

Youth Rising

Spring 2001

Poetry by the Student Liberators
SLAM High School Organizing Program



The Streets

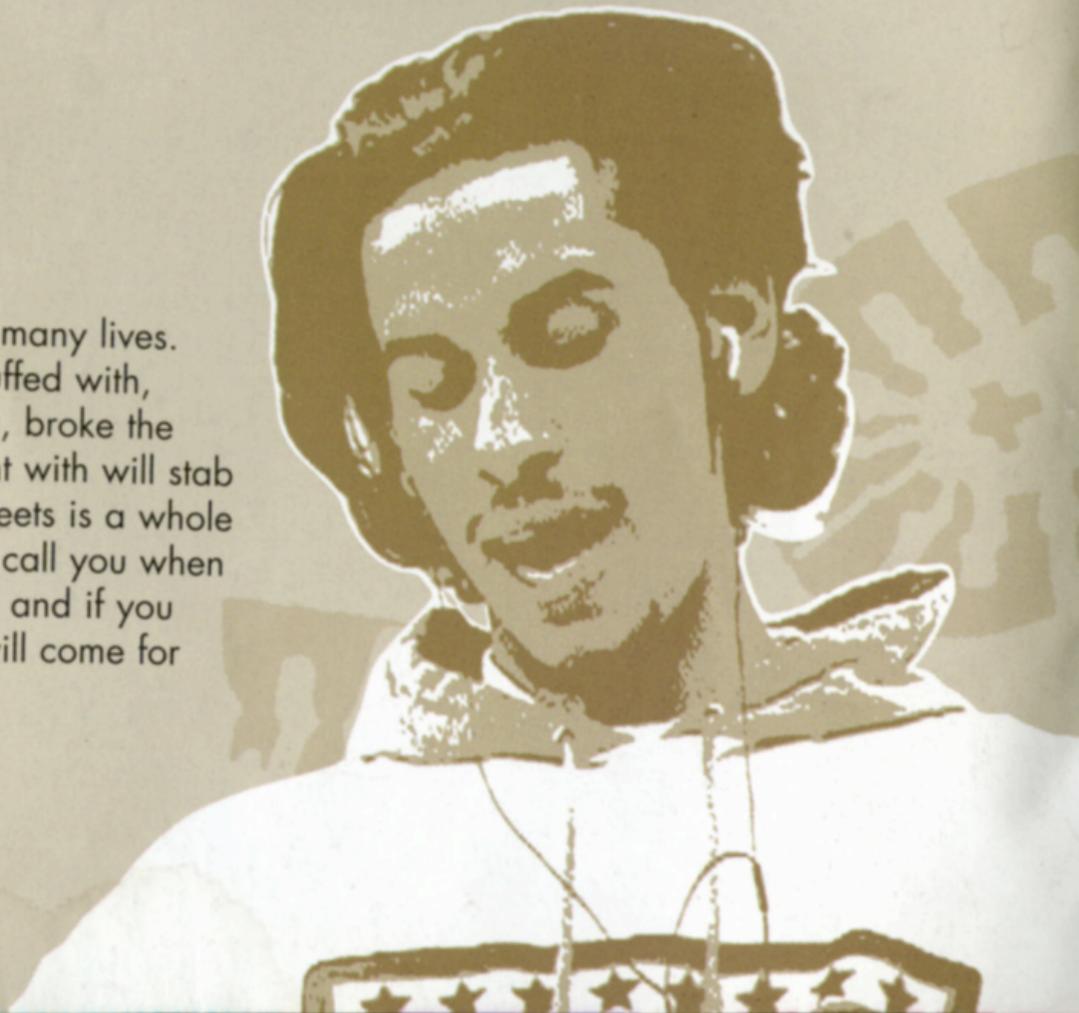
by Joel Serrano

Senior, Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

I am from the streets, and the streets do call you. When you're out or when you're in. The streets will call. When I say "streets," I mean just that. The place where everything wrong dwells. Where money is the number one thing on your mind, crime doesn't mean a thing for the right price.

The stoop where you sit down and watch the streets consume the lives of so many. The same stoop where thousands of blunts were smoked, with nothing to keep you safe but a metal gate with no lock, which allows you to enter or exit as you please. The streets are hard and cluttered with empty baggies, broken crack vials, and the tobacco from dutches cracked down the middle so you can roll your blunt.

The streets can change many lives. The same heads you puffed with, drank with, played with, broke the law with and got caught with will stab you in the back. The streets is a whole other world. The streets call you when you don't wanna come, and if you don't show the streets will come for you.



The streets aren't just the ground and pavement, the streets become a lifestyle you can never leave, a lifestyle of drugs, money, sex and violence. A lifestyle that deep down inside you're ashamed of. A lifestyle that has you trapped. If you're raised in the streets you might have a chance, but once you get caught up in the streets you never leave them and they never leave you.

The streets is watching to see who to snag up next, to see who to keep and claim. The streets can either make or break you. When you live the street life, there's only 3 results:

1. Death
2. Prison
3. Hospital for life

You see, even if you were once caught up in the streets and you make it out, they come back. If not for you then your kids. The streets never forget a face, name or foot. Every step you take on the streets, you leave your essence behind.



I Am From

by Jelisa Cabrera
Junior, Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

I am from the Farms, where the hoodrats roam at 3 in the morning. Basketball games in the summer. Where the sound of little kids fighting over who has to share the bike next because not every kid can afford one. Mothers screaming out their window telling them to get their ass upstairs or to get them something from the bodega. Where little kids grow up following their brother's footsteps, because they think it's cool. And the old ladies on the benches, saying once again another generation is lost. And pops coming home late from work bitchin' because he feels he's been workin' for shit, because he's been stuck in these projects for years.

I Am From

Cheng Liang
Senior, School for the Physical City

I walked through a life of different shoes.
They all had different tongues and different laces.
Not one of them held me permanently in places
Nor was one ever lost to racists.

Everyday, I walk to the place where my mother stays
Stepping on roaches and cookie crumbs, I know it's wrong
Sometimes I can't help it but ask myself:
"Mama, papa; why aren't you here in this place together?"

"Someone please call 911. Tell them this shoe box is all wrong."

I walked through a life of different shoes.
And I've been stepped on many times.
But as I seek to be the perfect shoe
I know that I'm better than I was.



by Jelisa Cabrera
Junior, Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

and Angela Demsak
Freshman, School for the Physical City

Why Is My Brother On T.V.?

Why is my brother on TV?

Is it about the color of his skin or the size of his nose or size of his lips?
Was he misjudged and really innocent?

Why couldn't they see he was always the top of the class?
What about his future?
What would it be?



Judgement

Judgement stalks on its prey,
its people, its society, not giving
it a second chance to breathe again,
to live again.

Lady Liberty is giving out free
judgement to the government to
rot our communities.

Stalks staring at its prey
wanting to kill
wanting to take over
wanting everything in sight.

As he stares, you feel the fear
as it enters your body
you feel yourself starting to shake and tremble
and shiver with fear.
As he shoots his gun you feel
the bullet pierce your heart and you fall

As you lie there
you Dream the endless Dream



No Escape

by Jane Yang

Freshman, School for the Physical City

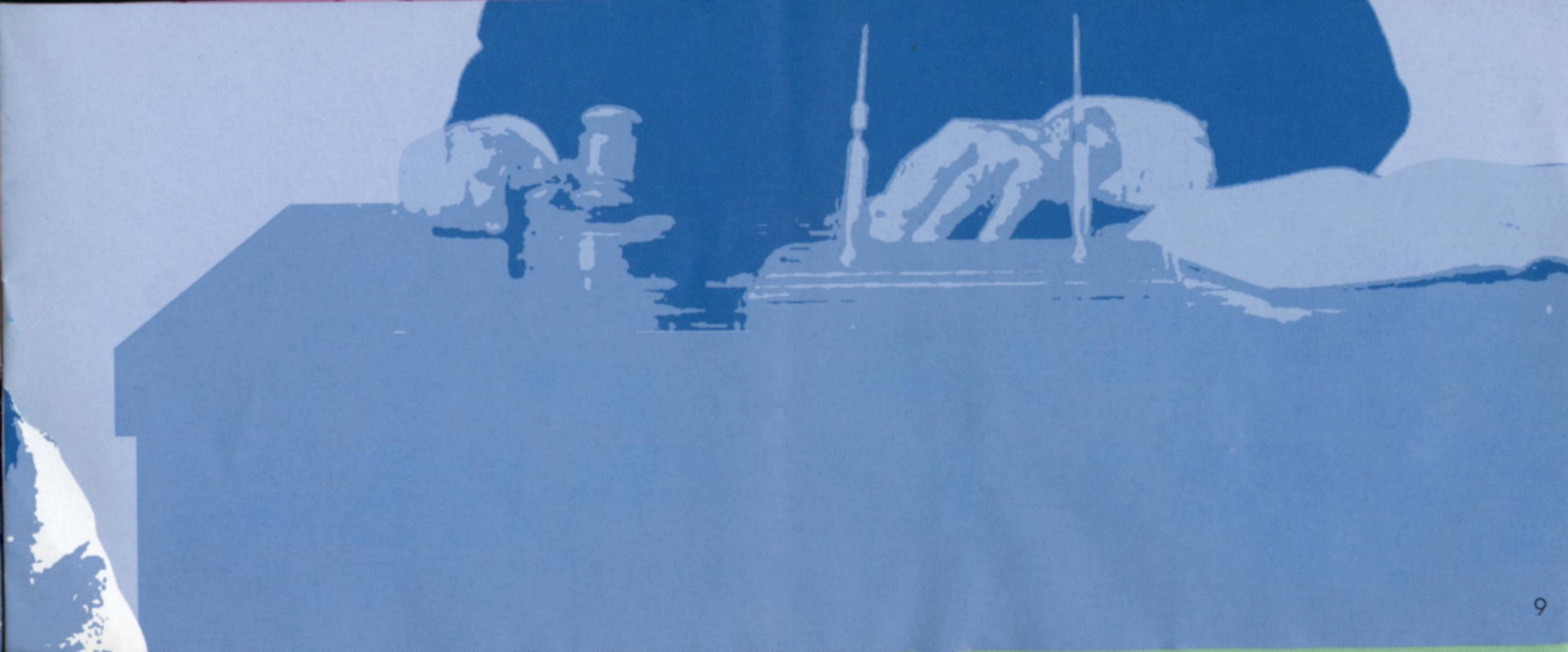
You want me to plead guilty? Guilty for what? The ghetto life I've been living in that has been rubbed through my skin ever since I was born? I'm not guilty for the clothes I wear.

Would it matter if I followed all the rules? Would you look at me as a guy who's ready to commit a crime because of my Tommy shirt and my baggy jeans I wear?

If I'm guilty for wearing what I wear and being who I am, then let me plead guilty for the rest of my life. There is no escape...

No Escape!!!

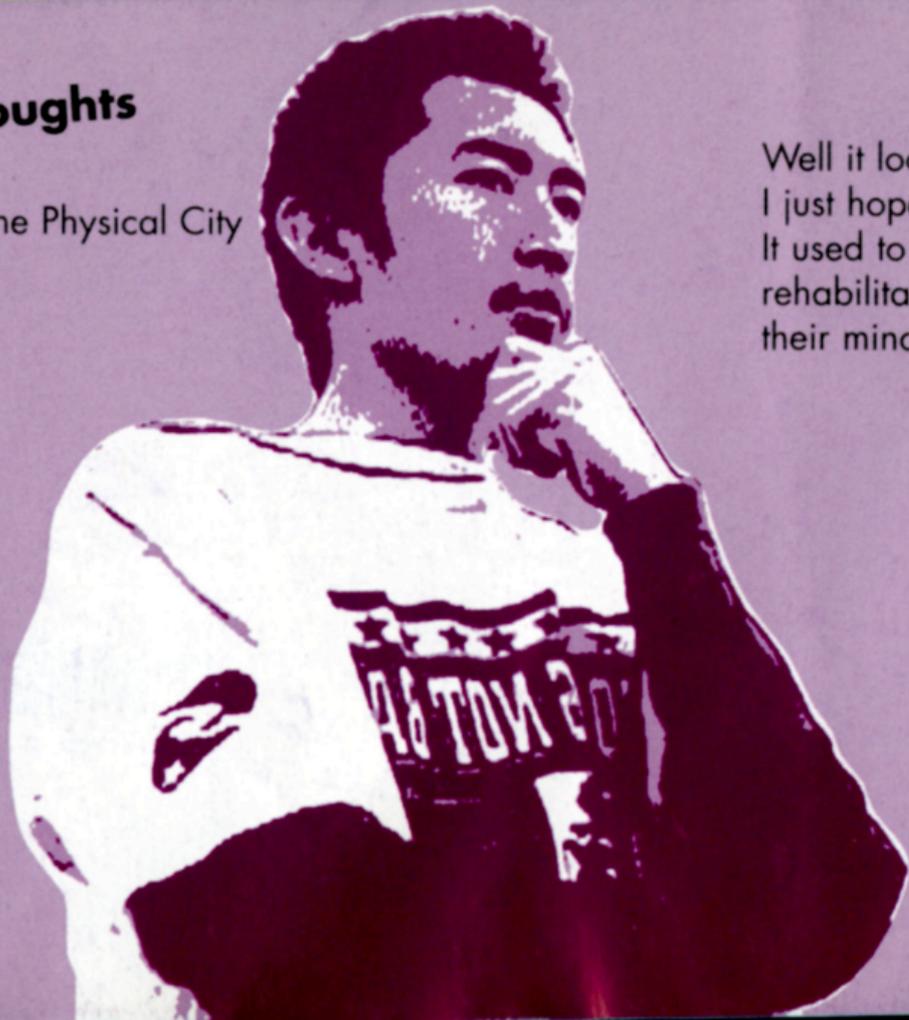




The Judge's Thoughts

Cheng Liang

Senior, School for the Physical City



Well it looks like I just sent another juvenile to prison. I just hope he doesn't blame me, but blame the system. It used to be that juveniles were encouraged to rehabilitate themselves. After all, they are children and their minds aren't set.

But recently, with all the shootings, we're more suspicious of children than we use to be. We jump at every chance we get to put them where the real criminals should be.

Nowadays, we can try 13 year olds as adults. Steal their time to play, and put them away in their cell all day. I don't agree with any of this, but that's the system. If you can't beat it, you will end up in it.



Letter From Prison

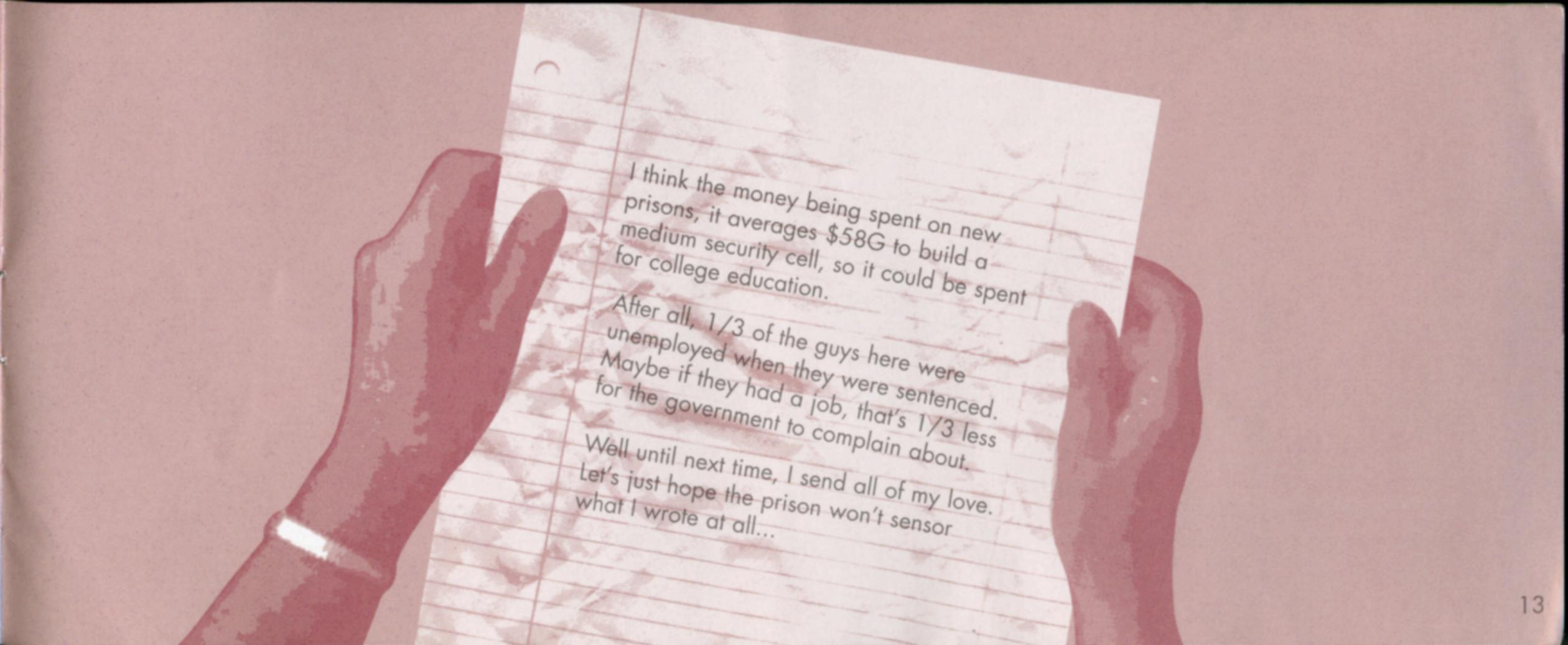
Cheng Liang
Senior, School for the Physical City

Dear Mom,

Well, here I am in prison, and it really isn't great. I never thought I'd be put here for something silly like my race

In 1999, when I first got here, less than 36% of the prisoners were white. I talked to the other guys, and it became clear to me, 7 of 10 prisoners never did a violent deed.

Some of them got here for silly things like stealing cable. I don't know, I don't think some of them should be in prison at all.



I think the money being spent on new prisons, it averages \$58G to build a medium security cell, so it could be spent for college education.

After all, 1/3 of the guys here were unemployed when they were sentenced. Maybe if they had a job, that's 1/3 less for the government to complain about.

Well until next time, I send all of my love. Let's just hope the prison won't sensor what I wrote at all...

Tribute to Amadou

by Jelisa Cabrera
Junior, Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

Angela Demsak
Freshman, School for the Physical City

Joel Serrano
Senior, Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

and Jane Yang
Freshman, School for the Physical City

1.

My name is Jelisa. My thoughts on Amadou
Are not as fresh to my mind as the first day
I heard about his death.

My name is Jelisa. I feel sad and betrayed that not
Only an innocent person had died but
Another innocent black person died.

My name is Jelisa. It seems like every second we are
Losing a soldier, losing a soldier to the injustice of this society
To the government that is supposed to serve
And protect us.

2.

Imagine being shot forty-one times,
Just because you're pulling out your wallet.
My first reaction was to change the channel.

Imagine having someone get shot and
This person is all over the news,
This person whom you don't even know.

Imagine this innocent man who was just pulling out his wallet.
No one deserves to be shot
Especially not from pigs.

3.

Imagine being scared and nervous all the time.
Imagine being scared at the time you most needed help,
From the people who are there to protect you and your
family and friends.

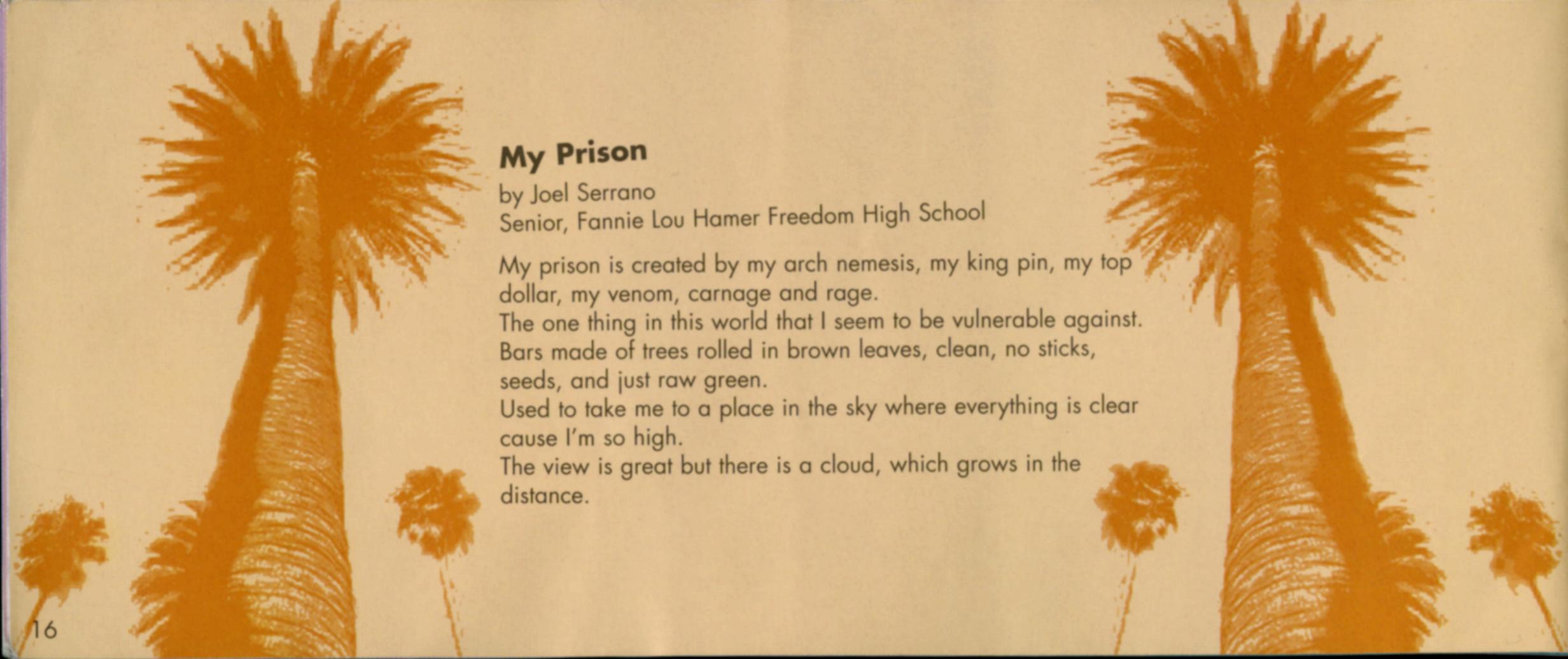
Being scared because they killed an unarmed person.
Nervous because that person could have been you
Imagine 41 bullets flying toward you
Imagine a person getting shot 41 times
Would you still feel the same
Or different?

4.

I thought to myself how much more violence is there
Going to be?
When will it all end?

When will our kids be able to live in a world
Where they don't have to be scared to walk down their own street?
When will our schools be safe so that
Our youth can get up out the ghetto?

When will the officers we trust
Actually protect us?
How can they protect us when they themselves harm?
When will we have protection from our protectors?
When will it all end?



My Prison

by Joel Serrano
Senior, Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

My prison is created by my arch nemesis, my king pin, my top dollar, my venom, carnage and rage.

The one thing in this world that I seem to be vulnerable against. Bars made of trees rolled in brown leaves, clean, no sticks, seeds, and just raw green.

Used to take me to a place in the sky where everything is clear cause I'm so high.

The view is great but there is a cloud, which grows in the distance.

TWA

Eddie Bauer



Marriott

Definition

Cheng Liang
Senior, School for the Physical City

Industries are making money. How?
Industries are making money. How?

They're making money by exploiting. Who?

Cheap labor from immigrants. Cheap labor from prisoners. These people can work for the wages of slaves. But is it really morally wrong?

The immigrants need a place to earn dimes. The prisoners need a place to spend time. And we want our products here on time.

One can say industries are good, another bad. Good, bad, right, wrong
Who are we to say alone?

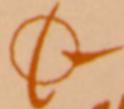
For men have made these words of distinction, but have not realized the magnitude of their definition.

VICTORIA'S SECRET

ANN TAYLOR

Microsoft

DELL


BOEING

DKNY

What is this?

This is a ray of light. Aesthetic venom. This is an affirmation of our power. These pieces are written by youth to show that police brutality and the prison industrial complex – locking folks up for profit – are real. We are not statistics. Our people and our communities are flesh and blood, human. At a time when young minds are being locked behind prison walls and bamboozled by media miseducation, our writing stands as a testament to the truth and a tool for action. All power to the people. Let's get it.

What is the HSOP?

The High School Organizing Program works with youth city-wide to examine issues they face. Currently we are working with three high schools: Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom H.S. in the Bronx, and the School for the Physical City and East Side Community H.S. in Manhattan. The student interns work with facilitators – who are college students and community activists – to create imaginative projects and learn concrete skills in public speaking, computer graphics, outreach, video production, art and creative writing.



The public speaking crew used creative theater techniques to create presentations that speak to young people about the criminalization of youth and prison labor.

Giovanni Cortes, Aanayah Cuyler, Brianna Day, Max Schulman and Emery Taylor. Facilitated by Kai Lumumba Barrow.



The graphic design crew used computer graphics skills as a tool to communicate a message of social justice.

East Side Community H.S.: Marisol Lopez, Blair Melton, Vida Mena, Adriana Porras, Irving Saez, Linda Torres and Shifa Vegum. Facilitated by John Kim.



The promotions crew developed and put to use creative tactics for reaching out to other youth and the community about the prison industrial complex. They also performed a skit showing the challenges of doing outreach.

Damien Hayes, Zubah Herrera, Mylandria Maldonado, Chantel Patrice Otto, Noel Rodriguez, and Leonard Thomas. Facilitated by Rachel Laforest.



The video production crew learned video production, editing and interviewing skills and produced a video called "We Love Criminals" on the theme of youth incarceration.

Aisha Olivera, Emily Rodriguez, Michael Weisman and Eric Von Hulha. Facilitated by Lenina Nadal and Alice Carin. In cooperation with Deep Dish TV.



The art crew used art to express struggles and victories in our communities. Projects included Personal Prisons and the 17 Masks Totem Pole remembering the 17 youths who have received the death penalty.

Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom H.S.: Jelisa Cabrera, Giovanni Cortes, Joel Serrano and Emery Taylor. Facilitated by Nermin Abdel-Wahab, Sasa Ynoa and guest facilitator Haideen Anderson.



SLAM

SLAM High School Organizing Program

The creative writing Student Liberators are Jelisa Cabrera, Angela Demsak, Cheng Liang, Joel Serrano and Jane Yang. Facilitated by Sandra Barros and Suzy Martin. Portraits from HSOP video crew. Booklet designed by Eulan Atkinson. Thanks to Daniel Jerome (East Side Community H.S.), Kyle Hartung (Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom H.S.), John O'Reily (School for the Physical City), and Haideen Anderson. With support from Tom Poole & Deep Dish TV, Hunter College USG, Active Element, and North Star Foundation. 695 Park Avenue New York NY 10021 (212) 772-4261