandmother, aunt, and friend and eventually I will be a woman in corporate America as I want to be.

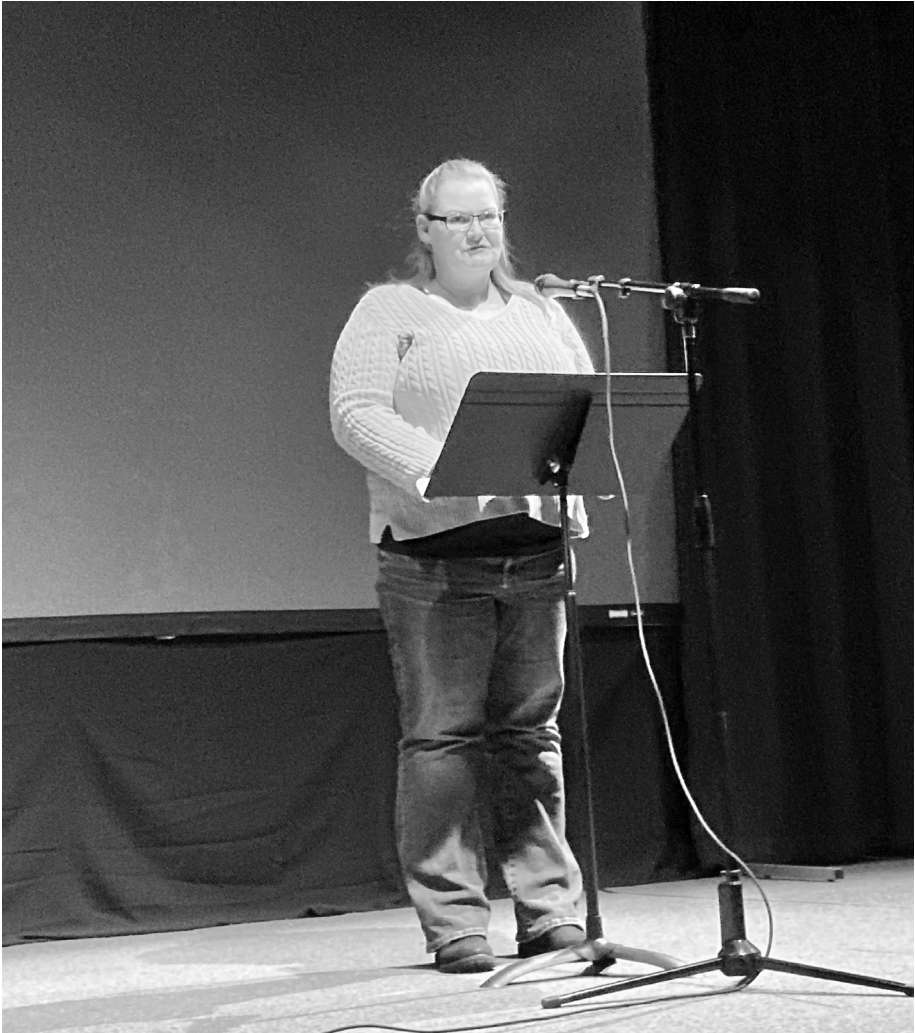
Letter to a Friend Regarding Abolition and Liberation

Gwen Wellman

Dear Friend,

I have recently been studying a new and very interesting concept and theory about the way we view the world’s incarcerated population. Through this, I have stumbled upon a couple of words that weren’t altogether new to me, but I have found a new meaning in. I am writing to you today to share those words, ideas, and views with you.

Do you remember back in middle school when we learned about the abolition of slavery? Well, I do. That was my reference for this word until I started to learn more about its meaning and the power it can hold in an entirely different sense. It means the stopping or ending of a certain practice or act. I have been reading quite a lot about how abolition in our prison systems could mean a great many things for the people of our nation, and our world, and I’m excited to tell you more about how. Most people couldn’t imagine a place where there was no 911 to call when there was an emergency. It’s considered so convenient, right? Well, not if you are the person with a mental illness, who truly needs help. Instead, you are being sent to another prison to be pushed aside by the system and ultimately, come back worse than you went in. Prisons are not rehabilitative. They are traumatic places in which no good ever comes. My vision would be that the same situation arises, and that same person might feel the need to call someone for help, but instead there would be a different number to call. A system in place to get that individual to the kind of help that would actually remedy the root problem, so they could truly end up in a better place than before and not cause any more trouble for the community...



We have all been raised in a world of these systems, and no one ever really questioned it before. Now is the time to ask questions and liberate the oppressed prisoners, none of whom deserve to be treated in such an inhumane manner. I hope you agree, dear friend. If you don’t, that is okay too. We are allowed to have different opinions, because this is America. Land of the free, and home of the brave.

Until next time,

Gwen



Scenes from the play “For the Next Guy”

David Troup

David Troup performing scenes from a full length play “For the Next Guy,” based on the experiences of Norman Kehling, incarcerated for 30 years, seven of which were spent in isolation. The riveting performance had the audience breathless.

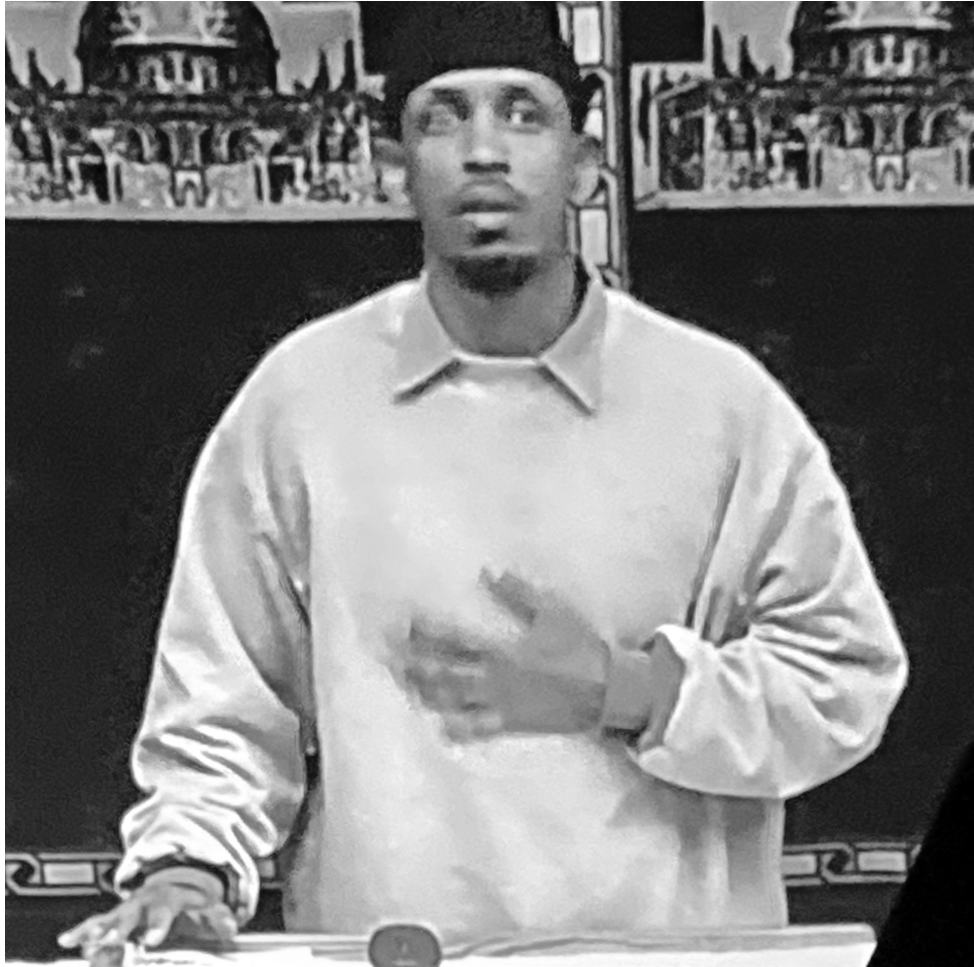
Colors Collide

Amber Yurchick

Why oh, why must colors collide? Haven't enough people died? A hint of color to your skin and that's all people ever see. They forget about the history, the pain, and all the agony; The slavery, brutality, and all the treachery too. As the days roll by, The body counts rise. With crimes being committed by the white men in blue. The one's sworn by God to speak nothing but the truth. You may not want to believe me, but know that it's true.

Bandaged, bruised, shot, beaten, raped, and battered. As another one of His children has been left murdered. By yet another, "trusted" disguised soldier of law; Or should I say a, "K. K. K. poser" flaw? Something has to be done. We must come together as one! And do away with this divide. Oh why, oh why must colors collide.





I Know a Land You Do Not!

Abdi Awad

There is a forgotten land that I know. A land no one wishes to live. Please allow me to tell you about this mysterious land. This land is allegory fiction to most people. Except to those who have economical gains, or burial rights to its grounds. This land is cordoned off from the rest of the world. A land that once you move in, you will never leave the same if you ever leave. A land where colors don't exist, unless you are standing in front of a mirror. A land where very few people visit, but thousands live and thousands of more vacation years at a time. And some are destined to be swallowed by the same sad concrete soil they walk on. No one is happy to live here, yet, everyone adapts to the environment of grief, sadness, and unwelcoming deaths. No one they love is permitted to witness their last breath. A land that slavery is the fuel that keeps its lights on. Without the slaves, this land would cease to exist.

...This No One's Land was once home to some of the greatest human beings on this earth (men and women), including God's Prophets. Great men like Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Malcolm X, and many women whose history has been forgotten. Countries brown, and poor families. This land is not land for sane minds and souls. This is a land where corruption is spelled correction, and correction means punishment. The heart of No One's Land rarely beats. The universe is ashamed of No One's Land. You want to know more about this land? Because I don't.

Spoken from the heart: Experiences of an Opportunity Scholar

Sophie McMullan

Sophie McMullan speaks about her experience as the first Opportunity Scholar. Sophie shares her story of hope as she transitioned to someone within the justice system, to a student at the University and now to the role of mentor.

Sophie also has played a role in collecting data to support policy changes in the state of Maine to better serve transition aged youth who are involved in systems of care.



Closing Panel

A conversation with Joseph Jackson, Cheryl Wilkins, David Troup, Norman Kehling, Gwen Wellman, Kerry Simes, Amber Yurchick, & Megan Shockley



Performers field questions and engage the audience to partner toward solutions.

A community of abolition and healing is born...