OUR STATEMENT ON THE DEREK CHAUVIN VERDICT

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ALUMNI PROGRAM NEWS & MEMBER HIGHLIGHTS
On April 20, 2021, the nation let out a collective sigh of relief the moment Derek Chauvin was found guilty of the death of George Floyd. For many of us, we feared there would be no accountability and yet another police officer would simply walk away after taking a life and devastating a family and community. We have this fear because we know there is something inherently wrong with our justice system. Today, the first step has been taken to honor George Floyd’s life and to begin offering his family peace and closure we hope they may be able to find. We now must turn our attention to Derek Chauvin’s upcoming sentencing hearing with the hope he will be held fully accountable.

For far too long, we have been ignored and we have been hurt. We long for the day we no longer have to fear losing another Daunte Wright, Andrés Guardado, Breonna Taylor, Adam Toledo, Sean Monterrosa, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Tamir Rice, Oscar Grant, and so many others. The verdict is the beginning of our collective journey to healing as a nation. InsideOUT Writers understands that the road ahead is going to be difficult, and we remain committed to standing alongside and supporting those we serve. Our hearts go out to those who have suffered injustices, and we stand in solidarity with those who are demanding change.

Sincerely,
InsideOUT Writers
Statement on the Hate Crimes against the AAPI Community

It has been about a month since the mass shooting at three Atlanta spas, where one man chose to act on his deep-seated hatred by taking the lives of eight fellow Americans. Of the eight victims in Atlanta, six were Asian Americans who loved their families and communities. The decision made by the shooter to target spas and massage parlors was not random, per the shooter’s own admission. There have been more than 3,800 other documented attacks on the Asian-American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) community since the beginning of the pandemic. In the midst of the ongoing #StopAsianHate movement, we have to ask ourselves how simmering prejudices keep escalating to violence in racism-fueled episodes across the country. Our nation’s strong AAPI community has been grossly scapegoated and punished for COVID-19, perpetrated both by direct assailants and those who choose to stand idly by when presented with injustice. As a result, many have lost their businesses, more have lost their sense of security, and some have even lost their lives.

Though we have seen that there remains a large subset of the American population that is indifferent to the plight of our AAPI neighbors, it is heartening to witness Americans from all backgrounds rallying together to protect one another and resist the bitterness racism injects into our communities. It is heartening to see people confronting their own biases in pursuit of a safer and more equitable future for AAPI individuals and those from other marginalized populations. Ultimately, we must understand that continuing to let even casual racism slide, though it may be the easier path, is not the right path forward if we wish to effectively dissolve the rampant stereotyping, hypersexualization, and dehumanization of AAPI people that has paved the way for this frightening yet unsurprising spike in violence.
InsideOUT Writers is no stranger to injustice and unspeakable tragedy. We were founded with the goal of addressing mass injustice in the judicial system, particularly in the juvenile detention system. But familiarity does not desensitize us. In the midst of a global pandemic that has already impacted countless lives, these attacks have left the country reeling. But they have also reminded us of the importance of community and the strength we have to come together and combat violence. Through the combined power of our voices, we can continue to uplift and reinforce our support for members of the AAPI community.

This is why InsideOUT Writers has partnered with Compassion in Oakland, a nonprofit founded specifically to provide volunteer chaperones and other critical resources to Asian American Elders to ensure they stay safe when they leave home. As an organization, InsideOUT Writers is committed to deconstructing the systemic discrimination that has led to race-based violence against members of the AAPI community. We commit to continuing to advocate for their safety. It is time we all do the same. It is unconscionable to continue to look the other way.

#StandAgainstHate #StopAsianHate
IOW’s Continued Response to COVID-19:

As the COVID-19 pandemic has progressed, IOW has been focused on ensuring our community has access to the resources it needs to keep themselves safe. We’ve kept our ear to the ground to pass on any opportunity to sign-up for testing, make appointments for vaccinations, and have acted as a resource for referrals for anyone in our community navigating changing ordinances and restrictions. We’ve been very happy to be able to work with Stay Housed LA and have alums attend their informative and insightful workshops on tenants’ rights, eviction moratorium’s and rent reduction. In addition, we have been able to connect alums to opportunities for employment through California Justice Leaders, dress for success programs with Clothes the Deal, and resume workshops organized by UCLA and the Youth Uprising Coalition. In addition, we have found ways to connect alums to mental health, medical and housing resources whenever and however needed.

BIPOC and AAPI Solidarity: We Stand With Love, Together

As life has reshaped itself around the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic, our daily lives and the way we see ourselves in our worlds changed. With the televised murder of George Floyd, as well as the murders or attacks of Breonna Taylor, Ahmed Abery, Andres Guardado, Elijah McClain, Jacob Blake and far too many others, as well as the attacks in Atlanta and Boulder, our society as a whole mourned. For our community, IOW has utilized our safest space, our Writing Circles, to discuss these attacks and murders with our alums. We are profoundly fortunate that we have built an understanding of love, trust, and family in these spaces and our alums know they are safe to experience their rage, exhaustion, and grief communally– with a support system ready for them if they need us. IOW has been in this fight for 25 years, and as an organization and community we understand that the road ahead is going to be difficult, but we will always remain committed to standing alongside and supporting those we serve. Our hearts go out to those who have suffered injustices, and we stand in solidarity with those who are demanding change.
We are beyond ecstatic to announce that as of February 2021, IOW has re-entered the halls! We are once again able to offer creative writing classes to youths inside Central Juvenile Hall and have a healthy roster of volunteers excited to volunteer! The structure of our classes is a little different as COVID-19 restrictions prohibit us from physically entering the halls, but we have been able to connect with our students inside via teleconference. We have resumed weekly classes; however, volunteers are now participating on a month-by-month basis.

Every Wednesday and Friday at noon, we dial-in and hear students share their writing. Even though we can’t see them face-to-face, we are there with them through the power of pen and paper. We express immense gratitude to our teachers Lauren Chung, Shelley Diamond, Jacques Edline, and April Hong for their patience, kindness, and persistence. They continue to show up every week and be there for our youth with such grace and good humor. Every week, our teachers continue to share lessons and exercises to encourage the students to write on the blank pages.

Being able to reconnect with our students after almost a full year away has left us overjoyed, and we are profoundly grateful to continue to forge healthy and positive connections with our students inside. We will continue to do our best to empower our students through creative writing to find their voice and come home with their heads held high!
It's an old tale, the kind we know in our bones before it's finished being told. A woman is swept off her feet by the Prince of her dreams. Wedding bells chime, children follow, cue the happy-ever-after voice-over as they ride off into the sunset. All children are told, be the lucky woman or be the Prince - but you have to want to be at least one of them. But why? In the U.S. (Queen Bey aside) we don't have royalty. So, what represents power for us? The concept of voting is supposed to mean that we have the last word on how power is used in our country. Through our discussion, the alums were able to determine that there is power in the communal action of voting - we were able to make a collective choice about who sat in our White House and whether we deserved Stimulus Checks as the COVID-19 pandemic showed no signs of slowing down - while for Meghan, royalty and all the expectations and fairy tales that go with it, couldn’t save her or her son from racism, losing their home, protection or income. Thanks to Maria Elena Rodriguez’s eye-opening dive into a heartfelt examination of structural power, internal power, and how fairy tales play into what we believe of ourselves and our power, our alums were able to engage with insight and vulnerability into such a layered topic and recognize their own agency as individuals - even when they may believe their social status as previously incarcerated bars them from that agency.
Our alums were asked, when that voice in your head tells you that something is wrong, why don’t you listen? Every one of us has had an experience where we said something because we knew other people would approve, but that moment of guilt flashes inside when we think about the impact of our words or actions. So why do we do it? When it comes to police brutality, toxic masculinity, anti-lgbtqia phobia, racism, sexism, the list could go on, we so often want to err on the side of the status quo. Our alums identified that when they reflected on moments in their life that felt the worst, their internal voice was telling them to do or say something different than what they actually said or did. But at the time, even when what they said or did the thing that felt wrong, they looked towards their authority figures for validation. Alums explored personal examples of those difficult moments with the unrelenting honesty of hindsight and experience. Gina Loring facilitated a very emotional and powerful discussion on the influences that shape our thinking and how to remind oneself that even if your voice feels alone in a crowd, your voice is enough.

Ana Lilia brought us together to discuss the power of Audre Lorde’s unflinching dissection of the expectations of our society and the burdens to perform that we place upon ourselves to meet those expectations in her stunning piece, A Litany for Survival. Our alums were challenged to break down the societal and personal burdens from in their own upbringings and they responded clarity, honesty and forgiveness. Ultimately, they concluded that it is forgiveness that allows us to move forward, forgiveness that allows us to learn. They determined that in order to truly come to peace with their experiences, one must review their past with clarity, but not forget that to move forward with grace, forgiveness is a form of true power.
Adam Weissman’s Workshop: Storytelling in Screenwriting

During the month of April, we held a multi-part Workshop with screenwriter Adam Weissman, writer for The Good Doctor, Sons of Anarchy and CSI, on Storytelling in Screenwriting.

Adam’s Workshop dived into the key points of storytelling. Allowing a story to open itself and shake out the details of its existence with the goal of creating a specific beginning, middle, and end, identifying character, the particulars of their voice, and imbuing a scene with color and life requires meticulous attention to detail and unending patience. Adam asked our alums difficult questions about the background of story construction; how does one define a story? What makes a story interesting? Of our alums’ favorite stories, what made those stories their favorite? Each alum arrived at a different conclusion and began to construct their pieces over the course of the Workshop. Alums found inspiration in experiences in their past, profound moments from their present, and hopeful glances towards the future. Some brought to life the stories they feared would never be told, of people who made an impact on their lives who didn’t think anyone would truly want to listen. Others created narratives based on worlds they’d never inhabited, experiences they could only imagine. Some jumped at the opportunity to explore an idea through the lens of someone they disagreed with as they tried to see through the lens of, ‘the other side.’

As the workshop drew to a close, the alums all arrived at the same conclusion. The true draw to any story is the emotional connection the audience feels while reading, that pinprick in the back of their eyes if a character suffers, or the unbidden joy when they triumph. During the last session, while discussing the impact of writing their stories with Adam, each alum realized they’d discovered something of themselves while building worlds for others.

Opening our doors to this virtual realm of communication has allowed us to connect in ways we never deemed possible before it was necessary. Again, and again throughout the events of this past year, the collective grieving, anger, societal adjustments, fears, and unanticipated joy, brought us back to the same question that needed to be processed communally. What is power, and who wields it? Again, and again, we came back to the same answer. We do if we choose to.
Alumni Highlight:
George Sanchez, Julio Quijada, and Lionel Tate

George Sanchez's Short Film: The Story Of The Westside

George is the author of two books of poetry, Aztec Slave and Words from the Deep Core of My Brown Corazon – both of which were published during his incarceration. George began writing at the tender age of 13 and hasn’t been able to put his pen down since. He is currently working on a new book of poetry, Bumping Slow Oldies with Sad Eyes, and a single-man play.

George’s work was recently turned into a beautiful spoken-word piece with visual accompaniment in this short film – The Story of the Westside. George has this to say about this project: “I was just another Latino kid incarcerated and written off by society. I was just another statistic. Very few could see through my pain and what I went through. I was known as "Little G" but I don’t see myself with this identity anymore. Today, I embrace my Mexican heritage, my background, history, community, and all identities who have suffered oppression, felt the walls of judgment and society closing in around them.” You can watch George’s piece here.

Julio Quijada’s Theatre Piece: Rise Up Like Starlight

We are so proud to announce the premiere of the theater film, "Rise Up Like Starlight," led and created by former foster youth with lived experiences- including our very own Julio Quijada! This interactive theatre piece is a series of stories shared by former foster youth who have found their voice through the arts. Julio is an engaging and powerful screenwriter whose ultimate hope is to see his own films come to life!

He is currently an editor at NBC Universal and has previously worked at Netflix and the Coalition for Engaged Education as a Lead Youth Navigator. Julio has been an active alum of IOW for quite some time and a regular at our Screenwriting Workshops with Adam Weissman. He is especially proud of his contribution to this piece as he hopes his work will help, “former foster youth empowerment and healing.” If you would like to tune in to the premiere of Julio’s work, click this link for tickets for the May 29th performance!
Lionel Tate’s Documentary: Not Just Another Day

Lionel has been a longtime alumn of IOW. Recently, Lionel was featured in the documentary, Not Just Another Day by director Ricky Rhodes and Plant Forth Films. The film premiered at the San Luis Obispo International Film Festival and was the Oregon Documentary Film Festival Official Winter 2021 Selection for Best Editing. The film’s synopsis is as follows:

“In 2015, Lionel Tate was one of the 142,000 Black Americans arrested for marijuana possession. Facing a felony conviction, homelessness and crippling debt, he now strives to rebuild his life with his family. This film helps expose the unequal criminalization many Black Americans face from marijuana laws in our country. Meanwhile, legal cannabis is sold medicinally and recreationally across the country and has boomed into a multi-billion dollar industry.” — Plant Forth Films

An engaging and visceral writer, Lionel is multi-talented and approaches all aspects of his life with an artistic flair. He has a profound passion for cooking and after he was released, opened his own catering company. He aspires to attend culinary school to become a chef and enjoys life with his young son and family while navigating the difficulties of re-entry and the stigma of having been previously incarcerated. If you would like to learn more about the documentary, check out Plant Forth Film’s website here or read Forbes interview with director Ricky Rhodes here.
The mission of InsideOUT Writers is to reduce the juvenile recidivism rate by providing a range of services that evolves to meet the needs of currently and formerly incarcerated youth and young adults.

Using creative writing as a catalyst for personal transformation, these young people are empowered with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully re-integrate into our communities becoming advocates for their future.

**PEN. PAPER. PERSEVERANCE.**

I write from the inside out.