



YOUTH STORIES

By Elgin Smith

FROM THE JANE ADDAMS HULL-HOUSE MUSEUM

This zine series was made in connection with “Unfinished Business–Juvenile Justice,” the community-curated exhibit at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, on view through August 2011.

“Unfinished Business” is curated in collaboration with over a dozen community partners and makes connections between the founding of the nation’s first Juvenile Court in 1899 and the pressing contemporary issues of juvenile justice and prison reform. The exhibit fosters dialogue and provides opportunities for visitors to participate onsite in several forms of civic engagement. While much progress has been made on the issue about which Jane Addams and other Hull-House reformers cared so deeply, we wanted visitors to know that there is still a lot of “unfinished business.” The work of creating a more just society continues, and we can all be part of transformative social change.

These zines—created in collaboration with Project NIA; the Chicago Freedom School; teaching artists Rachel Marie Crane-Williams and Elgin-Bokari T. Smith; artist and activist Billy Dee; and youth inside and outside the system—attempt to create a critical awareness of the issues by addressing the many facets of juvenile justice. Five zines speak to the History of the Juvenile Court, Girls in the System, Youth Stories (of the Incarcerated), the School-to-Prison Pipeline, and the Prison-Industrial Complex. Through dialogue and creative thinking, we believe that a series of zines allows us to become a more effective public history site and enables us to contribute to popular education in a unique way. These zines challenge preconceived notions, stir our imaginations, and generate new community beyond the Museum’s walls.

So, what is a zine? Fanzines or “zines” are do-it-yourself (DIY) mini-books that have a long history of communicating openly, honestly, and plainly. Zines are independent and

capture the spirit of a localized scene, but are meant to have far-reaching effects. Once you read a zine, pass it along to a friend or acquaintance. By sharing and discussing zines, the community grows, and you’ve made a valuable connection with someone.

The Jane Addams Hull-House Museum serves as a dynamic memorial to Nobel Peace Prize recipient Jane Addams and other resident social reformers whose work influenced the lives of their immigrant neighbors as well as national and international public policy.

The Museum preserves and develops the original Hull-House site for the interpretation and continuation of the historic settlement house vision, linking research, education, and social engagement.

The zine series is a valuable tool for civic engagement and emphasizes that “history is not a spectator sport” but something that everyone can and should be engaged in making at all times.

Want to find out more or get involved? Check us out and download copies of the zines at: www.hullhousemuseum.org

--Teresa Silva, community curator of “Unfinished Business–Juvenile Justice,” Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, 2011

FROM PROJECT NIA

After over a year of work, I am thrilled to announce the publication of a series of zines about the juvenile justice and prison systems. This collaborative experience was a truly rewarding and wonderful one. When I approached my friend Lisa Lee, of the Jane Addams Hull House Museum, with the idea of creating a graphic novel about the history and current manifestations of juvenile justice, I could not have imagined where we’d end up today. We both agreed that this project would only make sense if we centered the voices of incarcerated youth as well as young people on the outside. We knew that we wanted to find partners who would share our vision and would have the skills to execute it. We were incredibly lucky to find talented and dedicated teaching artists like Rachel Williams and Elgin Smith to work with on this project. Both of them collaborated respectfully with the young people who participated in what would eventually come to be known as our “cradle to prison pipeline” comic arts project. After that, they spent countless hours drawing and authoring the zines that we are releasing today. If we had paid them what they are worth, we would all be bankrupt.

We were also blessed to partner with the Chicago Freedom School which provided a meeting space for youth and with Eva Nagao, Freedom School board co-chair, who took it upon herself to recruit young people for this project. Eva handled all of the logistics for the 5 weeks of the comic arts program for youth on the outside. Special thanks also to Rachel Shine who volunteered her time with the youth as they learned about juvenile justice and drew their own images.

The Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC) welcomed us for 4 weeks in August 2010 to work with the young people who were incarcerated there. Teaching artist Elgin Smith, who already works at JTDC, led

comic arts workshops for both girls and boys at the jail. We are indebted to the youth for sharing their stories and talents with us.

As an added bonus, artist and activist Billy Dee, working with members of the Chicago PIC Teaching Collective, has created a zine about the prison industrial complex that the Museum has generously printed too. There is no way that anyone who looks at the “PIC Is” zine will miss Billy’s talent or huge heart. Both are apparent throughout the publication.

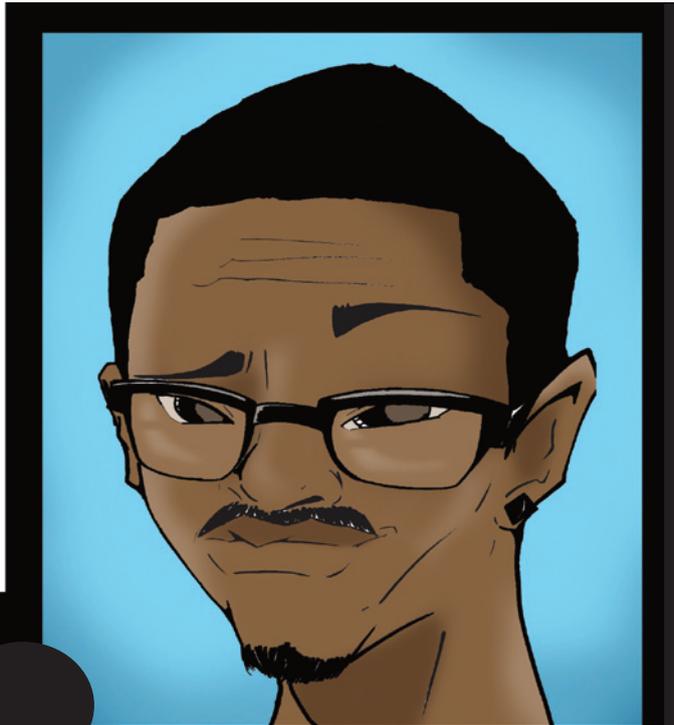
This project would not have been as seamless or as enjoyable as it was without the presence and guidance of Teresa Silva. Teresa’s steady hand and her soft touch moved us along and helped bring the project to completion. Thanks to Teresa for all of her contributions.

There are few people in the world as unique and inspiring as Lisa Lee. Over the years, Lisa has fostered opportunities for youth and adults across Chicago to learn about history, art, and social justice. She does this without fanfare but always with unmatched generosity of spirit. This project would not have happened without her. I am eternally grateful to Lisa for all that she has done and will undoubtedly continue to do in the future.

Finally, a point of personal privilege... I am committed to using art as a tool for social transformation and justice. I believe that art has the capacity to speak across difference and to help educate and incite people to action. I hope that those individuals who read these zines come away asking the question: How can I contribute to dismantling the prison industrial complex? If even only one person asks, then we will have done our part.

In Peace and Solidarity,

Mariame Kaba, Director, Project NIA



ELGIN-BOKARI T. SMITH
TEACHING ARTIST
AGE: 23

You never know where life will lead, but you must trust. It's been over a year since I graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with my BFA and life has all really started to kick in. I'm a graphic Illustrator who is currently teaching at two locations: Visual Arts at the Gary Comer Youth Center and Ceramic Sculpture at The Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center.

In the summer, I was invited to teach a three-week course in Comics to both the boys and girls at The Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. I had already taught the Ceramics class, which had opened my eyes to the potential of the students. So when offered the opportunity to teach Comics, I was very excited.

Life is but a journey that leads us to our true potential. I view art in the same way. I love to create, with love. Art is and should be used as therapy. When a person can express his or her actions creatively only beauty can surface.

My God, They're So Young

My first thoughts were: "What could these boys have done to be in a place like this?" I asked each one their name and asked if they saw themselves as a writer, artist, or talker. Sadly, the majority didn't see themselves as any of these things. So, I gave them an assignment entitled, "Tell Me a Story."



Boys' Class

Through the assignment I quickly found out much more about the students. I have a few great drawers, some passionate writers, and a whole lot of talkers.



My second goal was to make sure that I taught the youth about Jane Addams, co-founder of the Hull-House Settlement and advocate for the Cook County Juvenile Court, the first of its kind in the world. Of course, none of the boys knew who she was but, by the end of the class, they knew all this and that she was the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Overall, class was ok, but like most first days you never know how the students really felt. My goals were to stand my ground and keep them engaged.



CASH GRAFFITI DONE BY YOUTH

WORDS FROM THE INSIDE **Journal Writings from the Youth**

How was my first day?

It was very cold and boring. I thought about my family all night. I wasn't really scared because it's nothing to be scared about. I remember taking a cold shower. I didn't like it at all, but I went though it like a man. I kept telling myself it's a detention center and at least I'm not in county jail where you have a foot mate telling you to do stuff when you don't want to. Overall I got along with people really quickly and I had court the next week so I was good. I ended up getting out on house-arrest.*

By C.K.

**A "foot mate" is a guard who escorts detainees around the facility.*

*Boy's Class***WORDS FROM THE INSIDE**
Journal Writings from the Youth**Making Choices**

When I first got here I was scared but every time I came back, I got used to it. It seems like when you get here everybody likes you but once they see you everyday they will change and try to jump on you. That just shows who your friends are. Some people that you converse with will act like your friend but when it comes down to someone beating you up they won't help. On the other hand, when it's time for them to get jumped they want you to help. They didn't even help and then they'll try to shank you cause you

"If you're like me, you're most likely wondering what's up with the abbreviated names. Well, all youth who participated in this project are incarcerated youth, and their names must remain confidential."

didn't help them. Like my mother always said stay off the streets because nobody's going to do anything when you die except put your face on a t-shirt and say rest in peace. By the next day they will forget you.

By S.H.

*Familiar Faces*

Today was my first day teaching the girls, and I have to say, it went quite well. Not better than the boys' class, just less challenging. I saw a lot of familiar faces (from the ceramic class), which made teaching convenient. I was picked up late for the session, so the girls had a to wait while I set up class.



Girls' Class

The first thing the girls learned about was the story of Jane Addams. I was fairly confident that the girls would appreciate the tale of this heroic, female humanitarian. I told them that Addams cofounded the Hull-House Settlement, helped establish the NAACP with Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and was the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. They girls were surprised to learn that Addams was white and fought for the rights of African Americans. They embraced her story.



JANE ADDAMS DRAWING DONE BY YOUTH

Girls' Class

Today, I continued the "Tell Me a Story" idea from the boys' class. Most girls went straight to work but a few needed a little guidance. Overall, they all did a great job. The girls really opened up and told some powerful stories. I believe that there are really going to be a lot of life-changing experiences in this class.

When I first got here all I could think about is how couldn't take my little boy to the park.



COMIC DONE BY YOUTH

WORDS FROM THE INSIDE

Journal Writings from the Youth

What I've Learned

I feel I learned a lot being here. I learned how it's important to not take things for granted. I found out sometimes I let my attitude take over me. I now know my life should be more important. I often sit back and think of what I've done in my past. When I make phone calls home I tell my mom I love her I never used to tell her stuff like that. Juvenile has also brought me closer to my little brother. Last time we spoke he made me cry because he said he missed me a lot. I feel disappointed knowing my 8-month sister doesn't know me. I wouldn't want her to grow up and say she never knew who I was. I also miss being around my other sister and brother. I want them to know I love them a lot and am thinking about them, my life, freedom and my future game plan.

By R.D.

Making Comics— Teaching Expectation vs Reality

Today was tough, there's no other way to say it. I started class teaching the boys how to bring speech to an illustration. So I drew some images on the chalkboard: two people looking at each other, a man with a speech bubble, a woman with a thought bubble, and a narration box. I asked the kids to tell me what was going on in the scene: What was the man saying? What was the girl thinking? Where does the scene take place? Once all the boys understood the assignment, everyone did well. However, once it was time to start the real assignment the class went down hill.



Boys' Class

I asked the boys to get in groups of two and have them and their partner come up with an idea for a comic story about the past, present, or future of the Juvenile Center. However, at that point the majority of the class decided teaching time was over. At the time I felt working in groups would be the best idea. I didn't realize giving the kids more freedom would hinder their creativity. Overall, the class was OK. I have to take my wins over my losses because I did complete the goal of teaching them basic narration for comic books.



After talking to my mother, I realized that perhaps a conversation with my younger self would help me figure out how to relate to the youth.



Today Was A Good Day

Today was another good day in the girls' class. When the students arrived, they got a little wild but for the right reasons. They were ready to engage and do work. We started off the class doing journal writing, using the theme "Beyond These Walls." I drew a picture of a girl's profile and made a thought bubble, asking "What is she thinking?" I was surprised to get so many poems from the youth in response to this exercise. Their words spoke of escaping the walls that bound them.

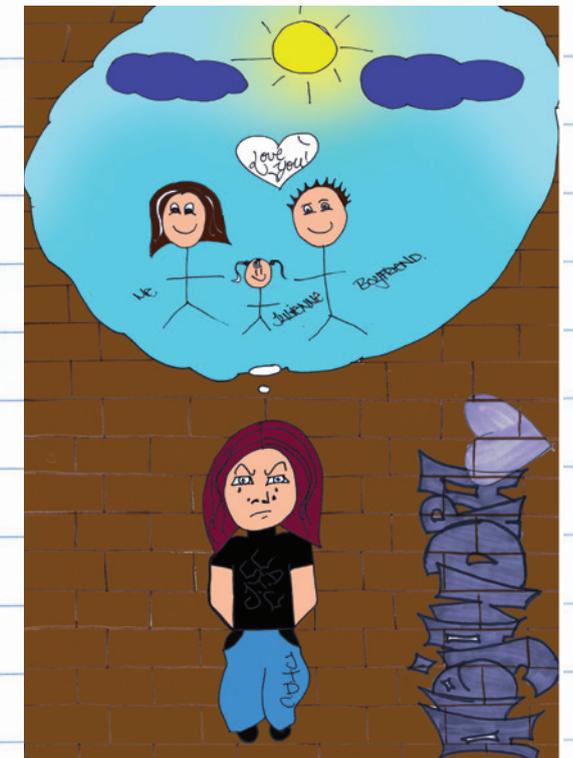


WORDS FROM THE INSIDE **Journal Writings from the Youth**

Beyond These Walls Stories

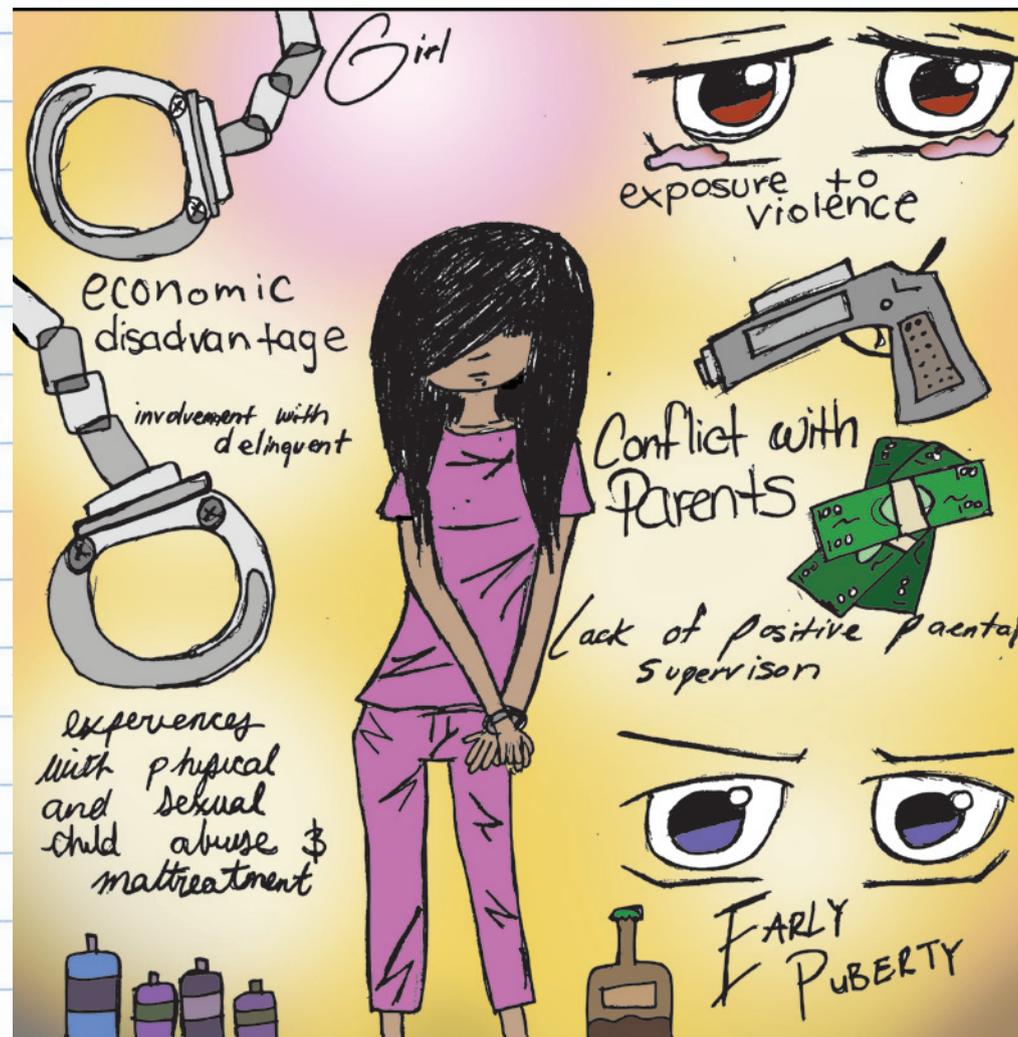
Beyond the walls I think about my life and how I'm going to get my life right. I also think about my relationships and how I'm going to get my baby back. Sometimes I wonder if that person wants me back. Beyond these walls, I want to be somebody and do something with my life. -

Beyond these walls, I think about my family and how I could be with my mom on her birthday. It would be great to be with my family in Indiana. I want to tell them I made the wrong decisions and that I'm sorry for what I did.



Beyond These Walls Stories

Beyond these walls I make wrong decisions and mistakes. If I would be outside of here I would be at home with my family. I would also be doing the right thing and be with my baby



Beyond these walls I wonder what's going on on my block. Where is my life going to be like when I leave here? What my momma is doing? What my auntie doing for her birthday?

Beyond These Walls Stories

Beyond these walls, I see my future: my family forgiveness and forgiving myself. Beyond these walls is freedom. I can see the world and stars I don't have to watch what I say beyond these walls I see my friends, I attend my school again. Beyond these walls, I'm begin my life all over again.



Beyond these walls is my son E'lynn. Beyond these walls is the future me going back to school. Beyond these walls I see my life, which contains my son, school, and being the best momma I can be. Trying to gain a good relationship with my mom beyond these walls.

Girls' Class

After their writing assignment, I asked the girls to tell me what classes they took while in the Juvenile Center and if they were beneficial. After going over simple comic-booking, the girls got right to work on their various projects. Some girls wrote letters to Jane Addams, while others drew pictures to go along with poems. Overall, it was a great class.



COMIC DONE BY YOUTH

WORDS FROM THE INSIDE

Journal Writings from the Youth

Lost

I learned Juvenile is a place that no one should want to be. Who wants to have someone tell them when to eat, sleep, and when you have to go to bed. I also learned to accept criticism, consequences and to control my anger. At night it's hard to sleep. I can't help tossing and turning just wondering will I make it to see tomorrow. I find myself trying not to wonder what life would be like without me in this world. Wondering will I make it in life, wondering how long can I stay holding on? But the real question is what's the purpose of living if all we gone do is die someday. So beware of your day cause you'll never know when your time will come.

By R.D.

Learning Experience

Today was truly a learning experience. I went into the classroom with a clear plan to teach the youth more about themselves, and I believe I achieved that. I started off with my daily profile drawing of a boy looking at the words: "They told me you can't, but..." This was an assignment to help the boys interpret a time when a person told them they couldn't do what they had the potential to achieve but then they proved them wrong. It was interesting to read how the boys won over their haters. Some spoke of reading ability or drawing skills, but most talked about their superior basketball skills.



Boys' Class

Today's security officer also played a big role in the behavior of the youth. He was as harsh as they come. Telling the boys how they should act in a stern voice. Even to go as far as use profane language to keep the boys in line. I couldn't really tell him to stop because I have to admit they needed a little control. At the same time, it's sad that it takes someone yelling at them to maintain order. In the end, do people like him really help or add to the problem?



Boys' Class

Toward the end of class students were starting to get with the program (thanks to the guard). I have to admit I enjoyed the silence. When it was time for the students to line up to go back to their cells I told them the story of my 13 year old childhood and I think they got a lot from it. I also made them promise not to be bound by the walls that hold them. I almost teared up hearing them repeat it back. Overall, I think I'm making strides with the boys; I wish I had more than 3 weeks. I believe I could make more changes.



...WHEN PEOPLE SEE ME...

WORDS FROM THE INSIDE **Journal Writings from the Youth**

How Was My First Day?

I been in and out this place the judge keeping a boy that can be playing high school basketball right now people keep putting me down and my caseworker keep moving me around. These years I been walking this earth people defining me as a trouble maker but I know who I really am been raised in the projects by my grams eating nothing but bread, hotdogs, and ham, I been practicing my anger, trying to make money in a good way so I wouldn't have to ask a stranger.

By A.C.

Beauty In The Dark

Today was one of the easiest classes. I arrived a little late, so when the girls came in I give them a journal to work on while I set up. The journal was the same as the boys' class, "They Told Me You Can't, But..." I noticed that we had a lot of new girls this week, so I reintroduced Jane Addams. Like the girls before they really enjoyed hearing all of her accomplishments. A lot of the new girls were artists, so I let them all do the "Tell Me a Story" assignment. I got a lot of great work today and I was very pleased with their participation. I ended the class with the saying, "Beauty In The Dark." Which is a phrase that simply means create/express yourself despite your situation. Overall, it was a great class.

WORDS FROM THE INSIDE **Journal Writings from the Youth**

They Told Me You Can't But...

They told me that I couldn't stay sober. They told me that I couldn't change, but I did. I stayed sober for over 60 days and changed my whole lifestyle. At least for a while. They told me I couldn't keep livin' my life this way. And they were right. But, I didn't listen. I did what I wanted and hurt the people who loved me the most. They keep telling me I can't keep living my life this way. But this time I believe them.



ARTWORK AND POEM DONE BY YOUTH

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Assignment 1

Tell me a story

- This is an assignment to see what the students levels are at.
- materials
 - Pencils, Pens, Paper, note books, Drawing paper
- Students must write a story based on the juvenile/our life. they may use any medium.
- questions to think about...
- what was your first day like
- what were your expectations
- where you scared
- what's court like.
- How did you family think
- what did you want to learn
- ~~how~~ what's the difference from being in and out
- why you don't want to talk

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- Today I teach my first zine class at the Cook County Juvie.

goals

- To teach who got them there
- Jane Adams
- topics to tell
 - Birth date s.e Hoover
 - WWI - Feeding the hungry in England
 - Womens writes
 - Hull house
 - immigrations
 - Cook County juvie - Place of Reform
 - nobel peace prize
 - Death

Was her dream realized or made in vain?

I want this question to be answered



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