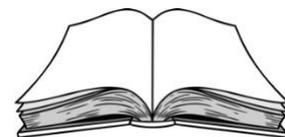


Appalachian Community Think Tank



Newsletter / Summer 2020

“Stay healthy, stay safe & ACTT STRONG” –Sharath



Purpose

In order to stay connected during Covid-19, we are issuing a temporary Appalachian Community Think Tank (ACTT) Newsletter.

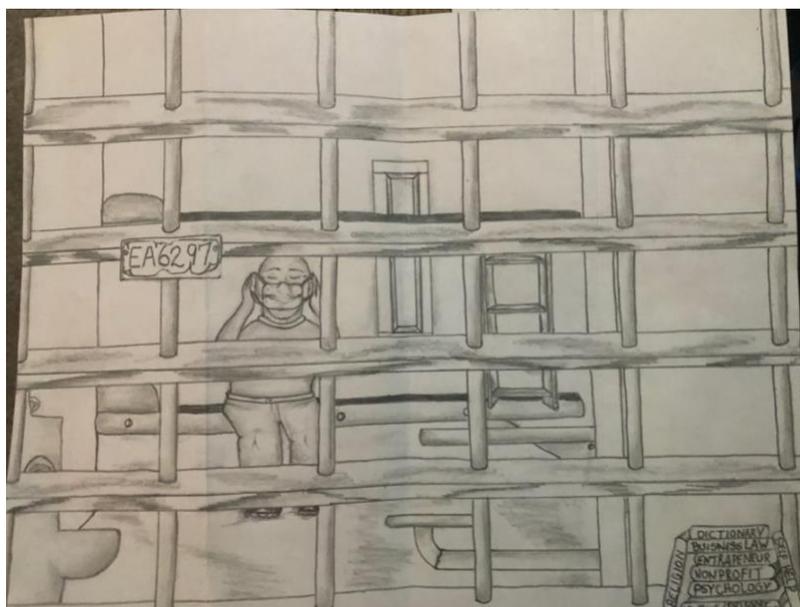
Who We Are

ACTT was born out of a 2019 Inside-Out Justice and Literature course consisting of West Virginia University (WVU) undergraduates and incarcerated students at SCI-Fayette in PA. Students collaborated on several projects with the goal to enhance education and empathy, primarily through the power of literature, in our communities.

Following the class, we came together to form ACTT. We met for the first time in January 2020. We were able to have two more meetings and were joined by University of Pittsburgh Inside-Out faculty. Then Covid-19 hit. Although we are a newly formed group, we are passionate about our work and hope to stay connected during this difficult time.

Special Thanks

Thank you to the SCI-Fayette administration for approving this Think Tank. We are especially grateful for the support and guidance of Principal Bohna and Acting Corrections School Principal Kimmel.



“The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions hidden by the answers.”

- James Baldwin

ACTT Announcement – Looking to the Future

Mike A. – *Missive from the Moderator*

It is my fervent hope that all members of ACTT and their loved ones have weathered the current storm to date and will continue to do so till each and every one of us reaches the horizon. May blessings wrap us all in their benediction and safeguard our way.

The inaugural gathering of ACTT was held on January 22nd of this year and was followed closely on February 12th by its second. The handful of hours that elapsed during these two meetings saw the expression of our combined mutual care in works that built on ideas first devised during WVU's fall 2019 Justice and Literature class. We were responsible for the creation of the striving possibilities that were manifesting in our space at that time. But the world was changing. Our last get together was on March 11th, though a number of us were unable to attend. Impending shutdown was looming. Then it was here. The world changed. April 8th and May 6th, the dates of our two scheduled meetings came and

went. Unable to meet face-to-face, I still gave much thought on those days in particular to the imaginings of the paths we might have taken in our endeavors. Thinking of conversations that we might share if and when we meet again.

At our last parting I asked everyone to fill out a small query of two questions. With the changing of the ways of the world I feel these two questions are just as relevant if not more so. Please give them some contemplation and get your responses to the two liaisons, Ms. Kimmel and Ms. Ryan, so they may pass them onto me. It is the moderator's intention to compile this info and present it in form for our next newsletter.

- 1) Looking to the future as ACTT progresses in this new world please list one endeavor you would like to see ACTT consider pursuing.
- 2) In 3 to 5 sentences please explain your reason for participating in ACTT.

Stay safe, my friends. Be well. And as always... Hold. The. Line.

Project Updates

ICARE:

The ICARE workgroup put together an agenda for their event and conducted research on groups who might be interested in attending like victim advocacy groups and universities.

Justice Speaks Podcast:

The group hopes to have the first discussion on the word "Justice."

Associates Degree Program:

On May 21, Katy had a positive Zoom meeting with WVU faculty, administrators, and Dr. Scotti, a counselor at SCI-Greene. The team has a plan for building a degree path and a Think Tank at Greene. More of the powerful legacy of the Inside-Out program at Fayette.

Symposium

Despite its routine ingestion of preventative Hydroxychloroquine, the 2020 Vision: Future Of Prison Education conference caught Covid-19. It's hooked up to a ventilator as I write this. Contact visitation won't be allowed until after the entire state of Pennsylvania is on "green." The return of students and outside volunteers will probably follow sometime after that. Unless you guys have experience setting up Zoom Educational Forums, we're on hold until an effective corona vaccine is proliferated. In the meantime I propose that we figure out a way to assemble a book of corona-related writings and art that we could publish and sell with the proceeds being used to benefit Appalachian people in need.

Re-entry Program:

Kenny wrote a proposal for a re-entry program dedicated to helping incarcerated individuals who have been inside for decades prepare for their release.

Justice4Who:

The Justice4Who workgroup is imagining the design of a website with the help of Lydia, an APBP volunteer. Workgroup members are working on writing content for the website. Mikey is designing a Zine. The first theme is "Justice." He hopes to collect content from everyone when we are a little less distant. Any ideas, art, and creative contributions are welcome. He hopes for 20 pages. Also, he thinks a Zine about our experience, thoughts and lives during this pandemic would be interesting. While everyone is forced apart, what keeps us together is what we can share.

Appalachian Prison Book Project (APBP):

Thanks to Jordan's birthday fundraiser, APBP has dedicated a special budget line for Think Tank projects, with start-up funds

Member Updates and *What are you reading and writing?*

"If you say you're a writer and you emerge from corona lockdown without having penned a book, a play, a screenplay, a pilot, an essay, a sermon, some poetry, a short story, some flash fiction, or something, you're lying to yourself." –Craig

Kate: I would like to share that I am going to William & Mary Law School in the fall! I also am getting a puppy which is exciting for me lol. I haven't had time to start reading anything yet but I hope the best for everyone. Know we miss all of the inside students so much & think about how you all are doing during this time. Sending best wishes & hope everyone is healthy!

Chuck: Chuck has been reading a lot and working on a novel.

Ya'iy: I have been reading: *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*- Maya Angelou, *Heavy*- Kiese Laymon (a really good memoir), *Caroling Dusk an Anthology of Verse by Black Poets*, *The Sense of Style*- Steven Pinker (boring but helpful), *By Cunning & Craft*- Peter Selgin, *What's Hanging on the Hush*- Lauren Russell (poetry) & *Assata* (my favorite so far).

"I've seemed to have forgotten how to remember."

–Jon

Dorian: I am reading *Marcus Garvey and the Vision for Africa*, with an introduction and commentaries by John Henrik Clarke. Marcus Garvey is the founder of an organization called the United Negro Improvement Association, the UNIA for short. In the early 1900's he was a strong proponent of the back to Africa movement but more profound than that was his plan to build a united African people on a world stage. He built one of the largest black political movements in American history. Marcus Garvey & W. E. B. Du Bois were political rivals in the era although they shared some of the same ideas.

katy: *Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine, a collection of prose poems and visual art from 2014. It's beautiful strong spare expansive; a call to act and reflect. Rankine weaves personal stories, accounts of police violence, racism in sports, everyday sighs, and asks, "How difficult is it for one body to feel the injustice wheeled against another?" In May and June, I completed a Restorative Justice training with Kay Pranis who has been facilitating peacemaking circles across the globe for 20 years.

Sharath: Sharath is working on a trade in electricity. The training is, he says, busting his brains. His grandfather passed away in late May. All our love to you and your family, Sharath.

"When righteousness, impartiality, humility, discretion, and integrity is employed to render judgment and promote liberty, the heart of justice begins to beat."

–Wayne

"He was refusing to let this current condition become a hostile living environment."

– Kenny

from a short story

Craig: *Glorious Ruin* is a powerful, vulnerable gospel-centered work by Tullian Tchividjian that acknowledges the suffering present in our lives and invites us to find God's presence in the midst of it. *Lonesome Dove* is an 843-page reading assignment Steve gave me. It's a classic novel by Larry McMurtry about life in the American West. McMurtry's got about 100 pages to hook me or his book is getting fed to the blue pigs. *Multiply* by Francis Chan is a paperback designed to help me understand more fully the scriptural call to make disciples and provide me with some new disciple-making tools and strategies. *White Fragility* is Yair's gift to me. In it Robin Diangelo examines the system of white supremacy and the western ideologies of individualism and presumed objectivity that supports it. She offers a roadmap for developing the stamina to discuss race with humility and challenges us to start the process of dismantling a system that hurts us all. *Caliphate*, by Hugh Kennedy, traces the history of the idea, the title and the office. I made it through the four orthodox or "rightly guided" caliphates and the Umayyad and Abassid dynasties before the subject matter got so dry I sent it down to medical for an IV. I also read a biography about Hal Mumme. Mumme is the savant responsible for the video game offenses you watch in the Big 12 every Saturday. Dana Holgorson, WVU's former HC learned everything he knew about scoring the football and not stopping a soul from Hal.

“I’m learning to play
‘Blackbird’ by the Beatles
on guitar.”

– Steve

Jordan: Jordan graduated from WVU with her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing (Fiction). A short story from her master's thesis, "Nymphs," was chosen by author Crystal Wilkinson for publication in the *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*. Another of her stories, "June Drop," is a finalist in the WV Fiction Competition and will be read by author Dorothy Allison. Jordan is currently working as a freelance writer for New South Media, Inc., a multimedia publishing company in Morgantown, WV that works to change the narratives surrounding WV through storytelling. She hopes to secure full-time employment through New South Media. She will spend the next few weeks teaching a young adult literature course through WVU. For her birthday, she raised \$500 for ACTT initiatives.

Kenny: Take care, and let my classmates (inside & out) know I'm thinking about them and I'm alive over here on A-Block.

Norm: The Elsinore Bennu Think Tank (EBTT) wrote the article “A Divinity that Shapes Our Ends: From Life Without Parole to the House of Life Initiative” which will be published in the *Federal Sentencing Reporter*. The EBTT is distributing food at 3 area senior high-rises. Also participating in an online writing group with Susan Stein.

Mikey: Currently Reading Basho and The Complete Haiku by Matsuo Basho. I encourage everyone to write a Haiku!

Sophie: Current read — *Solar Storms* by Linda Hogan. I’m thinking of you all, hope everyone is well and doing okay!! Stay brave!

Lydia: I am the type of person to bounce between several stories at the same time. Currently, I’m reading Celeste Ng’s *Little Fires Everywhere*, Eve Ewing’s *Electric Arches*, and Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*. Thank you for allowing me to help with Justice 4 Who. I’m really excited to be a part of it.

Ellen: I graduated, moved, and my short story “How to Say Tomatoes” was published in the *Baltimore Review*. I’m teaching, always writing, and trying to get better at identifying birds and wildflowers. Currently reading *The Boys of My Youth* by Jo Ann Beard and *Binocular Vision* by Edith Pearlman. I miss you all so much.

Steve: I recently finished a book called *Lonesome Dove*, by Larry McCurty. It was one of the best books I've ever read. Interesting characters; wit on par with Twain; and an engaging story about Texas cowboys. I'm currently reading a book called the *Killers of the Flower Moon*, by David Grann. It’s about an Indian Tribe that was hoodwinked out their money and murdered. It is also a story about the creation of the FBI. The next book I have on my agenda is *Bring Up the Bodies*, by Hilary Mantel, which a friend recommended. It’s a novel about English history and politics.

ACTT Outside: Members participated in a Solidarity Against Police Brutality Protest in Morgantown. Delegate Walker, who visited our IO class, was also there.

“Real love is action.”
– Ya’iyr