

# Southside



Student Writing  
from  
Richard J. Daley College  
Spring 2025

## Preface

During the Fall 2024 semester, Ana Arredondo, Chair of the English and Speech Department, asked professors to submit outstanding writing by students in their classes. Submissions in reply to this call for papers fill the pages of *Southside*.

Our hope is that this online publication becomes the first issue of an ongoing Daley College literary magazine that will be open to submissions of student writing by students as well as faculty. We are also considering including pieces by faculty and alumni. Unless the name *Southside* stirs a groundswell of enthusiasm, look for a contest to select a permanent name for the new literary magazine. A print edition, a feature of other City Colleges branches, is also a future possibility.

The guiding principles of this magazine are as follows:

- Publication, an important part of the writing process, acts as an incentive for quality writing.
- The ability to express oneself with power and authority through the written word is not the sole province of professional writers.
- Writing has enduring value to students, not only as a practical job skill, but as a method of self-expression and self-development.
- Good writing should be shared so that it can brighten and enlighten the lives of others.

Our first edition includes photographs to fill stretches of white space. In subsequent editions, we would like to see student photography and art work in these spaces.

If you are a Daley student who has writing, whether for class or of your own endeavor, that you think is suitable for publication, send an attachment—preferably as a Word file—to the following address: [rlawrence12@ccc.edu](mailto:rlawrence12@ccc.edu).

Ana Arredondo, Department Chair  
Robert Lawrence, Editor

## Contents

Audrey Johnson, <i>The Long Ride</i> . . . . .	3
Arturo Rivera, <i>Stepping Stones and New Beginnings</i> . . . . .	5
Vasette Valdez, <i>Old Yellow Couch</i> . . . . .	8
Veronica Crisostomo, <i>Pursuing My Dream of Becoming a Teacher</i> . . . . .	11
Jalen Wilkins, <i>Why can't I see what's right in front of me?</i> . . . . .	14
Jamari King, <i>My First Fight</i> . . . . .	16
Nohelia Alcala, <i>Bayer Rounds Up Monsanto</i> . . . . .	17
Brett Shaw, <i>Herbalife Nutrition Achieves Success by Managing Risks</i> . . . . .	19
Julian Monroy, <i>Ruta Sepetys' I Must Betray You: ÉäÉäÉÇÄÉÉVÉÖÉVÉÖÇÃÇΣÇf</i> . . . . .	22
Dalila Hurtado, <i>Exploration of Comfort and Cleanliness</i> . . . . .	25
Veronica Crisostomo, <i>Sleep Deprivation in Children and Their Mental Health</i> . . . . .	27
Lidia Hurley, <i>Ruta Sepetys' I Must Betray You: The Psychological and Societal Impact of Oppression</i> . . . . .	30
Ayanna Taylor, <i>For the Outliers: Are vagrancy laws and the like fair?</i> . . . . .	34
Veronica Segovia, <i>Safety in Schools</i> . . . . .	38
Raneem Affaneh, <i>When I Say</i> . . . . .	42
Daisy Lara, <i>I Am From</i> . . . . .	43
Eliana Torres, <i>When I Say Mexico</i> . . . . .	44
David Mendiola, <i>Pilsen</i> . . . . .	45
Arturo Rivera, <i>I Am From</i> . . . . .	47

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Cover	SME	p. 24	Robert Lawrence
p. 7	Lynn West	p. 10	Lynn West
p. 13	Lynn West	p. 31	Murray Close, <i>NY Times</i>
p. 15	Redmond Pie	p. 33	Wikimedia Commons
p. 16	TorHoerman Law	p. 40	Scott Olson, <i>Chalkbeat</i>
p. 19	Herbalife	p. 45	Andrew Jameson
p. 22	3 Seas Europe	p. 46	NBC Chicago

## **The Long Ride**

by Audrey Johnson

On the first day of third grade, you plopped your enormous backpack onto the faux leather seat across from me on the school bus and launched into a spree of bizarre would-you-rather questions. It was friendship at first sight. We had so much in common, even sharing the same bus stop! From then on, we spent every dreary long ride babbling nonsense into each other's ears. We would wrinkle our nose at the whiffs of rotting trash greeting us through the window as the bus passed a factory. We would point and gawk when chewed gum had been plastered to our usual favorite seat. We would complain about the perpetual lateness of the bus and the never-ending traffic. Bored beyond belief, we were forced to improvise. In our fight against monotony, we told each other stories.

Together, we told and retold the epic of Rat Wrapper, a dumpster residing himbo rodent with a natural talent for opera singing on his noble quest to become a famous rapper. We fashioned the tale of two squirrels creatively named the Squirrels who had to build giant robots to commit ecoterrorism. We created a spinoff about their scientist chicken allies raising a family of abandoned baby birds named after the periodic table.

Besides stories, we also tried our hand at lyric writing. When the holiday seasons rolled around, we made parody “catmas carols” (“On the third day of Christmas my kitty gave to me three dead hens, two turtle heads, and a partridge that is dead”). In October we wrote fully original classics such as “I’m Gonna Suck Your Bloo-oo-ood.” and “Werewolf dance!”

We would make creations of whatever whims our tiny brains led us on, with no regard to the confused looks from eavesdropping upperclassmen or the eye rolls and second hand embarrassment of our peers; we had utter confidence that every single one of our ideas was a masterpiece. Some pieces would be written down in spiral bound notebooks. Some stories would become little comics doodled on the back of math worksheets. Sometimes, we were mighty Roman orators, telling our tales again and again, letting them develop and change with each retelling. Sometimes it was a one and done event.

How else were we to occupy ourselves when the bus was 40 minutes late?

By the time we became pimple-faced preteens, the constant unreliability of the bus became too stressful for nerds who wished to make it to social studies class on time.

Your mom generously offered to drive us both to school in the mornings. At the time, I was infinitely grateful.

Every school day morning, I would arrive at your house at quarter to seven. I would stand around awkwardly in the cluttered dining room occupied by mounds of knick-knacks, dirty plates and papers on every formerly sittable surface. I would wait as the rest of the family tore apart the house, trying to find their sneakers or raincoats. Parent and kids would cram into the minivan car and we’d be off. Four years into our friendship and I’d finally been allowed to meet your parents.

Small correction: I exchanged pleasantries with your mom and dad on occasion when they would pick you up from the bus stop, learned to steer clear of your younger brother, who was very keen on randomly and startlingly poking people, but I didn’t paid much attention till now. Despite your seniority, your 10 year old younger brother got shotgun privileges. I thought that was unfair, but I was also relieved because it was easier for us to chatter from the back seat.

We continued our usual story repertoire, sometimes updating the content of our stories to be more fitting for our increased age.

(“So I had this idea, what if when the aliens took over they...”)

However, whenever your brother would stop talking in the front seat, your mother would listen in on our conversations.

“That’s silly,” she would interject. “That’s a dumb idea.”

She would never say that to me. Her disapproval was always directed at you. “That’s weird.” Weird was always used in a judgmental and mildly insulting manner, far from the celebratory way we always used it.

You would turn red. “Oh, sorry,” you’d say and stare at your feet. Every day you had fewer ideas to share. Finally, we reached a new standard. Each morning, we would climb in the minivan. We would make small talk about the weather or what homework we had done. After five or ten minutes, the conversation would peter out and you would stare solemnly out the window.

The school year came to an end, and summer arrived. Soon enough, it was time for the highlight of our summer: rock camp! Bands were assigned at random, so we could only make sad faces at each other when fate decided our combined lyrical talent was *not* to be this year.

Time flew by and it was the end of camp performance to showcase the song our bands had written for our parents and friends. Your band went while mine was in the green room. From backstage, I could hear you strumming the power chords you had just learned that week and belting your heart out with the lyrics you had shown me to proofread two days prior. When my band walked onstage, I looked out at the crowd. I saw my parents. I saw my bandmates' parents. I did not see your parents.

When the school year began again, the quiet car rides were back in full swing. Sad vacant looks. Condensation on the car windows. The sound of windshield wipers. I hated those car rides. I was older and more autonomous, so I fled the dreary car rides to the distraction of the busy public transit. I had your phone number, but our texts became few and far between. And then they stopped altogether.

I never sought you out, nor you me. Now, when I walk past your house, I see a different family through the window. I don’t know whether or not I’d recognize you if I saw you on the street. But I like to think you still remember our long bus rides, our silly songs and our stories, that your family didn’t suck every creative breath out of you. I hope you write your own silly songs and stories. Whenever I write something particularly zany, unapologetically self-indulgent, goofy, joyful, I am reminded of you. Wherever you are, I hope you let out a great big sneeze, know it's me thinking of you warmly. And continue writing your novel.

## Stepping Stones and New Beginnings

by Arturo Rivera

It was just any other random day for me at my old apartment when my fiancée hit me with some scary news. She said she was pregnant and that I was going to be a father. I was speechless. Although I pride myself on being independent, I've always been somewhat of an underachiever. Commitment had been one of my fears. How was I going to provide for a child when I hadn't even figured out this game of life? I had a mundane job that I dreaded. At that moment in life, all my girlfriend and I cared about was saving money for vacations and hanging out with friends. I must admit that I was a late bloomer as far as maturing goes. At 28 years old I had friends who already owned homes, and some even had their own business. Here I was with no career, no discipline, and no sense of direction. I was living life on autopilot.

After the good but shocking news, I had to brainstorm. How was I going to change my ways and do better for my new baby? Maybe because I grew up around my family's income tax business, I never liked the thought of authority. I had many jobs that I would quit after a few months because I hated the thought of being on somebody's schedule. One of those jobs was at a beer distributing factory where I was expected to do regular overtime. I remember hating life in that sweatbox full of what seemed like brain dead zombies. This sweet older lady that would regularly say hi to me asked me a question that would change my life forever: "Are you a citizen?" After I told her that I was she almost yelled at me in a way your mom would yell at you to do better. She told me that I didn't belong there and had every opportunity in the world being a US citizen. She was right. That was my last day at that job. I went home that night sweaty, tired, and with my hair a mess. I regularly maintained my own hair with clippers in between visits with my barber. As I was shaping up my hairline a sudden thought hit me. I should become a barber myself.

Becoming a barber was perfect for me. My barber would tell me about how he would make \$300-\$400 dollars on a good Saturday alone. Most barbers in the Midway area rent their chairs and aren't on schedule. This was it; this was my solution. In this modern era of barbering, the money is good, and the flexibility is even better. Although many barbers operate without a proper license, I wanted to do things the right way. Here I was researching barber schools and getting prices. I finally settled on a certain school after days of calling and inquiring about signing up. As always, the game of life hit me with an obstacle, again. How was I going to pay for this school with no job? Also, I can't forget about my rent, car note, and living expenses. I needed a short-term solution while I was studying. Given the fact that I dislike working for the man, I decided to do Uber. Uber was as flexible as the career I was embarking on. I picked people up and dropped them off throughout my entire schooling. I met many different walks of life in barber school, and that helped me get through a difficult time. Sometimes it felt like therapy. April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019, halfway through my schooling, my beautiful daughter was born. This would change me forever. I was now even more motivated to get this license and move forward with my life.

Later that year I completed the course and passed my state exam. I was now a licensed barber. After not seeing my old barber for a year, I booked an appointment with him. During that appointment I asked him if he knew anybody looking to hire a newly licensed barber. The owner of the shop overheard me and said that he was interested. That is how I got my big break and became a barber. I was so happy that I had finally achieved something worth being proud of in a

very long time. All my hard work, dedication, and sacrifice paid off. I remember thinking back to what that lady had told me at the old sweat box factory I worked at just a short time ago.

Having a baby changed my world views. Somebody was more important to me than myself. There was no going back to that old procrastinating version of myself. The first year of being a barber was a rough one. I never considered how long it took to build a decent clientele. Nobody wants to get cut by the new guy who just finished school. I found myself still doing Uber part time just to help with bills. Suddenly I felt super discouraged. I contemplated quitting and going back to the old family business or finding a random job that paid better per hour. My fiancée talked me out of it every time I felt down and out. I'm grateful for that strong support system that kept me from falling back into my comfort zone. Eventually my craft got better, and I passed my business card out to everybody who sat in my chair. The money got better, and I was on a roll. All my bills were paid, and my little family was way better off.

May 10th, 2023, my second daughter was born. Life was good and we moved out of our small apartment to an actual house. We sold our small car and purchased an SUV to make room for our growing family. Just like my growing family, our bills grew with us. As grateful as I am for the opportunity to be a flexible paid barber, I knew it wasn't going to provide for a large family. I tried to ignore it for months. Being a barber is great but there are undeniable periods where the income is unpredictable. Bills are not unpredictable. Even when I have a few consistent months of great income, it covers mainly just bills, and now I have more mouths to feed. There isn't much wiggle room for extras like vacations. I've managed to get by since I am good at managing money and made a few good investments in cryptocurrency. As funny as it sounds, barbering showed me how to be a man. A lot was learned from becoming a barber. This career showed me how to be responsible, develop people skills, and gain confidence. Not everything is meant to be forever. However, this was my steppingstone to do even better. Even when I thought I had it figured out, here I was again thinking of a career change.

As a youngster I hung out with the wrong crowd. The people I looked up to weren't superheroes, they were the roughneck men who everyone feared and respected. I wanted to be just like them growing up. My mother resisted and never approved of it, but she had to work long hours to support us. I admit I was easily manipulated and fell into that lifestyle that a lot of kids from the hood never leave. That is probably why I was always a late bloomer and lacked any discipline. It didn't help that me and father don't have the greatest relationship. When I left that life behind and freed myself from the mental chains, I found that I enjoyed helping people. I even took an EMT course thinking that was my calling. I still had no discipline, so nothing ever transpired. My heart was in the right place. I'm a people's person. I love to help people. After realizing that I lacked discipline even after becoming a barber, I decided to work on my body. I joined a gym and haven't looked back and have gotten in the best shape of my life. One night after an intense gym session I was lying in bed and saw an ad for the Army on my phone. **BOOM, that's it, that's what I want.**

After much research and hours of videos, I decided that I want to join the Army Reserves. I would get great discipline and get the honor of serving my country. I'd get to live at home with my family and still be a soldier, a lifelong goal of mine. I won't have to worry about paying rent back home. When I'm gone for training, they offer basic housing assistance, which helps pay for soldiers with dependents while away. Additionally, I can continue my schooling and career all while serving my country. Not only would it look great on any resume plus have great benefits, but I would also make my mother proud for all the times I've disappointed her in my younger



years. Now I had a plan I'm excited about, but I still needed a new career that would support my growing family.

The next day I went to the gym, and I noticed police recruiters handing out fliers. As I passed them, they handed me one and told me that I looked like a good candidate. I went home and started reading the flier. It was at that moment it all made sense to me. Most law enforcement jobs prefer people with military experience. The Army is synonymous with discipline, strong work ethic, and being mentally strong. That would surely give me the edge over other candidates. I should enter law enforcement and give back to the community after years of taking from it. I want to right all my wrongs. At this age it will be my biggest challenge yet. At the end it will be my biggest achievement. I hope to set a good example for everybody significant in my life. The best, and worst, is yet to come. I'm going to stay resilient and keep on pushing.





## Old Yellow Couch

by Vasette Valdez

Storms can be scary. The uncertainty that grows listening to the howling winds and thunderous downpours can be quite unsettling for anyone, especially a 10-year-old girl, and like any eldest sibling, you look to your parents for refuge and guidance. Unfortunately, even when they are trying their best to provide it, I realized that having dramatic parents may be the root cause of the uneasiness and anxiety one like myself may develop.

It was a chilly morning when I heard my mother's car roar to life. I knew I had slept in that day based on the level of crust that was built up on my eyes, so I peeled myself out of bed. Walking out of my room with my hair looking exactly how my pillow left it, I headed downstairs to see if anyone else was around. To my surprise not only were my dad and brother up, but they were all dressed and ready to roll. My stepdad was huffing and puffing about. It looked like he was trying to ransack the kitchen. "We are out of pancake mix and bacon. Sorry kid, I was going to make breakfast, but instead you are just going to have to find something else to eat," he said as he shut the cabinet doors and slammed the fridge closed. I didn't say anything, I just looked down at my brother who was struggling to put his dinosaur boots on. I kneeled to help him as my stepdad said, "Well your brother and I are going to get some groceries, I figured, you're old enough to stay home by yourself." As he said this, I looked out the window and noticed the clouds gathering in the sky. My brother hopped up, and I watched as he followed my dad like a little duckling out to the garage. "Well bye!" I shouted out, but I knew they couldn't hear me.

My dad always took my brother with him wherever he went. This wasn't unusual, but what was different about that day was how the sky looked. It turned from gray to a greenish hue in what felt like seconds. To ease my mind, I decided to see what scraps were left in the fridge. There was only a half-eaten donut and some Kool-Aid, so I opted for the sugary drink. Sipping on my fruity cup of Red 40, I began to settle down. I watched cartoons mindlessly until I heard some commotion outside. When I opened the curtains, I saw branches and leaves swirling around the block and mailboxes dancing against the curb. I knew something was up; just at that moment I heard our house phone ring. I picked up the receiver. My mother was speaking before I could even say, "Hello."

"Oh my God, there's a tornado watch in our area, if you hear a siren go off take cover in the basement." As she spoke, the loud warning noises filled my ears, and I went silent. I could hear my mom screaming for a response. Without pulling the phone away from my ear I muttered that the sirens had just gone off. She started freaking out, going on and on about the dangers of tornados, half telling me and half telling her coworkers. That only convinced me more that I would be dying alone that night. I used to watch storm chasers, and I understood tornadoes' ability to uproot entire homes, and for a little kid that is no small matter to dismiss. So I asked her if she thought everything was going to be okay, which was a mistake because my mother was always overly dramatic, and, unsurprisingly, she said she was not too sure. The lack of reassurance from her had my heart pumping, and I immediately acted.

I hung up on my mom and ran down to the basement. It was cold, dark, and cluttered. My mother had a hoarding addiction, and it took me a couple minutes to climb over miscellaneous items until I was able to get to this old yellow couch we had. I decided the best idea would be to flip it over so I could hide under it quickly. The couch was sturdy but light; I was able to flip it with ease and lie under it with my hands over my head. I assumed the position they taught us during tornado drills at school. It felt the safest to me. With my head

on the concrete, my forehead felt cool, and I could feel years' worth of dust and grime sticking to me. The smell was musty, and for a moment I felt calm simply because I loved that smell, but that only lasted for a second as flashbacks filled my mind.

My father used to ignore the tornado sirens; in fact, he would stand outside during severe weather without any regard for us. My mother was the exact opposite; she would prepare for the worst. One memory circling my head was when my brother and I woke up in her arms under the stairs in my basement. She was crying and praying to God to let the storm pass safely. There was never a moment where my mom could just ease up—tornadoes were always life or death to her, and my stepdad was never any help. I just wished that either of them comforted me during storms, maybe then I wouldn't have felt so afraid under that old yellow couch.

Those thoughts ended when I realized everything around me had gone silent. No rain, no wind, no animal noises, or cars moving outside. Surely this was it, my last moments away from everyone and everything I loved. I had the house phone my mom used to call me on sitting on the floor next to my head and during the last seconds of silence, I jolted up, startled by “Hungarian Dance” by James Vasquez, our ringtone at the time. I answered as quickly as possible fearing it was my mother calling to tell me something happened to my stepdad and brother or even her final goodbyes. Instead she said, “The storm is over, you can go back upstairs now!” I grabbed at my heart. The panic that had stiffened my body finally loosened up and I was able to crawl out of my shelter. While holding the phone with my head, I picked up the couch and sat down in it, sighing in relief. I remember thanking God over and over aloud as my mom told me she would be on her way home soon. I walked back upstairs to see that my cat was sitting in the living room window. Even he knew the storm wasn't that big of a deal.

When everyone got home, we all had a good laugh and told each other our stories of what happened. Of course, my mother expressed her worries about me to her coworkers, my father enjoyed watching the shopping carts skate across the parking lot until my brother started bawling, and I told them about my makeshift shelter. The entire time we reminisced I still felt uneasy. They didn't apologize for leaving me home alone. They didn't even acknowledge the fact that they overreacted to the whole situation or failed to reassure me that everything was going to be okay. I pretended to laugh and go on about my night as usual, but when I went to bed, sure enough I had nightmares about it.

Thinking back to that day, I remember how terrified I was. It was from that moment on that my nervousness and worried tendencies grew. A little reassurance from my parents could have stopped the anxiety I ended up developing, but since that wasn't the case, I learned how to get through it on my own. Quickly, creatively and with a whole lot of praying.

## **Pursuing My Dream of Becoming a Teacher** by Veronica Crisostomo

Elementary teachers always talk about what each student wants to be when they grow up. I remember one day in second grade in our nicely decorated classroom. Ms. Covarrubias had carefully organized tables and chairs in groups of four, leaving space for a black rug with different colorful shapes on the floor where we all sat together. She asked us what our dream was when we grew up. I can still see the look in our faces, especially how Aracely, my friend, wrinkled her face in confusion and deep thought of her future. We were only about six or seven years old. At that moment, all we could think of was playing and having fun, not worrying about being adults who must work to pay bills, living a basic life just to get by each day. Yet, unlike my friend, I knew what I wanted to be, a teacher.

My dream of being a teacher slowly disappeared, not because I didn't want it anymore, but because, as the saying goes, "When life throws you lemons, make lemonade." When I was eight, my parents got divorced, giving my father full custody of my older brother, who at the time was nine, and me. He was a single immigrant parent, a diesel mechanic who worked before sunrise until past sunset each day, even during the weekends—I can still smell the diesel of my dad's dirty clothes. Sometimes he labored as a construction worker. With two young children in Chicago and no family to help him care of us, my father had no choice but to send us to Salvatierra Guanajuato, Mexico, to live with my grandmother.

At the beginning of the new school year in fifth grade in Chicago, I was nine years old and having a tough time adapting to my life without my mother. The constant laughing, harassing, and bullying from my classmates was taking a toll on me. It was a complete relief when my dad withdrew my brother and me from school a week before taking us to Mexico, since a new life was starting for me somewhere else where no one knew anything about me. It was like starting from zero. Unfortunately, this feeling of relief soon went away as other worries arose.

It was mid-September in 2000 when I arrived in Salvatierra Guanajuato, Mexico, at my grandmother's house. At first, everything was fun and interesting to me, new and beautiful. The streets were not like in Chicago. There were no sidewalks in the neighborhood. We walked on what we considered the road, uneven and made of dirt. Only the main roads that connect the cities nearby were made of asphalt. As we walked in the neighborhood, the cars driving by created clouds of dust and we could smell the dirt. At night I was able to see the beautiful lights of the stars and moon clearly with no worries other than being a kid, playing outside with my cousins I had never met before until then, and feeling loved by my dad's side of the family.

A week after my arrival, my grandma enrolled my brother and me into our new school, which was only three blocks down our street. (Interesting fact: elementary school in Mexico only goes until sixth grade, and then three years of high school, unlike in the U.S.). As I mentioned, it was mid-September when I arrived in Mexico, the school year had already started, and I was starting fifth grade again but a little bit late. Here is where my new worries began. I remember walking into my new classroom, which was a single rectangular room with lots of windows on two of its side walls. I could see inside and beyond the classroom out onto the soccer field as I was making my way there. I remember wearing a navy-blue skirt, white collar blouse, navy blue cardigan, white knee-length socks, and my new black dress shoes my grandma had just bought for me. The class had already started, and everyone was sitting on their wooden benches. I walked in, feeling nervous and worrying about not having friends, struggling with only speaking Spanish, failing my classes, and going through the same issues I had at the beginning of fifth

grade in Chicago. I felt sick to my stomach. Once I walked in, there was complete silence, and everyone at once turned to look at me. Soon after low whispering occurred. I assumed they were talking about my uniform, as everyone else was wearing regular clothes. I did not bother to dig more into it, as I didn't want to be more anxious than I already was. My new teacher greeted and welcomed me to the classroom, assigning me a seat next to a nice friendly big smiley girl named Claudia—she immediately made me feel welcome and we became friends.

By the age of 13, despite all my worries and concerns, I managed to reach the second year of high school in Mexico, but before I was able to finish, my grandma withdrew me from school. Living in Mexico with my grandma wasn't easy; she was born and raised by extremely rigid parents who thought females were meant to be stay-at-home spouses. Because my brother had decided to run away, she thought I shouldn't be in school anymore as she didn't have anyone there to keep an eye on me. I was almost done with the school year. How difficult would it be for her to spare the month and a half left? Not difficult at all, but I had to listen and do what she said. I spent the following year at home with my grandmother doing chores day and night until one day a friend of mine, who was taking cosmetology courses, came to visit and told my grandmother about it, and convinced her to have me enrolled in a course.

It was the beginning of December 2005 when I began the cosmetology course. I can recall the first day as if it were yesterday. My friend was taking her classes in the evening while mine was in the morning. I walked in once again feeling nervous and anxious since I was only 14 years old and everyone there looked a lot older than me, surely in their late 20's to mid 30's. The main entrance had a nicely decorated white side table with flowers to the left. A few more steps into the beauty shop there were two doors, one on the left and the other on the right. The left door was for the beginners, learning everything that involved hair, haircuts, elegant hair styles for weddings or Quinceañeras, hair dyeing, to mention a few. The right door was for the advanced students learning manicure, pedicure, clarifying the skin tone—I never got to this level, therefore never knew what that meant exactly—and applying gel and acrylic nails. Surely, the left door was the one I had to walk through.

There were about five older women in the room; some were cutting hair while some were learning how to do permanent perms, but the teacher was not there. As I walked in, the women in the room at once stopped working and stared for a few seconds, which to me it felt like eternity, until one of them said in Spanish, "*La profe está en el otro cuarto*" (the professor is in the other room). I ran out quickly, as if I were trying to escape danger, when suddenly I bumped into the teacher, who was amazingly kind and said, "You must be Natalie's friend Veronica." She at once took me in and gave me a quick orientation of the building. Then she had me doing simple hair styles for the rest of the four hours the class lasted.

I continued attending the classes each day up until just before Christmas break. The last day I attended, she mentioned the day we were returning from break, but unfortunately, I did not pay enough attention to what she had said. I missed the date. When the break was over according to me, I went back, but absolutely no one was there. I decided not to make a fool of myself and never went back. Either way, at that time, cosmetology did not interest me at all.

A few months after, while I was speaking to my dad over the phone, he surprised me with great news—I was finally moving back with him to Chicago. I was extremely happy. Finally, being back with my dad was going to change my life around. I would go back to school. It was too soon to assume my life was changing for good—my dad not only had me come back to my country, but he also let my grandmother come with us.

Back in Chicago, according to the law, my dad needed to have me enroll in school as I was only 15 years old. But somehow my grandmother managed to convince my dad not to. I spent about half a year without going to school. One day, a friend of my dad's found out and recommended that he homeschool me so he wouldn't get into legal problems if someone found out and reported him. My dad took his friend's advice and enrolled me at American School for Homeschooling. They sent home three subject books for me to read along with the workbooks to do assignments. I began homeschooling right away. But after being in a foreign country only speaking Spanish, you can imagine how difficult was for me to succeed in my classes. I had to use my dad's old dictionary to help me translate all the English words I was unable to understand while studying and doing my homework, so it was taking me double the time to complete my course work. Although it was taking longer, I excelled in the subjects I completed. It became overwhelming to do this every single day. Therefore, I dropped homeschooling once I turned 16.

Around this time my mother was back in the picture. A year later, I decided to move in with her as she said she would enroll me in a high school close to her house in Summit, Illinois. I must admit she did try enrolling me into that high school (I prefer not to say the name of the school) but the clerk, because I was 17 years old back in 2008, said that I represented danger to their students, and I could not be enrolled into their high school. Those words stunted me until I was much older. How dare she say something like that to someone who wanted to attend school to learn and succeed in life. She did not give us any options or information about what we could do. I left there feeling disappointed and disgusted by her.

A few days later, my mom asked me if there wasn't anything else I could do about school, was it best to get a job and start making my life. I took her words and began searching and applying for a job on the internet. Days later, I received a call from a manager at Portillos & Barnelli's in Willowbrook, Illinois, asking for a time and day I could meet for an interview. The interview was successful, and I was hired on the spot.

I started my position as a salad prep team member. A few months after, I was trained in all the areas of business in the Barnelli's department. I worked there for about three years. During that time, I met my husband whom I dated for extraordinarily little time, about four to five months before we moved in together. A year after moving in together we had our first baby girl, and I decided to leave my job to focus on and take care of my newborn baby. We got married once my daughter turned one year old. Shortly after our wedding, we found out I was pregnant with my second daughter, and a year later, I was pregnant again with what I like to call my last baby, my son, AKA Chubby.

As my family grew, I realized only one source of income was not enough to support my our basic needs. I knew I must work to help my husband provide for us. I got a job at Wendy's as a team member. Based on how fast I learned and excelled at all my positions, I was promoted to manager. I stayed with the company for another three years, until I found better paying job opportunity at Chick-fil-A. The same way I succeeded at Wendy's, I succeeded at Chick-fil-A. Unlike the other two jobs I had before, I stayed with this company for almost 11 years. During all that time, I was encouraged and became courageous to get back on pursuing my dream of going to school.

One day after a long day at work, instead of driving home to my family I drove to College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, where I registered for GED classes. By the end of December 2017, I finished my GED and started my college education the next year. By January 2018, I was a full-time student, full-time manager at Chick-fil-A, and a full-time mother and wife all at once. I still do not know how I managed to get A's and B's my first two semesters of

college with only sleeping a few hours every day. Sadly, due to my degree requirements all my classes were lab work and because of Covid and not being able to meet in person, I was forced to take a sabbatical for a year. I finally graduated with an Associate Degree in Applied Science in May 2022.

By this time, I had also bought a house and moved back to Chicago, transferring my children to a Chicago Public School. I began volunteering at my children's school as a parent mentor for a few hours a day each week while still working at Chick-fil-A. The more time I spent at school, the more that dream I once had when I was younger of being a teacher slowly began to come back to life. Here I was enjoying what I was doing as a volunteer, not getting a check for it. I reduced my work hours to barely 20 per week so I could spend more time volunteering at school. I would take my children to school every morning and stay until school ended each day. By April 2023, I decided to apply for a job position at CPS as a Special Education Classroom Assistant (SECA), since I realized the need for staff who genuinely cared for the students.

To my surprise I was called for an interview and was hired in less than a week. I left my job with Chick-fil-A three weeks later upon hiring. Best decision I have ever made in my career life. I am now grateful for everything that happened in my life as it has led me back to my path pursuing my dream of becoming a teacher. Everything I learned in the food industry as a team member and as a leader has equipped me with the tools needed to be a person, not yet teacher by title but by heart, who is able to teach special education young adults with disabilities the basic life skills to find and keep a job, and develop the ability to self-advocate after they graduate the program.



## Why can't I see what's right in front of me?

Jalen Wilkins

I saw her today. How could I forget her luscious black silky hair, her soul staring black eyes, her gap between her teeth that she tries to hide, and her Latta Khamrah perfume that she always oversprays. She's so beautiful to me. I don't know if I'll ever get over her. No, not like the "Hey, we're friends but I'll always still have feelings" get over her, but more like, "Hey, we are cool, but I don't have feelings for you anymore" type getting over it. I'm a mess, I know. No, not like "Everything's everywhere, but I know where everything is" type of mess, but a "Bro, I can't find my AirPods. It's been three years" type of mess.

My iPhone just vibrated. It's probably an Instagram notification. I have a lot of followers. There's no way it's her, right? Wow, my mind is flooded with all kinds of thoughts. **Did she text me? If she did text me, why now? She broke up with me first, so why reach out now? Is she trying to run it back? What is her goal? Maybe she's bored with the other guy?** Then I remembered, I haven't even pulled my iPhone out of my pocket yet. Oh, God, I'm overthinking again. It's this thing I do, a lot. It's like experiencing everything at once and experiencing nothing at the same exact time. It's like that one scene from *Avatar: The Last Airbender* where Aang was able to view his past lives. That's kind of like what my overthinking is. I can see everything with these eyes of mine; nothing exists that I can't see.

"Heyyyy" **Fuck, 4 y's? She's flirting with me.** When she flirts it's not the casual "Hey you're really cute, could I get your number?" It's three awkward glances at you and five extra blinks in your direction for good measure. She wants you to pick up on her signals. What am I, a damn antenna? When I first saw the text message, it felt like a piece of freshly smelted iron just pressed against my chest cavity; a feather could land on my body and I would shatter into a million pieces, and for some reason I seem to be in a race with my breathing, and it's totally lapping my ass because I can't seem to catch up. Fuck, I'm panicking. There's always a weird angle with her. Like "Oh yeah I drink milk all the time" kind of weird. Engaging in a conversation with her is like trying to fight a boss in *Dark Souls III* on the hardest difficulty because her next move is unpredictable. Seriously it's like trying to guess which Jenga piece to pull out so the tower doesn't fall down.

I've been staring at the text so long I've started to see things I usually wouldn't care for on my phone. The screen has a slight crack at the bottom left hand corner. The sides are scraped up so bad you'd think a cat's claws went at it, and my charger plug is filled with so much dust you'd need a vacuum cleaner to get it all out. Wow, my phone is horrible. Any reasonable human being would probably sell this thing to the nearest scrap store for parts. You know what would be even worse though? Responding to this text message.

Fuck, what am I thinking? **"Did I just leave a slim, curvy, silk haired, dark skinned, nice smelling girl on seen?"** Listen, after staring at my phone for so long I thought I was traveling through hyperspace. I came to realize that whenever I speak to her she makes my insides feel like a preheated oven that's about to bake a thanksgiving turkey. She makes my head spin like an F5 tornado, and her very being is entangled into the fabric of my brain. It's like a spiderweb, except each strand is connected to a different part of my frontal lobe. This is exactly why I can't text her back. I like her too much to go through everything we went through all over again. The way her hand felt against my skin, the way her sofa-like lips caressed my mouth, the echo of her laughter reverberating throughout her dorm hall, and her horribly timed jokes like "What do you call a rooster staring at a pile of lettuce? A chicken sees a salad!" that she seems to



think are the funniest thing to ever grace this planet. All of these are memories from the past. When I stood there having an intense staring contest with my dimly lit screen, I realized I have to move on, even if I desperately want to act on what's right in front of me. I press the power button on my phone and the screen goes black. The black screen makes me feel like I'm in an infinitely expanding corridor with no windows. I put my phone back in my denim jeans because I know at the end of the day, I made the right decision.



## **My First Fight**

by  
Jamari King

Violence. I remember it like it was yesterday: the first time in my entire life where I used violence to solve a problem. It's so vivid in my head. It is one of the few memories in my head that has yet to leave. The stings of being punched, the adrenaline pumping through my veins, and the excitement and thrill of the conflict. All these feelings from that day are fresh in my mind. It was the day I realized how much I truly enjoy fighting. So here is the story of my very first act of violence. My very first fight.

When I was young I was a friendly kid. I was full of joy and glee. Despite everything going on around me, I was filled with joy. It was about 5th or 6th grade when I was being picked on by a kid bigger than me. This kid would call me names, throw stuff at me, and, as cliché as it was, he took my money (though it wasn't for lunch). I never told anyone about it because I didn't want to. I wasn't scared, but it was more of the fact that when I was growing up I was told not to fight, to simply alert the teacher or any person in an authoritative position. However, one day the bully started beating on me. I started coming home with bruises and marks and with my family breathing down my neck. They weren't just taking my old excuses of me falling or playing. I eventually gave in and told them the name of the bully and they came up to the school with the cops. Afterwards it stopped. The bullying stopped, but only for a moment. He eventually got back to it. The beatings got worse and more brutal. I was stuck in a difficult position. He wasn't going to stop because he didn't want to stop and I couldn't fight back because I wasn't allowed to. The pain grew until it got to the point where I didn't even mind it anymore. What really became a problem for me was the humiliation that came from it. It enraged me. I went to visit my cousin's family after that day, and they saw my bruises and ended up asking about them. I told them; however, my cousin's mom and dad told me to fight back.

The next day came and I saw him playing in the field. For some reason I was excited, not scared, not angry, but excited. I couldn't wait for him to come over and try to bully me. So I gave in and walked to the middle of the field where he was and called his name. He looked at me and I began to antagonize him. I started cursing at him, making fun of his family, and calling his mom names. He began to approach me. The plan was for him to hit me in front of security so I'd be within my rights to fight back. However, I just couldn't wait a second longer. I spit in his face and smashed his nose in as hard as I could and after that, we just kept fighting for as long as we could while security was sprinting. I don't remember much about the fight after that but I do remember words being replayed over and over in my head: "I love this." Eventually, security came and split us up and I remember just how good I felt. How satisfied I felt.

After that incident the bully eventually bullied me less and less until he completely stopped. I had stopped being a victim and started doing what I wanted. As time passed, I got into more fights. I became more confident in who I am, and I lost a sense of fear. All that mattered to me was having fun. I even got myself into unnecessary fights just for the kicks. Eventually, though, one of my friends at the time told me about a park district that taught boxing. I went there to see what it was about. I got to train and learn discipline. I truly got my fill of fights and fun. I enjoyed slowly climbing the mountain of struggle and coming out on top. These events cemented my obsession with violence, power, and superiority. That is what started my love for fighting. My very first fight.

# **Bayer Rounds Up Monsanto**

## by Nohelia Alcala

### **Introduction**

Bayer is one of the largest suppliers of pesticides; Monsanto is one of the largest suppliers of genetically modified seeds for crops. Bayer and Monsanto merged together in 2018, thus expanding both their businesses exponentially. Both companies have faced major scrutiny for their mishandling of the negative environmental implications of their decisions.

### **Maintaining Ethical Culture**

Monsanto did not maintain an ethical culture that effectively responded to various stakeholders. At the beginning stages of the company's GM seed development, it became clear that they were not interested in the damage they were doing to the environment so long as they were accruing profits. Around the 1990s, Monsanto's misconduct was revealed to the public about the misuse of waste from the production of their genetically engineered seeds: They had disposed of an extremely toxic chemical into a nearby body of water in a small town of Alabama that had disastrous effects on the living organisms of the body of water and its surroundings (Ferrell et al., 2022, p.388).

It was revealed that Monsanto's leaders had known about the damages for about four decades and had not made any indication that they cared or would halt the disposal of that waste in the creek, which later resulted in a settlement to the people who were affected by the fatal effects of that decision. However, even as the company acquired a new leader soon after, it did not change the fact that Bayer/Monsanto would later still be receiving massive lawsuits against their use of pesticides and genetically engineered seeds and the effects on the plaintiffs.

### **Positives and negatives of GM seeding**

There are many benefits and drawbacks to growing genetically modified seeds for crops. An advantage is that GM seeds can result in more crops coming to fruition and less likely to die out, which has saved farmers billions of dollars. For example, in 1970, before genetically modifying seeds was a concept, farmers were collecting about 70 bushels of crops for every acre and now they can harvest twice as many, about 150 bushels (Ferrell et al., 2021, p.389). Another advantage is allowing for more resistance to harmful pesticides and diseases.

However, exposure to pesticides can result in birth defects, cancer, immunotoxicity, and on a smaller scale can cause headaches, rashes, blistering and other irritations. Regulations for GM crops have also not had strict implementation adding to the negative effects for the health of the people who consume the produce from these farms. Furthermore, genetically modified crops can alter antibiotic resistance and contribute to allergies as well as negatively affect the ecosystems nearby. Through cross pollination, GM genes can attach to native plants, essentially exterminating the origins of that plant, thus creating a new plant which could be detrimental to the species that rely on nutrients or on pollination from the original plant.

### **Managing Harm**

To manage the potential harm to plant and animal life from using products such as the pesticide Roundup, Bayer should update their labels. They need to be transparent about the ingredients in Roundup and adjust the harm preventative instructions accordingly. The product should say boldly that it can cause cancer and other defects in a living organism. In fact, it could

be argued that the company should remove Roundup from the market and produce a product for GM crops that can still remove harmful weeds and insects while causing less harm to the environment and its living inhabitants. To make matters worse, the company continually and unfairly threatens farmers for using their products without permission. Birds and insects can carry GM seeds to other nearby farms, yet Bayer/Monsanto still sues farm owners for “stealing” their seeds whether or not the farmers had anything to do with how the seeds got there (Ferrell et al., 2022, p.391). It would help if the company spent less time finding new reasons to sue and find time to make a less invasive pesticide.

### Conclusion

Ultimately, Bayer/Monsanto has proven that they do not care about the ethical implications of damaging entire ecosystems or endangering those in proximity to their products. They have not done much to diminish the environmental damage that they have caused and continue to cause today. The extensive list of lawsuits that they have settled, accumulating to a total of about nine billion dollars, shows that they have caused catastrophic damage to not only the environment but the living organisms surrounding their products. Even if they begin to engineer their products to be less harmful, in all likelihood that will not change the permanence of the extreme damage that has already been done.

### Reference

Ferrell, O. C., Fraedrich, J., & Ferrell, L. (2022). *Business Ethics: Ethical Decision Making and Cases*. (13th ed.). Cengage Learning.

**THL** **ROUNDUP LAWSUIT**

GLYPHOSATE (ACTIVE INGREDIENT) LINKED TO CANCER

**PEOPLE EFFECTED:** Research has found that agricultural workers and individuals who used Roundup experience an increased risk for adverse health effects, including cancer.

**LAWSUIT INJURIES:**  
Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma  
Other Lymphatic Cancers  
Leukemia

**CHEMICALS INVOLVED:**  
Glyphosate

**LAWSUIT STATUS:**  
Accepting New Clients

**RECALL:**  
N/A (Active)

Example of a firm that litigates Roundup claims

# **Herbalife Nutrition Achieves Success by Managing Risks**

by Brett Shaw

## **Introduction**

As discussed in “Herbalife Nutrition Achieves Success by Managing Risks” by Ferrell et. al (2022), Herbalife Nutrition, a direct selling wellness brand, successfully navigates public misconceptions surrounding their business model. Herbalife Nutrition sells food products that help their customers achieve their fitness goals—whether that be losing weight, building muscle, or having more energy throughout the day. They sell these products using a controversial direct selling model. This paper digs more into the logistics of this selling model and identifies how Herbalife Nutrition has defended itself against public backlash.

## **Pyramid Schemes vs. Direct Selling**

Herbalife Nutrition utilizes a multilevel direct selling model to operate its business. This model has attracted a negative reputation, as it is often mistaken for a pyramid scheme. Both setups involve sellers working independently under a larger company. These sellers conduct their business by selling person to person, often selling to friends, neighbors, and people they connect with online. The sellers can be compensated both through the sale of products and through the recruitment of new sellers.

However, there are key differences between these two structures of business. A company that uses a pyramid scheme earns its profits through the continual recruitment of new sellers—not through the sale of the product itself. As this scheme grows, people at the bottom of the pyramid fail to make money, and the entire business crashes. The key signs of a pyramid scheme include sellers paying the company a fee to work for them, sellers receiving commissions for recruiting additional sellers, and recruitment commissions being more significant than actual product sales. In pyramid schemes, new sellers are often required to purchase bulk products with no options for refunds.

On the other hand, multilevel direct selling is a legitimate business model that protects its sellers and actually makes revenue through the sale of products. In multilevel direct selling, there is still an incentive to recruit other sellers because sellers earn “commissions on sales made by those they have recruited” (p. 408). This commission, however, is not required to earn profits. Sellers can make money simply by selling their own products without recruiting others. Another key difference is that legitimate direct selling businesses charge much less money to get started with the company. They require less initial purchase of inventory and offer their sellers the opportunity to return their unsold products for a refund if they would like to leave the business. Direct selling has been a legitimate method of business for years. It is important to understand how it differs from pyramid schemes so that consumers can responsibly place their trust.

## **Managing Public Relations Risks**

As a multilevel direct selling company, Herbalife Nutrition knows that they are vulnerable to speculation surrounding pyramid schemes and ethical misconduct. Therefore, Herbalife Nutrition maintains a strict system to regulate their company’s ethical behavior and avoid public relations risks. Herbalife Nutrition is very transparent with their sellers about their expectations for ethical behavior, and there are many available outlets for people to report violations.

There are also independent self-regulatory organizations that direct selling companies can voluntarily join to ensure that they are following ethical protocols. These organizations emphasize “ethical business practices and consumer protection measures and require that members adhere to the ... Code of Ethics” (p. 409). Herbalife Nutrition is a member of one of these organizations: the Direct Selling Self-Regulatory Council. Herbalife Nutrition’s commitment to self-regulation within their industry demonstrates their commitment to ethical behavior.

Another strategy that Herbalife Nutrition uses to protect their image is the strict management of their product quality. A direct selling company is only as successful as the reputation of their product. Herbalife Nutrition has a dedicated team of over 300 scientists working to ensure that their products are clean, high-quality, and effective. Any errors in production could be a disaster for the company.

A third strategy that Herbalife Nutrition uses is the creation of community spaces that keep their stakeholders happy and engaged. Through the Nutrition Club program, Herbalife Nutrition sellers and consumers have a space to gather where they can try products, engage in group exercise classes, and connect with like-minded people. These clubs foster a community of stakeholders that are more likely to stay loyal to Herbalife Nutrition should any public relations scandals surface. Through cooperation with ethical regulation committees, commitment to quality products, and engagement of stakeholders, Herbalife Nutrition upholds their good reputation.

### **Success After Investigation**

In 2012, Herbalife Nutrition received a swarm of media attention after William Ackman, a celebrity investor, went on a public tirade against the company. Ackman and his company, Pershing Square Capital Management, investigated Herbalife Nutrition and declared that they were “an elaborate pyramid scheme” (p. 413). Ackman asserted that Herbalife Nutrition’s sellers mostly lost money and that the company paid more for new sellers than for sales commissions. This accusation from a powerful market influencer caused Herbalife Nutrition’s stock to drop dramatically and threatened to put the company out of business. The swarm of attention also triggered an investigation by the Federal Trade Commission. The Federal Trade Commission held a public trial to determine if Herbalife Nutrition was indeed a pyramid scheme.

While this trial was initially extremely damaging to Herbalife Nutrition, the company was able to successfully defend themselves and use the trial as an opportunity to adjust their business model. Herbalife Nutrition was very cooperative with the FTC when providing financial records and details of their business. They spent millions of dollars on legal fees and lobbyists and ultimately won their case. Herbalife Nutrition did, however, have to pay 200 million dollars to sellers who were misled about the level of financial success that they could find with the company. Herbalife Nutrition also had to change how they reported product sales that were being consumed by sellers instead of sales to be consumed by non-sellers.

In the end, Herbalife Nutrition had no problem meeting these requirements and has since been better able to market their seller roles to people who are not looking to make a living salary but are simply trying to supplement their income. The entire case proved Herbalife Nutrition to be a legitimate company and helped them strategize the future of their business. Their stock value has since soared. The company appears to have a bright future as online influencing and person to person sales become more popular.

## Conclusion

By distinguishing themselves as different from a pyramid scheme, Herbalife Nutrition found great success and a loyal customer base. It is important for direct selling companies to maintain ethical integrity to manage the public relations risks that come with their business model. Stakeholders should be aware of the signs of actual pyramid schemes so that they can avoid scams and so that they do not misjudge legitimate companies with quality offerings like Herbalife Nutrition.

## Reference

Ferrell, O. C., Fraedrich, J., & Ferrell, L. (2022). *Business Ethics: Ethical Decision Making and Cases*. (13th ed.). Cengage Learning.





**Ruta Sepetys' *I Must Betray You*: ÉäÉäÉÇÅEÉVÉÖÉVÉÖÇÅÇΣÇ◇Çf**  
by Julian Monroy

“Fear arrived at five o’clock” is the opening line of Ruta Sepetys’ 2022 novel, *I Must Betray You*. The novel follows the 17-year-old protagonist Cristian and his struggles within a 1980s Romanian society ruled over with an iron fist by the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. As you can see from the first sentence, the novel doesn’t waste any time introducing one of its main themes – fear. In this society, the practice of “informing” – being blackmailed by Romania’s secret police to spy against suspected dissidents – is a sight more common than food. Fear is much more than a simple emotion. It is a master, enslaving the masses and shaping every aspect of their lives.

Another work of literature, Takami Koushun’s 1999 political satire *Battle Royale*, takes this concept of weaponized fear quite literally. A fascist Japanese government kidnaps teenagers yearly and has them fight to the death on a secluded island until only one remains – all in the name of demoralizing the population and building distrust among them. Even today in modern Japan, destructive fears exist, albeit they have just taken on different forms. There’s no better example of this than the epidemic of “kireru” attacks, and the fears that build up to a person committing terrible acts.

In *I Must Betray You*, Ruta Sepetys analyzes how fear is used as a corrupting and manipulative force against the innocent. It takes no prisoners – even the people we perceive as “villains” are human too. Cristian Florescu is just your average 17-year-old boy. He’s sarcastic, pines to be with a girl, hangs out with his best friend, goes to school, etc. – there’s just a little caveat, though. He’s blackmailed to inform on an American friend of his for the Securitate’s benefit, and what he believes to his ailing grandfather’s benefit too, in the form of medicine as a reward. Soon, his world is turned upside down. The girl he pines to be with describes him as “everything I despise” (Sepetys 118). He’s punching his best friend; he finds out the supposed “medicine” was all a sham – his life all comes crashing down because of the fear brought upon by the Securitate. Every aspect of Cristian’s life is monitored closely by multiple Securitate members who won’t even let him share a nice moment with his crush.

This fear crushes any semblance of a normal life Cristian may have had. Hell, his first kiss is within a prison where beforehand he was brutally beaten (Sepetys 242). Even many years later in the epilogue, he still struggles with trust, a sad reminder that some scars simply never fade away: “There were so many disturbing details of the surveillance. Things I felt for sure were private were not private ... Reading the files was indescribably violating and needled trust issues I had hoped were long buried” (Sepetys 290). Cristian’s transformation throughout the novel is harrowing to watch – seeing what was once a normal teenager being reduced to a bloody pulp at the hands of a ruthless dictatorship. Despite all this, Cristian manages to remain relatively hopeful throughout it all. Not only is fear a powerful and pervasive tool against the mind, it is also one of basic survival.

Stray dogs, a recurring symbol in *I Must Betray You*, start appearing quite early into the novel. In fact, the sixth chapter is almost solely dedicated to introducing them. Cristian describes an attack on a young girl in vividly violent detail: “The animals lunged at the girl, growling wild and guttural. She frantically swiveled her torso, holding her small fists protectively in front of her neck. Teeth landed, found anchor, and ripped” (Sepetys 21). Fearful, hungry, forced into malice to survive – these are all things that can describe both the Romanian people and these stray dogs. In fact, even one of the main antagonists that we follow, a man only known as agent

“Paddle Hands,” is recognized as human too when his facade breaks, even if just for a split second: “The agent gave a small laugh. ‘Didn’t we all.’ His body suddenly stiffened, returning to tight posture, as if lashed by an invisible whip ... But the momentary, minuscule crack in his armor, I saw it” (Sepetys 130).

It’s doubtful that these dogs want to attack and maul the innocent, but in their world, they are forced to out of a need to survive after their homes were destroyed. It is forced just as Romanians must inform on even their own families and friends, just for something as basic a human need as food. Even Paddle Hands is only doing this out of need to survive as well. Perhaps he was once a normal person, like Cristian, only forced into this situation due to unfortunate circumstances. Later, towards the end of the novel, as the Romanian people find their long-lost voices and rise against the regime, so do the stray dogs. As Cristian is being held at a prison, guards attempt to goad a dog into attacking him. The plan quickly goes south however, as the dog quickly turns on the guard. No longer enslaved by fear, they too get the chance to revolt against their oppressors and injustice. In a crumbling regime with hopeful citizens rising against it, the once pervasive fears that once plagued the innocent evaporate, like a demon splashed with holy water. While some are brave enough to rise up against the confines of fear, sadly, not every single person is able to find the resolve that is within them. Isolated, their minds are consumed by fear.

In *Battle Royale*, the words beautiful killing machine are apt to describe student Souma Mitsuko. She’s so ruthless she even scares a student dubbed “The Untouchable,” becoming the only person he actively fears and avoids. Though she’s seemingly heartless, a heart-wrenching insight into her character is given just moments before she dies:

Suddenly Mitsuko’s thoughts—despite the fact that she was in a life-or-death confrontation—slipped into another dimension. It only lasted for a split second. When I spoke to Hiroki Sugimura I said: ‘I just decided to take instead of being taken.’ That’s what I said. When did I...become like that? (Takami 541).

Like Sepetys with Paddle Hands, Takami puts the story on a brief pause to humanize what we see as a villain. These people weren’t born monsters – no one is. It is their fears and demons that push them to this point, whether that be killing their own classmates or working for a brutal dictator. Mitsuko reflects on her actions, and regrets them as well. Fear transforms normal people and creates people who are simply walking shells, having mentally checked out years ago. It is this mental checkout which can allow them to perform such mortifying actions and not even flinch at murder or betrayal. It’s quite harrowing. Even a person whose name translates to child of light can be corrupted into killing others.

The corruption of the mind due to pervasive fear obviously does not pertain to just fiction – what a perfect world it would be if it did. The “kireru” (Japanese: to snap, to break) epidemic of Japan is an example of these fears corrupting the innocent that persists even in the modern day. The phenomenon is characterized typically by younger people, who one day seemingly “snap” and commit crimes such as murder. An article describes kireru as “ordinary well-behaved boys and girls suffering breakdowns – nobody can predict when they will explode” (Rawles). Tomohiro Kato, perpetrator of the 2008 Akihabara massacre, was subject to high academic pressure by his mother. His younger brother recalled incidents where he was forced to eat scraps of food off the floor or stand outside in deep snow as punishment. All this, and he was forced to suffer in silence. It’s this silent sorrow that served as prelude to the attack. Obviously, I don’t know the guy – not will I either, considering he was Japan’s most recent executee in 2022, but

you can reasonably theorize his life was full of fear: The fear of being isolated, which he commonly was in school. The fear of academic failure, put onto him by his abusive parents. The fear of what his life would become after he failed his university entrance exams. And, if you feel you have nothing to live for – who cares? Who cares if you go and ram into people with a van, and begin stabbing them? Who cares if you’re arrested and put on death row? In 2006, Tomohiro unsuccessfully attempted suicide after he became deeply in debt. For three years he would roam this earth, an empty shell of the auspicious child he used to be. Tomohiro felt he had no one he could turn to, and that the world had given up on him. And fear ate him alive.

Pervasive, powerful, painful – fear. It transcends all boundaries – time, culture, language, reality, fiction. It is a tool that can pervert the benevolent into the malevolent, turn mighty human men into whimpering dogs, and all the while putting forth much effort as blinking. It isolates brother from brother, and corrodes the mind into madness. In a society controlled by fear and oppression, there isn’t a reason to openly beat citizens to force them into submission, when turning man against each other is such an irresistibly simplistic solution.

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*Romanian Parliament Building  
Built during the Ceausescu regime*

## Exploration of Comfort and Cleanliness

by Dalila Hurtado

Outdoors, an outhouse; indoors, a bathroom. To some people the bathroom is like their own personal sanctuary. Nobody likes to discuss what happens in there, but everyone has a certain way they like to do things, a routine, an implemented practice. As a teenager I had always been interested in Asian culture and that's where the inspiration struck for me to purchase my own bidet attachment. It was an eye opener and life changing experience that forever changed my own bathroom practice. In the Western side of the world, bathroom practice consists of doing your business and, once done, cleaning up with toilet paper. On the Eastern side of the world, they use a bidet built into a toilet or an attachment on said toilet that shoots a stream of water up a person's heinie. I know that must sound weird and uncomfortable, but you never know until you try. Although bidets can be a bacterial playground for fecal contamination, bidets are far more environmentally friendly, provide good personal hygiene, and offer health benefits, making them a superior choice for current bathroom practices.

Bidets are far more environmentally friendly than toilet paper. The amount of natural resources that go to waste in producing and shipping toilet paper in America alone, without considering all Western countries, is far greater than the amount of resources used for bidets. According to "The Dermatologists' Case for the Bidet in the *International Journal of Women's Dermatology*, "Toilet paper requires the use of 15 million trees to produce the 36 billion rolls of toilet paper Americans use annually. On average, it takes 36 gallons of water to produce a single roll of toilet paper. A bidet uses an estimated 1/8th of a gallon per use"(Yosef et al. e103). Bidets only require water; meanwhile the production for toilet paper requires trees, water, and carbon emissions making bidets the more environmentally friendly option.

Good hygiene is very important to maintain. In Western countries, people use toilet paper to get the job done, but it doesn't do as thorough a job as a bidet. Dr. Akira Tsunoda reports on a simulation experiment conducted by Oie et al. In this experiment, artificial stool containing a common bacterium was spread on fake buttocks and cleaned in two ways to see which way produced cleaner, less contaminated results. The first way was to wipe with paper using the hand, which resulted in more contamination compared to using a bidet to rinse the buttocks and then wipe dry. "The number of bacteria adhering to the hand was significantly lower" when the bidet was used (336).

Any medical conditions that affect the perianal region of a person's body can be very challenging and difficult to keep at bay when relieving oneself and keeping clean. Bidets provide a more gentle and easier to use solution to those perianal medical conditions. "Due to the sensitive skin in the genital area, symptoms of diseases such as pruritus and burning can be more pronounced with toilet paper or irritant-or allergen-containing wet wipes" (Yosef et al. 103). It stands to reason that bidets can be gentler for those without such conditions.

However, one must acknowledge that bidets are at risk of contact with one of the most contaminated and unhygienic substances, fecal matter. In "Bidet Toilet Use May Cause Anal Symptoms and Nosocomial Infection," Tsunoda reports on outbreaks of resistant bacteria in hospitals from the use of bidets. "In each case, the outbreaks were reportedly due to bidet use by patients in the hematology department, and it is speculated that antimicrobial-resistant bacteria attached to the nozzles spread to other patients through the splay water" (337). Hospitals are germ laden environments with multiple toilet users, so keeping a home bidet free of fecal matter can readily be achieved.

We are creatures of nature and once we have implemented our ways we intend to keep them as is. Progress is inevitable, which is why I wonder why the Western side of the world hasn't progressed with their bathroom practices. Being amazed with Asian culture has shown me a superior way to improve my bathroom hygiene. Toilet paper has been around for many years and it has got the job done, but let's face it, many years of producing toilet paper isn't in any way beneficial to the earth we live in and the environment. In addition, when using toilet paper you allow yourself to have a higher chance of exposure to bacteria and excrement on your hand and buttocks resulting in very poor hygiene. Bidets provide health benefits, good personal hygiene, and reduce the waste of paper, therefore making them a superior choice for current bathroom practices.

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## **Sleep Deprivation in Children and Their Mental Health**

by  
Veronica Crisostomo

Did you know that about 35% of children experience sleep deprivation? This number only increases when it is broken down into groups. Children aged 6-12 years old are recommended to sleep between 9-12 hours per day. But this age group has the highest percentage of sleep deprived children, 37.5%. Demographic characteristics and family factors contribute to the high percentage of sleep deprivation (Claussen et al.). Children in a low-income household are more likely to go to sleep late and still wake up at the same time each day to go to school. In a low-income family, normally both parents must work. Some parents work different schedules so at least one parent is at home during the evening time. In some scenarios, this is not possible, and parents work late while other family members or even paid babysitters are taking care of the children. By the time parents can get home with their children, it is past their bedtime. In a poor neighborhood, the noises outside or even the worry for safety can keep children awake.

Technology also plays a role. Research has shown that exposure to screen time before bedtime increases stimulation and excitement in the brain, making it difficult to get a good night's sleep. It is recommended for children to be off technology or any other screen device a minimum of 30 minutes before their bedtime to allow the brain time to think and to prepare it for a better sleep.

Unfortunately, there is no FDA approved sleep medication for children. There are over the counter sleeping (OTC) aids for the young. However, sleep specialists feel that further research is needed on OTC ingredients, and they suggest consulting a pediatrician before using these remedies. Either way, it is important that parents ensure children get their full hours of sleep to prevent health problems. Children who do not get enough sleep have higher risk of having physical health problems as well as “attention and behavioral, poor cognitive development, and poor mental health” (Wheaton and Claussen).

During sleep time the brain processes information learned throughout the day, saves memories and experiences into “permanent storage, and clears space for new information” (Dimitriu). Not sleeping enough also affects children's emotions and feelings. They tend to be more impulsive, feel sad and have increased anxiety, which can compromise their mental health leading to depression. Children with anxiety and sleep deprivation may have difficulty controlling their emotions or expressing their feelings (Clementi). Some children might interpret their anxious feeling as if they were hungry, making them prone to late snacking or eating unhealthy foods.

Poor sleep hygiene increases the chances of a heart attack, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, and neurological problems. These are chronic diseases that do nothing but decrease one's life span. As mentioned, there aren't FDA-approved sleep medications for children but there are for adults. Each year adults spend approximately \$95 billion dollars on sleep related health problems (Huyett and Bhattacharyya). These expenses can be easily reduced if we simply improve sleep habits and help children develop good sleep behaviors at an early age.

Ilya Khaytin, MD, PhD, an Interim Medical Director, Sleep Medicine attending Physician, Autonomic Medicine, Pulmonary and Sleep Medicine Assistant Professor of Pediatrics (Critical Care), at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, told me, “One cannot crave for something that have not tried yet,” meaning that children cannot crave for





Dr. Khaytin      *Lurie Children's  
Hospital*

sleep unless they've tried a great night's sleep. Like when we try chocolate ice cream for the first time, and we love it, our body then craves that chocolate ice cream again; this is how sleep also functions.

To help children have great mental health we must create and maintain a healthy bedtime routine not only for the children but for the whole family. As mentioned, turn off any electronics or devices 30-60 minutes before bedtime. Engage in a positive calm reflection moment of the day to help prepare the brain for sleep. Avoid any caffeinated drinks including soda. A bedtime story can help calm the excitement of the brain. In best cases maintain a dark room to help aid for melatonin production. Exercising along with having a healthy eating and drinking diet also helps improve sleep quality (Bowman).

To conclude, this research has shown me the importance of prioritizing sleep more than ever. I now know and understand a lot of what my son was experiencing a few months ago. Because of his mental health and sleep deprivation I was motivated to research this topic to better understand what he was experiencing and ways to help him feel better and get his full night's sleep. This has not only benefited my son but also the rest of my family including myself. I no longer feel as tired as I used to before. Those night cravings of eating salty and sweet treats are gone. I feel, overall, way better throughout the day unlike before when I would take a nap during the day and still feel tired. I no longer nap, and I can stay awake until our bedtime.

This may be my own real-life experience, but all the information and recommendations that researchers and doctors provide are there for a reason. It is good to pay attention and give their wisdom a try. There can only be great benefits and no regrets.

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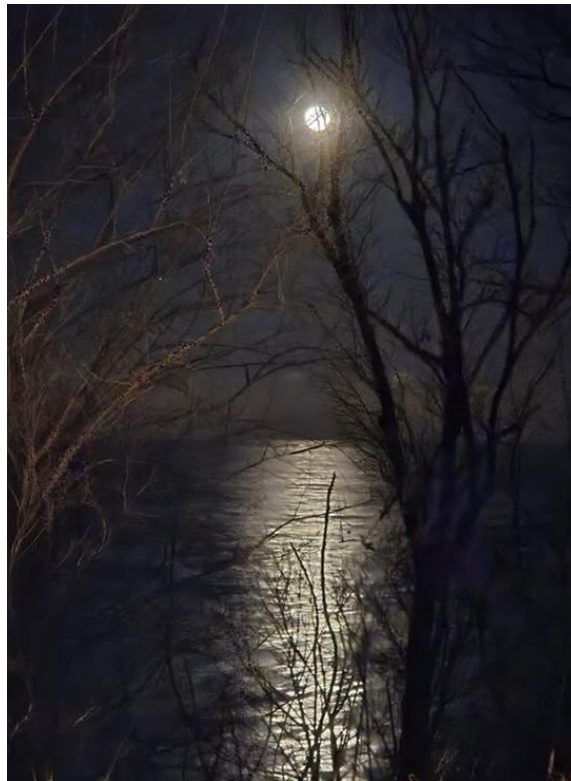
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**Ruta Sepetys *I Must Betray You*: The Psychological and Societal Impact of Oppression**  
by Lidia Hurley

Ruta Sepetys' *I Must Betray You* embodies the fear and betrayal that defined life under Nicolae Ceaușescu's brutal dictatorship in communist Romania. Through the eyes of Cristian, a teenage boy navigating a world of paranoia, surveillance, and oppression, Sepetys portrays the psychological and societal impacts of living under a repressive regime: "Trust was a dangerous commodity, like a blade that could cut in any direction" (Sepetys 12). Suzanne Collins's novel *The Hunger Games* has similar themes to Ruta Sepetys' novel, where the Capitol uses fear and betrayal as tools of control. Both novels explore the profound effects of oppression, revealing how such regimes manipulate trust, instill fear, and inspire acts of resistance. Living under a repressive dictatorship can have psychological and societal impacts, showing how fear, betrayal, and courage shape both personal and national identity.

Fear is one of the most effective tools wielded by oppressive regimes, inserting itself into every aspect of life and breaking down trust in societies. In *I Must Betray You*, Cristian learns early on that fear controls his actions and interactions. He states, "My father had taught me the rules. Speak carefully. Look over your shoulder. Trust no one" (Sepetys 5). This constant alertness suppresses any sense of freedom, as people are forced to monitor themselves and others to avoid suspicion. The fear extends beyond physical safety, creating a psychological pressure that shapes behavior and limits personal expression.

Similarly, in *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, the Capitol uses fear to maintain its dominance over the districts. The annual Hunger Games are where children are forced to fight to the death, serving as a brutal reminder of the Capitol's power. Katniss Everdeen describes this oppressive reality: "The Capitol has their way of turning children into killers" (Collins 19). By forcing districts to witness the suffering and death of their children, the Capitol ensures compliance through a shared trauma rooted in fear. They choose children because they know others can share the pain of seeing kids going on a televised hunt and kill. Annually each district loses a boy and a girl randomly selected for the games. Teenagers can take the child's place in the annual Hunger Games by volunteering as a tribute. Children and teens are killed off to bring entertainment to the Capitol and to reduce the population in every district. The games are systematic genocide. Winners are promised wealth and popularity for winning the games. They receive income from the Capitol each year and won't have to worry about money for the rest of their lives. The Capitol uses the winners to show that the games are worth winning, making it popular for future candidates. Katniss fights to show those in the Capitol differently by rebelling in the games and using her strengths to help others join in to fight against the Capitol and the annual games.

Both novels depict fear as a psychological weapon that strips individuals of freedom, isolates them from others, and enforces the will of the regime. Cristian's internal struggle against this fear mirrors Katniss's journey throughout the annual Hunger Games, as both characters find ways to resist the oppressive government seeking to define their lives. The regime uses Cristian's family as leverage to make him an informer and uses Bunu's sickness to get Cristian to agree more to help them inform on the American diplomat. Cristian plans on how to go against the regime by giving the American diplomat his notebook with everything he goes through in Romania hoping the message will be spread and the world will know the truth. Similarly, the Capitol uses Katniss to make the games more popular and they promise her family will be in good hands, but if she does something wrong or not to the Capitol's liking she puts her family at

risk. Those who follow her are also at risk of being punished by the Capitol guards. She uses the annual games to show others that she is working for not just her district but the other districts giving them hope they can go against the Capitol. These narratives highlight the devastating psychological effects of fear and its role in maintaining authoritarian control.

Additionally, betrayal further amplifies the psychological impact of oppression, destroying trust and creating more isolation. In *I Must Betray You*, betrayal is a constant threat, as the Romanian secret police recruit informants from within the population, including friends and family through blackmail. Cristian's world is changed in the blink of an eye when he discovers the extent of this manipulation. Cristian states, "The file wasn't just about me. It named others, too. Friends. Family. People I trusted" (Sepetys 101). The regime's strategy of encouraging betrayal creates a cycle of fear and paranoia that prevents collective resistance. Cristian's relationships are damaged by the knowledge that anyone could be reporting on him, leaving him unable to trust anyone even those closest to him.

In *The Hunger Games*, a similar dynamic unfolds as tributes are forced into alliances within the arena, alliances filled with distrust due to the Capitol's influence. Katniss reflects on this experience, stating, "To this day, I can never be sure who was a friend and who was an enemy" (Collins 373). In both novels, betrayal is shown to dehumanize individuals, destroying their ability to form genuine connections. These examples illustrate how betrayal is used as a tool of oppression, how it dismantles personal identity and society.

Despite the fear and betrayal they endure, both Cristian and Katniss demonstrate the resilience and courage necessary to resist oppressive systems. Cristian decides to document the truth about Ceaușescu's regime, knowing the risks involved is an act of extraordinary bravery. He states, "If I stay silent, I am guilty of complicity. If I speak out, I risk everything" (Sepetys 134). Similarly, Katniss's defiance of the Capitol, from her alliance with Rue to her ultimate decision to challenge the Games' rules, embodies the courage to stand against tyranny. She states, "I am more than just a piece in their games" (Collins 142).

These acts of resistance in fictional novels reflect real-life moments of defiance under Ceaușescu's dictatorship. Charles T. Powers, an American journalist who visited Romania during Ceaușescu's rule, witnessed the fear and oppression that showed daily life under dictatorship. Powers describes how under intense repression acts of protest emerge: "Even in the face of severe repression, moments of protest and resistance emerged, often at great personal risk." His observations reveal the courage required to stand against a regime that used surveillance and betrayal to maintain control over its people. Both Cristian and Katniss show that courage is a vital force in reclaiming personal and collective identity, to overcome the fear and betrayal used by regimes to control their people.

Living under a repressive dictatorship can have psychological and societal impacts, showing how fear, betrayal, and courage shape both personal and national identity. Ruta Sepetys' *I Must Betray You* and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* reveal the psychological toll of fear and betrayal, yet also celebrate the resilience and courage that emerges in the resistance to tyranny. The historical context from Charles T. Powers' article highlights how these fictional acts reflect real experiences, demonstrating the universal impact of living under surveillance and oppression. Ultimately, these narratives remind us of the enduring human capacity to resist, rebuild trust, and fight for dignity and freedom even in the darkest circumstances.

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*Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen in The Hunger Games*

## For the Outliers: Are vagrancy laws and the like fair?

by Ayanna Taylor

Throughout history, laws have served a purpose of establishing a sense of order within society. Their purpose is to regulate, protect or prohibit certain actions in order to ensure that society runs as intended. Vagrancy laws and the like have been established for other purposes within our societies from the past to our current day.

Vagrancy is defined as when a person is seen wandering around without any means of financial support, homeless, unemployed, or experiencing severe poverty. Some prohibitions also associated with vagrancy include anti-loitering, anti-panhandling, and public disturbance laws. Vagrancy laws have origins in 16th century England. Any poor person who failed to find a job and was seen begging was prosecuted for the crime of vagrancy under the 1547 Vagrancy Act and made a slave for two years as punishment. Finding a job was so hard that thousands of people would be looking for employment at any given time. Law officials described the people begging without employment as “a threat to law and order” (Lambert). In the state of Virginia, the Vagrancy Act of 1866 was established after the Civil War in which freed slaves were named vagrants if they were seen as idle and not performing labor. The punishment would be working for no pay, often with a ball and chain (Tarter). Other post Civil War Southern states, claiming they would “be overrun with dissolute and abandoned characters,” also established vagrancy laws (Tarter).

During both of these eras, vagrancy laws were seen as a way to establish a sense of order and to mitigate the presence of societal failings as well as any signs of social and economic unrest, allegedly for the benefit of the people. Today, many of us are familiar with similar prohibitions against loitering, begging, and panhandling. We even see takedowns of tent cities in the news. All of these measures are said to bring order and safety to the public, but I question how and why these laws are enforced. Who are the targets? Are vagrancy laws and the like fair? I decided to get down to the bottom of these questions. After researching, I came to the conclusion that vagrancy laws and the like are *not* fair. In this paper I will provide four major reasons why: Vagrancy laws have a discriminatory background; vagrancy laws criminalize poverty and homelessness; vagrancy laws are used for capitalistic economic gain; and vagrancy laws are not reformatory or truly helpful to the affected people.

Vagrancy laws have a background of being historically discriminatory. I consider this unfair because no one should be targeted, dehumanized and punished for something they can not control and by laws that are often put in place to further oppress a group of people. After the Civil War and the emancipation of slaves, many freedmen found themselves without the resources to help them onto their feet or offer any sort of support. “Some states passed black codes that severely limited the rights of black people, many of whom have been enslaved. These codes limited what jobs African Americans could hold, and their ability to leave a job once hired” (Brown). Vagrancy laws were an important part of the black codes that were put in place to control black people and punish them for not working in the ways that the ruling class wanted them to, which is unfair because no one should be treated differently because of their race.

Vagrancy laws in modern times also have a trend of targeting the poor, which brings me to my second reason: Vagrancy laws discriminate against the homeless and people who are in poverty, criminalizing their efforts to survive:

With the advent of modern homelessness in the 1980s, rather than addressing the underlying lack of affordable housing, communities faced with increasingly visible

homelessness began pushing homeless persons out of public view with laws criminalizing life-sustaining acts such as self-sheltering (“camping”), sleeping, resting, eating, or asking for any donations. Other communities have used disparate enforcement of other ordinances, such as jaywalking or littering, to harass and push homeless persons out of certain areas. (Tars)

During the Black Lives Matter protests, the connection between racism and targeting the homeless was apparent. “As the pandemic of racism came to the forefront in 2020, so did its intersections with the criminalization of homelessness. BILPOC communities are more likely to experience homelessness, and are more likely to be targeted by the police for enforcement” (Tars).

Criminalization occurs not only through passing vagrancy laws, but through selective enforcement. Certain communities face being stopped by police and criminalized more than other communities who behave no differently. Selective enforcement is another form of discrimination when we all should be treated as equals and not have disadvantages because of the color of your skin or how much money you make. “Bias by decision makers at all stages of the justice process disadvantages black people. Studies have found that they are more likely to be stopped by the police, detained pretrial, charged with more serious crimes, and sentenced more harshly than white people” (Hinton).

The criminalization of poverty and homelessness through vagrancy laws adds to the incarceration cycle. When people in poor communities have a higher rate of being imprisoned, their communities are left without resources coming into their economy, which results in more poverty. “Disproportionately incarcerating people from poor communities removes economic resources and drives cycles of poverty and justice system involvement, making criminal justice contact the norm in the lives of a growing number of Black Americans” (Hinton). And ex-prisoners have a tough time obtaining employment

We have learned about vagrancy laws’ discriminatory past and how they criminalize targeted groups; now it’s time to talk about those targeted groups are used for economic gain. One way is through forced prison labor. The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states, “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” Slavery and involuntary servitude are forbidden for free citizens, but unpaid forced labor for the incarcerated *can* be legal. Not only are targeted groups not getting the resources they need to survive within their communities, but when incarcerated they’re putting money into the pockets of the prisons and corporations they’re working for while rarely seeing any of it themselves.

Yes, corporations. Tough on crime laws of the 1980s led to tremendous growth of the for-profit prison system. “Harmful crime policies of the 1980s and beyond fueled a rapid expansion in the nation’s prison population. The resulting burden on the public sector led to the modern emergence of for-profit prisons in many states and the federal system” (Budd). Vagrancy laws are being used to fill up for-profit prisons to boost those corporations’ profits at the expense of people who just need help and resources. It’s no accident that the private prison industry lobbies for the criminalization of homelessness. A second example of how vagrancy laws are used for capitalistic economic gain is through policing private property. “Central to this is the belief that property rights are not just about owning or using property but also contributing to the broader societal and economic stability” (“Vagrancy”). This shows vagrancy laws can be less about providing justice and more about preserving property values and capital.

Finally we can talk about how vagrancy laws are not reformatory or truly helpful to others. Instead of criminalizing the poor and the homeless for discriminatory reasons or to protect property values, how about offering resources to be more preventative of vagrancy? “Poverty and Homelessness: These are perhaps the most direct causes of vagrancy. Economic downturns, lack of affordable housing, and sufficient social safety nets contribute significantly” (“Vagrancy”). This source states how the lack of housing is the most direct cause of vagrancy and poverty and how the homeless can suffer from a lot of unfortunate things such as lack of a safety net and economic decline outside of one's control. People don't need to be punished for vagrancy. For many the difference between being a law abiding citizen and a criminal is having the resources they need to meet their basic needs. Health is also a factor. “Mental health and Substance Abuse: Often overlooked, these factors play a significant role. Without adequate support and treatment, individuals suffering from mental health issues or substance abuse may find themselves on the streets.” (“Vagrancy”). Sometimes people just need treatment for mental health or substance abuse issues to be able function as a person who is able to meet their own needs, which would mean proper rehabilitation services and treatments instead of throwing them into a cell.

Vagrancy laws and the like are unfair. It's time to look over some solutions to this societal issue. The first possible solution would be to decriminalize homelessness by contacting officials to get certain laws abolished or changing public bias against the character of homeless people. The second one is offering social services to those in need as there are often financial, mental and substance issues for the reason why people become vagrants in the first place. A third solution would be free housing for all as a basic human right as the primary reason for vagrancy is because someone is without a home; if everyone had a home it would be easier for people to provide other things for themselves like groceries, therapy, and other needs while also having the security of not having to panhandle or loiter.

In conclusion, vagrancy laws' racially discriminatory origins have evolved into something intersectional as its vagueness can affect anyone while it still focuses on the core targeted groups, primarily Black and poor communities. Their entire existence seems to be in service of perceived social order or the community economy. We discover that solutions like providing social services and free housing would see fewer vagrants, which is fair to those targeted communities and challenges racist and classist laws in our country.

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*Martin Luther King arrested for "loitering," Montgomery, 1958*



## **Safety in Schools** by Veronica Segovia

Currently, attending school in the United States has become a risk, leading to emotional or physical health damage not only for students, but also for teachers who are exposed to abuse or violent situations. Some factors to analyze are bullying, gun violence, drugs, and sexual harassment. As a mother, I would expect that my kids are safe when they are in school, but what are the schools doing to ensure the safety of students at Chicago Public Schools? Sylvan Lebrun informs that in this new school year (2024-25), Chicago Schools are facing a wave of violent threats that are leading to lockdowns and remote learning. Threats of violence at schools affect the development of students and can sabotage the education system of the United States. Some changes that would improve safety in the scholar system include training their to understand and communicate better with students, controlling what students bring inside school, limiting the entrances to buildings, involving police agents to participate in safety drills inside the school, and the most important, implementing programs that support the education of students, families and the community.

I live in Chicago South, and as a mother of three I have experienced fear and impotence when violent situations have happened in schools of this country. My kids have told me that some students in elementary schools were taking guns, cigarettes, alcohol and drugs inside Chicago's public schools. This problem of discipline represents a huge risk for safety in these schools. Many of these cases have not been officially reported and do not exist in records.

Now that I am working at a CPS school, I see how violent students can be, and not only are the rest of the students vulnerable, but also teachers have difficulty controlling some students. It is sad to say it, but I have seen that in many cases the parents are responsible for this behavior in their children. The situation has led to the school system's sending some teachers for self-defense workshops. Conditions of violence in schools cause fear and anxiety among community members. Knowing that our country allows firearms these days, every single threat has to be taken seriously.

Safety in schools has always been a priority, but sadly, it is known that violent crimes inside the schools and universities in the United States have been happening for many years. In most of these cases, the response of the police has not been successful. For example, in Uvalde Texas school shooting in 2022, almost 400 officers responded, but they did not confront the gunman, who was in two conjoined classrooms filled with 33 students and 3 teachers. It is not clear why law enforcement waited more than one hour for a border patrol tactical team to arrive before confronting the gunman, despite nationwide active shooter protocols that call on officers to stop an attacker as soon as possible (Mendez). Factors like that demonstrate that officials and law enforcement are not always ready to confront those violent events.

Now, let's focus on the Chicago Public Schools. Police data show that crimes inside schools include students and teachers being beaten, threatened with knives and guns, robbed of their belongings, sexually exploited, attacked with weapons, and raped, with one homicide in 2022 and one human trafficking case in 2015 (Andriesen). With this said, we can assume that school safety goes beyond preventing fires and disciplining the students.

Some CPS elementary schools workers told me that there are only one or two security officers for a whole school that includes about 300 to 600 students from pre-k to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and in many cases, they don't have a metal detector. These conditions make it difficult to control what students can bring inside school and prevent violent situations.

Sanjana Gupta explains some possible causes for violent behavior in schools can be “poor academic performance, prior history of violence, hyperactive or impulsive personality, mental health conditions, witnessing or being a victim of violence, alcohol, drug or tobacco use, dysfunctional family dynamic, domestic violence or abuse, access to weapons, delinquent peers, and poverty or high crime rates in the community.” It is obvious that minors dealing with these problems are at a disadvantage and will not be ready to learn and interact healthily with others.

Let’s review what strategies have been used by the school system and analyze where the flaws are and how they could be improved. Steven Sawchuck affirms the strategies that some districts in CPS have made in a desperate try to improve safety include installing fences, metal detectors, bullet proof glass, as well as increasing the number of school safety officers. Unfortunately, reports inform us that these methods did not help as much as they were anticipated to. It is important to note that not all the CPS schools have enough resources or funding to implement some of these safety features.

Until this school year, the law permitted schools to have a police patrol presence during school hours. Resources show that this strategy results in a higher proportion of students being suspended, arrested, or referred to the juvenile-justice systems. Currently, CPS has cancelled its relationship with the Chicago Police Department, arguing that the system criminalizes our children (Orrin and Cardel). Research shows that having police officers present in schools reduces violent incidents such as fights, but does not reduce shootings or firearm-related issues.

Today, it is known that all CPS schools have security cameras. However, most of the cameras record only video, not audio. Also, no cameras are allowed in classrooms to protect the privacy of students, professors and staff. As a staff member of a CPS school describes, “A school day consists of all sorts of interactions. Students interact with teachers, administrators, and other students daily which creates opportunities for controversy” (Arellano). In this case, the controversy can come in the form of bullying among students, verbal abuse from students toward staff, verbal abuse from staff toward students, and verbal workplace harassment among staff members. Although it has been argued that capturing audio surveillance in a school is a violation of privacy (Clark and Orman), it would certainly help get to the bottom of these situations and give victims a way to provide evidence of any abuse/harassment taking place at schools. This would also allow the accused to prove themselves innocent.

Following the recommendation of psychologists, some schools work to develop activities with staff, parents and students, with the purpose of building strong relationships between adults and children, trying to create a sense of community between school staff members and families. School psychologist Sedor declares that having better communication between students and staff will create a better response to challenges such as fear, loss, problem solving, and strengthening coping strategies. “It’s about relationships and being able to listen,” she says in an article for Education Week, referring to how important it is to support students and intervention of wellness efforts.

Regarding some strategies from experts, Brandon Faber suggests a system with multiple layers for safety in schools. For physical security, locking mechanisms on doors offers control over access, and keeping doors locked is its main goal. He suggests equipping classrooms with communication channels to rapidly alert and monitor unexpected visitors. While it is necessary to protect students and staff, “The only guaranteed protection for a school is making it as secure as a prison,” affirms Faber. But from the view of a parent or a teacher, schools must promote a welcoming and safe environment. How can schools keep a climate of a welcoming place for learning while for safety it is as secure as a prison?

School districts in Illinois used to enforce a transparent backpack policy. All students were required to carry transparent backpacks, with the purpose of having control of what students bring inside schools. This strategy was attractive because this protocol results in cheaper than installing metal detectors or having personal checking students' belongings every school day. However, some experts of Rutgers University claim "there is no evidence that clear backpacks do anything to improve student safety" (McLaughlin). Margaret Betz pleaded that privacy is one ethical principle, and everyone's personal space should not be exposed to others.

Policing in schools is another solution that was proposed and tried. This consists of referral to law enforcement. Corey Mitchel explains that a referral is when an employee reports a student to any law enforcement agency for an incident that happened at school. He states that "All arrests are referrals, but not all referrals result in arrests." Data shows that policing in schools disproportionately affects students with disabilities, Black children, and in some states, Native American and Latino Children. Protecting the rights of children, some states prohibited officers to arrest students without permission of supervisors, and proposed plans to direct students to conflict resolution workshops instead of court hearings. Troja said, "there is no need for excessive use of law enforcement."

Tennessee state passed a bill allowing the state's teachers and school staff to be armed and prepared to respond in case an attack occurs. Jamiel Lynch declares that to carry a handgun in schools, personnel must obtain authorization from the superintendent, complete 40 hours of school police training, complete a background check, and complete a psychological exam. This measure created a national debate. "A teacher is not allowed to put a rainbow flag on her desk, but she is allowed to carry a gun in this state," Akbari said. According to data from Everytown for Gun Safety, 34 states prohibit teachers from carrying guns in elementary schools.

Another proposed solution is the creation of online public school education programs from kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The programs are available in every state of United States and offer a safe way to continue education to families that have had bad experiences with safety of their children in school. The content and format look very complete, convenient and interesting. As an adult and as a mother, I understand the desire for safety, but I don't think it is a good strategy, because our kids need to socialize with others and learn to solve problems, take decisions and deal with situations in the real world.

Clearly, many factors influence the way a student reacts to the stimulus received during a school day, and this topic is not about discipline only. Having good communication with every student would make a big difference. Based on my experience working in a CPS school, I have seen how important the relation between students and staff is, resulting in the confidence of students with adults. Every person working in schools plays a very important role, not only to perform as a secretary, janitor, professor, nursery or kitchen staff. Anyone there will be in contact with students, and they all are models for kids to follow. If every school implements mandatory training to learn effective techniques of communication and safe relationships with minors, the students will enjoy their experience as part of the school and develop their potential to take better decisions in life. Also, it is important to recognize when a student suffers from a mental health condition and follow up with a specialist.

For school protocols during emergency situations, as mentioned before, some cases show that the police department has failed in the management of the situation. It is sad to recognize that shootings happen in elementary schools, and it is necessary to implement a specialized group of police agents professionally trained to respond successfully and solve those violent situations. If these agents practice visiting real schools, they will be familiar with the space,

atmosphere and presence of students and teachers inside the buildings. The practice of safety drills in schools should include those specialized police officers; that way, students will be more confident to follow instructions, and the agents will be ready to respond.

It is very important to control what students bring inside school. Not all the Chicago public schools receive the same resources, but safety is something that must be taken seriously. Talking clearly with students about the consequences for bad actions will allow security staff to proceed with penalties. It is necessary to check backpacks! Sadly, some parents don't do it, and this can change a story. Even if the school has a metal detector, one of my proposed solutions is at least once a week do a discreet checkup of the students' belongings in determined classrooms. This strategy will cause students to be aware that any day their own backpacks are at risk of being inspected, and they will know the consequences of having unsafe content.

Of course, every school district should have a plan for crisis response, and we all know that practicing the safety drills can make a big difference in emergency situations, but what about parents? I think it is necessary to keep the parents informed. What should they do outside the school if something happens? And what can they expect from the security staff? As an example, District 33 has created a clear and plain language plan to coordinate response instead of using safety codes. Not only school leaders, but staff and students should know the steps to follow in an emergency. Moreover parents/guardians should also know the protocol and be familiar with the plan.

Having a good safety system in schools is a big challenge, and many facts need to be changed. This problem can never be completely solved because dangers are everywhere, and situations are present in different ways; but having staff prepared, trained, and supported by professionals will change history. Students at every Chicago public school deserve more resources. They represent the future of our country, and now they need programs that reinforce their physical health, mental health and emotional health. Education and safety will improve when these measures are implemented.

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## **When I Say**

by Raneem Affaneh

When I say home, I see red brick  
in the middle of 76th street on the edge of Ashburn  
to the left, 3 emerald green trees  
trees that were crying to be trimmed

When I say home, I smell the strong scent of fresh Clorox  
that lingers after a long day of cleaning  
a scent that always reminds me of Kifah,  
who makes it feel like a home the most

When I say home, I feel the soft coral blanket  
keeping me warm in the cold winters that seep through the windows  
while the AC blasts, as the sun warmly hugs home

When I say home, I hear the loud call to prayer that echoes,  
Jacob and Jasmeen chasing each other down the stairs,  
while grandpa tells them to slow down,  
the floor creaking at every step.

When I say home, I feel a sense of safety  
It's the place that echoes love  
where my soul finds rest.  
where my fight or flight becomes relaxed.

**I am From**  
by Daisy Lara

I am from Rosalinda and Ricardo, Lucas and Anita, Martha Gomez  
and Aristeo Lara.  
I am from a beautiful skyline, nice beaches, amazing riverwalk, and  
great history.  
I am from partying late Friday and Saturday nights with family to playing  
softball for hours with loved ones of Sunday.  
I am from taco lovers, birria lovers, and tamale lovers.  
I am from hard workers, money lovers, and real go getters.  
I am from where love and loyalty make you family, not blood.  
I am from “treat others how you want to be treated,” “respect is earned,” and  
“if one eats we all eat.”  
I am from kicking it with people who love you and help you climb up  
instead of holding you back.  
I am from drawing to escape when parents are arguing.  
I am from running away to Raquel’s just to watch One Tree Hill to comfort me.  
I am from having horses, cows, pigs, and chickens running around while  
visiting our hometown.  
I am from the lovely mountains, beautiful nights with bright stars, and nothing  
but silence in La Loma Larga.  
I am from the little basement that would flood every time it rained, old couches, broken  
doors, and long lonely days waiting for my mother to come home from work.  
I am from the lady who never gave up and has done everything for me.  
I am from the giggles, smirks, and lovely memories with friends and real family.

**When I Say Mexico**  
by Eliana Torres

When I say Mexico

I mean Tejupilco, where you wake up in the morning to the sound of crows from roosters and chickens.

The smell of warm homemade bread and teacups filled with hot Nescafé coffee hits your face as they sit on the wooden table in the kitchen.

The sound of women laughing and gossiping about their husbands with each other from afar and hard corridos blasting from the speakers of the non-luxury Hondas and Toyotas.

When I say Mexico

I mean the feeling of freedom you get as you take a step outdoors  
not having any worries besides having to wash dishes and clean your room.

Walking around the touristic plaza while smelling the cooking asada from taco vendors,  
stepping into tianguis on every turn you take making you an impulsive spender.

The outdoor parties where you dance to tierra caliente zapateado all night,  
filling the air with dust, giving you a blurry sight.

The pastel purple and blue-colored houses that surround you,  
and hearing legends being told like La Llorona,  
wondering if they are true.

When I say Mexico

I mean enjoying every little moment with your loved ones.

Where riding horses and feeding chickens becomes fun.

Waking up around 8am Sunday morning to get ready for church  
and eating coco with chamoy ice cream.

Riding motorbikes at full speed on winding and lonely roads like a dream.

Celebrating traditional holidays like Posadas, Day of the Dead and Holy Week,  
where you meet new cousins you have never met before.

Tasting spicy red mole and hot green chicken tamales  
and the days fly by so quickly that you wish you had more time.

When I say Mexico

I mean the heavy weight on your chest as you start to say goodbye.

Getting your grandparents' blessing  
not knowing if they'll still be there when you return makes you want to cry.



**Pilsen**  
by David Mendiola

What comes to mind when I say Pilsen?  
Is it the constant reminder not to walk alone at night  
because of SD's constant thefts and shootings?  
Is it the gentrification you notice on 18th street  
when you no longer see your neighbor Victor?  
Is it the National Museum of Mexican Art at Harrison Park,  
standing as one of the many art institutes in the community?  
Or is it the setting of your origin story zapped into your mind when I say the word Pilsen?

When I say Pilsen,  
I think of the bumper cars at the Fiesta Del Sol after a soccer tournament at Chi-Town Futbol.  
The smell of carne asada tacos as I squeeze fresh lemon over them.  
The sight of an ice cold horchata being handed to me from my mom's beige hands.  
Seeing my father's pearly white teeth as his smile goes from cheek to cheek  
listening to Los Angeles Azules play, reminding him of his life in Mexico City.

When I say Pilsen,  
I think of the annual Italian fest on Oakley Avenue.  
Sneaking through the alley with my cousin Javi,  
because we didn't want to pay the ten-dollar entry fee.  
The vibrant red and green color scheme,  
complementing the dangling lights hanging from the apartments.  
The nerves building up in my stomach  
as I work up the courage to ask my mom for a toy gun to play as mafia bosses.

When I say Pilsen,  
I think of how united and bonded the community is.  
The cherry-flavored lollipops from my upstairs neighbor, Bob.  
The vroom of his motorcycle making everyone mad in the morning when he turned it on.  
Slices of pizza from Igotz restaurant.  
The mango-pineapple smoothie from Mora Mia Café.  
The Italian BMT from the deli that's no longer there.

When I say Pilsen,  
I see a representation of my childhood.  
Friends sticking water bottles in the back of bikes to make them sound like motorcycles.  
My friend Juan running on the gravel, trying to be the first at Ruiz Park.  
Arturo with his long, wavy hair, dribbling a basketball to Baraga Park,  
trying to claim a hoop before anyone else.  
I see Irma C. Ruiz, a red cemented school with three stories of stairs that had me dying going up.

When I say Pilsen,  
I think of purple and gold, which stands for strength and brilliance.

When I say Pilsen,  
I think of power, which I will endure for generations.

When I say Pilsen,  
I see a fight for survival.  
I see the tears of my friend Christian because he will no longer see his brother Antonio.  
I see the back of Louie's black Nissan driving away for good to a new community.  
I see my mother saying goodbye to her sister, Susana,  
as we prepare to leave Pilsen behind to remember it as just our origin story.



*Pilsen Historic District, 21st & Ashland*

**I am From**  
by Arturo Rivera

I am from the 90's, 1990 to be exact.  
From a time that was much simpler.  
From where kids went outside to play rather than  
being antisocial on a phone screen.  
I am from the South Side where being a Cubs fan is tough.  
I am from blistering winters, yet the best summers.  
From open fire hydrants and Italian ice to cool down.  
I am from soccer games in the alley and two garbage cans  
as the goal post.  
I am from tacos, pizza, and Italian beef.  
I am from the corn gey and the smell of fresh tortillas in the air.  
I am from an old soul, a Cadillac Seville with suede seats.  
I am from tradition, Family, history, and humble beginnings.  
From vacations to Mexico, to being glad to be back  
in sweet home Chicago.  
I am from good. I am from bad. I am from second chances.  
From blessed and fortunate, to cursed and wretched.  
I am from mechanics, cars, and offices.  
I am from concrete, skyscrapers, and Lake Shore Drive.  
From the sun and the moon, the alpha and the omega.  
I am who I am, and I wouldn't change anything.

