

FROM GANGSTER TO REVOLUTIONARY!

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In this piece, Lewis documents his transition “from gangster to revolutionary.” He details the challenges he faced both before and during incarceration, and describes how the compassion of a mentor and the enlightenment that came from reading several revolutionary works transformed him. In telling his story, he hopes to encourage others to tell theirs as well.

I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1980. I lived in a house that probably should have been condemned—broken windows, roaches, rats, and more. My household was my brother, four dope fiend uncles, my mom and my grandmother, and in all of the confusion I was lost, really allowed to run wild.

So at age 11 or 12, I was out late at night getting my uncle to buy me and my friends beer. We would smoke some weed, get drunk and steal my mom’s car, joy riding the city. By the time I was 15 I was a gang member, already violent. I had already shot a grown man during a home invasion, and I was selling crack cocaine.

By 22 years old, I was in prison. The entire time, I had no support from the streets so I robbed inmates every chance I got, beating them up and taking their gas station food. I got out at age 25, twice as violent with dreams of taking over the streets. I kicked my OG’s crackhead father out of my grandmother’s old house and set up shop!

For a second, I was doing good. (At least I thought I was). I moved my younger brother in with me and started teaching him the game. We would eat pizza every night, and every morning I would walk him to school. Then one day I found myself face down in cuffs with a police taser prong in my back on my way back to jail. I had only lasted 2 weeks!

I went to Miami County on a violation and I was full of so much anger. At that time, the prison was extremely racist so I was a perfect fit, fighting every white supremacist I could find. This not only filled me with rage, but it filled me with hate. By the time I went home 3 years later, I was a monster.

Less than a month after my release, I found myself choking a man on his front porch at 2 A.M. with a kitchen knife through his neck and a hostage in his living room. Soon after, I was once again on the run; and at 29 years old, I was right back in prison—this time with 75 years!

It is said that a man willing to throw away his life is enough to terrorize a thousand. When I got to ISP, I had fully become that man!

Looking back, I think I was suicidal. I was at the most violent prison in the entire state, and I held no fear. If you said something I didn’t like, I might spit in your face! I carried knives 12 inches long and I stayed drunk as a skunk. Michigan city prison

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loved it! I once again was a perfect fit, and in only a matter of years I was running the prison for my gang.

I didn't care about being righteous, though. I was a gangster, the culmination of a lifetime of confusion and pain with a few dozen young killers behind me, many of us never going home.

My influence after seven years had grown so negative and strong that the prison actually kicked me out and I was sent to P-Town. I was put on lock up ("Administrative Segregation"), with no out date and no explanation. I thought it was the worst thing in the world, but looking back God was at work because it was here that I met the man that would change my life!

His name was Beans, aka Kwame Shakur. He was on the lock up unit I was on, and someone had told me he was in my gang. As soon as I got to the unit, I started sending out kites telling all the gang members who I was and that I was taking over. When I wrote Kwame, he responded with some literature about an organization called NALC, or the "New Afrikan Liberation Collective." He was way too busy to take an active role in my structure at the time, but he still sent me some money to help me get things started and that meant a lot to me.

One thing about me was I didn't watch television. I had stopped for seven years so I was a reader. I started reading what he gave me and it made all the sense in the world! What I didn't know then was that Kwame was a globally known, active revolutionary that saw a lot of potential in me, and my revolutionary education had begun.

He had a system of books organized from beginner books to hard reads, and he started me with a book called "Stand Straight Struggle Forward." He gave me extra time, talking to me over the range and making sure I understood concepts like communism, socialism, capitalism, colonialism—steel sharpening steel! As soon as I knew enough to form a real opinion, he allowed me to start doing interviews on YouTube television shows and radio, and there was a change in me.

I learned that I couldn't be against racism and still be racist, making me look at race relations completely differently. I learned the history of African Americans, the history of America and the ins and outs of our political system. I learned what all the fuss was about; and the crazy part was, I cared!

I had become, **a revolutionary!**

When I got off the lock up unit, my gang gave me the blessing to run that prison; but at the same time that I was building a gang structure, I also built a revolutionary structure consisting of all gangs and all races. But it seemed like the more we grew, the more the correctional officers hated us, and things eventually came to a head. I learned the corrections officers beat up Kwame off camera. Retaliation was a must, and next thing you know there was a war between the New Africans (my gang) and the pigs!

When they came to cop a plea, I didn't cooperate and as a result was kicked out of my second prison and sent to the super racist WVCF, or Wabash Valley Correctional.

But I stayed connected to Kwame, and when I got here a man by the name of Comrade Jones added himself to my tablet, vowing his support.

This comrade represented a group called “Focus Group,” part of IDOC Watch. This is when I got introduced to some of the real revolutionary groups in the “free” world. Together we have done many great things, but the greatest thing I believe we will do is take more individuals from **gangsters**, to **revolutionaries!**

This is my story.

What’s yours?