

A Reading Guide for Youth with Incarcerated Parents

This is a guide to readings written by inspiring black men and women whose lives have been touched by incarceration in some way. Daniel Beaty is the child of an incarcerated parent. Kemba Smith personally experienced imprisonment. Hill Harper views mass incarceration as an issue in which every American should become involved and work to correct, and like Smith, believes especially so in cases of long sentences for non-violent crimes. If you have read a similarly inspiring book and would like to share a 300-400 word inspiring author biography to be added, please email your submission to: scholarchipsfund@gmail.com This guide also includes practical resources relevant to the lives of scholars' family members, such as books on how to find employment after prison and on re-integration into society post-incarceration.

Daniel Beaty nearly went to prison before he was born. His pregnant mother was caught with heroin that his father who dealt the drug had left in the home. To avoid prison, Daniel's father 'snitched' on his crew, but then felt so guilty about it that he began not only to deal, but to use, heroin. He was sent to jail when Daniel (then "Danny") was only three years old.

In third grade, Danny's teacher showed his class a video of Martin Luther King giving his "I have a Dream" speech. Danny was amazed at the many thousands of people in the crowd listening to MLK and determined that he too would like to give speeches. He promptly wrote a speech and his teacher helped set Danny up to deliver it at local Kiwanis, Rotary, NAACP and other organizations' meetings. By sixth grade Daniel was giving speeches nationally.

Mr. Beaty, in his 2014 memoir, *Transforming Pain into Power*, describes the importance of MLK as a role model, a male who was not in jail or on drugs, like his father or his brother (who was addicted to crack cocaine), but moving people positively through his words. Mr. Beaty went on to major in English and Music at Yale University and to graduate with Honors, but due to his father having left him at an early age, Mr. Beaty describes how he never was able to enjoy his accomplishments. He kept feeling that he must have done something wrong or be "unlovable," for his father to have made the choices that he did that caused him to essentially abandon his

family. At his graduation ceremony from Yale, Mr. Beaty felt sad, like a fraud, a failure, someone who didn't really belong on that stage.

It took Mr. Beaty a long time to get on the path to healing, to realize that he was good, worthy of love, and accomplished. What he did to change the way he thought about himself is what he describes in detail in his book. Part of it involved giving back to youths with backgrounds like his and giving even more speeches to a range of audiences.

Transforming Pain into Power is meant as a guide for others who have experienced or are experiencing pain in their lives that keeps them from enjoying the present and planning for the life of their dreams. It contains practical exercises that the reader can use to heal themselves, and through sharing the book, others.

Hill Harper is an actor (star of *CSI: New York*) and activist. He started writing books because he felt that black males in particular often did not have meaningful black male role models. His fifth, and according to the author, his final book, is *Letters to an Incarcerated Brother: Encouragement, Hope, and Healing for Inmates and Their Loved Ones* (Gotham, 2014). It was written in an effort to get people to empathize with the incarcerated and take action to do something about the astounding number of imprisoned people in the USA. Hill also wrote the book because he believes that the incarceration of black males in particular is having a devastating impact on black communities.

In late 2013, while waiting to appear on *Today*, Hill Harper informed staff at theGrio, an online site, that: "We lock up more people in this country than any other country in the world, including China, which has four times our population...I'm not talking about percentage. I'm talking about

actual numbers of people that we incarcerate. It's deplorable. We have to do better, we will, and hopefully, anyone who reads this book [*Letters to a Young Brother*] will relate to it."

Harper's book offers pathways to healing and ways of obtaining community support. It touches on issues similar to those that legal scholar Michelle Alexander raises in her seminal work, [The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness](#), such as how millions of black men have been imprisoned and thereby stripped of legal rights, **largely for petty, non-violent offenses.**

Mr. Harper seeks to not only support those that are imprisoned, but to break the cycle of incarceration. His approach includes a web site (incarceratedbrother.com) through which people can send copies of his book to prisons in their area or elsewhere in the country. Mr. Harper also created an organization, [Manifest Your Destiny](#) that implements themes from his books in the real world, such as encouraging youths to complete high school and college because the data shows that the likelihood of incarceration drops dramatically with each level of education achieved. The organization also seeks to prevent recidivism (the re-incarceration of those that have been released).

Rather than focusing on the negatives, Mr. Harper uses his book to share the wisdom of some of the brightest minds of our day on the issues related to incarceration. The book has a considerable potential audience because it is meant not only for those that are imprisoned, but also for their family members that are impacted by it.

Jeff Henderson was just another inner-city black kid born into a world of poverty and limited options, where crime seemed to provide the only way to get out. Raised mostly by his single mother, who struggled just to keep food on the table, Jeff dreamed big. He had to get out and he soon did by turning to what so many in his community did: dealing drugs. But Jeff was no ordinary drug dealer; by twenty-one, he was one of the top cocaine dealers in San Diego, making up to \$35,000 a week. Two years later he was indicted on federal drug trafficking charges and sentenced to almost twenty years in prison. Before he knew what had hit him, he was looking at spending most of his life behind bars. The street life had been the only one he'd ever known and even incarcerated he was too hardheaded to realize that no good would come of it.

That is, until he was assigned to one of the least desirable prison jobs: washing dishes. That job helped turn his whole life around. It gave him access to the prison kitchen and he became fascinated watching his fellow prisoners cook for the thousands of other inmates and prison officials. Henderson learned to cook in prison. Not cocaine, but food. And his dream was born: Once outside, he would become a chef.

It was a tough, seemingly impossible journey for an ex-con. Few chefs would give him the opportunity to cook in their restaurants. And once hired, he endured racism and sabotage in the kitchen. But Henderson refused to accept rejection. Driven by a dream and an unshakable will to succeed, Chef Jeff worked hard to overcome unimaginable adversity and eventually reached the top of his profession, becoming executive chef at Café Bellagio in Las Vegas.

Alive with the energy of the streets, the sober reality of prison, and the visceral thrill of being inside the fast-paced kitchens of great restaurants, *Cooked* is an intense, intimate tale of crime, punishment, and redemption—a deeply poignant story of how the worst wrong can lead to the most extraordinary right.

Piper Kerman is the author of *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, which has inspired the popular Netflix series. Piper, like Kemba Smith (see entry below), had followed her drug-dealing boyfriend halfway across the world and was persuaded to ferry drugs and money through international customs. Five years later, the police showed up at her door. Despite hiring a good lawyer and having the support of family and friends, Piper was sentenced to fifteen months at Danbury Federal Prison in Connecticut. The book is memoir of Piper's life post her prison sentence, as a graduate of Smith who was taking pleasure in a luxurious life before her crimes caught up with her. Yet she also describes her experience in prison and the lessons she learns from the women she meets. Piper currently travels giving motivational speeches and provides professional training to women at local prisons.

Ron Krannich, Ph.D. is the author of the first book to outline jobs for ex-offenders: *Best Jobs for Ex-Offenders: 101 Opportunities to Jump-Start Your New Life* (Impact Publishers 2008). Ex-offenders face difficulties in finding and keeping jobs, especially ones that offer a promising future. Krannich's book profiles 101 opportunities that are open to ex-offenders and identifies jobs that are closed to them. It covers topics such as the nature of work available, qualifications needed, and potential earnings. The book is meant to help the majority of ex-offenders that lack

knowledge about opportunities that are appropriate for their backgrounds that contain ‘red flags’ in terms of employment.

Tom Lagana and Laura Lagana wrote *Serving Productive Time: Stories, Poems, and Tips to Inspire Positive Change from Inmates, Prison Staff, and Volunteers* (HCI 2009). The book offers an opportunity to read about extraordinary people who are taking steps to make positive changes in their own lives while reaching out to others do the same. The stories will help readers gain new perspectives on those who are incarcerated, from understanding that we all make mistakes or need a helping hand at some point or are even imprisoned in some way (such as by our beliefs, an illness, or other situation). The book describes the need to prepare inmates for release and the importance of supporting them afterward. *Serving Productive Time* leaves readers with a renewed appreciation for making positive changes in their own lives and in others.

Kevin Powell is an author and activist. Along with several contributors, Mr. Powell wrote *The Black Male Handbook: A Blueprint for Life* (Atria Books, 2008). The book contains chapters on physical and mental health, ending violence against women and girls, developing political awareness, redefining black manhood, creating a spiritual foundation, and features an appendix that contains many useful readings, resources and advice.

Jeffrey Ian Ross, Ph.D. and Stephen C. Richards, Ph.D. wrote *Beyond Bars: Rejoining Society after Prison* (ALPHA 2009), an essential resource for former convicts and their families

post-incarceration. It includes tips for prisoners on how to prepare for release, along with ways to deal with spouses, children, and other family members, and offers free resources that are available that provide support. It also addresses money issues including how to create a budget and a bank account, how to avoid drugs and other illicit activities, and how to find a job.

Kemba Smith grew up in a middle-class community near Richmond, Virginia. She is the author of *Poster Child: The Kemba Smith Story* (First Edition Design Publishing, 2013), a self-published memoir which details how in an effort to ‘fit in’ she was blinded by love and devotion to Peter Hall, a drug dealer she met while she was a student at Hampton University.

Unbeknownst to Ms. Smith, Mr. Hall was the leader of a \$4 million crack cocaine ring and one of the FBI’s 15 Most Wanted. Her relationship led to many poor choices that ended in her being the victim of domestic violence and, in 1994, sentenced to 24.5 years in prison.

Ms. Smith’s long prison sentence for possession of and conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine, became the subject of national controversy because she was a first-time, non-violent offender. Ultimately she regained her freedom in December 2000, after having served 6.5 years of her sentence, due to action taken by then President Clinton that granted Ms. Smith executive clemency.

Although Ms. Smith made some poor choices as a youth, she ultimately found opportunity in misfortune and personal challenges. Ms. Smith used her situation to fight for others facing long prison terms for first-time, non-violent drug offenders, getting her story out in *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *JET*, *People*, *Glamour* and *Essence* magazines as well as on Court TV, The View, Nightline, CNN, The Early Morning Show and other programs.

Ms. Smith went on to graduate from Virginia Union University with a degree in Social Work. She also graduated from Howard University Law School. Today, in addition to being an author and a mom, Ms. Kemba Smith Pradia is a motivational speaker, consultant, and criminal justice advocate. She speaks out on behalf of those incarcerated in Virginia and is working to re-instate their ability to vote, hold public office and serve on juries.

She has received multiple awards and honors for her determination to educate the public about the disturbing consequences of current drug policies and her work has been featured by The Sentencing Project, a research and advocacy group. Ms. Smith Pradia now serves as a model for others. She is a woman of courage that has learned from her experiences and chosen to use the knowledge gained to benefit others through the Kemba Smith Foundation, which educates youths about drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, and AIDS.

Daniel Whyte III is the son of a pastor and gospel singer. He was born in New York but raised in North Carolina. He is the President of Gospel Light Society International, a worldwide evangelistic ministry. He is also the President of Torch Ministries International. Pastor Whyte is heard by thousands each week on his radio broadcasts and is the founder of Torch Legacy Publications through which he has published many of the 34 books he had written, including several *New York Times* bestsellers.

Pastor Whyte wrote *Letters to Young Black Men: Advice and Encouragement for a Difficult Journey* (Torch Legacy Publications, 2005) and a follow up book *Mo' Letters to Young Black Men* (Torch Legacy Publications, 2007). The books are written from the perspective of a Christian seeking to reach out to young people through the power of the ministry. Pastor Whyte's

books encourage readers to know their creator and to know that they are not inferior. He encourages youths to appreciate the power of the written word and reading and of working hard. Whyte's books are inspirational. They explore the spiritual, mental, and emotional aspects of life that often go unaddressed and can cause conflict and trouble for young people. Although aimed specifically at black males, the books hold lessons for young men from all backgrounds.

In between releasing the two aforementioned books, Mr. Whyte came out with *Letters to Young Black Women* (Torch Legacy Publications, 2006), at the request of his readers. The book is more about prevention than healing because Mr. Whyte believes that many of the problems that black women face can be prevented from happening if they operate from a position of strength and self-empowerment. The book, like his others, stresses the importance of education, but more so than the books for black males, focuses on the importance of relationships, including marriage.