

## 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

Apr. 1, 2022

POEMS BY JAMAR RUSSELL

125

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  
9/27/2021  
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 13<sup>th</sup> 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