“We Make Prisoners”

We make prisoners not when we give them the gun
Nah, the bullet has already been shot
And instead of killing just one target, it kills both ways
The heart and the backbone
Everything becoming dead
But even then, we fail to notice that it is not the weapon’s fault
the dark blasting metal or the burning powder inside of a gun has nothing to do with it
The fact is we make a prisoner when we tell it, that it can never be good enough. It can never speak or
write properly, because the language it speaks is foreign. When we tell it, their work is non-traditional
and does not follow the current structured models of society. When their worth is based on a
borderline grade of a C- and a D+ even though the reason they “failed” might be that “it” did not get
food that day or that the public school system has not functioned fairly for them.

We make prisoners not when we give them the drugs
Nah, they are already high in disillusionment when all you give them is low expectations…When we
televised in the media that the only thing they can do is play sports, rap, or steal. When we show
mainly the early pregnancies, the fights, the drugs, the bad and the ugly. My question is where is the
good at? Why do not celebrate that they can be the next president, the next big entrepreneur?

We make prisoners not when we get them a tattoo, their ink has already been tainted, the pains in their
backs have already been infringed not by the pen, but by the media that we produced, the recycled
jokes that we laughed at only to survive

We make prisoners not when we give them the knife
Nah, they have already been cut and opened
Their abilities unsharpened and cropped like plantains ready to be boiled
They become products in a factory distributed in orange suits
Ready for sale

We make prisoners not when we give them the alcohol, they are already drunk from the beverages of
uncertainty. From not knowing how they will take care of their family. The famous words verbatim
cycle through their brains “from now on, everything I say will be held against you”. They laugh at this.
They already know that their mouths have been sealed a long time ago when they were told they were
different. She is different because she is a girl. He is different because he is black. They knew they
were prisoners a long time ago like species trapped in its own ecosystem.
The truth is, we make prisoners when we teach them the same old history, the two sided dichotomy of winner v. loser, hero v. criminal, black v. white, democrat v. Republican, rich v. poor, Christian v. Muslim, American v. Native Americans, you v. the world. We make prisoners when I hear my 3 year old brother stating what millions of applications still deem important. He states color, but not just color, a distinction. He looks at a picture, and says “you black, papa black, me black”. The way he said it put it a tingling in my skin. Maybe to him he is throwing out that color he learned, but the fact he finds the need to tell me it because in him he already knows. He already knows they taught him we are “different”. He is already categorizing more than colors, but the quality of our skins. I am not suggesting we should be a color-blind society. Nah, I love my Hispanic identity, but when we continue to learn that those differences make one more superior than the other. We have a problem. An imprisonment problem.

We talk about affirmative action in the educational system. I want to see the day we talk about affirmative action in the criminal justice system. I read this article from the Harvard Review about adaptive leadership and it said institutions and systems—they are not really bad or corrupt—they are exactly built like they are made to be—like we want it to be. Our factory of prisoners is fully working, so good that the prisons are full and the majority that are accepted in are blacks and Hispanics while the whites get rejected and are not welcomed in the beautiful facilities that the taxpayers built. At the end of the day, it is about taxes, numbers, money, cost, revenue. Business wins. Money speaks. While the spirits of the prisoners weep and plunge into the dark world where Ben Franklins will never exist and the only thing they see is their legal sentence expanding like the sockets in their dense eyes.

We make prisoners when we follow the money not the people. When we assume because you are this or that you will do that and heck even if you make it to be the president of the free world you will be imprisoned in a world of hypocritical convictions.

We make prisoners not when we give them the DUI. But when we give them the eye. The staring eye that if it sees you with a hoodie, it starts blinking dead- scared like it was watching a scary movie except it is reality and each story is received not by the television screen but by the hopeful soul of a little boy or girl’s dream. Each stare is a judgment that threatens to kill the American dream and with each blink the kid becomes chained in iron bonds of disappointment. The criminal justice system can’t be fixed by government spending. Money signifies no ending but quite the opposite. It continues a positive feedback loop where more continue to get trapped in an unjust capitalist system. Let’s reconsider the shackles of our notions and suspend disbelief. What if all the people of the world can really be free? What if we rebuilt this prison factory to make it a dignified world where everyone can truly live?