

## Poverty:

Poverty defined is: *the state of being poor; lack of the means of providing material needs or comfort.* My upbringing and biology lies there with poverty side to side. What it means to me probably may mean something different to others. What it has put on my food table probably wasn't on most. But, my imagination of what poverty is, to me, was the regular way of life. I grew up on the other side of the highway from MATC (**Hillside Projects**, born there. **Lapham 'Carver' Park**, raised there). So I have a few chapters in these areas.

In the 80's, my mother kept me and my sister well cared for—even though our living quarters was invaded by rats and cockroaches. Both projects, at that time, were infested with rats and cockroaches and most people living in these projects could do little to solve the problem. So, like all the others, there was no comfort at living in these conditions. But my mother, she didn't fail to do her due diligence. Raising us on her own, working full time; going to night school at MATC; while on food stamps; my mother tried her hardest to make it seem as if we was living a fabulous and comfortable life. At that time, I assumed we were. As I got older, I figured things to be less than normal. But by that time, I was running with the numbers within the Gangster Disciple's.

Now, as I reflect back on those days of the 80's. I smile at how poverty transformed me into a social being. Well, at the least, social wise, I've learned through this sociology course that people and groups, plus those rats and

cockroaches "*I just adored*"...played a major role at molding and influencing the character I now hold.

### **Dramaturgy:**

How often we've heard the following statements is a mystery to me.

"Never let them see you cry!" I remember my father telling me that once when I almost started crying after missing the winning shot of our championship JV (junior varsity) basketball game. "Smile for the camera!" This was my mother's motto, always wanting to capture happiness within picture—even if that happiness was only perceived, rather than actually existing. "*This is how she seen life, even while sleeping with rats and cockroaches.*" "Don't give 'them' the satisfaction!" My fourth grade teacher, Ms. Schuler, once told me that. I was struggling with a new word, one I had never seen or heard before, so it was difficult to sound out. As I stumbled over it during our out-loud reading session, a few kids in the back were laughing and poking fun at me. I started toward them, fists balled up, ready to fight. Only, Ms. Schuler stopped me with those words. The value of that statement—and the lesson I took from it—still holds weight today.

### **Theory:**

What do all these examples have in common? All of them are designed for "*impression management.*" We want to give off a different impression outwardly than we feel within. Call it insecurity or secrecy—whatever you like. In the end, it

is a matter of how we want to be perceived by others. No one wants to be predictable. No one wants their inner self revealed so openly as that.

But, to become someone with a better sense, you'll have to reveal "some things" overall. As we all know, all best friends/ partners were strangers first. We engage in face to face primary groups to help form ourselves, even if it makes us vulnerable to pain—we open ourselves to others to expand psychologically. We form groups because it's how we succeed. As the French aristocrat and social theorist Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "*Americans are a nation of joiners.*" So too, what we are is to be sought in the invisible depths of our own being through these acts: *Buying a pair of Jordan's to be with the in-crowd. Running with the Gangster Disciples just to be a part of something powerful. Sleeping with cockroaches and rats and witnessing poverty hands on. Stumbling over a word that was difficult to say and overcoming the humiliation.* All these relationships define me. These acts are transient and superficial now. Gone, even though their effects may persist for a little while—the memories remain.

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