

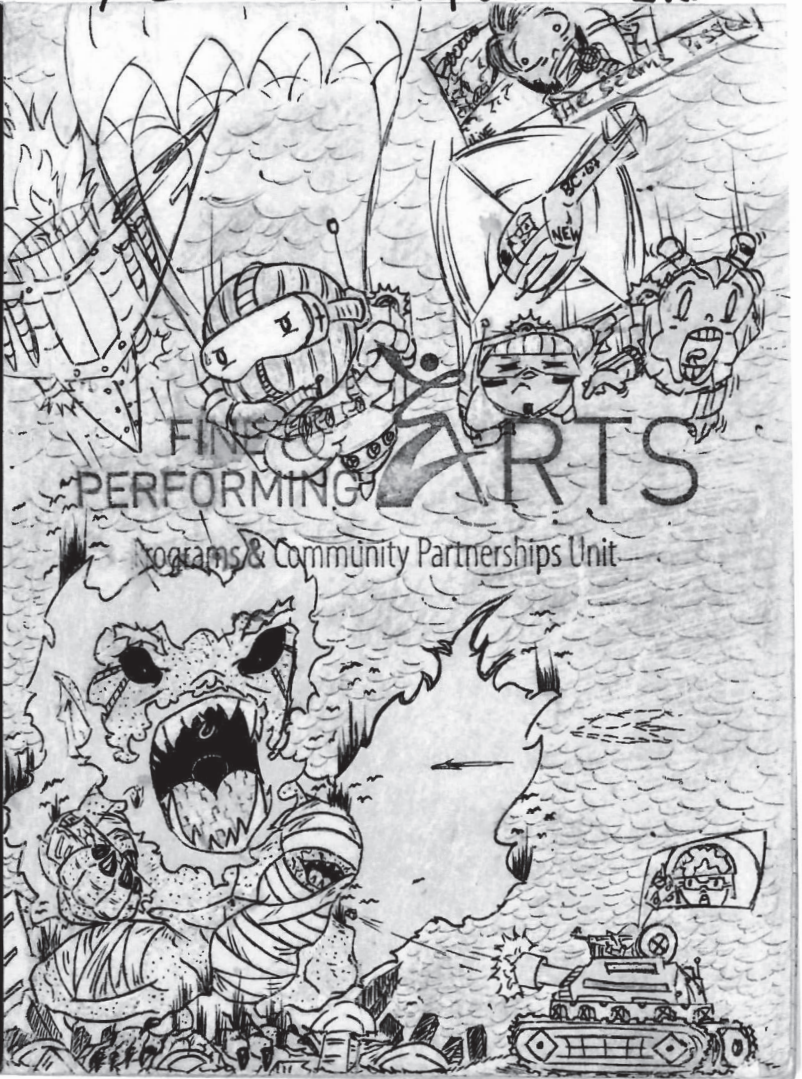
Bridges

Summer 2025

Issue No. 7

Art By: Errol G. Stephenson JR.

IAA Sun. Infinite - Bio: Artworld



2023

EGS JR.

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Justice Initiatives at Brooklyn Public Library is thrilled to bring you Issue #7 of *Bridges*, a zine for our incarcerated neighbors throughout New York. In these pages, you'll discover seven carefully selected pieces of writing and artwork, spanning a variety of genres and forms, created by writers and artists inside. You'll also find updates on important news and current events. As many of you are aware, Robert Brooks and Messiah Nantwi recently lost their lives at the hands of Marcy and Mid-State prison guards and at least six other incarcerated individuals died during DOCCS unlawful strike. We understand how deeply affecting this news might be and encourage you to reach out if you need any help identifying resources to take care of your emotional and mental well-being. In response, we've included information on the newly proposed mandates for Marcy and other DOCCS facilities as well as the continued suspension of the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement Act (HALT). You'll also find a briefing on the federal oversight ruling at Rikers, along with details about the NYC Fair Chance for Housing Act. Finally, we've included information on how to access resources, such as our TeleStory and Welcome Home programs, and of course, a great crossword puzzle.

We begin our Writing & Art section with Reginald Stephens's essay, *Unlikely Sanctuary*, a prelude to his memoir-in-progress that explores his radical acceptance of selfhood and circumstances within the confines of a cell. In an excerpt from Quentin Lewis's novel, we meet Knowledge, a thirteen-year-old whose big win at the tables commences a bold coming-of-age journey. Anthony Rodriguez's short story, *Mr. Contrari The Contrarian*, follows the narrator's encounter with Henry Contrari, an unusual character who dives into a profound exploration of family history and personal agency.

How to Submit Writing & Art

In his poem *Prison Does (A Poem for Safira)*, Raymond A. Rasheed Wallace maps a revolutionary spirit that confronts the psychological and structural violence of incarceration, a message further pronounced by Gary “C.t.” Carpenter’s powerful and incisive poem, *AtticA*. Interspersed are drawings by Dyego M. Foddrell and Errol G. Stephenson Jr. that complicate and deepen our understanding of resilience, autonomy, and resistance in the face of oppression—central themes that resonate across all seven works presented in this issue of *Bridges*.

We hope that you enjoy these pieces as much as we did when we read them. We also hope that they will inspire you in your own writing and creativity. If you have poetry, essays, short stories, scripts, or visual art that you would like to see in the pages of *Bridges*, we’d love to hear from you. Please see the following page for submission guidelines.

In solidarity,

Justice Initiatives
at Brooklyn Public Library

We welcome your thoughts and feedback.

Write to us anytime at:

Justice Initiatives–Bridges Zine
Brooklyn Public Library, Outreach Services
10 Grand Army Plaza
Brooklyn, NY 11238

- ▶ You may submit up to six poems, up to two essays or stories, or up to four pieces of visual art.
- ▶ Submissions can be typed or handwritten. Please keep a copy of your work and provide an address where we can reach you, including your legal name, ID number, and your pen name, if you want to use one.
- ▶ Please specify if you would like your submission to be returned. If so, we will make every effort to either return your work to you or to an outside contact whose address must be provided. If you do not want your work to be returned or do not specify otherwise, we will archive your work at the library.
- ▶ Submission deadlines are rolling, but we anticipate publishing a total of two more issues in 2025.
- ▶ If selected, we will write to you within 4–6 months of submission to confirm acceptance and set up payment. We offer a \$100 honorarium for each published artwork, poem, or work of fiction and nonfiction. Thank you so much in advance, we can’t wait to see your entries.

Send submissions to:

Justice Initiatives–Bridges Zine
Brooklyn Public Library, Outreach Services
10 Grand Army Plaza
Brooklyn, NY 11238

Welcome Home

Reentry support through the library

Welcome Home is a Justice Initiatives program here to provide you with comprehensive support as you navigate reentry. At the heart of Welcome Home are our Reentry Navigators, Paul Rivera and Donald Washington. Having both been through the system themselves, they know how overwhelming it can be to come home and use their own experiences and perspectives to help guide you through your own reentry journey. They'd love to connect with you ahead of your release and invite you to get in touch using the number or address below.

When asked to describe the program, Paul shares that for formerly incarcerated New Yorkers, Welcome Home is not only "a main support program but a way to restore their humanity and bring them back into society. It helps by making individuals understand that they are not alone in the process and to give them a one-on-one personal approach to help navigate the system that has separated them for so long."

"We help individuals navigate the systems and the bureaucracies they will face, moving forward," Paul explains. "We teach participants how to make meetings, we attend meetings with them to show that they have a support system. This is what the Welcome Home program is about. What they learn from us are things that will continue to guide them and keep them on the path they seek for themselves. It is not something we do that is one and done, we make sure it is something that is continuous throughout."

"What makes Welcome Home special," Donald adds, "is our focus on supporting patrons to achieve their goals. This is our primary focus. Our hope is that patrons walk away feeling empowered and capable."

"We are all committed to the work that we do," says Paul, "in our culture, in our policies and procedures. It's about giving community to one another, helping people join together in unity, I think there is strength in the way we work with each other within our team. We work with a sense of camaraderie, friendship and a common understanding that we are committed to the same cause, knowing that we are all working as one mind and one body as we help individuals not only restore their body but their minds upon returning to society. We hope to continue to expand the community one individual at a time."

Who is Welcome Home for?

The program is available to anyone directly impacted by the criminal legal system, from those arrested without charge to those who have been incarcerated for many years. People of all backgrounds, ages, abilities, and genders are invited to participate.

What services does Welcome Home provide?

- ▶ one-on-one appointments with Reentry Navigators to help you identify your needs and goals and map out your reentry journey
- ▶ guidance on housing, health, reconnecting with loved ones and more
- ▶ monthly dinners where you can join a supportive community of peers and share resources
- ▶ connections to free library services, local groups and the compassionate, dignified help you deserve

Call 929.561.9789 for more information about Welcome Home or **write to us at:**

Welcome Home
C/O Outreach Services
Brooklyn Public Library
10 Grand Army Plaza
Brooklyn, NY 11238

Telestory

Video calls through the library.

If you are in one of the following facilities and you have family in New York City, you may be eligible to join Brooklyn Public Library's TeleStory program:

- ▶ Altona
- ▶ Cayuga
- ▶ Elmira
- ▶ Fishkill
- ▶ Franklin
- ▶ Mid-State
- ▶ Riverview
- ▶ Ulster
- ▶ Washington
- ▶ Wende

TeleStory allows families to make FREE video calls to incarcerated loved ones from the comfort and convenience of a Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) branch. The program is made available as a supplement to in-person visits.

Please note:

- ▶ Video calls are for 60 minutes
- ▶ Family members must be approved by doccs
- ▶ Video calls are by appointment only
- ▶ Family members must show identification
- ▶ Video calls are a supplement to—not a replacement for—in-person visits.

Please contact your Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator (ORC) for more information. To apply, request an application from your ORC or call BPL at 718.916.9408.

News & Current Events

New Mandates at Marcy & DOCCS facilities

A number of new policies have been implemented or proposed at Marcy and all DOCCS facilities since December 2024.

Marcy Correctional Facility:

- ▶ **Employee Termination:** DOCCS Commissioner Daniel F. Martuscello announced that he has begun the termination process for all staff involved in the killing of Robert Brooks, but there have been no updates since December.
- ▶ **New Superintendent:** Bennie Thorpe has replaced former superintendent Danielle Medbury.

All DOCCS Facilities:

- ▶ **Body-worn camera policy:** Correction Officers are required to have their body cameras activated and on at any time they are engaging directly with you.
- ▶ **Surveillance cameras:** Governor Kathy Hochul has included \$400 million towards the installation of fixed surveillance cameras at all DOCCS facilities in her proposed budget, which will be finalized with lawmakers by April 1, 2025.
- ▶ **Office of Special Investigations:** Governor Hochul has also proposed adding DOCCS staff to the Office of Special Investigations and expanding the whistleblower hotline in the state budget to more effectively facilitate your anonymous tips.
- ▶ **Correctional Association of New York:** \$2 million has been proposed in the state budget for CANY to expand their ability to provide independent monitoring and oversight of New York state prisons.

Federal Oversight at Rikers

On May 13th, 2025, federal judge, Laura Taylor Swain, removed Rikers Island from the city's control and appointed an outside official—known as a “remediation manager”—to make major decisions regarding Riker's jails and work with the correction commissioner to develop a plan for improvement. We'll walk you through some frequently asked questions and what this could mean for those of you at Rikers currently reading this.

What is a remediation manager & who will Judge Swain appoint?

The remediation manager is for all intents and purposes a receiver, an external independent authority appointed by the court to manage a failing institution. Judge Swain will determine the extent of control the remediation manager will have over Rikers—their power could be all-encompassing, allowing them to hire and assign staff, negotiate contracts, determine money allocation, and could usurp the authority of unions representing correction officers. The remediation manager would return power back to the city once conditions have improved to meet the court's standards. Importantly, a remediation manager operates outside the politics and power structure of commissioners, the City Council, and the correction officers' union, allowing them to make more sweeping reforms.

Judge Swain ordered plaintiffs (Legal Aid Society) and the city government (DOCCS) to propose four candidates each for the position by August 29, from which she will ultimately choose whom to appoint.

What led us here?

In 2015, the city settled a class-action lawsuit filed by the Legal Aid Society and private law firms, over the abuses in the city's jails, including Rikers. Part of the settlement included appointing an independent monitor, Steve J. Martin, who has since noticed worsening conditions at Rikers, despite many chances given to

fix the widespread violence. In July 2023, Martin asked Judge Swain to consider finding the city in contempt followed by a call from Manhattan's top federal prosecutor, Damian Williams, for an independent authority to take over the jail from the city.

Isn't Rikers set to close in 2027?

The city announced in 2024 that they would not be able to meet the legally mandated deadline to close Rikers by 2027 and replace it with four smaller inland city jails. Regardless, Judge Swain will have to determine the improvements that need to be made before control could go back to the city.

Stay tuned for more news, including who Judge Swain appoints as remediation manager and their plans for Rikers, in our forthcoming issues.

Suspension of HALT Solitary Confinement Act

On February 27, 2025 the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement Act (HALT) was suspended in an agreement between Kathy Hochul and the union representing DOCCS workers, the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association (NYSCOPBA), after New York state prison guards went on strike from February 17 to March 10. Passed in 2022 after an intense grassroots campaign, the HALT Act limits the time an incarcerated person can spend in solitary, provides a process for disputing one's isolation, and does not allow for the use of solitary on people who are disabled, pregnant, under twenty-one, or over fifty-five years old. While there have been multiple reports of the HALT Act being insufficiently implemented before its suspension, the threat the law poses the prison system's balance of power made its suspension one of the primary demands for striking guards.

The suspension was due to expire in May, 90 days after its implementation, but prison guards continue to carry out its suspension. The Legal Aid Society filed a lawsuit challenging DOCCS "far-reaching and unlawful rollback of HALT." The case is ongoing, and we'll keep you updated in our forthcoming issues.

New York City Fair Chance for Housing Act

The Fair Chance for Housing Act went into effect on January 1st, 2025 with the intention of protecting your right to find a home in the city if you have a criminal record. It is now illegal for NYC housing providers to consider felony convictions older than 5 years and misdemeanor convictions older than 3 years when deciding on a tenant or buyer's housing application. Housing providers who use criminal background checks can only do so after reviewing the tenant or buyer's general eligibility and making a conditional offer—housing providers can review felony convictions within 5 years, misdemeanors within 3 years, and sex offenses during their background check. If the housing provider wants to revoke a housing offer after such a check they must follow the notice and process requirements of the Fair Chance Act.

Unlikely Sanctuary

By Reginald Stephens

It is never lost on me that I live in a bathroom—a bathroom that would be a half bath in a mid-range house on Zillow. Maybe about the same size of an apartment in the South Bronx. I live in a bathroom. It's a talking point I use as proof of the abnormality of life in prison. As much as it is a space that confines me, a space meant to punish me, it is my temple, where I pray, my place of reflection. It is my quiet place, the place where I sleep with both eyes closed. It is a space that has opened my eyes wide.

I have always likened prison to the housing projects of New York City—where people live in small, cramped spaces, side by side with other families packed in small cramped spaces. Some housing projects are newer, larger or smaller just like the bathrooms of prison.

While in my bathroom...

I remember walking through the hallways of my childhood where the smell of cooked food wafts through my memory like connective tissue when I smell my neighbor's amazing culinary concoctions boiling in his plastic hot pot as the aroma drifts over into my bathroom.

As an adolescent I remember Greg from the third floor blasting Parliament Funkadelic out of his window, and on the sidewalk as we danced like the ancestors. My neighbors here blast music from their bathrooms as they imbibe homemade alcoholic beverages, or cough as they smoke skinny blunts to teleport from the stresses of the day, while doing a two step in a space just big enough for three steps, creating happy hour in a place where having a good time is against the rules.

And in the place of bathrooms spontaneous violence materializes seemingly out of nowhere. It maims, cuts, scars and kills as we gossip about like pages of the New York Daily News to cope.

In my bathroom...

I tried to wallpaper away the pain of my reality. I asked my family to send me color coordinated blankets, sheets and towels. I put photos on my wall, and arranged my bathroom in what I thought a bathroom in Home and Garden might look like. I took pictures in new shirts and sneakers, smiling, posing, as if I were having a good time. A lifetime later there is no disguising or dressing up the fact that I live in a bathroom, I no longer take pictures and all my smiles are rueful.

In my bathroom is a stainless steel sink/toilet combination. I appreciate the glossy white paint on my bathroom's cinder block walls; it assists my aging eyes in seeing the stark reality of everything. I have a small gray desk, bolted to the floor, with a seat that swings out from under the desk, but for all of its compact utility, the seat is too small for my ass, but it's a great nightstand. There is a locker right next to the desk I keep my food in. When my locker is full it provides a false sense of wellbeing, but when it is empty, it represents the emptiness I feel on the inside most of the time. My bed is also bolted to the floor. It's a hard, steel frame, of which my feet hang off the end. The mattress is as thin as the car cushion I remember my Uncle Ken sitting on in the driver's seat of whatever that car was in 1969. If only I was eight years old again...

CHAPTER ONE

Quentin Lewis

The people who designed this place did so purely for the functionality of its purpose, but the longest sheets and towels were a conformity to an aspiration I never seemed to achieve among others still aspiring with sheets and towels in bathrooms. I tried to create some other reality. Avoiding the truth is a self-induced torture, as truth resides just beneath the surface of charades. Now I live my truth and it hurts less as the past becomes wisdom. I have figured out my purpose and I know how to function.

I have discarded the mask and I no longer color coordinate sheets and towels, or new shirts and sneakers. I have aged into my own skin and identity, true to my soul. It has been the most difficult simple thing I have ever done. The irony of it, maskless, I'm more out of place in a space never meant to fit anyone, yet there is always a bathroom for one more, no matter what mask you put on.

I will continue my routines and ruminations until life is no longer a place of charades in a bathroom. I socialize because it satisfies a basic human need, but often, I can't wait to be alone in my bathroom—now devoid of decorations and disguises. The walls of the bathroom are as bare as my maskless face, save the calendar that mocks me. My possessions now exist for their utility value only. When my bathroom door closes shut (it is rarely open more than a minute or two) it's the only place I feel fully in control of my time and space; it's the only place here I feel safe. It's an unlikely sanctuary.

"Where did you learn to gamble little bro ," I-Born asked Quentin.

"From watching yall in the barbershop," Quentin answered.

"What's your name," I-Born asked.

"Quentin."

"I'm going to call you Knowledge from now on. How old are you Knowledge."

"Why you asking me all these questions."

"Because I like your style little man. Your ahead of your time," I-Born said.

"I'm 13 years old," Knowledge answered.

"Do you know how much money you won so far," I-Born asked.

"Fifty six hundred," Knowledge answered.

"I aint see you count that paper yet," I-Born said.

"I did it in my head," Knowledge replied.

"You smart. I like that. I be seeing you go to school too. You know my name already. I-Born."

"Yeah I know your name," Knowledge said shaking I-Born's hand which was really rough. Probably because it was his only hand. I-Born had one arm. He blew his other arm off at the elbow from holding on a quarter stick of dynamite.

"I got to go take care of some business Knowledge. Meet me here tomorrow at the God hour. That's 7 o'clock. Alright," I-Born said.

Knowledge nodded his head okay.

"Peace young God," I-Born said.

"You owe me two hundred dollars," Knowledge said.

I-Born turned around with a slight smirk on his face and dug into his pocket using his prosthetic arm to pull out two crispy one hundred dollar bills. After handing Knowledge the money, I-Born hopped into his sky blue Mercedes Benz. Which was playing Old Dirty Bastards song "Brooklyn Zoo." I-Born rolled up the windows and peeled rubber out of the parking lot on Thurston Road and Enterprise Street.

Knowledge situated all the money he had and put it in his pocket. He hopped on his bike and rode home as fast as he could. The parking lot on Thurston Road and Enterprise was not far from where he lived on the corner of Post Avenue and Anthony Street.

Feeling the wind as he peddled down Sawyer Street and made a left down Post Avenue, Knowledge never felt so happy in his life. Six thousand dollars was the most money he ever had.

Taking his bike up the steps and down the hallway to his apartment, Knowledge was already thinking about meeting I-Born tomorrow. He heard his mom on the telephone when he put his key into the door. His mother Denise stared at him when he walked inside and closed the door behind him.

"Quentin just came in," Denise said.

Rolling his bike into the living room Denise shoved him the phone. It was his uncle Tim.

"Who is this," Knowledge asked.

"That's how you answer the phone. What you doing coming in the house at 11:30 at night. Where you been," Uncle Tim asked.

"What," Knowledge said.

"Oh you tough now huh. You getting big but you not grown little nigga. Respect my sister. Your curfew is 9:30," Uncle Tim said.

"Man go head Uncle Tim," Knowledge replied. A few weeks

ago Uncle Tim tried to discipline Knowledge for coming in the house late. Knowledge slammed him really hard for punching him in the chest. Uncle Tim backed off after seeing that Knowledge wasn't hearing him putting hands on him anymore.

"Just don't make this shit no habit. Your mother told me that you do everything else right.. I know you want to enjoy your summer off of school. Your still too young to be out in these streets late at night. All I'm saying is be on point out here. Let somebody know where your at. I want you to get a summer job. When you gone do that," Uncle Tim asked.

"Soon," Knowledge responded.

"Your mother be worried about you. I told her that your not going to be in any trouble. Don't let me down. If you need anything call me."

"Alright," Knowledge said to his uncle then hung up the phone.

Knowledge thought to himself, "was is my little brother Rommel at." He had to be in bed because if he wasn't sleep he would have been following behind him.

"Mom," Knowledge called.

"I'm in my room baby," Denise answered.

They lived in a 2 bedroom apartment. Quentin and Rommel shared the same room. Mother's room was the smallest one of the two. Knowledge opened the door and stepped inside. She was smoking a joint and painting her toe nails red. "Did anybody call me today," Knowledge asked his mother Denise.

"I'm not your damn secretary boy," Denise answered. She was 37 years old and was born and raised in Rochester, New York. Denise has two jobs. One at Wendy's and one at Duncan Doughnuts. With only an high school diploma, Denise has managed to raise three boys by hustling weed and crack on the side in her younger

days. Denise met Knowledge's father Dennis in high school. Dennis went to prison when Knowledge was only 2 years old. He remains in prison to this day.

"I know mom but you been here all day," Knowledge response was.

"Let's see Tracey, Shawn, Patricia and Erica," Denise told her son.

"That's it," Knowledge asked.

"What do you mean that's it. That's enough damn girls calling my house already," Denise said.

"Alright mom. Good looking." Knowledge said giving his mother a kiss on the cheek. While leaving out of her room she said, "I cooked your favorite. Go heat up your food and eat."

"No doubt mom," Knowledge answered. The clock on the kitchen wall read 12:43 a.m. Knowledge took the lid off the pot on the stove. It was chicken and dumplings, his favorite. He heated the stove to a light medium blaze, stirred the food and picked up the phone.

Knowledge wasn't going to call Tracey, Patricia or Erica. Their parents would have a fit. So he called his friend Shawn that he met at the Boys and Girls Club on Genessee Street and Flint Street. Knowledge and Shawn hooked up on the basketball court after dominating the competition one day like Shag and Kobe.

Knowledge dialed Shawn's number. "Hello," Shawn said.

"What's up," Knowledge asked him. Shawn knew his voice immediately.

"Nothing. Tired. I was just about to get some rest," Shawn said.

"You called me earlier," Knowledge asked Shawn.

"Yeah. I wanted to come through. I aint do nothing all day. I know we could of found something to get into," Shawn said.

"We're going downtown tomorrow. Around 11 o'clock. I'm going to ride my bike to your crib and then we're going to catch the bus downtown," Knowledge told Shawn.

"Yeah," Shawn replied.

"I got a surprise for you," Knowledge said stirring the chicken and dumplings his mother made for him.

"Oh yeah. What's that about," Shawn asked.

"I'll tell you about it on our way downtown tomorrow," Knowledge responded. He hung up the phone, stirred the food then sat at the kitchen table.

The clock on the kitchen wall read 1 o'clock in the morning. Knowledge pulled out the money he won from gabbling. He licked his thumb and index finger and began counting his money. One hundred, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred, ... Knowledge never had this much money in his young life. It made him feel secure. He knew that things would never be the same again.

The food was ready. Stirring the food one last time, knowledge turned the stove off and took out an bowl from the cabinet to serve himself. He filled his bowl up then opened the refrigerator and pour himself ice tea from a picture. He sat down at the kitchen table and dug into his food. Thinking about all of the events that occurred from yesterday.

Before leaving the kitchen, Knowledge put the pot of chicken and dumplings in the refrigerator, washed his dishes, turned off the light and went to his room.

Rommel was resting. Knowledge used the bathroom then washed his hands. Looking in the mirror he noted that he needed his hair braided. He then walked into his bedroom, took his clothes off and then jumped into the bed. He staeshed his money on the bottom side of his pillow then dreamed about being rich.

When I'm gone ... call me,
Redeemed.

Call me killer as you kill me,
Call me monster or thief,
but don't forget to call me,
Redeemed.

Call me father or son,
brother or none,
but I pray that you
will call me
Redeemed.



Am I atoned for all my sins?
Will my sorries be enough?
For anyone to call me,
Redeemed?

Return what I have stolen,
impossible, a dream.
This endless path is chosen,
A walk to be, I hope to be,
God help me be...
Redeemed.

Dyego Foddrrell

ATONED

Inresponsible

Thief

Self-loathing

Angry

Untrustworthy

Murderer

Greedy

Phoney

Manipulative

Hate

Conniving

Crazy

Liar

Envy

Unstable

Inconsiderate

Selfish

Presumptuous

Unstable

REDEEMED

Deceiver

Mr. Contrari: The Contrarian

By: Anthony Rodriguez

It was a warm and sunny day. I was sitting in one of my favorite diners when this middle-aged fellow steps up and asks me if it would inconvenience me if he sat with me for a while as he enjoyed his lunch as well. I politely invited him to sit with me, and we began exchanging pleasantries, but I remembered that I had not asked him his name. Have you ever done something that you wish you could take back but it becomes apparently too late? Well, little did I know that me asking his name would be one of those times for me. Let me recount how he chose to give me the answer to my query.

"Hello! Let me pleasantly introduce myself. My name is Henry Contrari. Why thank you! I must say that people usually tell me it sounds weird but never unique. My name is sort of the family joke, and what you may come to understand has been the family curse as well. Heh, heh I knew that would prompt you to ask me for the historic origins of my family's abnormal moniker. However, it is not a very complicated story, nor is very compellingly attention grabbing, to say the least. What? You still want to hear the tale? Well, okay, in that case, if you insist, here goes."

"When I was a youngster, I was the sort of lad who would kill and resurrect curiosity's cat constantly. I asked my grandma about our family tree, and she eagerly divulged to me the roots of my genealogy with deft aplomb. She began the tale by opening a very old tome-like photo album. She opened it to

a page that contained the depiction of a stylized tree. She explained to me how the tree contained the names of each generation of Contrari of the past and present. I was instantly fascinated and utterly captivated because I thought I had hit pay dirt."

"She steadily and carefully flipped through the album. She matched every name on the tree with the faces in the photos. I was amazed at how her memory of all these people was so crisp. It was as if the memories were freshly minted and the people in the photos were still with us today. What I remember most vividly is how with every page flipped and each photo identified, grandma would snort, giggle, snort, hrumph, sneer, grimace, mock-spit, suck-her-teeth, cringe or make some other sort of emotional classifying response but gave me no story with each response."

"I waited patiently and respectfully without interrupting her omni-spectrum type musings. Eventually, she reached the last page and finally pointed to the photo which was of my father and mother. This prompted her to shake and sniff loudly as if she was experiencing an allergic reaction to something which causes a runny nose. Then, she slammed the album shut and looked up at me exclaiming, "Finito!" She even patted me on the head like you would do to a puppy and gave me this big shit-eating grin. I call- FOEY!

"She couldn't expect me to fall at her feet in awe and proclaim her the greatest of the raconteurs ever to walk the earth. Foey, I say to the millionth power! I felt robbed without a gun. My face must have done so many flips you'd probably give me the nickname "pancake." I guess she must have noticed the affrontery I felt at that moment for being so bamboozled and hoodwinked. All she did was "tsk-tsk" at me and grabbed each of my ball-fisted hands.

"Now, I was a very well-mannered and respectful boy, especially to my elders but you can't imagine how much I wanted to kick her chair over with her still seated in it at that moment. She pulled me closer as if she was going to hug me, and I mock-resisted as I slowly inched her away. Then she asked me matter-of-factly the one question that even today perplexes me and has surely flummoxed me all of my days since then, especially, when I'm being pensive about my life's journey. But, I digress. She asked me: 'Hank, do you think that if I had truly elucidated all of our familial minutiae, it would have in any way affected the decisions which will contribute to the ultimate formation of who you will become throughout each of your tomorrows?'

"Believe me, my friend, when I looked at her, I just stared at that moment. I could not utter a reply to her most devious obfuscating avoidance. But, truly, part of me said yes because there were so many things I needed to know. I had to satisfy the portions of my being that were shaking with an unquenchable curiosity which plagues me friendishly.

"What if one of my ancestor's lives was the story which would have mentored me or sparked a legacy proudly gleaned from one of their lofty achievements? All of my childhood hero worship for fire fighters, policemen, presidents, astronauts and whatnot could have been simply found right there within my family tree. What if one of their stories was about some negative, criminal or unscrupulous act that could have taught me what path to avoid during my life's journey? Her question only incited an uncontrollable wanderlust within me to seek out

all of my family's stories which might lead me to truly become the person I'm suppose to be. I decided from that moment on that all my aspirations were limitless.

"Although, on the contrary, another part of me said no because there may have been so many things I didn't really need to know. What if finding out their stories spoiled the person I was truly destined to become because of all these lofty achievements I was expected to live up to? What if I was not allowed to find my own way in life because I had to live up to their standards only? One failure could truly have been my legacy and downfall because I would be judged throughout my days for that shortcoming.

"So, you see my friend, that witty matriarchal harpy left me a shattered puzzle to forever piece together. Her question was one definition to the genealogical characterization of my name which I have been able to mash together with my own philosophical musings. My name is truly the epitome of a proposition related to another in such a way that if the latter is true, the former must be false, but if the latter is false, the former is not necessarily true. I'm destined for a part of me to always say yes to some things. Then, in true fashion, another part of me has to say ~~no~~ ^{no}. A true rendition of the word "Contrary" if I ever heard it.

"Well, Da svidaniya, good man. I must be getting along now so I can make my appointed sky diving lesson. Live long and prosper mon frere!"

I know now what my mistake was, which leaves me conflicted inside as I was watching the strange little man walk out of the diner. Do I become an unrepentant Curmudgeon always displaying a face that says, "Stay away!" without a compromise? But, am I truly satisfied with the friendly person I am? I guess that good old "Mr. Contrari the Contrarian" has left me rightly and truly confused with no answers to my questions. I wonder if my curiosities will ever be sated. Will I finally find the answers to the many mysteries of my life?

Part of me said yes, but another part of me said no.

- Fin -

Anthony Rodriguez



June 20, 2023

PRISON DOES
(A POEM FOR SAFIRA)

By, Raymond A. Rasheed Wallace

Prison does more than confine the body; It may pervert the mind, and prove effective in caging the heart, and all it may contain of hope ambition desire aspiration fear, and intrigue.

If love is an inclination to that which is best for you, then prison will hasten you enroute, while indifferent to endure.

It fashions illusions through tightly woven threads of deprivation.

Prison neither dares nor threatens the heart against engendering anything; it only assures grief to the heart which dares.

Rather, prison is fuel, an impetus to procreate, as it simultaneously dangles the hindrance of such.

It cloaks beauty via uniforms and costumes, and reveals ugly, due to costume uniformity.

Prison does, perfect distance between the bearer of, and the product of the rib. It erects impediments, yet post awareness of abilities where none previously stood; it attempts to asphyxiate aspirations; yet cannot supplant assiduous supplications coupled with efforts.

Nor can it keep out those who want to get in.

Prison does delude them to think they are, because we were...

We will be...

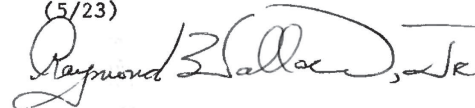
We will be...

We will be...

Despite what...

Prison does...

(5/23)



Attica By Gary "C.T." Carpenter

Lost and alone
Besides myself
Down in a hole
That's mine
Only Hell.

This pain
His Rage
That I've
Been Delt.

Fills me with
Anger

Makes me
Wanna yell.

Attica, Attica!

the end

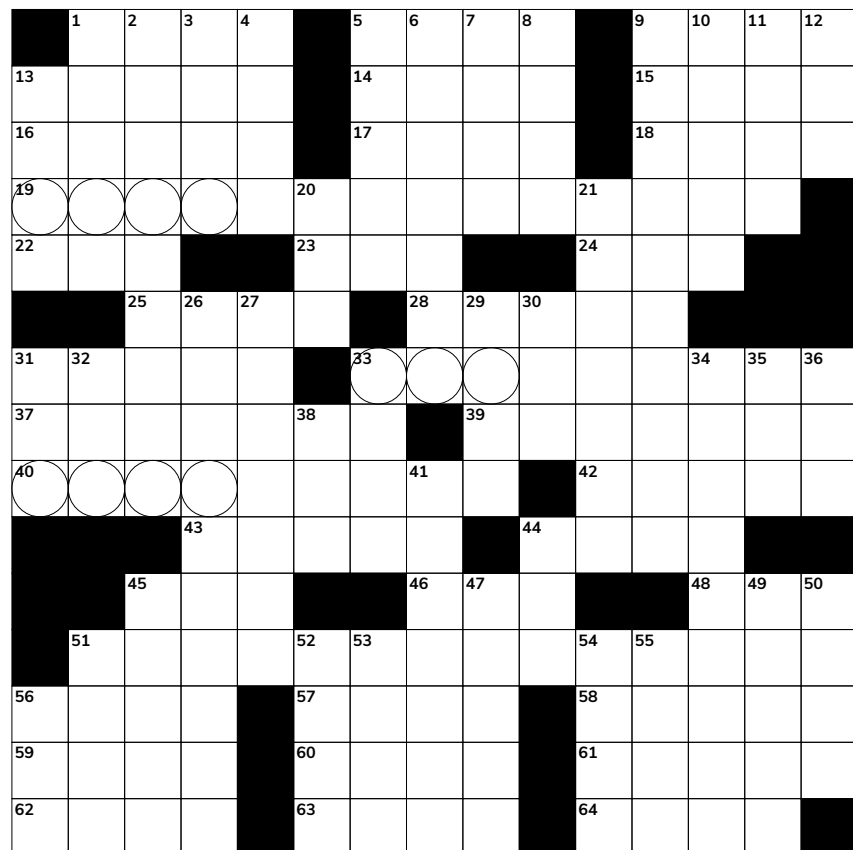


Book fair on the steps of Brooklyn Public Library's Central Library as part of the Crown Heights Cultural Festival, 1971. Source: Brooklyn Public Library, Center for Brooklyn History.

On Your Marks

Difficulty: Medium

Kate Chin Park



ACROSS

- | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Group of women who drive, for short? | 16 "That guy is such ___" ("He's so dull") | 24 "did u leave yet? what's ur ___?" | 40 They will rise catastrophically when Greenland's ice melts |
| 5 Continent with the world's two most populous countries | 17 Category of primates that includes humans | 25 First gentleman? | 42 Ana de ___ (star of "Knives Out" and "Blonde") |
| 9 State between Colorado and Nevada | 18 Drains | 28 Believer in Jah | 43 Coming ___ (growing up) |
| 13 Town boss | 19 Wire triangles with question-mark-shaped hooks on top, basically | 31 Freak out | 44 "Do ___ others as you would have them do ___ you" |
| 14 Twins, doubles, and queens | 22 Bottom seam | 33 Richly spiced Louisiana rice dish | 45 Texting abbr. for "as far as I'm concerned" |
| 15 Bong alternative | 23 Summertime astrological sign | 39 Provided the food | |

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 43 Coming ___ (growing up) | 6 Makeup chain | 44 Type of computer port |
| 44 "Do ___ others as you would have them do ___ you" | 7 Brainstorming result | 45 Answer to "Who's there?" |
| 45 Texting abbr. for "as far as I'm concerned" | 8 What the A in 1-Across stands for, for short | 47 Come to the same conclusion |
| 46 Smallish batteries | 9 Notice of potential loss to an underdog | 49 Big fluffy-faced Japanese dog |
| 48 Name that sounds like a beam of light | 10 Headwear for a beauty pageant contestant | 50 Norte, sur, oeste, ___ |
| 51 Objects at a sprinter's feet at the opening of a race ... and what 19-, 33-, and 40-Across all contain in their circled letters | 11 They run on smartphones | 51 Ooze |
| 52 What precedes Weds. | 12 1960s hit "___ So Fine" | 52 What precedes Weds. |
| 53 Place such as Jamaica or Cuba, in Spanish | 13 Word that describes speeds faster than sound | 53 Place such as Jamaica or Cuba, in Spanish |
| 54 Luxuriously leafy and green | 20 Stately tree | 54 Luxuriously leafy and green |
| 55 "I'm ___ you" ("You're not slick") | 21 Darken in the sun | 55 "I'm ___ you" ("You're not slick") |
| 56 Scores worth six 31-Down each | 26 Tactful, like an ambassador | 56 Scores worth six 31-Down each |
| | 27 Need to the point that it's painful | |
| | 29 Some movie theaters | |
| | 30 Government org. that provides loans to mom and pop shops | |
| | 31 What 56-Down each earn six of | |
| | 32 "___ you kidding me right now?" | |
| | 33 Image file format | |
| | 34 Protected by heavy metal, in a way | |
| | 35 Congressional opposite of nay | |
| | 36 Billboards and commercials, for example | |
| | 38 What ovaries produce | |
| | 41 Like beef with the lowest fat content | |

DOWN

- | |
|--|
| 1 Soup-serving spoon |
| 2 Extreme preoccupation with fire |
| 3 You might argue over whether this describes MJ or LeBron |
| 4 "\$*& I'm so frustrated!" |
| 5 Knock down a peg |

solution on page 42

Resources

Correctional Association of New York (CANY)

For New York State Prisons

CANY is mandated by law to provide independent monitoring and oversight of state prisons in New York.

About CANY

CANY is an independent non-profit organization based in Brooklyn, NY, with authority under Correction Law Section 146 (3) to provide oversight of NYS prisons. Correctional oversight aims to increase transparency of public institutions and encourage accountability for the operation of safe and humane prisons and jails.

CANY uses its unique authority to speak confidentially with incarcerated individuals and staff via in-person prison visits, surveys, collect calls, and written correspondence. CANY uses the information it collects to increase transparency and accountability, reduce harmful practices, and advocate for decreased incarceration. CANY publishes reports and data documenting conditions and trends in prisons to educate elected officials and the public.

Recent Projects

CANY conducts regularly scheduled monitoring visits to correctional facilities and publishes reports summarizing its findings. The report about a particular facility is made available in that facility's law library. In 2024, CANY published reports about Wende, Wyoming, Fishkill, Taconic, and Woodbourne.

CANY also analyzes issues that are consistently raised across DOCCS facilities. Recent projects include a systemwide survey and report about the Incarcerated Grievance Program, a review of

implementation of the HALT law, and a distance analysis highlighting how far from home people are incarcerated.

You can participate in CANY's oversight activities by completing any CANY surveys you receive and speaking to a CANY representative on a routine monitoring visit.

How can CANY help me?

CANY does not provide direct services; however, staff can sometimes make referrals to direct service providers, escalate urgent issues, and suggest additional ways to make a report about prison conditions. Individuals may request a copy of our Action Guide, which lists organizations and resources one can utilize for self-advocacy, and our Policy Agenda, in which we outline the systemwide changes we are recommending.

Contact CANY



Mondays, Tuesdays & Fridays
9 am – 5 pm
212.254.5700
CANY accepts collect calls



CANY
P.O. Box 793
Brooklyn, NY 11207
CANY accepts privileged mail

Board of Correction (BOC)

For New York City Jails

The Board of Correction carries out independent oversight and enacts regulations to support safer, fairer, smaller, and more humane NYC jails.

The Board works to:

- ▶ Ensure compliance with minimum standards “for the care, custody, correction, treatment, supervision, and discipline of all persons held or confined under the jurisdiction of the Department of Correction”
- ▶ Investigate any matter within the jurisdiction of the Department
- ▶ Review grievances from inmates and staff
- ▶ Evaluate the performance of the NYC Department of Correction (DOC)
- ▶ Make recommendations on areas of key correctional planning.

Contact BOC



Freedom Agenda

Freedom Agenda is dedicated to organizing people and communities directly impacted by incarceration to achieve decarceration and system transformation. To build power and change, we engage formerly incarcerated people and their loved ones as members and leaders who drive campaigns that utilize a range of tactics including direct action, public education, narrative change, and issue-based lobbying. We advocate to shift policy and practice towards building a City and State that invests in community resources and supportive services, to build strength and stability in communities that are too often disrupted by systems of punishment and incarceration. We are also core partners in the Campaign to Close Rikers.

If you or your loved ones would like to contact us during or after your incarceration, you can do so at:

Freedom Agenda
Urban Justice Center
40 Rector St, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10006

Books by Mail

These organizations send books to folks who are incarcerated. Whether you're reading to learn or for fun (or both!), you can send them a letter with your contact information and your book requests.

Books Through Bars | New York City, NY

When you write to Books Through Bars, it will be helpful if you can follow these guidelines:

- ▶ Mention any restrictions the facility you are housed in places on reading materials

(continued)

- ▶ Please list subjects and genres, rather than specific authors/ titles.
- ▶ We do not carry religious literature. We rarely have almanacs, materials related to computers or vocational training, or legal resource materials. But we can provide a resource guide where some of those other materials may be requested.

NYC Books Through Bars
 c/o Bluestocking Bookstore
 116 Suffolk Street
 New York, NY 10002

Books Beyond Bars | New York City, NY

Books Beyond Bars cannot fulfill requests that would be rejected under DOCCS guidelines (e.g. martial arts instruction books, books on growing cannabis, etc.)

Please limit request letters to once per month.

Books Beyond Bars
 Center for Appellate Litigation
 120 Wall Street 29th Floor
 New York, NY 10005

Beacon Prison Books Project | Beacon, NY

Incarcerated individuals can send a letter/postcard with three books they are interested in (or genres/authors they like).

Beacon Prison Books Project
 P.O Box 132
 Beacon, NY 12508

Re/Creation and Publications Accepting Submissions

While Justice Initiatives receives many incredible submissions for the *Bridges* zine, we unfortunately can't publish them all. We have included a list of additional organizations to which you might consider submitting your work.

Re/Creation

Re/Creation is a non-profit community of writers and artists with a shared vision for co-creating a world free of oppression. Members and contributors are people who have been directly impacted by the criminal legal system and their allies. We support each other's critical, creative, and artistic works, championing talented storytellers to build confidence and community. We work toward these goals through workshops in jails and prisons as well as for people returning from incarceration, an online publishing platform, speaking engagements, and connecting directly impacted thinkers and creators to relevant campaigns. If you are currently or formerly incarcerated and would like to reach out to Re/Creation about your work, you can do so at:

Re/Creation c/o John Proctor
 2900 Purchase St
 Purchase, NY 10577

Jewish Currents

Founded in 1946, Jewish Currents is a print and online magazine committed to the rich tradition of thought, activism, and culture on the Jewish left and the left more broadly. You don't have to be Jewish to contribute to Jewish Currents, and your story does not necessarily need a Jewish angle; it only needs to speak to issues of critical importance to our audience. In addition to specific Jewish communal politics and Israel/Palestine, issues we cover include mass incarceration, racial justice, strategies and horizons of

American left movements, abolitionist movements, the global rise of the far right, labor, climate, immigration, and feminism. We believe it is key to feature incarcerated writers and reporters in our pages. We prefer to review full drafts of pieces, and usually recommend pieces be around 1,000 words. Pieces should be built around a clear argument or intervention. Questions we will consider as we evaluate your pieces include, Why does this matter? Why now? And why you? View our full guidelines at tinyurl.com/jcincarceratedwriters.

Jewish Currents
PO Box 130049
Brooklyn, NY 11213

Prism

Prism is an independent and nonprofit newsroom led by journalists of color. Our reporting reflects the lived experiences of people most impacted by injustice. Prism's Right to Write (R2W) project is an editorial initiative to work with incarcerated writers in the U.S. The communities we report alongside are deeply affected by the Prison Industrial Complex and the anti-Blackness that is inherent to carceral politics in the U.S. We are looking for personal essays, op-eds, features, reported news stories, or explainers. We accept pitches, complete drafts, and as-told-to pieces. Stories must be under 1,600 words. Prism pays \$0.50/word.

Prism
1423 Broadway #271
Oakland, CA 94612

Inquest

Our content spans multiple topics related to American carceralism, the branches and manifestations of which are many. We welcome pieces offering a broad range of ideas, innovations, analyses, narratives, critiques, and insights that might help push our national conversation and actions forward. Submission formats can be

varied as well; we welcome deep dives, analyses or reflections on proposed or existing attempts at change, first-person accounts, proposals for interventions, and clarifications or illuminations about the structures underlying mass incarceration and how we talk about them. Published pieces are between 1,250 and 2,500 words, though somewhat shorter or longer pieces may be considered depending on the subject matter and execution. We currently pay at a rate of \$250 per piece.

ATTN: Inquest Submission
Institute to End Mass Incarceration
23 Everett Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Or submit editable Word documents to submissions@inquest.org

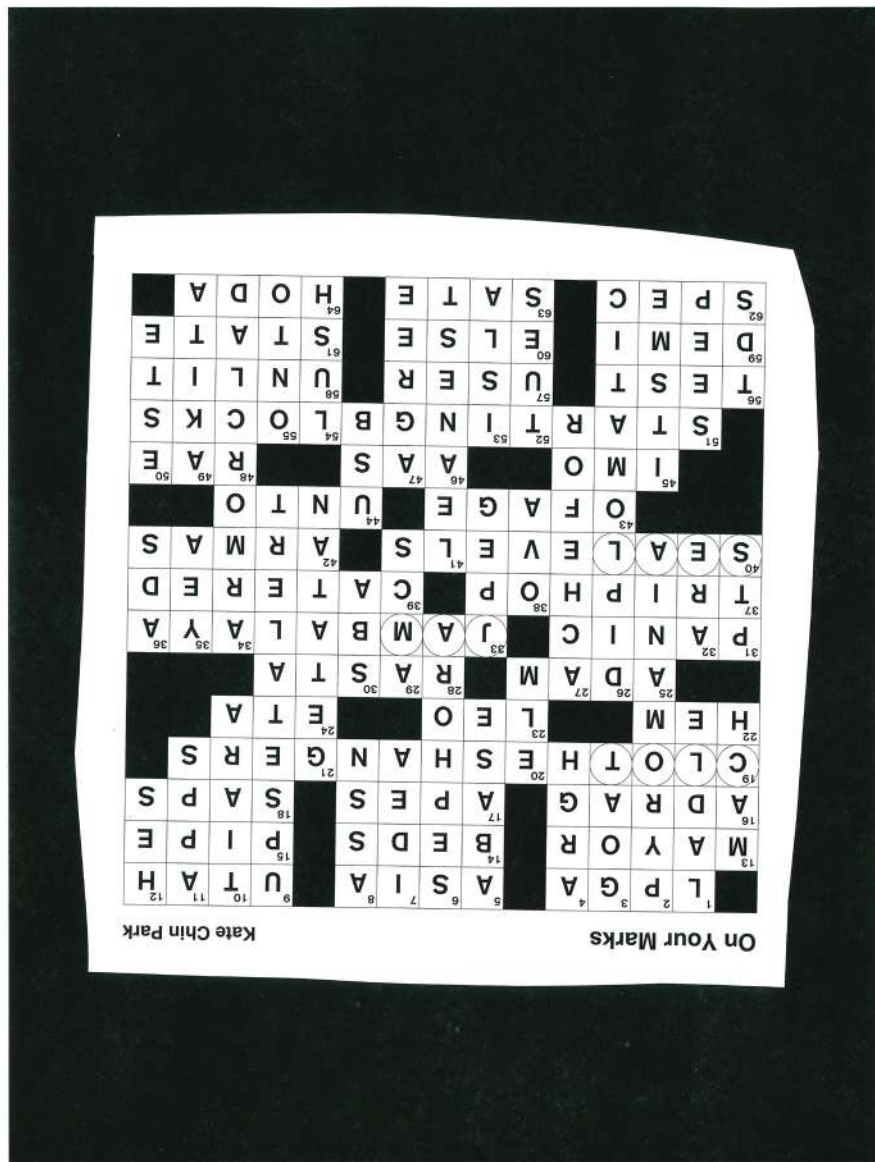
Contact Us

As library workers, we believe that access to information is your right! Have questions about something? It can be about almost anything: recipes, sports, history, nature—whatever comes to mind. Send us a letter and we'll find the answer.*

Write to us at:

Justice Initiatives
 Outreach Services
 Brooklyn Public Library
 10 Grand Army Plaza
 Brooklyn, NY 11238

*NOTE: At this time, we can only answer letters and questions from individuals in New York State. We cannot answer questions about someone's personal address or information.





Crowd on Coney Island beach at night watching fireworks display; jetty in center, June 27, 1951. Brooklyn Daily Eagle photographs, Brooklyn Public Library, Center for Brooklyn History

Presented by:

Bklyn
Public Library

**Justice
Initiatives**

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