

Collected Poems

JAMAR RUSSELL

I. UNCOMMON

Often on the compound, niggas'll call me or say I look like Common
Even the C.O.s'll say, "You look like that actor"
Not having knowledge of Common Sense the rapper

I occasionally tell people common sense ain't common
Due to different backgrounds and points of view,
People just don't think the same
I even feel like that about Dude
The man they say I look like ain't common, and here's what I'm saying

Dude came from the hood, became a B-boy, rapper, and made it to the silver
screen
Moms moved me from the hood, I became a D-boy, sold crack, and left a murder
scene

In my opinion, oh boy is exceptional
Few have done what he did
Playing roles opposite Paula Patton
Wit her fine ass
Having relationships with Erykah and Serena
Wit they beautiful, thick, bad asses
Then having the good fortune to be part of Hip hop and cinema classics
That's uncommon

Being a Black man in prison
That's common
Being a distributor and user of narcotics
That's common
Leaving a woman behind to raise a child
That's common
Using violence and leaving a mama crying
That's common
I guess that make me a common mutha fucka
A common nigga

So when they ask, "Do you know who you look like?"
I answer for them, "Common"
Wishing I could be in his place
Or like him, be doing something better
Using my words, performing in shows, being in commercials and motion pictures

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POEMS BY JAMAR RUSSELL

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Yea, I wouldn't mind that at all
I don't mind being said to look like Common
I just mind being a common nigga
I'd rather be uncommon

Live from the Pen
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Jamar Russell

II. LOOK AT ME

In this climate of prison reform
I'm tryin' something out of the norm
No, I'm not housed in a dorm
Or anything like minimum
I'm in a facility that's medium
Amongst various levels of criminals
I am an individual
Puttin' work in
Hoping my work can
Deliver the outcome
To get me out from
Circumstances that's miserable
Still, I keep my head up high
Keep my head to the sky
Like Earth, Wind, and Fire
My containment will allow me to experience earth and wind, but not fire
So it's with the strongest desire
That I continue to write
I continue to fight
To bring attention to my situation
So I can get back to life
One without guard shacks where I'm subject to frisk
And shake downs
I want to use my experience to become an activist
To bring recidivism and mass incarceration way down
I'm doing something out of the norm
Writing these poems
Producing these books
So folks can have a look at what's going on
Now I see Kim K. on T.V.
As well as Meek Mills and Jay-Z
Trying to help guys like me
But I only know a few guys like me
Who are putting the work in
Trying to make certain
That when people start searchin'
For who's a good candidate to be helped to get released
They'll look at me
My actions can speak for me
Check my jacket
My track record
What do you see?
I've formed habits
In the midst of madness

Impressive of not just a confined man
But of even one in society
I just want to be free
Let me be of service and offer the youngins something that wasn't offered to me
Yea, we have to reform prisons
But my real concern is out in the streets
Why do I have to catch them here for youth programs after they're already in
correctional facilities?
I ask for you to let me to be of use in the community
I ask that if you want to help someone get free
That you choose an asset
Look at me!

Live from the Pen,
J.S. Russell

III. DOES MY LIFE MATTER?

Felony
After masked men in the name of the law swerve and jump out
Guns drawn
Traumatic
Terroristic
On the same corner that I seen police frisk Yo-yo and Tracy
Pulling out wads of cash
The most at the time that I'd ever seen
Years, over a decade later, it's me
Waiting to buy drugs
And for what?
What was left to us?
My brother, cousins, and daddy used and sold drugs
And all have been to the County
I just took it a step further
Convicted for murder
Serving my sentence
I've learned systematic injustice and disenfranchisement
Much too late to fully know what I'm up against
School to Prison Pipeline
I was an Honor Roll student
Still, I supplied coke to be stuffed in a pipe and put to fire
Why?
Can I blame it on injustice in a system that existed before I was an infant?
Raised in the Crack Era
Born into Reagan
To fund a war
Flooded drugs in communities like mine
Racist
Been killing us
From a War on Drugs
Laws setup by the same mutha fuckas
My crime
Being black
Tryna get some stacks
In a game I'd never win at
My opposition was the cops and the robbers
Crackers and niggas who hate
Why bother?
Tryna escape?
Not money or education can save me from The United States
Me not being a human is in The Constitution
I'm a slave because of the 13th Amendment
Minority communities heavily policed to put blacks back in slavery

Amend it!
All the contributions we've made to this country
Acknowledge it!
How better things could be if we've had the resources
Invest in it!
I wish I had it
I would have been an Engineer
But instead I'm here
Do they care?
Could they understand my fear?
Scared that I wouldn't see 18
They didn't outline me in chalk at a murder scene
But they got my ass at sentencing
A different lynching
But does it matter?

Live from the Pen,
J. S. Russell