

Artist Statement

This poem is inspired by Keith LaMar, an incredible human with so much insight, wisdom, intelligence, and perspective who is *unjustly* on death row in solitary confinement. I met Keith in a book club I was a part of in high school. We often spoke about systemic oppression, racism, and philosophy. I notice an unwavering connection between Keith's experience and an AADS class I am taking with Dr. Gilman Whiting, *Black Education*. In this class, we have learned about the unjust system that is the school to prison pipeline, referred to as *The Cyclical Exchange*, in my poem—a carefully curated system that entraps, most often, young Black boys, thrusting them into the prison system.

I also watched a film entitled *13th*, which speaks carefully to the details of the prison industrial complex, with a focus on the 13th amendment: abolished slavery and involuntary servitude throughout the United States, except as punishment for a convicted crime. In this film, I learned that many companies are quietly invested in prisons. For example, there is skyrocketed pricing for phone calls, but to make a phone call you must work for free labor, a perpetual and “cyclical exchange.” Other examples include the ways in which different healthcare providers use prisons to make a lot of money, yet they do not actually maintain the health of the prisoners. Black men account for 6.5% of the US population, but they make up 40.2% of the US prison population. There has never been a moment in US history where the law and order branch of the state has not operated against the freedom and liberty of Black people. (DuVernay, A. (Director). (2016). *13th*). The 13th amendment is a tool. It is privileged and held to a higher esteem due to being written in the constitution. Black men are continuing to be enslaved but in a manner that is somehow deemed acceptable by our government. The documentary referred to convict leasing, as a new form of slavery, and how that has really evolved into mass incarceration. This demonstrates the ways in which Black men are really targeted in the US and used as a *machine* for American success, which really means rich *white* success.

This system unfortunately starts in our **education system**, with disproportionate punishment towards our Black and brown students, leading them astray in irreparable ways.

Keith LaMar's sentence is the result of the 1993 Lucasville Prison Uprising, which included the death of a prison guard and other prisoners.

- State investigators did not observe any evidence or the crime scene.
- There was proof that jailhouse informants were paid to create false narratives that blamed Keith.
- Keith had no connection to any of the groups that were involved in the commotion.
- Ohio withheld evidence that would prove the innocence of Keith LaMar.
- The *actual* perpetrator admitted to murdering an *alleged* victim of Keith's.
- Racism was rampant in Keith's case; there were no Black jurors, and the environment was an *openly* a racist one.

Visit Keith's Website and support his journey: <https://www.keithlamar.org/>

'For the past 31 years, Keith has maintained his innocence from solitary confinement, researching and studying his death penalty case from inside a steel cage the size of a closet. In spite of being unable to touch grass or feel the wind against his skin, Keith LaMar has cultivated a beautifully perceptive understanding about life and the system that railroaded him.'

Take Action Here:



<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/free-keith-lamar>

**THE COUNTDOWN HAS
STARTED
WANT TO GET INVOLVED
FOR AN INNOCENT MAN
ON DEATH ROW ?**

1 SIGN KEITH'S PETITION
WWW.ACTIONNETWORK.ORG/PETITIONS/FREE-KEITH-LAMAR

**2 FOLLOW & SHARE JFKL ON
SOCIAL MEDIA**



**3 DONATE TO KEITH'S
LEGAL DEFENSE FUND**
WWW.KEITHLAMAR.ORG/DONATE

**4 READ KEITH'S BOOK,
CONDEMNED**
WWW.KEITHLAMAR.ORG/CONDEMNED