

## **I STAND HERE BEFORE YOU**

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**By**  
**Dale Davis**

**With**  
**DeAndre Akins, Johnal Adger, Walter Bennett, Caprice Clark, Markeish Clarke,**  
**Michael Earling, Lorenzo George, Rodrick Houston, Taurean Martell, Elijah Mickle,**  
**Lyndon Robinson, Christopher Simon, Daniel Vasquez, Edward Williams, Malcolm Williams**

**BEATS** by Mansion Studios, arrangement by DeAndre Akins and Daniel Vasquez, Caprice Clark, Lorenzo George

**STAGING** by Taurean Martell and Edward Williams

### **CAST**

Fifteen student / inmates in Monroe County Jail

Writing by Four Fourth Grade Students at Dag Hammarskjold School #6, 585 Upper Falls Boulevard

### **SETTING**

The play takes place on Three North, Monroe County Jail

**As the audience assembles for the performance, Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" is played. It is repeated until everyone is seated and ready.**

### **What's Going On**

#### **Marvin Gaye**

Mother, mother  
There's too many of you crying  
Brother, brother, brother  
There's far too many of you dying  
You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some lovin' here today - Ya

Father, father  
We don't need to escalate  
You see, war is not the answer

For only love can conquer hate  
You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some lovin' here today

Picket lines and picket signs  
Don't punish me with brutality  
Talk to me, so you can see  
Oh, what's going on  
What's going on  
Ya, what's going on  
Ah, what's going on

In the mean time  
Right on, baby  
Right on  
Right on

Father, father, everybody thinks we're wrong  
Oh, but who are they to judge us  
Simply because our hair is long  
Oh, you know we've got to find a way  
To bring some understanding here today  
Oh

Picket lines and picket signs  
Don't punish me with brutality  
Talk to me  
So you can see  
What's going on  
Ya, what's going on  
Tell me what's going on  
I'll tell you what's going on - Uh  
Right on baby  
Right on baby

**The cast of fifteen inmates stands in a straight line facing the audience.**

Each inmate recites I Stand Here Before You in turn. At the conclusion, they all recite We Stand Here Before you together.

### **Inmate #1**

**Goes Directly to Center Stage and recites the fact.**

In the 14605 zip-code area, North Clinton Avenue, Joseph Avenue, Rochester, New York, there are 1.63 females for every male age 19 to 49. One out of 3 young males is under some form of correctional supervision: in jail, in prison, on probation, or on parole. Forty-five percent of the residents live below the poverty level.

**Two Student / Inmates leave the line and walk to different sides of the room. Once in position, they recite the charges.**

Robbery

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Robbery

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Accessory to Weapon

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Drug Charge

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Grand Larceny Second

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Robbery

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Burglary Second

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

V. O. P.

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Gun Charge

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Criminal Mischief

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Robbery

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Reckless Endangerment

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

V. O. P.

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Assault Second

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Grand Larceny Second

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Disorderly Conduct

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Possession of Firearm

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Robbery

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

Robbery Second

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

V. O. P.

*[Sound of cell door opening and closing]*

**The two inmates return to the line.**

**As each inmate speaks, he steps out of the straight line, and goes to center stage. The effect is intended to see the inmate as an individual standing before you and not as part of a line of criminals. Following his speech, the inmate returns to the line.**

**Inmate #1**

I stand here before you in an orange suit.

I stand here before you, a young man trapped inside a boy's body, but I won't tell anybody.

I stand here before you and say I didn't listen that the streets were not the way.

I stand here before you and say I was not responsible, and I did not get it the right way.

I stand here before you and say I want to stop being a statistic to the streets. I want to be a statistic in a college.

I stand here before you and tell you I don't want the many bad times in my life to ruin my future. I stand before you to say I don't want to fall short to a dream I may not know just yet.

I stand here before you and say I am 17, and I still don't know my dream yet.

## **Inmate # 2**

### **(Beat #2, CD 2 played under)**

I am already here, already shackled, sentenced to a life of low income and no intellect or guidance. I have been stripped of childhood joy, replaced with a probation term of life. In my mind, release is non-existent because my pigmentation brings fear not only to my community but to my nation. Juvenile facilities housed my dreams and taught me that I am the enemy, led to "progression" of "corrections" not bettering my mind but increasing the locks on my spirit. No matter I am already here, but where am I going?

## **Inmate #3**

I stand before you in this orange suit and think about what it means to me to be an American today. I think of a light switch. When the light is off you don't really see the truth. You can only see what the dark allows you to see. I always found it amusing when schools told me to ask for help, as if the teachers, principals, and staff really cared and wanted to help me. They were just trying to get their paychecks and get by. They said they understood, but how could they? Most teachers didn't grow up with drugs, killers, broken homes, in an environment that encourages this. Most teachers didn't know what it's like when you don't know whether or not your going to make it to twenty-one or when your mom is strung out on drugs, or your father has never been around. Most teachers didn't know what it is like to look to the streets for guidance.

When the light switch is turned on people can see what's hidden.

When people see a group of young males they assume they're a gang not knowing that they are more than that, not knowing there's no stable home for them, not knowing school is no longer an option. They ask for help, but it just falls on deaf ears. There are no silver spoons, supporting parents, or people who care.

Our voices scream for help but no one hears. We say we're Americans just like everyone, but no one cares. Can someone turn the light switch because no one sees us or our problems.

## **Brooklyn Lawson 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Poem**

I am a strong, Black girl  
who survived the streets of Rochester.  
I wonder everyday if I'm going to get shot.  
I hear guns  
screaming at each other  
and bullets saying  
hurry, hurry.

I see killing all the time,  
and I wonder  
if I will be next.  
I want to leave as soon as possible,  
but I am thinking time is too slow.  
I am a strong, Black girl  
who survived the streets of Rochester.

I pretend that I am in a better place.  
I feel bullets going right through me.  
I touch the people who kill  
and tell them to stop.  
I worry that I won't see life  
the way I want to.  
I cry because of where I live.  
I am a strong, Black girl  
who survived the streets of Rochester.

#### **Inmate #4**

I am a seventeen-year-old African American. I was born in the ROC. I like music, basketball, and young ladies. My brother, sister, and I were raised by a single parent. My mother tried her hardest to raise us alone. She tried her best to make sure I did good in school and that I had food in my stomach. She taught us if we wanted something we had to work hard for it.

When I was growing up, I got in trouble in school a lot. Fighting was my main problem. I used to dream of being a defense lawyer or a rapper or a pro-basketball player. I don't know why I wanted to be a defense lawyer. I just thought that would be a good thing to be. But something happened to me when I turned thirteen. I started to join the street. I let the street start take over my life. I didn't know it at the time, but the streets did. I started fighting more, and I stopped going to school. I went to school some days, but not like I used to when I was young. School meant nothing to me.

I was doing so much I didn't think about if I got caught I could go to jail. Then one day, December 9, I got caught. Now I am looking at five years.

#### **Beat #7, CD #1 played under**

Growing up in the hood,  
hearing gunshots and sirens  
fights all day, people going to jail,  
drugs being sold.  
People here are so cold,  
rolling dice, smoking weed, and drinking grand cru,  
getting money and getting with girls  
"Life in the fast lane."  
I got caught up in that life  
sex, money, drugs, and guns,  
I let those things play a part in my life.  
After I got my feet wet I didn't want to turn back  
I chose that life style

I thought I knew what was good for me.  
After a couple of years I started calling the boys from  
the hood my family.  
The hood took over my life slowly but surely.  
All of the things I did,  
I never thought about jail time.  
Some of the stuff caught up to me.  
What's the word "Karma"?  
The streets have me looking at five years.  
Or should I stay I got myself looking at five years

## **Inmate #2**

**Goes Directly to Center Stage and recites the fact.**

Every second a public school student is suspended.  
Every ten seconds a high school student drops out.  
Each day 2,467 high school students drop out.  
Each day 8,221 public school students are suspended.

## **Inmate #5**

**Beat #2, CD #1 played under**

Silent tears,  
silent tears,  
I wonder if anyone hears my cries.  
Free from misery, free from grief,  
will I ever be free?

I tell myself that things will change.  
My tears though are like puddles of rain.

Why am I here?  
What is my destiny?  
Is it sorrow and pain?

**Each inmate recites a number in turn. The numbers are recited in order, round robin style, by all of the inmates. All inmates clap their hands together after each number is recited. At the conclusion, they silently face the audience again.**

330126  
*[All clap hands forcefully]*

323824  
*[All clap hands forcefully]*

321971

*[All clap hands forcefully]*

327890

*[All clap hands forcefully]*

332629

*[All clap hands forcefully]*

327439

*[All clap hands forcefully]*

335501

*[All clap hands forcefully]*

324527

*[All clap hands forcefully]*

320508

*[All clap hands forcefully]*

322259

*[All clap hands forcefully]*

### **Inmate #**

#### **Beat by Lorenzo George, played under**

*[Chorus]*

As I stand here before you I am thinking  
what is there for me to do.

I live at home, no dad, no food.

Now I am stuck in a cell. I'm living in a Hell.

As I stand here before you

I am stuck in this orange suit.

I did what I thought I had to do.

Now I'm stuck in this cell. I'm living in a Hell.

*[Verse 1]*

Life is crazy when you live in poverty.

Mostly I am the only person who knows what I can be.

I'm still young, and I grew up in a house with no daddy.

Now I am stuck in a cage like a pet rabbit.

Can we in here change the future?



Can we in here stick together and keep our minds positive?  
What does life mean to me?  
Do I care if I live or die  
or do I just like the fear that comes on my momma's face when she cries.  
What lesson have I learned?

[Chorus]

As I stand here before you I am thinking  
what is there for me to do.  
I live at home, no dad, no food.  
Now I am stuck in a cell. I'm living in a Hell.  
As I stand here before you  
I am stuck in this orange suit.  
I did what I thought I had to do.  
Now I'm stuck in this cell. I'm living in a Hell.

### **Inmate #6**

#### **Beat #10, CD #1 played under**

Growing up was not hard or easy for me. I had both my parents just never in the same home. I was young when my mom left home, around four years old. I was left in the dark all alone.

Did I do something wrong?  
Will she ever come back?

I never figured out how a mom could just leave like that. But it was done. Life is knowing that there is no place to run. I grow older and memories pass. Sometimes memories are a monkey on my back that I just can't shake off. It seems as though more and more keep piling on throwing banana peels in front of every step I take and keep on and on until I can't take any more and I lose my identity.

John Doe is the name of a stranger even to himself.

I'm here because horror and terror filled my veins that once carried blood. Now I carry guilt and shame. I have tarnished my good name. I can't believe how far I came to only be lost and for what cost. This is what it took for me to realize I should have been my own boss.

### **Jahmeric Hunter 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Poem**

I am a man  
who survived the streets  
of the gangs.

I wonder if I will live long enough.

I hear bullets  
telling me to run  
as fast as I can.

I see people

dying on the streets  
of the gangs.

I want to know if I am the next to go.

### **Inmate #7**

#### **Beat #4, CD 1 played under**

It is hard being a citizen in the ROC. Kids are exposed to drugs. Mothers take care of children without a father. It's like our city is going through a mid-life crisis.

My city is dying, and so many people in it are dying, too. It is like a jungle, and if you can't survive in it you are food. People kill all day and all night. Will my city ever be the same or will it shatter into pieces like a priceless vase that was tipped over?

Should we just have a funeral for my city, closed casket? Will it ever stop?

### **Inmate #2**

#### **Beat #8 CD #2 played under**

When I'm locked in a cell all day, it's hard to keep going. I wish I could sleep all day, but I can't. I can feel my soul's flesh dyeing more and more every day. My family tells me to "be strong" but, no matter how many pushups I do, I still feel weak. My tears heat and burn the center of my eyes making my depressed spirit easier to see. I tried to do good. I tried to go to school. I tried to live a good life. I didn't have the strength to keep going.

My failure feels so heavy. It's hard to keep going with the world on my shoulder, my world. I have to keep going.

### **Inmate #5**

#### **Beat #17 CD #2 played under**

A cold life,  
I was brought up in pain.  
Throwing cuffs the police seemed to harass me.  
It's strange I've had enough.  
My life is hard, I'm shackled in chains.  
My heart is broken in pieces through pain.  
Who can I trust?

The days of my childhood witnessed shootings and drive-byes.  
Some fallen victims,  
some recruiting,  
it's crazy

it's not hard to be stupid.  
I am optimistic on changing the future  
because we can rise.  
Locked up,  
separated from our families by hard time.  
This is a world of pain,  
and I'm tired of pretending it's all fine.  
It hurts inside.  
I need to change.  
I can't be this monster.  
I am judged as if I could never prosper.  
How can this be?

A life of pain and misery,  
my dreams are wicked.  
Can I explain  
at least I lived it,  
a hopeless child  
in so much pain how could I smile.  
I am sick and tired of wearing an orange suit,  
a youth with no refuge to run to.

### **Inmate #8**

#### **Beat #7 CD #2 played under**

I am much more than this orange suit you see standing here before you. I have goals. I grew up with violence. It is hard to do right. Every day I got into fights. I knew it was wrong. I wanted to do right. I am much more than a criminal. My parents want me to be more. It makes me sick to be in here. I want to support my kids. I want to go to college. I want to get knowledge.

We all want the same things.  
Why do we do what we do?

Deep down inside we all want a home.

### **Inmate #9**

Okay, I'm going to start out by saying my father is dead. The only people in my mom's household are my sister and I.

My sister is seventeen, and she is a lot of trouble. I'm not saying she isn't a good person. She has her good times like everybody else. She can be a nuisance at times, but when she is not, she can be fun to be around. When she doesn't get what she wants she goes right back to being a nuisance. She gets loud, and she and my mother bicker a lot. It drives me crazy. I've learned to deal with it because there is no stopping it.

My mom is funny in her own way. Not too many people get her, but I do. She lies though.

I'm the quiet one in the house until someone makes me angry. I really want everybody to leave me alone. I push people away sometimes. I really don't want to be around people.

The only things I wanted were my girl and my drugs. This has landed me in jail. I have been in and out of jail since 2007. I have wasted three years of my life.

**Beat #11 CD 1 (short beat played in its entirety)**

**Spoken softly as a prayer**

*All I want is love.  
My heart is broken,  
and my tongue feels like it's choking.  
All I want is love.*

*I'm in jail.  
Can I get a letter?  
Am I missed?  
All I want is love.*

**Beat #11 CD 1 (short beat played in its entirety)**

What is my purpose?  
Why am I on this earth?  
Why am I in jail?

**Beat #11 CD #1 (short beat played in its entirety)**

I think I am in jail because I was a young boy trying to fit in with the rest of the crowd. It started when I just walked down the street, and I got picked on and people tried to fight me. I got beat up a lot. I got sick and tired of getting beat up every time I walked to the store, so I fought back.

What is my purpose?

After getting picked on, school came into play. I went to school, but there was always this one kid who messed with me. I got sick and tired of it. I got into fights and got kicked out of school. After I got kicked out of school seven or eight times, I stopped going.

Not going to school I ended up hanging out with the wrong crowd. We smoked and drank. If I didn't do these things, they called me names, "You're weak. Go to mommy. You are mommy's boy."

What is my purpose?

What were my resources, a dead father and a mom who didn't care any more because I didn't listen to her. The streets became my resources. I learned how to get money. I didn't want to do what I did, but this looked like the only way I could get money. My way became the streets.

Now I am in jail, a school dropout, and I have a baby on the way. What is my purpose?

**Inmate #3**

**Goes Directly to Center Stage and recites the fact.**

A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison in his lifetime a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance of the same fate.

**Inmate #10 [To Be Recorded ahead of time and played as part of the play]**

Daddy why have you not been in my life for so long?  
I wish I could see your face one day.  
Daddy, why can't you be here to cherish moments with me?  
I wish you were here to hold me and be my hero, Superman.  
I can't talk now more than fifteen minutes on the phone  
because the phone would die.  
Daddy where have you been?

I write so you can read my son.  
Daddy will be there someday.

God, I love my own child.  
Please protect hm.  
I would give my life over  
if you can keep my son off the street.  
Just touch him Father, God.  
Amen.

**All Inmates Together**

Amen

**Dianajha Fulton 4th Grade Poem**

I am someone  
whose dad is in jail.  
I wonder how long he will be in there.  
I hear his voice in my head  
saying don't give up. Do your best.  
I see him in my head when we were together having fun.  
I want to see him as soon as I can.  
I am someone  
whose dad is in jail.

I pretend my dad is here with me  
helping me with my homework.  
I feel his hugs and kisses saying I love you.  
I touch the things he gave me,  
and I pray at night.  
I worry if my dad will get into a fight

because I don't want him in the box.  
I cry because I miss him so much.  
I am someone  
whose dad is in jail.

### **Inmate #11**

Being in jail is like being on a far away island with a whole bunch of people who made mistakes in their lives and who want to change. When you are on this island, you cannot do what you want to do, you can't see whom you want to see, you can't eat what you want to eat. You have to listen to someone all day long.

Jail makes you feel bad for all of the things you did to get here, and it makes you realize that being here is a waste of your lifetime. You miss everything you had, and it makes you want to change.

Why don't the people who have the power to set you free see that you want to change your life? They just see what you did to get to this island. The next thing you know is that you are on this island for years just wasting your life away.

### **Pause**

How am I judged?

The first thing people think is that if I am in here wearing these oranges I am a bad person and I deserve what I get. This hurts because they only know one thing about me and that is that I am in jail. They don't know my background, where I came from, who I am, whether I got straight A's in school, if I want to go to college, how I want a job.

All that is known is that I must have done something bad to get in jail.

### **Inmate #2**

#### **Beat #3, CD 2 played under**

I'm not a child anymore. I am a man. I started off crawling away from life's predators. I fought back to survive. I have been behind the locked rooms of my soul since I was two. I am seventeen now. I dodged bullets and puffed on the smoke of dead end choices. Internally and externally I've been killed and held hostage. I've shed tears that burned my skin and left nothing but my spirit to float. I've had dreams of falling and screaming but somehow the dreams continue when I wake up. I am all that's here, forever nothing, searching, hurting, nowhere, but, always existence. Once upon a time a boy, forever after a man

### **Inmate #12**

What's going on? Why am I'm here?  
I really don't know why I'm here.  
I sit in a cell all day long  
and just think about what if.

What if I thought first?  
What if I thought about my future first?  
What if I had something to do with myself  
and not just sit around not doing anything?

### **Pause**

What if people only saw the real inner me and not the outer me  
and believed that I could do a lot of things  
other than what the next man puts into my head or what's going on around me.  
Can anyone see the inner me  
and give me another chance at life  
rather than seeing me sitting in a small cell?  
What's going on?

### **Pause**

Life, what does life mean to me?  
I ask myself that.  
What am I doing with my life?  
There are so many things I could do with my life,  
but the life I choose sent me here behind bars.  
I had it all right in my hands to go down the right path.  
All my life my mother was in my ear  
saying, "Watch the people you hang with.  
Go to school and become something.  
Don't smoke, stay out of jail."  
And now I can say it went in one ear and out the other.  
Why was that because I was hardheaded  
or did I want to see why she said these things?

Now I know the time you spend in jail will never come back.

I ask myself what does my life means to me.  
Do I have a chance to change it?

Now I know I want to change and to do something with my life.

Who am I? I am a young Black male. I am set back and will be set back until I am free, free to let my  
dreams run free throughout America, my dreams from my mind, my spirit, and my soul.

### **Inmate #3**

#### **Beat #23, CD 1 played under**

I stand here before you thinking why when I dream is there always some negative person who tries to  
take it away? My life is based upon dreams that I haven't fulfilled, like school that I haven't finished yet.  
If none of my dreams can ever be fulfilled, somebody please get a pen and give me a poke to wake me. I  
want my dreams fulfilled.

I sit back and develop a lot of anger. I know too well the experience of jail. When freedom comes I will praise it. I will enjoy it. One mistake and your life is in the hands of a jury and a judge.

It is hard to live when you are always being judged.

### **Sound of cell door closing**

It's not the struggles or pain we go through as we were growing up, it's the love that we were supposed to have.

Where were our parents?

### **Inmate #4**

**Goes Directly to Center Stage and recites the fact.**

Every 5 minutes a child is arrested for a drug offense.  
Every 9 minutes a child is arrested for a violent crime.

Each day 155 children are arrested for violent crimes.  
Each day 296 children are arrested for drug crimes.

### **Inmate #2**

Dark yet darker, within darkness. Alone. An endless road, forever falling. Alone. My tears attempt to build an ocean that leads to an island of escape, still alone. My heart's beat is slowing, a mist of freezing destruction and criticism make my feet solid. Alone. A fire of broken hope burns within me and leaves permanent damage. Alone. I can see the air I breathe. Full of hate, pain, and a crushed childhood, the combustion of my soul my skin disintegrates with false courage. I am reduced to a puddle stepped on by those who have forgotten me. Alone.

### **Inmate #5**

**Beat #4, CD 1 played under**

So many of us in here are lost and were led astray  
by all the misery we felt each day.  
It's killing me.  
Inside my heart is broken,  
but still I stop and listen.  
When times are rough,  
I fight with pride.  
I am an optimist.  
These times are a burden.  
The pain brings on grief.  
Inside it is like I am drowning;  
the rain is getting deep.

I have searched for love,



but couldn't find  
love, a piece of joy, or peace of mind.

As an adolescent I caught on fast,  
sinful ways and plenty of cash.  
I stand before you and acknowledge that what I did was wrong.  
The streets began to seem like home to me.  
I tried, but I lost my focus.  
The pain I feel drives me hopeless.  
I feel I am stuck inside a storm,  
and the rain is pouring.

### **Inmate #13**

Orange from head to toe,  
who do you see,  
criminal, thief?

How can I get out of this predicament?

Who is there to help me  
when I go out in the real world wanting to succeed?

### **Inmate #14**

What's going on, what do I feel inside?  
I feel hate.  
I feel like I'm not the person I want to be.  
Is this who I have become?  
Last night I looked in the mirror at the real me,  
and talked to the hurting me, the one who is hurting inside.  
I ask the hurting me  
why, why do I do the things I do?  
Why do I feel like I need to smoke to get by in life?  
Do I just get high because I'm bored?  
Why do I feel the need to be on the corner to get money  
not knowing when a stray bullet will ricochet off anything and take my life.  
Will a bullet with no name on it end my life?  
Is why I am hurting because of the things I have been through in my life?  
Or is it the things I have seen growing up?  
Sometimes I wonder if I am grown.  
I have a birthday coming up.  
I will be 19.

It seems like my 15, 16, 17, 18 years of age  
were controlled by the men with the blue suits,  
the men that smacked the mallet, the men giving us time to ruin our lives.  
They think it will help us become better,  
but all it does is turn us into beasts.  
So what's going on?

Prison to me is a place where the animals run wild,  
where the strong live off the weak  
and these walls that go so high and when you finally get to the top  
barbed wire is there.  
When I did my one year in Greene Correctional Facility I felt like my  
life ended so quickly, like it was the end to death.  
I thought to myself it was the end,  
the end of corner hustling, the end of running the streets as if I was in a marathon race,  
the end of listening to the devil like he got me to a piece of life where I didn't want to be.  
Some people say they are sick tired of being sick and tired.  
I don't want to go to prison where the guards tell me when to eat and when to go to sleep.

I stare at these walls because after a while I talk to these walls  
not really knowing I am talking to the walls.  
They become absolute.  
I have the hatred that goes on and the brutality,  
the fights, the cots, the everything.  
Who said these walls damage the mind.

#### **Inmate #5**

**Goes Directly to Center Stage and recites the fact.**

Every 25 seconds a child is arrested.  
Every 3 hours a child or teen is killed by a firearm.

Each day 3,477 children are arrested.

#### **Inmate #**

I stand,  
I stand  
here before you,  
here before you.

I stand,  
I stand,  
here before you,  
here before you  
just to show you  
who stands here before you.

I want to make a better way.  
I want to have faith in my community,  
in our schools.  
in our families.  
You have heard the many struggles that are in our way.

Who was there to steer us straight?  
What is there left to demonstrate?  
Our hard times come from our struggles;  
our hard times come from living at a this pace.  
Now we are all in a death race,  
living in a bad place  
unable to find a lawyer to accept this case.  
This is no way to live.  
Everyone needs dreams and a future.

#### **Deja Caldwell 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Poem**

I am a girl whose brother is in jail.  
I wonder how he is doing in such a bad place.  
I hear him calling me.  
I see him in school.  
I want him out of jail.  
I am a girl whose brother is in jail.

I pretend he is out.  
I feel like crying  
when they talk about him.  
I touch the pictures we took.  
I worry about him.  
I cry in my sleep.  
I am a girl whose brother is in jail.  
I understand he is bad,  
but he is still my brother.  
I say my prayers about him.  
I dream about him.

#### **Inmate #15**

When we are here for so many years  
we shed so many tears.

Finding myself  
inside myself.  
It's hard growing up with no help.  
I have to keep going,  
no love to make a heart stop growing.  
Pain starts showing,  
tears start rolling.  
Drowning in my misery,  
the war is in my eyes.  
I see the world as my enemy.  
Peace is the remedy.  
I wish somebody would put the kid into me.  
Adult situations,  
adolescent patience.  
Read

"already here,"  
what's the meaning of waiting?  
Closer to death with every breath I'm taking.  
Losing my grip with every move I'm making.  
Scared of my life,  
spirit  
quaking,  
soul  
shaking.  
Life taken.

We are here for so many years  
we shed so many tears.

We are here for so many years  
we shed so many tears.

We are here for so many years  
we shed so many tears.

**The cast of fifteen inmates stands silently in a straight line facing the audience. Together the inmates recite We Stand Here Before You.**

Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" is played briefly and fades indicating

**THE END**

Sources  
<http://rochesterchildrenwrite.com/teacher%20index.html>  
City, February 11-17, 2009  
Cradle to Prison Pipeline, Children's Defense Fund

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