

LEAP

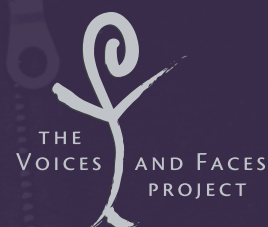
SPRING/SUMMER • 2018

LOUD • EMPOWERED • ACCEPTED • PROUD

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MY WORLD, YOUR WORLD
It's ours together

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LEAVING THE PAST
Yes we can

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GIRL BEHIND THE SMILE
Can you see the real me?



DEAR READERS

We would like to welcome you to a journey, a powerful journey to self-acceptance, a journey we hope will give voice to the ones who have been silenced. Because voice is what LEAP — a magazine for those who are Loud, Empowered, Accepted, and Proud — is all about.

LEAP will change lives. It is full of powerful and inspiring experiences from those of us who have lived through hurt, violence, and fears of being unheard. This magazine is a chance for us to stand and be heard.

You should read LEAP because it's not just words, statements, writings, or drawings — it's feeling created into something special and something we've experienced. LEAP is a way we can overcome our fears and tell our story without actually having to stand in front of a group of people physically and tell them about ourselves. Worrying about being judged is worrying about what people think, and that doesn't matter because each of us is still unique. Read LEAP and you will know this:

We are more than what society has labeled us.

We are positive-minded teens who never let our pasts determine our future.

We use the hurt we have experienced for strength.

We speak up when it's time to, and respect ourselves because we deserve to.

Readers, we want you to know that you too are beautiful queens and handsome kings. You are worthy of more than street corners and jail cells. You are brilliant and intelligent. LEAP can help you build better relationships with each other, and it will help you voice your opinions. LEAP is a way to be heard and a way to change.

Enjoy these pages, and be a part of that change.

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WHAT I BE

I am the what
He, as in, my father
Planted to leave.
This is what I be
I don't care what nobody see
My body is for me and that's
What my body be.
If I were you looking
At me,
I would definitely judge me
Cause that is all you see —
A five-foot-four me, a caramel me,
Blonde-hair, scared-arms me.
I'm not perfect
Can't you see?
So judge me — I don't care
What you see,
But, hello, some people call me Ve.

– *VH*

BETTER

Dear young women, you can be better
You can be stronger, wiser, and self-respecting
You can say No. Respect your gold.
You're not a prize, nor a price tag, not a product —
You are God's creation.
You're not trash blown in the wind
You're not tires on a car
You're not gravel on a dirt road
You're not debatable
You're not disposable
You are a blessing.
You can be better
Not for him, for you
Not for her, for you —
Dear young women, you can be better.

– *Latese*

GIRL, UNDERESTIMATED

A small pretty girl without guidance tiptoeing to reach the top, too cute, so everyone watch — she's a girl underestimated, undervalued, capable of ruling nations. A small pretty girl, no one would have ever known what this girl can do.

"I can't, I tried, I don't" is all she hears, but she will do anything she puts her mind to. Striving for big dreams that jump through fire while saving stars. She's a girl street-smart, and this girl reads, reads, reads. The boys try to figure her out; girls are angered by her quick wit and style. She's confused by what's going on in our society. She's not exposed to her history, so she really doesn't know any better. But because she's educated, it's imperative for her to make a change.

People try to belittle her, tell her she won't be able to do things she wants. Still she won't take no for an answer; she will keep pushing till she gets what she wants.

I say all this to say what it took for me to get incarcerated. I say all this to know my history: when, where, how, and why we go through the things we do. It's sad to say, but people of color, my brothers and sisters, we're not supposed to be educated, we're not supposed to know where we came from, or how to function, or how to make right decisions.

It's because Everybody just wants money, power, and respect
And we look for love in the wrong places and we don't have our priorities straight
And we would do anything just to get them bills, Robin jeans, or Jordans,
When all we got to do is get a *J.o.b.*

But no, that would be the right way. We want power, so we do things out of character to feel in control. We want to be respected, so we put on this big front to feel some admiration boosting our esteem. If only I knew then what I know now.

This system is set up to fail us, to make us the next statistics, to make us believe that's how life goes. Young people have to make something out of life before the judge makes it for us. Many people told me, "You gonna do this much time; the judge is going to say, 'You not gonna be able to do that.'" But I've seen and heard the opposite. So what does that tell you? I'll tell you what it tells you. I will be the change.

– *Destiny*

WHOSE PROTEST IS THIS?

A SHORT STORY

I could see a reflection in the black mirror. There were multiple bags under my dark brown eyes. As I was getting my poster ready to hold high so that people could see it — *You can make a Difference by thinking Different* — a young man named Latrell walked up to me, rudely saying, “Wassup, baby? Let me get your number.” I turned the other way quick, as I hit him with a “Boy, please, don’t nobody want that shit.”

It was as hot as two fat chicks sleeping together with no AC in 101 degrees. Texas had been very hot lately, all over it was over a hundred. I’d left my apartment thinking about my baby I had just killed. My mother was my role model till she found out I was pregnant at sixteen and kicked me out and emancipated me.

My mind was wandering everywhere, except on this protest I had set up for the community. Others had their top signs showing, and some had just cardboard and marker signs. It put a smile on my face to see everybody who had attended my protest. It didn’t last long. Only up until the time the police came and ruined everything.

Still, I just knew everyone would change for the better because when the police left, all the protestors from the event stayed and started to clean the community up.

— VH

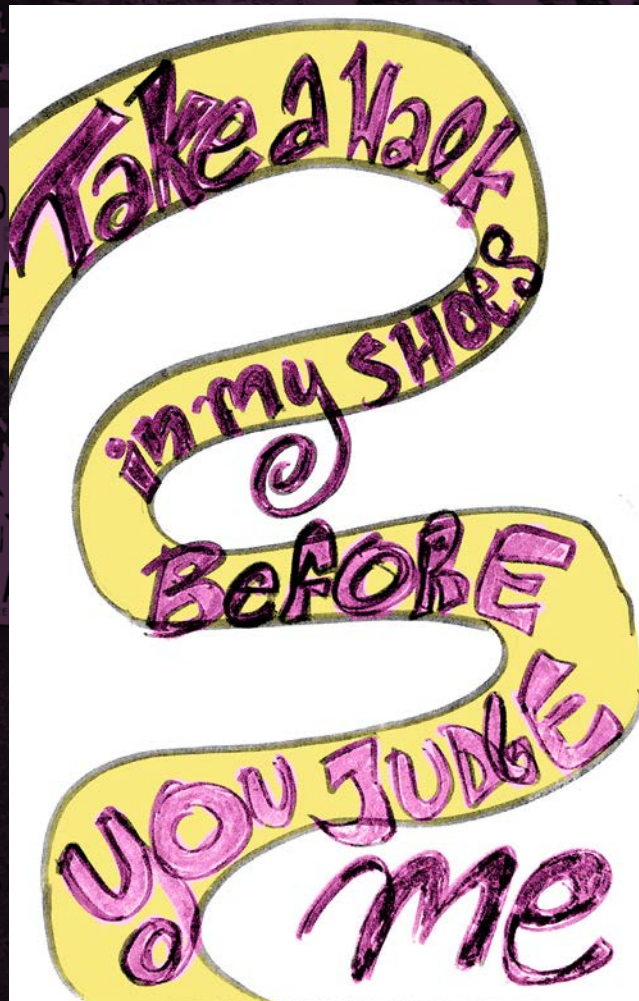
你可以通过思考不同而有所作为！

Meaning...

You Can Make A Difference By Thinking Different!



We · Can · Rule · This · World



I'M NOT WAITING
• FOR CHANGE •

I AM THE CHANGE

Let's
End
Violence



**STOP
LOOK
LISTEN
THEN
MAKE
YOUR
DECISION**

**IF NOT FREE IF
NOT FREE IF
NOT FREE IF**

HOMEcomings

Home is a place I've been kept out of,
I've been kept out of home
I'm in JTDC.

What I miss about home is my family, my room, my family's cooking,
My bathtub, my clothes, my furniture, most importantly, the love and support.
I'm kept away from my home by force
If I could I would go back.

—NP

ENDURE

Time goes slow
Time goes fast
We're in a world
Where blacks will
Never last.

—NP

EIGHTEEN

I was born and raised out west
Where my mama isn't having no rest
It was hard for her, it was hard for us
So I couldn't think about the rest.

I had to get outta the gang
Before a nigga shot me down,
Before I feel his pain,
I prayed to the Lord that He touch my heart
Before I go down the drain
I'm just 18, I'm trying to live my life the best way I can
I know I can do better cuz it's in me
And I said, When I do the best every day
I'm better.

—SH

MY WORLD YOUR WORLD

I live in a world where good is bad and bad is good,
 Where when you try to do good
 All you get is bad, like when you try to get a job and all you hear is
 “Have you ever been convicted of a crime?” — so you go
 Back to the dog-eat-dog world, back to get it when you can,
 Back to the goddamn block where we wasn’t raised to say “He a king
 And she a Queen.” It’s more like he an “OPP” and she a “thot.” I live in a world
 Where people are happy with things just the way they are.
 Like when we see ourselves as athletes, rappers,
 Entertainers, lazy, stupid, pimps, criminals, worthless,
 Or, as superior to women, and treat them like toys.
 They convince you that you aren’t capable and you don’t deserve better, when really it’s just
 White America has more *Advantages*, and black America has more *Obstacles*.
 What some whites don’t realize is they’re born into a world and system that automatically
 Puts them on top, and us on the bottom with other so-called minorities—
 Poor people and people of color fighting each other for leftovers.
 See what I mean when I say people are happy with things just the way they are.

I live in a world where an attack happens just about any way you can think of —
 Unemployment, hunger, which leads to
 Incarceration, liquor stores on every corner, and healthy food
 In no corner. The laws are unfair:
 Evictions and Foreclosures, diabetes and high blood pressure
 Schools with old wrong books and overworked teachers
 Garbage on the streets, garbage on the radio
 Drugs and guns imported from outside the community
 And Police and Judges act like they’re God.

I live in a world where they kinda freed us but then started
 Lynching us instead, then changed their mind and let
 Us vote, go to their schools, and get jobs
 Only if we dressed, talked, and thought
 Just like white people. Now white America
 Doesn’t need us for labor anymore
 And machines do all the work. So with fewer jobs
 And without proper education
 A lot of us commit crimes
 That get us back in the system, again
 In chains, again, and working for free, again.
 Wake Up! Stand Up! Step Up! And recognize
 What World We live in.

—Destiny



Photo: Patricia Evans

» *What some whites don’t realize is they’re born into a world and system that automatically puts them on top.* «



WHY MOMMA?

Photo: Patricia Evans

You isn't gotta let her talk to you like that, Momma
 You gotta job now, you can take care of yourself
 You isn't gotta let her lay hands on you like that, Momma
 You can leave now, let that ass go.
 You isn't gotta let her break your spirit like that, Momma
 You got all the awards, you got all this love, Momma, she don't deserve you
 Momma why don't you listen to me when I tell you you deserve better
 Momma why don't you believe me when I tell you, isn't nothing in this world better than the love
 You give, except maybe Jesus
 But I know you and Him are close, so same difference
 Momma why you suffer so much when you can just be free
 Momma why I keep telling you things my friends keep telling me
 Momma why they keep telling me the same things you need to hear
 Momma why don't I listen to them?
 Momma why I let her talk to me like that
 Momma why I let her put her hands on me like that
 Momma why I let her break my spirit like that
 Momma why I ask so many questions don't neither of us got the answer to
 Momma why you showing me this mirror
 Momma . . . I know
 I've heard it before.

– *Cydney O. Brown*

I AM NOT YOU

Hey, father.
I'm sorry
that I failed you.

Was I not good enough?
Did I not have your nose?
Or the hazel
in your eyes?
Or, maybe you wasn't expecting
the piece that was between my thighs.

This shit is crazy.
How can you have a child
but not be around
you Fugazi.

Is it cause I didn't say "Dada"
as my first word?
Or I didn't make you smile?
Maybe I wasn't
worth your while.

It turns out it wasn't me.
Only thing that I can say
is it's not my fault my father's not around.
It's my father who brought me down,
but fuck 'em, I'm not 'bout to put a frown on me
cause my father failed me –
yeah, my father failed me.
It's not my fault he a dead beat.
Bye, father.

– VH

THE CHI

Chicago
Where I come from if
You shoot a gun you a
Savage but if you go to school to do something
Cool you a fool.

Where you can't just be
You — you gotta be that
Boy who's Facebook
Famous or that girl they ran a train on
For their crib

Where if you ain't got
Foreign cars, designer clothes,
Or toting poles
You just a basic ho.

–Destiny

LEAVING THE PAST

I miss the sound of gunshots. But I don't miss the shock and awe that follows. I don't miss the running, and the hiding. I don't miss the sound of my heartbeat banging in my ear. I don't miss saying "Rest in Peace."

I think I find peace in this place of strangers. No gunshots heard. No "clear" sense of present danger. There are trees. So many of them. So many that they hide the houses. The beautiful houses I used to only see on TV or in cars during long drives through neighborhoods not mine. But this time, right here, right now, this neighborhood is mine.

People walk their dogs. They smile. They always smile. Not at me but at my dog. I am sure that my walking a dog makes them feel safe enough not to see me. So they don't clutch their pearls or pull their purses close, but they do say hi to my dog. But I am the one who wants to bark. No one sits on their porches. They are too busy with resisting Trump or insisting that we give him a chance. No one blasts music. No one's courageous enough to dance on their stoops while smoking a blunt. They don't want to disturb the peace.

In this neighborhood, they call the cops. They don't see the color blue the same way that I do. I wonder if they call the cops on violating uncles the way I wanted my family to.

I don't hide my Mac anymore. No fears of anyone walking through doors and walls, uninvited, when I am not here. There are people jogging. Running by choice and not because of the stick-up boys! The same boys who went to battle anytime anyone dared to cackle and call me "faggot."

I feel safe enough to walk at night without looking over my shoulder but afraid of what I see as I get older: no one on their porches dancing. Not a single neighbor screaming from across the street, "Hey girl, I think your brother came by today. He was knocking but no one opened their door!" I see no clear and present danger. I feel safe among these strangers but I still miss the sound of gunshots.

— *Louie Ortiz-Fonesca*

THE STREET

I came from down the
 Street
 Where if you at the
 Wrong place at the
 Wrong time
 You get put six feet
 Down
 Can't tell you much
 About doing right
 Cause I'm locked up
 Doing time
 But I swear if I could rewind –
 I have a lot of free
 Time on my mind
 I'm from down the
 Street
 Where I see a lot of
 Crime
 If I could fix that I would
 But I contribute to them
 Crimes from time to
 Time
 What the hell be on my
 Mind
 Lil brother can't even
 Walk down the street
 Without someone yelling
 Drive by
 I come from down
 The street
 Where I grew up involved
 in crimes
 I wish I could rewind it
 But now I'm doing
 Time
 Lil G and Keshun on
 The corner selling
 Nickels and dimes
 I'm from where they
 Call you nigga and bitch
 Ho's and bro's
 I hate it so much
 But I'm from down
 The street where
 You wouldn't want
 To be me.

– *VH*

MY BLOODLINE GOES BEYOND CHICAGO

I come from a long list of empowered ancestors
I come from African American, Puerto Rican, Caucasian descent
I come from Tiffany & David
From a mother that works too hard.

I come from Chicago to California and back to Chicago
I come from Kimbark, Cottage, Crandon, Justine, and Essex
I come from many places
I come from a holy family,
A strong-willed and determined family,
I come from a crazy, outspoken family,
An unreliable and sometimes harsh family.

My bloodline goes beyond Chicago
Beyond Southshore
I come from Tiffany & David
I know where I come from
But I don't know where I'm going, just yet.

– *Amaya Woods*

FREE

Freedom
is what we need
Life is real, it's not a dream
Why can't they just set us free
Because locking us up
Doesn't make us weak
Freedom is what we need.

– *NP*

HEY, GIRL

Just stop changing
Who you are and how your body is made
Don't blame God for what you look like
Don't let a magazine change you
Don't let every model you see in every store or picture change you
Don't let a man tell you what to be.
Be the one who starts the change of loving everything about you
Embrace it, love it, don't be the one to end it.

– *Jazmyn Carthen*

DEAR PINKE

You made me look at life different
 You inspired me to do better and be better
 It not just the hair on my head that they see
 Nor the shoes on my feet but the hope and that faith that you see
 When you look at me
 Nor the way that I walk or talk
 You were always there to say, no, you are better
 You will be better.

I always look up to you, no matter what I do
 I always looked right to you
 I step out the door, told myself, can't do it, can't be here
 And told myself, it's not time,
 So I figure out my goals and plans,
 Find out a way to make peace in my land
 Cuz I ain't got time to waste in this jail
 Thinking about my life, like, damn, what the hell I come from?

– SH

THIS HIGH IS TOO HIGH

A SHORT STORY

I was so high I could barely walk up the stairs. I'm thinking how can a 13-year-old be this high as I continue to stumble up the stairs. As I got to the last stair, all I heard was "Ronnie what the hell wrong with you smelling like shit?" I couldn't move, I couldn't talk, I couldn't do shit but realize how high I was.

My mom yelled again, "Ronnie, why you moving so damn slow, come here!"

I had to tell her what I had done. So she could know what I was high off. "Mom, I popped a Xanax and drank some lean and smoked some weed."

I was slurring out and I could tell she was angry, but the next thing she said, "You little motherfucker, do you got some of that shit now? You going to the hospital now!" I told her no, I lied, she found it in my pocket.

– VH



» *Had she really
gotten away from
her old neighborhood?* «

THE GIRL BEHIND THE SMILE

Photo: Javier Otero

The girl behind the smile is a quiet girl who loves to read, write, and get good grades, a girl who sets high standards for herself. She is a girl who watched her friends and family go down the wrong path. Her childhood friends are in jail, selling drugs, drinking, smoking, or dead.

When you look at the girl with that smile, you wouldn't know she lived in the hood, the place where — where she heard gunshots every night, where the police came and took her mom away, where her friends were fighting for their lives, where people knew to run when they saw the police. It is the place that turned her friends into gangbangers, the place where her uncle took his last breath: it is a place she had to leave behind. Her neighborhood was changing, the buildings getting torn down, and her mother wanted to keep her family safe.

The girl thought when they moved, they were moving to somewhere better, safer. She thought, "This place at last will be quiet." During the day, it was as if nothing happened in this new place. No one knew that she and her siblings walked in fear. The park was no place for children; there were shootings there all the time. The walks from bus to home were lonely. All her friends were back in the old neighborhood.

At the end of her block there were Mexicans who never really came outside and a lady sitting in the window all day. Next door there was a couple always fighting and a cat outside her window crying. Boys ran on the side of her house with guns. Had she really gotten away from her old neighborhood? Did she really get away? Did she find somewhere better? Or was she trapped in the same place with just a different name?

The girl behind the smile is a quiet girl who loves to read, write, get good grades, and set high standards for herself. She is a girl who watched her friends and family go down the wrong path. Many of her childhood friends are in jail; they are selling drugs, drinking, smoking, or dead. She has made a promise to herself that she will not follow in their path, that she will succeed — the girl behind the smile is me.

— *Jakryha Berry*

BROKEN IDENTITY

His X chromosome plus her X chromosome
 Equals my genetic make-up
 But I am not my mother's or my father's child
 A soul trapped in a body that is not my own
 I grow clueless as to who I really am

Because:
 My mother was the spitting image
 Of everything I said I never wanted to be:
 One, she's a crack Fiend
 Two, she's a prostitute
 Three, she's a lying thief

And every time I look into her eyes,
 I see the soul of a small child
 With no direction
 Who can't really seem to fathom
 This idea of right and wrong

And leave it to society
 To make my father a mystery
 Because he was gunned down before I reached the age of three
 17 years later and I have yet to see his face
 No pictures, no memories, no trace
 And in my mind I piece together the man I think he would be
 The man I think should be, the man I'll never meet

So tell me
 How am I supposed to know who I really am
 How the hell am I supposed to piece together family history?
 When everything about my damn family is a mystery
 And no matter how hard I try,
 I swear I'll never win
 As I try to take it back to where I think it all began
 No records of my family,
 And no idea of who I should be
 No idea of what I would be, no legacy to leave
 You see I stand before you, with a broken Identity created by:

His X chromosome and her X chromosome
 Equals my genetic make-up
 But I am not my mother's or my father's child.

– **Marline Johnson**

Shared for the first time with the young people at JTDC, July 2017

BETTER WE

First, be aware you are rare
Second, make a list of life goals, and rip it up —
Changing the cycle in me changes what I see
My safe space is where peace lives
Hell once gave me refuge —
Better we
Better us.
From mud we came
Ashed and shamed
Beaten and blamed
To bring about the change —
I refuse to be the same,
Freedom to soar, not be sorry for my story
Even as I write I'm changing into a
Better me.

— *Samantha Collier*

» EVEN
AS I WRITE
I'M CHANGING
INTO A
BETTER ME «

LEAP

LOUD • EMPOWERED • ACCEPTED • PROUD

The stories we tell can change the world.
And changing the world is what LEAP is all about.

LEAP is a publication of The Voices and Faces Project, an award-winning non-profit storytelling project. Featuring work created or discussed during "The Stories We Tell," an immersive testimonial writing program for girls whose lives have been affected and altered by violence, LEAP is made possible through the support of the JTDC Foundation. To find out more about The Voices and Faces Project, or to support "The Stories We Tell" scholarship fund, visit voicesandfaces.org.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED