

LETTER TO the youth,

From Prison

6-12-14

Dear young Kings and Queens,

You do not know me personally, but you know me by way of a hood movie character, or better yet, through the eyes of your favorite rapper. Of what they speak, I have lived. I am currently writing you from a state prison cell — because I care about you and your future. I'm not sure what you may have been told about prison life, but allow me to provide you with some facts about this caged world: you are told when to sleep, what and when to eat, what your occupation behind bars will be (which is worth roughly 10 cents per hour on average), and you wear the same clothing for the duration of your prison term. The hurtful part is being locked from your family and loved ones. Envision yourself not being able to hold, hug, or kiss them — all you have to hold are pictures. The guards will speak to you in any manner they feel or see fit. The most degrading part is having to strip off all your clothing so your naked body can be examined and searched. You must bend over, lifting and holding your private parts, in the presence of other men. Now tell me, does this sound like an environment you want to be in? To my young Kings, trust me when I say that street life — be it the drugs, pimpin', murder or Jackin' game, is nothing more than carnage itself. It is a self-destructive life because you either die at a young age or go to prison — which is like death — because your so-called "ride or die" partners soon forget about you when you're gone. You will be reduced to a memory, like when you did or said this or that, you soon realize that you're doing your time yourself. The outside world is still moving, while yours is at a standstill. Life is a game and we will all go through different stages, but the question I ask you is: Are you setting yourself up to win or lose? If you find that you have failed to create a successful life, do not despair. Seek out other ways to reach that goal. I once read that a man or woman is great not because he or she hasn't failed but because failure hasn't stopped them. Booker T. Washington said, "Start where you are with what you have, knowing that what you have is plenty enough."

We too often think of ourselves in terms of what we can't do, rather than what we can do. There is no height to your ability to think. Your thoughts manifest into actions, so direct them towards where you want to be. The mind is a tool more powerful than any AK-47 or any gun you can think of. I must stress this one last thing, young King. We have got to stop making babies if we're not willing to be there for our babies. You see, it's not fair to that little boy or girl. They didn't ask to be here without a father. Too many of us know how it feels to grow up without our dads, so why keep that going? We have to be there for our kids and when I say, "Be there," I don't just mean paying for diapers, childcare or Jordans for our child. We need to seek vision for our kids, provide positive guidance and pass down information and wisdom that we have learned along the way. Our kids are our spitting image, but it's the image they see from us that will have an effect on how their life will materialize. Let us be conscious of this and check our own image. If we are not ready to take on such a task but still choose to indulge in sex, then use condoms. To my young Queens, you must know your own worth. You are royalty and should hold no price because your value is priceless. I used to use my reputation, status and image to scheme on women for whatever agenda I had going. I look around this prison at my fellow prisoners, as well as myself, and see now, while us men are in here, our kids have been left by us for you to take care of alone, and yet you still send us money, you still make time, accept our phone calls, and find a way to come visit and send pictures. The essence of a woman is beauty. But notice how when I speak of your beauty I didn't refer to your physical make-up and body shape. While certain things may make you attractive, they don't make you beautiful. Beautiful comes from within. I urge you to have that self-confidence and seek beauty ~ that beauty that lies within you. Don't allow the indoctrination through the media, music and cosmetic entities to define for you what beauty is, causing you to question and become insecure with how God made you. I don't have all the answers. But what I do know, I'm more than willing to share in hopes that you share with me, so we can build together. There is misinformation out there about who we are, and if we don't have honest conversations with ourselves and with one another, we will feed into the misconceptions,