

New Literacies for a New Millennium: Forging University/Community Partnerships

Rubin “Hurricane” Carter

Transcript of the keynote speech presented by the Center for Interdisciplinary
Studies of Writing

**Speaker Series
No. 19 ♦ 2001**

**Lillian Bridwell-Bowles,
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Preface

On March 8, 2001, over 1,200 people participated in the annual colloquium of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing. Many other campus organizations joined us in this event, as a part of the President's Sesquicentennial Series, a yearlong series to celebrate the University's 150th birthday. Our Center could find no better reason to celebrate than to focus on literacy and the role it might have in liberation and education in the 21st Century. Rubin "Hurricane" Carter was the best person we could find to help us think about the crucial role of literacy in an individual's life.

Two representatives of communities committed to literacy development joined us in welcoming Carter to the evening lecture: Tony Diggs, Coordinator of the African American Learning Resource Center, and Corinth Matera, a leader of the Women's Prison Book Project, which provides books to women in prison. Both of these leaders described the influence Carter's example has had among the people they serve.

We also used this occasion to promote future partnerships between the University and the Community. Earlier in the day at the University's new Alumni Center, Mr. Carter inspired a gathering of over 200 students, faculty, and community leaders, all of whom are interested in literacy work. At one point, a student leader volunteered 150 students to work with students in St. Paul Schools. This connection is already being forged.

We take great pleasure in sharing Carter's remarks with the participants in our colloquium. They are transcribed from his lecture, and any inaccuracies are entirely our own. The information provided in this lecture is Mr. Carter's own opinions. We hope they inspire you. Please contact us if you would like more copies of this publication.

Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Series Editor
Mesut Akdere, Editor
January 2002

Introduction by Lillian Bridwell-Bowles

Rubin Carter is NOT Denzel Washington. Let me be clear. I don't know Denzel Washington, but I have to say that I think we are extremely fortunate that we have the REAL Rubin Carter with us tonight. He is an extraordinary human being, full of passion for human rights, clear about his own self-worth, and inspiring to all who meet him.

Carter spent what he says were three life sentences in prison before he found the help he needed to prove himself innocent. While in prison, he discovered the power, the magic of the written word – devouring books and writing his own book, *The Sixteenth Round*. Never bitter about his situation, Carter chose life and humanity over despair and victimhood. His presence with us today is a triumph of the human spirit, most importantly, but it is also a triumph of literacy. One of the books Carter reports reading in prison is one that has meant a great deal to me personally – Victor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, about a Holocaust survivor's philosophy and commitment to not only surviving but prevailing.

Let me say no more. Let's give Rubin Carter center ring and center stage here at the Ted Mann Hall.

Rubin “Hurricane” Carter

New Literacies for a New Millennium: Forging University/Community Partnerships

Thank you very, very much. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, members of the faculty, members of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing, esteemed panel members, honored guests, and friends.

Having had only an eighth-grade education myself, I am always very excited when I am asked to come and speak at institutions of so-called “higher learning,” because the only degrees I’ve ever received in my lifetime were from institutions of lower learning. And when I say lower, I mean low. I got my Bachelor’s degree from streets of oppression, my Master’s degree from man’s inhumanity to man, and my Ph. D. in prison brutality. You see, so it is indeed a great honor and an extraordinary pleasure for me to be here tonight at the University of Minnesota, attempting to engage your young fertile minds, trying to supplant a new circle of ideas from which we can think from, a circle of ideas from which we can act from, a new circle of ideas which will inform our attitudes, because it is the physical body or vehicles that are the vehicles, the cars in which we matriculate life. But it is our attitude that becomes our steering wheel. So it is incredibly, I feel, extraordinarily honored to be here tonight.

And, in fact, given the nature of my history during the past sixty-four years, constantly struggling with mindless, knuckleheaded human beings, simply being human when you really come to think about that, after spending twenty excruciating years in prison for crimes that you not only did not commit, but would not and could not have committed and just narrowly escaping the electric chair, and when the black man in this country escapes a state-sponsored execution, that’s miraculous. It is absolutely miraculous. So when you really come to think about all of that, it’s a great pleasure for me to be anywhere today. Yes, anywhere today. I am a survivor – survivor of the American so-called criminal justice system, in the same way as those

who survived the awful Holocaust of Nazi Germany. Surviving in the very same death camps of Trenton State Prison, of Buchwald, of Auschwitz, of all of them. Where innocent people, millions of innocent people, were being slaughtered every single day. I am a survivor in that very same way. Only in Germany, people were jailed and slaughtered because of their religion, while in the United States of America it is because of the color of our skin. I am a survivor.

Now over the years, close to forty years, to be exact, people have said that I was a victim of racism. Movies, songs, and books, and while we're talking about movies, just let me say this. Just let me say this for a second. If anybody came here tonight, if anybody came here tonight expecting Denzel Washington up here, I apologize for that. I truly do. Because Denzel Washington can make anybody look good. Yeah, he can. When I walk down the street now, people come up to me, look at me, shake their heads and say, "You don't look like Denzel Washington." But I can't complain. I can't complain, I really can't. Because until I saw D (that's what we call him), until I saw D portraying me up there on that big screen, man, I didn't know how good looking I really was. You know what I mean? I didn't have a clue. Yeah, I didn't have a clue. Anyway, movies, songs, and books have all chronicled the racist underpinnings of my incarceration. Even the US District Court Judge H. Lee Sarokin who set me free and whose decision was upheld all the way to the United States Supreme Court, the Reagan-Rehnquist Supreme Court, ruled that my conviction was based, not upon any factual or credible evidence –

but my conviction was based simply upon an appeal to racism rather than reason, and on concealment of evidence which would have clearly shown me not to be guilty, rather than disclosure of that evidence.

So I have become, in the eyes of some people, a symbol of the criminal justice system that to this very day is undeniably infected by racism. Undeniably infected by racism. Did you

know that as of February 14 last year, 2000, that the United States now has more people in prison, behind bars, than any other country on the face of this earth. Even 500,000 more than even so-called Communist China, which has four times the population of this country. And did you know that out of those 2 million people there are 80,000 black women in prison...80,000 black women in prison. And capitol punishment in this country has turned this prison system into assembly lines of death. People are dying and being killed in this country in your name every single day. The United States is the only Western – so-called Western – industrialized nation who still insists upon maintaining the anachronism of the death penalty. And even though we understand that it is impossible to ask for a perfect punishment, which is death, coming from an imperfect system. That is absolutely insane.

And, did you know that in 1996, Congress, the President of the United States (Clinton), the House of Representatives, as well as the United States Supreme Court; passed a 1996 Anti-Terrorism Effective Death Penalty Act, and because of that Act, have taken the writ of habeas corpus from every citizen in this country? The writ of habeas corpus is the one life-affirming jewel in the crown of thorns we know as the criminal justice system. And now they've taken that away from you and because of that 1996 Anti-Terrorism Effective Death Penalty Act, one out of every three young black men in this country between the ages of twelve and twenty-seven have been tagged, just like you would go out in the jungle on a safari and tag the animals in order to keep track of them. One out of every three young black men in this country is under the control of the criminal justice system. One out of three. That's outrageous. There are more young black men in U.S. prisons than there are in this University.

So – racism, it seems – having been born black in a segregated United States sixty-four years ago, where segregation and Jim Crowism and lynching was not only the law, but also the practice – or not only the practice, but also the law. Racism, it seems, has very often been at the

forefront of my life. Very forefront. And it would have been very easy for me to be bitter over that fact. It would be very easy for me to be angry over that fact. And indeed for a long, long time I was angry over that fact. I mean, who would not be angry over that fact, where one moment you find yourself on top of the world, the number one contender for the middleweight crown, and then the next moment you find yourself dashed to the lowest levels of human existence, which is a prison. Who would not be angry over that fact? For seemingly nothing at all, only because you say that you got a right to protect yourself; people got a right to defend themselves, even if it gets, even if it's against the police. You got a right to defend yourself. Who would not be angry over that fact? And for a long time, I was angry over that fact. I was angrier than a black bear during mating season – yes, I was – who wasn't getting any. That's mad. That's mad. You can't get any madder than that. But I also came to realize, I also came to realize that there is a way for all of us to transcend this particular plague. This plague of hatred, which we call racism, but is nothing but hatred. A way for all of us to embrace our differences. A way for all of us to reach a higher level of understanding. And trust me, folks, please, trust me on this. I did not come to this realization easily. No, I didn't. I came in kicking, biting, screaming, and scratching. Because it's easy to be angry; it's easy to be bitter; it's easy to be mad. So trust me when I tell you this – if I could do it, if I could do it, then I am confident, absolutely confident, so everyone else can as well. I am absolutely confident of that.

Now, I am not naïve, folks. I really am not naïve. I mean Mrs. Carter didn't give birth to a fool. I know that peace and reconciliation are difficult, but I also know that they are possible. I know that we live in the universe of unlimited possibilities, and there is nothing that we cannot do. And my belief and understanding in these possibilities are grounded in my own experiences. You see, when I was accused and convicted of being a triple racist murderer in 1966, and then run through a very expensive machine called the criminal justice system, and coming out on the

other side of that machine as a triple racist murderer, what was I to do? What is anybody to do under those circumstances? Had you snatched up off the street? Had you been run through a court? Had you come out on the other side as a triple racist murderer, what is one to do? What is anybody to do? And this is the first moment when you must begin to respect yourself. You see, there I was, an innocent man in prison, a black man accused of killing three white people, and because of my attitude and because of my stubbornness absolutely nobody gave me any chance of ever seeing the light of day again. Nobody gave me any chance of seeing that. So my being here today is an absolute miracle. My being here today is an absolute proof that what I am saying is true.

Now let's go back to when this really, really started happening. You see, my attitude was then and still is today, that just because a jury of twelve misinformed people, misinformed based upon bought and paid for perjury coming from criminals who was simply buying themselves a way out of prison, misinformed based upon manufactured evidence that never existed at all, misinformed based upon planted evidence, misinformed based upon lie after lie after lie, just because this jury of twelve misinformed people found me guilty based upon that misinformation, did not make me guilty. And because I knew I was innocent, I had to act in accordance to what I knew rather than what other people thought or believed. So I refused to obey the prison rules, I refused to obey anything about the prison; I saw no reason why I should become a good prisoner when I hadn't been a bad civilian. I couldn't understand that. I could see no reason why I should help my keepers keep me kept when I shouldn't be there in the first place. I saw no reason why I should do that. So I refused to obey the prison rules. I refused to wear the prison's clothing. I refused to wear the stripes of a guilty person. I refused to eat their food. I refuse to work the prison's jobs, and I would have refused to breathe the prison's air if I could have done so and yet allow my innocence to remain alive. Because that's the only thing I had – my

innocence. And my stubbornness and my attitude earned me many trips to solitary confinement. In fact, I spent close to ten of the twenty years in solitary confinement, six feet under the ground in total darkness. No sanitary conditions, no running water, no lights, five slices of stale bread to eat, and a cup of water to drink...Pretty good.

As the Executive Director of the Association in Defense of the Wrongly Convicted – based in Canada, Great Britain, and here in the United States – CEO Les Owens and I recently returned from Australia where we had the privilege and honor to participate in the World Reconciliation Conference with Nelson Mandela and others. Where nations as well as individuals are looking back into their past, seeing the injustices that had occurred in the past, atoning for those injustices, so that we can move on into the 21st century as civilized human beings. Well, when Nelson Mandela was in prison on Robin Island, Nelson said that solitary confinement was the hardest part of his experience. He said, in fact, he looked forward to cockroaches walking across the prison cell so he could have somebody to talk to. Well, in the State prison in New Jersey, I met two former members so far from the State of New Jersey, one from Trenton where I spent a lot of years. Trenton State Prison was so bad that even the cockroaches stayed out of it. Yes, they did. Yes, they did. And whenever starvation did force them to come in, man, they came in armed to the teeth. Yes, they did. One time, on one of those rare occasions when I was not in solitary confinement, I heard a loud noise coming from under the iron slab that was soldered to the wall as my bed. I looked up under the bed and, lo and behold, there I saw a cockroach pull a switchblade on a mouse and take his piece of cheese. Yes, I did. Take his piece of cheese. That's how diabolical life in prison really is.

But I could also tell you, my friends, I could also tell you that strange things happen to you when you are in solitary confinement, when you're in the hole where there is no morning, noon, or night. Just different shades of darkness – lighter dark, deeper dark, darker dark, but

always darkness, where everything blends into one, where there is no schedule, no communication with outsiders, no radios or television or books. There's simply darkness, bitterness and hate. And you can imagine what hate produces. You see, any system that in any way – call the system whatever you wish to call it – it's nothing but a word. Call it democracy, call it plutocracy, call it autocracy, call it communism, call it apartheid, call it Christian, call it demo...call it whatever you want to call it. Any system that in any way discriminates, harms, injures, belittles any other human being on the face of this earth is a system of hatred. And that system of hatred can only produce hatred, because hatred is one of those phenomena that can only reproduce itself. Hatred produces more hatred. And when you have a system where people are told simply because of the color of their skin, which nobody had anything to do with, when people are told because of the color of your skin you can't live here, you can't sleep here, you can't work here, you can't worship here, you can't do all these things – that, ladies and gentlemen, is the system of hatred. And that hatred can only produce other hatred. And that's why there's so much hatred going on in our society today. Children shooting children, people bombing buildings, people murdering each other all over the place. It's because this system of hatred, which was created hundreds of years ago at a different time at a different place and for different reasons, that system of hatred is no longer relevant to the life of human beings today. And therefore that system of hatred and circle of ideas, which creates that system of hatred, must stop, because it's gotten out of control. At one point that system of hatred was only centered on Africans in this country. And now that hatred has gotten loose and is affecting everybody in this country. We've got to do away with it. We have to do away with it.

But if you spend enough time in darkness, if you spend enough time where you can see nothing, where everything just blends into one, where you, yourself, no longer exist, if you spend enough time where you hear people giving up and giving out all around you, the humiliation, the

violence – if you live, if you spend enough time in darkness, you will begin to see things more vividly than you've ever seen them before. Oh, it may take days, it may take weeks, it may take even years – but you will begin to see things, not as they appear to be in this thin film of false reality that we interact with every day, but you will begin to see things as they really are. And you will begin to see yourself as you've never seen yourself before. Because when you can't see outside, you can only look inside. And thus began my own journey of peace and reconciliation.

I learned in the darkness of dark that we do not live here on this planet, on a cold dead planet. No, sir. This planet is alive and this planet is intelligent and this planet is magical – very, very magical. There is nothing that we cannot do on this planet. There is nowhere – we don't have to go anywhere to get what is necessary for us to be all that we can be. We already have it – every one of us already has it. We just have to access it. And our access to all the magic to all that exists in this universe is only through ourselves. And that's why every religion ever created and ever placed on this earth, no matter what religion it is, the underlying principle of every religion on this earth is "Unto thy own self be true." Know thyself. Know thyself. And I'm telling you, that's exactly what we don't know. We don't know a single thing about ourselves. We know more about our televisions and our cars and our lawnmowers and our computers and all our DVDs and all that kind of stuff. But we don't know a single thing about ourselves.

We've been told that we evolved from the animal kingdom, that we exist one branch above the chimpanzee. That's a lie. We did not come up from the animal kingdom. You see, when you come up from the animal kingdom, you're in the wrong place. You're down looking up. And when we say that we come from the animal kingdom that justifies our bestiality towards one another. That justifies our animalistic behavior towards one another. We did not come from the animal kingdom. We come from the sun. We don't even come from this earth; we come from the sun. We are seeds; each one of us is a seed of flowers planted in organic life on earth

with the capacity and the capability to grow taller and stronger and wiser than any old tree has ever grown on this earth. And we don't have to go to Tibet to get it. We don't have to go to Jerusalem and the Wailing Wall to have it. We don't have to go to Mecca to get it. We don't have to go anywhere; we already have it. Right now. We have within us the ability right now to achieve the greatest miracle on this planet. And that's the return of our humanity from living death. And that's why you young people need to know who you really are and what you really are, so that you won't be hoodwinked and bamboozled.

Now, hoodwinked and bamboozled, that is true. That is the absolute truth. We are hypnotized on this planet. Every one of us is under the patrol of Kundalini, under the patrol of hypnotism. You see, Kundalini was a magician who lived eons ago, and Kundalini was also a shepherd. And he had problems because the sheep kept running away. The sheep didn't like the fact that all Kundalini wanted was their wool to get rich and eat their meat to get fat. So those sheep were smart. They ran away. So Kundalini had a problem. So Kundalini thought about his problem and one day he solved it. He gathered all of his sheep together and he hypnotized his sheep. Yes, he did. He said, "You are no longer a sheep," he told one of them. "And I don't want your wool or your meat to eat. You are now a lion. You are the king of the jungle." And to another sheep he said, "You are tiger. You are the queen of the jungle." And to another sheep he said, "You are a wolf," to another, "You're a bear," to another, "You're a elephant," to another, "You're an eagle," and on and on and on until after awhile Kundalini had no more problems with his sheep running away. They just sat there and waited for him to come and shear their wool to get rich and eat the meat to get fat.

Well, we ourselves are under the power of Kundalini. And we see Kundalini everywhere in nature even. Even in nature we can see the hypnotism that's going on. We can see where the animals can become a leaf on a tree or a rock on the ground or a log laying on the ground. We

have the chameleon nature to become other things other than we are. Even Mother Nature herself can be looked at as a beautiful woman standing in front of a big looking glass, changing costumes all the time, from spring to summer to fall to winter, from storm, from hurricanes to tornados. Always trying to be what you are not. That's hypnotism. When we try to identify ourselves or to identify someone else, how do we do that? We identify them with words. We say, "I am a man. You are a woman." Or "I am a female and you are a shemale." Or "I'm black, I'm white, red, brown, yellow." Or "I'm Christian, I'm Muslim, I'm Jewish, I'm a Holy Roller, I'm Episcopalian." "I'm Democrat, I'm Republican, or I'm Independent." We say nothing but words. We are mesmerized by words and images. Walk with me on this one. Let's think together. This beautiful theater. What is real about this theater and what is not? Do you understand the question? What exists in this theater and what does not exist? What is the truth of this theater and what is the lie of this theater? What is real in this theater and what is not? You understand the question? OK, we say, all right, hey man, this is wood – that's real. And if you run into that cement over there, well, you know it's real. Or if you fall off from that balcony up there, you know it. So this must be real, the brick, the mortar, the steel. This must be real. But is it really real? We can call in the bulldozer right now and an hour later tear this whole building down, where it does not exist anymore. We could put a condominium here, a swimming pool, or a golf course. You could put anything here, but this building will no longer exist. So this building is transitory; it is an image. It can be moved. So this brick and steel and mortar are not real because they can be gone in two seconds. So what is real about this building? We see that the brick and mortar is not real. What is real about this building? And what is real about this building is the idea that created this building. That idea will last forever and ever. That idea will last for eternity. So it is the invisible idea that is real and the visible not real. You see, everything we see in life is nothing but images. They are visible manifestations of invisible

ideas. It is the invisible that is real and not the visible. It is the invisible and not the visible. You see, along with that hypnotism we have become hypnotized by three specific words. And these three words have caused us a great deal of problems in lives. And that one word is the thing called “time.” Is there such a thing called time? Or is time simply a man-made creation in order for men to do sensible work? You see, when you are sent to prison for triple life, as I was sent to prison – triple life, I mean, triple life, I mean – give me a break. You know, maybe this fascination of sentencing people to multiple life sentence, maybe that has something to do with the Dred Scott decision of 1857. Do you remember that decision? The Dred Scott decision, where the United States Supreme Court ruled that Africans in this country were only three-fifths of a human being. Do you remember that decision? Do you know about that decision? Well, maybe the Supreme Court justices – in sentencing and upholding the sentencing of people multiple life sentences – maybe the Supreme Court justices thought that that two-fifths of the three-fifths of a human being, perhaps that two-fifths that the black folks didn’t possess belonged to the feline family, the cat family with nine lives. Because I knew all I had was one life to live. Freedom. There’s no such thing as freedom. It does not exist. It cannot exist. The only thing that exists – you see today is what it is because yesterday was what it was. And if today is what it is because yesterday was what it was, then tomorrow will be exactly what we make of today. So what we have rather than time is the eternal “now.” That’s all that exists on this planet – the “Eternal Now.” Tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, ten years from now, will still be now to us. So there’s nothing but “now.” And that’s one of the words that we’ve been hypnotized with.

Another word is “freedom.” Everybody’s looking for freedom. And everybody’s seeking freedom. But has anybody ever attained freedom? No, ‘cause freedom does not exist. We live in a concentric universe – worlds within worlds within worlds within worlds, all the way

from the outer galaxy to a little drop of dew, worlds within worlds within worlds. So rather than "freedom," what we do have is "free from." We can be free from poverty, we can be free from illiteracy, we can be free from drug infestation, we can be free from crime, we can be free from sickness; we can be free from, but there's no such thing as freedom. It doesn't exist. When I went to prison in 1966, my daughter was three years old. And she and her mother were coming to visit me in prison through a thick bulletproof glass and telephone receivers in the ear, once a month. And after one particular visit, my daughter looked up at me – she was six years old at this time, my daughter looked up at me through this thick bulletproof glass and said, "Daddy, why can't you come home with us?" Now that hurt me; that really hurt. Because how was I to explain to this six-year-old child what prison is really about? That prison is here for one of two reasons – to keep you here for as long the system has sentenced you there for, or, if you don't wish to stay there, to murder you, to kill you, and to justify in the morning's paper. How could I tell this child that? How could I explain to this child that I didn't just abandon her and her mother, that I just didn't go out one day to the candy store and didn't return for the next nine or ten, twenty years. What can I say to this child? So that disturbed me so much that when I went back to my cell that night, for the first time ever, a poem came to me. I'd either written or helped to write five different books, but only one poem, because it takes a different action to write a poem than it does to write a book. And I entitle this poem "Freedom." And it goes like this:

A little child once said to her father,
 "Tell me, sir," asked she,
 "What is the meaning of freedom?
 And what is liberty?"
 "Oh, they're one and the same, my daughter.
 But only two ways to say one word.
 But for better answer, to out and catch yourself a bird."

The little child did as her father instructed, successfully and full of pride.
 She brought a sparrow into the house and sadly watched it die.
 The child then turned to her father with teardrops on her face.
 "Why did my sparrow die, sir? Didn't he like this place?"

“That’s not the point, my daughter,” said the father to his child.
“And I say to you in these few words.
No man knows what freedom is,
but the lack of it killed that bird.”

You say to me, we got to be free from. And in order to be free, you got to be able to do. And in order to do, you’ve got to have power. And in order to have power, you’ve got to know yourself. Because that’s where all the power lies – right in yourself. It does not lie in the school, it does not lie in the church, it does not lie in the White House or the Vatican. The power lies in you. And you need to access that power.

The third word that causes a great deal of problems every day and a word that we are all hypnotized by is this word called “racism.” “Race-ism,” this word affects everybody. Every human being, particularly in this country, in this Western world, it affects everybody. Because when members of the white tribe hear this word racism, they stand up and say, “I had nothing to do with that. I had nothing...don’t, don’t put that on me. I had nothing to do with that. Although I may have benefited from it, I had nothing to do with it myself.” And when black people hear this word racism, we duck. Oh, yeah, ‘cause we know where it’s coming to. But is there anything such as racism? Is it? I mean, racism did not just fall out of the sky, folks. And nor was it secreted by insects. Racism is a man-made thing. And this man-made thing is financed, supported, and controlled by the government, by the schools, by the churches, by Congress, by the Representatives, by everything in this society that is....This racism is perpetuated. And it’s perpetuated from generation to generation to generation. “Cause little children are not born, not one person on this earth, is born hating another person. Not one person is born doing that. But we are conditioned to hate other people. When there’s really no such thing as racism, what we have? Ladies and gentlemen, what has affected us so deeply is not racism, but tribalism. That’s what we have on this planet Earth – Tribalism. We have six dominant tribes of human beings on

this planet. Six dominant tribes. And within those tribes, we have sub-tribes. Take the white tribe, for example, who's on top of the world at the moment. But they haven't always been on the top of the world, and they won't always be on the top of the world. And in this white tribe we can see the sub-tribes and the inner tribes. We have the English tribe, we have the French tribe, we have the German tribe, and we have the Irish tribe...tribes. All those are inner tribes. And we can also see from this white tribe, that even the white tribes don't get along with one another. Because the English don't like the French, and the French don't like the Germans, and the Germans don't like anybody. You see? So, these are internal tribes. But one thing the white tribe does have...they have unity. Because when another tribe attacks any member of the white tribe, the white tribe members put their differences aside and they team up and kick the dookie out of anybody else who's attacking them. These are the members of the white tribe.

And then we have the yellow tribe, which is threatening the white tribe these days. Oh, yeah, the yellow tribe certainly has more people than the white tribe has. And if it weren't for the fact that the white tribe possesses all of this massive destructive power, the yellow tribe would run over the white tribe. But the white tribes do have these massive destructive powers, and they will use them. Just check our Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And then we have the red tribe, which has almost been completely decimated from the face of this earth, who was also in control of this planet at one time, and will again. And then we have the brown tribe, and then we have the black tribe. The black tribe who was not only almost decimated from the face of this earth, but whose history, whose language, whose religion, whose culture has been totally, totally deducted from our brains. We don't understand anything about ourselves. In fact, every member of the black tribe that is born on this planet, the first thing we know, the first thing we know, even before we know our ABCs, the first thing we know – that if you're white, you're all right. If you're yellow, you're mellow; if you're brown, you can stick around; but if you're

black, get back, get back. Every child in this country goes through that in its brain, every single child.

And then let's go to the sixth tribe. The sixth tribe is a conglomeration or mixture of all other five tribes. So that's what we have on this planet earth. Six dominant tribes of human beings are in a state of competition. In a state of competition for what? For the earth's wealth. For the minor rights. For the control of it, for the right to live as a decent human being. That's what we're talking about here, you see? That's what we're talking about here. That's all. And if we begin to look at these six dominant tribes as teams, as football teams, baseball teams, hockey teams, or like that, then we will be able to see quite differently than we've seen before. We won't look at racism and feel the hatred and the hurt and the pain from that racism; we'll know that here's six teams, and if the black team is not strong enough, it means, if the black team is not strong enough, then whole black team needs to be strong enough to do for themselves. Just as the white team does for themselves, the yellow team does for themselves, the brown does for themselves. If we begin to look at this in a very real sense, all that hurt and pain about being black in America will fall off us, fall off us, and we'll be able to stand up, stand up like we are.... See, because any time a black person gets the opportunity to do anything in this society, anything, man, we take it and go. We take it and, vroom – run with it. Any time we get a chance to play golf – look out, Tiger Woods. Any time we get a chance to play tennis, watch out, Serena Williams, girls. No, any time we get an opportunity to do anything, we take it and run. But you know what? If we take these six dominant tribes of human beings and break them down into individuals, we would then be able to see what we are doing to ourselves and someone else. We would then be able see where our problems really lie. Six human beings, trapped in happenstance, because not one of us on this earth had anything to do with being born on this earth. You understand that? None of us had anything to do with being born, and we had nothing

to do to being born to the parents that we were born to. And we had nothing to do with what position in life our parents held when we were born to them. We had nothing to do with that, and therefore we are all here by happenstance:

Six human beings trapped in happenstance
 In the black and bitter cold.
 Each one possessed a stick of wood,
 Or so the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs.
 The first woman held hers back.
 For of all the faces around the fire,
 She noticed that one of them were black.

The next man looking 'cross the way
 Saw not one member of his church,
 And couldn't bring himself to give
 The fire his stick of birch.

The third man sat in tattered clothes;
 He gave his coat a hitch.
 "Why should my stick of wood be put to use
 To warm the idle rich?"

The rich man just sat back and thought
 Of all the wealth he had in store,
 And how he could keep what he had earned
 From the lazy, shiftless poor.

The black man's face bespoke revenge
 As their fire faded from sight,
 For all he saw in his stick of wood
 Was a chance to spite the white.

The last man in this forlorn group
 Did naught, except for gain,
 Giving only to those who gave
 Was how he played the game.

Their logs held tight in death's still hands
 Was proof on human sin.
 They didn't die from the cold without –
 They died from cold within.*

* Poem written by James Patrick Kinney

You see, that's what we are doing to ourselves. We are dying from the cold within. You see, the inside is like the outside, and the outside is like the inside. If we see around us poverty, illiteracy, drug infestation, criminality, homelessness – if we see all of that in our society, then it means that inside of us there's criminality, there's homelessness, there's hatred, and there's pain, because only the inside is being manifested on the outside.

I came to realize that there is no such thing as racism because there is no such thing as race. I mean, even the word racism presupposes and then interjects the idea that there is more than one race of people on this planet. There is not. There is only one race of people on this entire planet called Earth – the human race. And we all belong to that; we all belong to that – one race, one people. Yes. One race, one people, one spirit, one love. One spirit. One spirit, in dividing itself up, gives birth to all the souls that struggle in the universe. One spirit, one life, one love. And maybe I felt this way because I could no longer see my own skin, you know? And if you can't see your own skin for long periods of time, or you can't see your own skin colored, then you can no longer be black. And if I was no longer black, then others could no longer be white. And if there was no white or black or brown or yellow or red as races, you understand the question? As races...if there's no white, black, brown, yellow, red as races, then there are no races. There's only one race, and that's the human race. I came to learn that the things that divide us as nations as well as individuals – race, religion, politics, ethnicity, class, and gender – all of these things are very superficial. All of these things are as transitory as is this building. We do have the same blood coursing through our bodies. We all have the same veins, the same tissues, and the same tendons. But what unites us, what unites us in this miraculous gift called life – the need for compassion, the desire to help another soul, the simple gesture of human kindness. These acts of bravery are far more powerful than anything else. We can find reconciliation with our enemies, but we can only find peace within ourselves. You see, hate put

me in prison, and love busted me out of there, busted me out of there. You see, love is the cure for all people, all people for those who give it and those who receive it. If but that one virtue, love, could be made universal, the kings and the queens, the presidents and the dictators of the world would have no battlefields. The heads of families would attempt no usurpations. Rulers and ministers would be gracious and loyal. Fathers and sons would be kind and filial. Brothers would be harmonious and easily reconciled. Humankind in general, loving one another, the strong would not prey upon the weak. The many would not plunder the few. The rich would not insult the poor, and the noble would not be insolent to the mean, and the deceitful would not impose upon the simple. The myth of racism is still the scourge in our lives, but we can transcend that. We can transcend that. There is such a thing as higher mind. It does exist. There is such a thing as spirit; there is such a thing as a Creator. There are all of these things. We live in a magical...you are rarities, all of you. Every one of you is the rarest thing on this planet Earth. You are miracles, and you must understand that. You are rarities. Let's take a painting by Rembrandt or a bronze by Degas or a violin by Stradivarius or a play by Shakespeare. Now, all of these things have great value because their creators were masters, and masters are indeed few in number. But there's more than one painting by Rembrandt, there's more than one bronze by Degas, there's more than one play by Shakespeare, there's more than one violin by Stradivarius. Now on that fact alone, you are the rarest entity on this entire planet, because there's only one of you. Only one of you. Never in all of the foundations of this earth has there ever been anyone here just like you. And never till the end of time will there be another one here just like you. But we are shown no appreciation of our uniqueness, none whatsoever. Because we've been told to place all of our trust, to place all of our belief, to place all of our love elsewhere, other than here to ourselves. This is where it all belongs, to yourself, because you are the most important thing on this planet. It is only through self that you are able

to do anything. So what I really want to talk to about tonight is what I learned in the darkness of dark is the power of personal worth. The power of personal worth working together for success. You young people must get involved in every aspect of this system. You must get involved, and you must bring your freshness, bring your fresh compassion. Shame us old fogies for doing what we've done to you, for leaving the legacy that we're leaving you, where people hate one another, don't even know one another and yet hate one another. That's horrible. So, the power of personal worth, working together for success. Overcoming adversity and then going the distance – going the distance between what you start out doing and what you end up with. Because a lot of people struggle, struggle all their lives to climb the ladder of success only to find it leaning against the wrong wall. You know what I mean? So you've got to end up doing exactly what you started out doing, because there are no straight lines in the universe. Did you know that? There are no straight lines in the universe. Everything in the universe is circular, from the outer galaxy to a little drop of dew is circular. There are no straight lines in the universe. And that's why there's no straight road to success. It doesn't happen. There will always be curves called failures, loops called confusion, speed bumps called friends, and red lights called enemies, caution lights called family. And you'll always have flat tires called jobs. Yes. But if you have a spare tire called determination, an engine called perseverance, and a driver called consciousness, you will indeed reach that place called success. You can do it. I learned in prison in the deeper darkness of dark the answer to prayer. I mean, I was a prayer in prison. I prayed, ooh, did I pray, you know? But first I had to know whom I was praying to. So what is prayer? What is prayer? Prayer is a lower level begging, screeching, trying to bribe a higher level, the Creator or God or whatever it is that we are praying to, to come down from that higher level and act on our behalf on this lower level. We don't ask God or the Creator or whomever we are praying to lift us up to the higher level. No, we want to him to come down and act on our

behalf. And that's why it's so difficult to get an answer to prayer, because the Creator says, "No, I'm not coming down there, with those crazy human beings, being human." So I learned that the answer to prayer is that you must act like you already have what you as yet have not. And you will have it. You understand that? You got to act like you already have what you as yet have not, and you will have it. In prison I had to act like, every single second I had to act like I was free even though my physical body was in prison. I had to act like I was free every single second, and if I act like I was free every single second, I will be free, and I am free. It works. It works. It works. It works.

So...going the distance. But I also have to tell you, and I have to tell it to you straight. When I was a professional prizefighter, when I was prizefighting, I never liked going the distance. I would rather get those fights over with quickly as I can, you know what I mean? They didn't call me "the Hurricane" for nothing. No, you see, going the distance meant that judges and referees got to decide whether you had won or lost the fight. And quite frankly I would rather make that decision for them. No dancin', no shuckin', and no jivin'. I wanted the quick and easy way out. But sometimes your opponent refuses to give up, refuses to give in, and refuses to give out, and you have no choice. You got to go the distance. So what does "going the distance" mean? It's a common enough phrase. And we hear it all the time. But is it something that applies only to prizefighters and to long distance runners? Or is it a concept that has universal application? And then again, what is the distance anyway? You know what I mean? That's got a measure out. What is the distance anyway? Well, the dream and dare to dream, folks. Dare to dream, because what is a dream but hope, and hope but a dream. And that once you have a dream – once you have some hope, once you have an aim, once you have a direction – only then, only then can you have a permanent right and a permanent wrong. A permanent truth and a permanent falsehood, a permanent good and a permanent bad. Because if

you don't have an aim, if you don't have a direction, if you don't have a target, if you don't have a goal, then your right and wrong, truth and falsehood, good and bad is as aimless as you are. So you got to have a goal. Because once you have a goal, only when you have an aim, can you then have a permanent truth and a permanent falsehood, a permanent right, a permanent wrong, a permanent good and a permanent bad, because everything that helps you to accomplish your goal to achieve your aim, to go towards the direction of your target is good, is right, and is the truth. And everything that saps your energy that takes you away from your aim that deters you from your goal is wrong, is a lie, and is bad. So only when you have a permanent aim can you then have a permanent right and a permanent wrong, a permanent truth and a permanent right. So dare to dream, dare to dream. And the dream of every prizefighter and of every professional and of every salesperson, no matter what you're selling, the dream of every professional is to become the champion of the world. That's our collective dream. (And I need some more water.) That's our collective dream. And the distance of a championship fight, at least during my prize fighting career, was fifteen (thank you, my love) yes, was fifteen three-minute rounds of unmitigated fury. That's what I was training for. That was the life and breath of my existence. But then a strange thing happened to me on the way to the Championship of the World. Unbeknownst to me, the rules were changed. And the fight was extended beyond fifteen rounds.

The distance was now three lifetimes in prison, and the odds against my surviving it were so great that the handicappers in Las Vegas wouldn't even touch them. So the question then becomes, when the rules change, and you know the rules are changing all the time, every time you think you got it made, they change the rules on you. All the time. So when the rules change in any endeavor, whether it be prizefighting, shining shoes, or whatever it may be, when the distance suddenly seems impossibly far, what do we do? What do we do? I mean, it's easy enough to just throw in the towel, to call it quits. That course of action, or rather that course of

inaction or reaction is almost irresistible. We become overwhelmed by a sense of personal powerlessness, apathy, and even despair. Did you hear the one about the polltaker who was polling this very affluent community, asking the question, "What is the greatest problem in the world today: Is it one of ignorance or is it one of apathy?" And this very distinguished homeowner, standing in the doorway with his smoking jacket on slammed the door in the polltaker's face and shouted, "I don't know and, damn it, I don't care." But isn't that why things never change, why things never get done? Today there is no social emotion more prevalent than that of personal powerlessness. And that is truly disturbing. You see, I know about powerlessness. There is no place on earth where that's more evident than in the prison. I lived it and I know what it does to people. It makes us feel fearful and angry. And today everybody seems to be afraid of something, afraid of losing your job, afraid of immigrants, afraid of crime, afraid of drugs, afraid of AIDS, afraid of toxic air and contaminated water, afraid that we can't make our mortgage payment or meet our car loans, afraid that our children's lives will be worse off than our own, afraid of even being afraid.

Well, in this darkness of dark, I've learned that our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate. No. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond belief, that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light and our darkness, which most frightens us. We say to ourselves, how can I be a miracle when I am shackled by debt and don't know from where tomorrow's bread's gonna come. How can I be talented when I'm a failure at even the most menial task? How can I be brilliant, how can I be fabulous, how can I be all these things? The question is, how can you not be all of those things? How can you not be perfect? This is not a universe that is on the road towards perfection. Everything in this universe is perfect now. You are perfect now; you just don't know it. You just don't know it. So...I want talk to you about the magic, the invisible magic that is in this room right today. That if we were able to release from all of

this excess baggage that we carry around with us, that I'm a man, that I'm a husband, that I'm a wife, that I'm a girlfriend, that I'm a boyfriend, that I'm a captain, that I'm a doctor, that I'm a judge. All that's excess baggage. It all means nothing. And if we were able to get rid of that, if we were able to put that excess baggage down at the door before we walked in here, everybody in this room would be levitating right now. Because all that heavy stuff would be gone from you. It is worthless. It means nothing whatsoever. Dare to dream.

You see, during my thirteenth year in prison, I received a letter. I just want to show you the magic that exists, and it's no accident, not at all. I received a letter written by a sixteen-year-old boy who had just been rescued from the mean streets of Brooklyn's worst ghetto the year before. He had been brought to Toronto by a group of Canadian friends who informally adopted and educated him and provided him with a safe environment. Lezra was his name. Now at the age of fifteen, just one year earlier, Lezra had been third in his grade ten Brooklyn classes of forty – third. He was considered to be an honor student and these Canadians were absolutely dumbfounded when they listened to his dreams and realized this youngster will never be able to accomplish his dreams because he was totally and utterly illiterate. He couldn't read or write. He couldn't speak a single word of Standard English. Although every day in school he was made to pledge allegiance to his flag. Now, Lezra's dream – and he dared to dream, dared to dream – don't let anybody stop you from dreaming. Lezra's dream was to become a lawyer. Now he really didn't know what lawyers did. All he knew was that lawyers got paid a great deal of money when people were in trouble. And in his world, and in my world as well, everybody was always in trouble. So Lezra's chances of needing a lawyer were far greater than his chances of ever becoming one. You know what I mean? Now, I mention Lezra's story for good reason. Not only because he became like a son to me, and along with his Canadian family, were instrumental in helping me to obtain my freedom, but because what happened to me and Lezra

demonstrates a very important ideal. Access to opportunity is the key. Access to opportunity is the key. But Lezra is the first to admit that had he not been brought to Canada and properly educated there were only three options open to him in the ghettos of Brooklyn – to be murdered on the streets, to be strung out on drugs, or to be locked up in jail. Not particularly a broad range of career opportunities, hey?

So when I say to you access to opportunity is the key, I mean that literally. Seizing upon the opportunity, not letting it pass you by. Don't let that opportunity pass you by, because if you let an opportunity pass you by, in one moment of time, since that one moment of time is also one moment in eternity, you've not only missed that opportunity at that moment, but you've missed that opportunity for eternity. So seize the opportunity. Not letting it pass you by is absolutely vital and necessary in dealing with the power of personal worth. Opportunity. Opportunity. Speaking about opportunity, I'm getting ready to close down now, folks. Speaking about opportunity, as I stand here right now, I remember the night I had my first professional bout. I didn't come prepared to fight, no; I was sitting in the audience, just like you, as a spectator. I had a hot dog in my mouth, a soda pop in my hand, and I was looking at a very beautiful young lady sitting in front of me. Man, I was enjoying myself. When suddenly my manager came running up to me and shouted, "Quick, I got a fight for you. You're up next." Well, now I may have had a full stomach, and that's exactly the way to go into a fight, but this was my chance to become a professional, and I was hungry. Running back to the dressing room, I realized I had no boxing gear and no equipment. So I hurried and borrowed boxing trunks from this fighter, shoes from that fighter, and other equipment from other fighters. And when I finally put it all on together, I looked like a psychedelic accident. Yes, I did. Yes, I did. I was wearing red shoes, purple trunks, green socks, with a baby blue robe, with a wad of toilet paper stuck between my lips for a mouthpiece. People in the audience started falling out of their chairs. They started

rolling in the aisles when I came bouncing down the aisle, carrying my own water bucket, and looking ridiculous. But I didn't have time to ponder my looks, no; I climbed into the ring amidst the hoots and jeers, the laughter and ridicule. But it didn't bother me a bit. This is what I had been dreaming of. This is what I had been working towards for years.

This was my amazing grace, this was my opportunity, my access to opportunity, and I wasn't about to let it pass me by. No, sir. Now, my opponent, and I still remember his name – Pike Reeve – was sharp. He was color coordinated and he was slick. And nobody was laughing at him. In fact, he was laughing at me too. Yes, he was. But I whooped his butt. Yes, I did. I won the fight. Yeah. You know? I won the fight. Now, that was the triumph of substance over form – a subject that great philosophers have studied forever, and I learned it from boxing. Substance is always more powerful than form. Substance is always more powerful than form. Dare to dream, ladies and gentlemen. Dare to dream. Because even lost dreams, old-timer, you know what I mean? When we get to be my age, we kinda don't wanna dream anymore, do we? Dare to dream, my brother, because even lost dreams maybe are not always lost. You understand me?

Thirty-six years after my career as a prizefighter was over, thirty-five years after everyone thought that I would spend the rest of my life in prison for crimes that I didn't commit, for the first time in pugilistic history, the World Boxing Council and the World Boxing Association awarded me with the middleweight championship belts of the world. Dare to dream, ladies and gentlemen. Dare to dream. Dare to dream. Dare to dream. And in September of 1994, I was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Dare to dream, ladies and gentlemen; dare to dream? This belt, this belt... These belts, yeah, yes, yes, these belts, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Dare to dream. Dare to dream. Dare to dream. Please sit down, sit down. Dare to dream, dare to dream. Thank you. You see, these belts, ladies and gentlemen, these belts are

symbols of that great victory –the victory of substance over form. It just goes to show that if you don't give up, if you don't give in, and you don't give out, if you keep on stumbling, keep on bumbling, no matter what the odds are, no matter what the circumstances are, no matter what the obstacles are – 'cause obstacle are not placed in front of us to stop us, but simply to make us stronger for the next obstacle to come. Because life is an obstacle course. But if you don't give up, if you don't give in, and you don't give out, if you keep on stumbling, keep on bumbling, chances are you may stumble up on something when you least expect it. But have you ever heard of anybody stumbling up on anything while they were sitting down? Get up. Wake up. And remember. Do all things with love. Love for yourself, love for all others, and love for the Creator. Thank you very much.