



## C. Fausto Cabrera and Zeke Caligiuri on Precarity and Critical Resistance

*Works of Justice*

Podcast Resource Guide

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Last fall, Coffee House Press released [American Precariat: Parables of Exclusion](#), an anthology of essays edited by a collective of incarcerated writers involved in the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop. The volume interrogates the complexity and fluidity of class and caste systems in the United States, and includes transcribed conversations of the editors. In the latest *Works of Justice* podcast, two of *American Precariat's* editors, **C. Fausto Cabrera** and **Zeke Caligiuri**, talk about how they developed a friendship rooted in writing while incarcerated, what they did to bring writing programs into Minnesota prisons, and the history of how the volume came to be.

### KEYWORDS

Friendship, Editing, Poetry, Memoir, Minnesota, Incarceration, Prison, Writing

### GUESTS

**C. Fausto Cabrera** is a multi-genre artist, writer, and activist recently released from incarceration after 21 years. His work has appeared in *The Colorado Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *The Woodward Review*, among others. With photographer Alec Soth, he is the author of the prose epistle project, *The Parameters of Our Cage* (MACK Books, 2020), and most recently, he served as an editor for *American Precariat: Parables of Exclusion* (Coffee House Press, 2023). Cabrera co-founded The Stillwater Writers Collective, a partnership with the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop (MPWW). He works closely with the organizations Until We Are All Free and We Are All Criminals to bring attention to the multifaceted ways justice impacts people and communities. He is a Haymarket Books 2024 Writing Freedom Fellow.

**Zeke Caligiuri** is a writer and activist from South Minneapolis. He is the author of *This is Where I Am* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), a finalist for the Minnesota Book Awards. He has won multiple awards through the PEN Prison Writing Awards and is a co-founder of the Stillwater Writers Collective, the first all-prisoner created and facilitated collective in the country. He is a contributor to *The*

*Sentences That Create Us: Crafting a Writer's Life in Prison* (Haymarket Books, 2022), as well as *School, Not Jail: How Educators Can Disrupt School Pushout and Mass Incarceration* (Teachers College Press, 2021). Caligiuri is an editor and contributor to the recent anthology, *American Precariat: Parables of Exclusion* (Coffee House Press, 2023). His fiction was anthologized in *Prison Noir* (Akashic Books, 2014), edited by Joyce Carol Oates. As an incarcerated writer, his work has been widely published in journals and anthologies for years. He is directly impacted by over two decades of incarceration and currently does community outreach for the Minnesota Justice Research Center and is helping to build the Re-Enfranchised Coalition, empowering system-impacted people and reinvesting in the humanization of those still stuck within the captivity business. He was recently named as a 2024 Writing Freedom Fellow.

### CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

**Deborah Appleman** is the Hollis L. Caswell Professor and Chair of Educational Studies at Carleton College. She also teaches college-level creative writing, language, and literature courses for the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop. Appleman has authored or co-authored several books, including *Words No Bars Can Hold: Literacy Writing in Prison* (2019) and most recently, *Literature and the New Culture Wars* (2022).

**Jimmy Santiago Baca** is an American poet from New Mexico. Baca was incarcerated at the age of 21, and served five years in prison. He taught himself to read and write while in prison, and began to write poetry. His first poetry collection, *Immigrants in Our Own Land*, was published by the Louisiana State University Press in 1979 and includes the widely anthologized poem, "I Am Offering This Poem." He was brought to international recognition with his semi-autobiographical minor epic in verse, *Martin & Meditations on the South Valley*, which received the American Book Award for poetry and the Hispanic Heritage Award in Literature. In 2004, Baca founded Cedar Tree, Inc., a nonprofit supporting writing workshops for people in prison and youth.

**Jennifer Bowen** is the Founding Director of the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop. Her work has received a Pushcart Prize, an Arts and Letters Prize, the Tim McGinnis Award, and has appeared in *The Sun*, *The Iowa Review*, *Orion*, and *Kenyon Review*, among others. Her collection of nonfiction, *Lightworthy: Essays on Love, Justice and Art*, is forthcoming from Milkweed Press in 2025.

**George Jackson** was a Black American writer and activist. A member of the Black Panther Party, Jackson co-founded the Black Guerrilla Family while incarcerated. Jackson achieved fame as one of the Soledad Brothers and was later shot to death by prison guards in San Quentin Prison during an attempt to escape. He is the author of the *Soledad Brothers: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (1974).

The **James-Younger Gang** (also known as the **Big James Gang**) was notorious in the 1860s for robberies and other crimes in the aftermath of the Civil War. The gang consisted of brothers Jesse and Frank James, who were sometimes joined by brothers Jim, John, Bob and Cole Younger. The two sets of siblings were based in Missouri, a divided state during the war, and were outspoken partisans for the South. With the state declared for the Union in the conflict, the brothers and other associates turned to unlawful activity to support themselves. During a 1876 attempted bank robbery in Northfield, Minnesota, the gang killed a Swedish immigrant and a bank cashier. Jim, Bob, and Cole Younger were eventually caught and convicted of the crime. The three brothers pleaded guilty on November 20, 1876, and were sentenced to life terms in the Minnesota Territorial Prison at Stillwater (Now Minnesota Correctional Facility – Stillwater). While incarcerated, Cole Younger helped found *The Prison Mirror*, the longest-running prison newspaper in the United States.

**Malcolm X** (1925-1965) was a Black American activist and revolutionary who was a prominent figure during the civil rights movement. He learned about Islam while incarcerated in the 1940s, and joined the Nation of Islam (NOI) once he was paroled. In the 1950s, X was appointed by Elijah Muhammad as the national NOI representative, an appointment he held until the early 1960s. With the NOI, he organized temples, founded a newspaper, and led Temple No. 7 in New York City's Harlem. He cut ties with the NOI in 1964 to focus on aligning with other civil rights leaders and to develop a Black nationalist organization. He was assassinated at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City on February 21, 1965. His posthumous biography, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), was co-authored by Alex Haley and released nine months after his death.

The **Minnesota Correctional Facility - Faribault** is a men's state prison in Faribault, Minnesota consisting of a medium-security facility and a minimum-security unit. Housing about 2,000 people, it is the most populated prison in Minnesota. The facility was built in 1879 as the Minnesota Experimental School for the Feeble Minded, and housed deaf and blind young students. The school transitioned to a state hospital in the early 1900s, and was authorized as a prison in 1989.

The **Minnesota Correctional Facility – Lino Lakes** is a men's state prison in Lino Lakes, Minnesota consisting of medium-security and minimum-security units. With a population of about 1,300 people, Lino Lakes has the highest concentration of educational and treatment programs of all state correctional facilities in Minnesota. In many cases, individuals serve the final phase of their sentence at Lino Lakes to prepare for their release. The facility opened in 1963 as a juvenile facility for boys and girls, and was converted to an adult facility in 1978.

The **Minnesota Correctional Facility – Rush City** is a high-security men's state prison in Rush City, Minnesota that houses up to 1,000 individuals. The facility opened in 2000.

The **Minnesota Correctional Facility – Stillwater** is a men's close custody state prison in Bayport, Minnesota. Stillwater was built to replace the original Minnesota Territorial Prison—located just to the

north in the city of Stillwater—which was built in 1853 before Minnesota was incorporated as a state. The Territorial Prison operated until 1914, when operations were moved to the new site south of Stillwater. Until the expansion of MCI-Faribault, Stillwater was the largest prison in Minnesota. It houses a population of about 1,600 people. The facility is known for its award-winning publication, *The Prison Mirror*—the oldest continuously-operated prison newspaper in the United States.

**The Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop (MPWW)** was founded by Jen Bowen in 2011 with a single creative writing class at Lino Lakes Prison. The initiative has since grown into an organization of over 25 instructors who have taught more than 250 creative writing classes to over 3,000 people in every adult state prison in Minnesota. MPWW is the largest and most enduring prison-based literary organization in the United States.

**The Prison Mirror** was founded at the Minnesota Territorial Prison (now the Minnesota Correctional Facility - Stillwater) in 1887 and is considered the oldest continuously published prison newspaper in the United States. The newspaper was originally funded by people incarcerated at the facility—including the Younger Brothers, members of the James-Younger Gang—and won the Charles C. Clayton Award in 1969 and 1987 from the University of Illinois – Carbondale, and a similar award from Amicus in 1985.

The **Stillwater Writers Collective** was founded by C. Fausto Cabrera and Zeke Caligiuri while they were incarcerated at MCI - Stillwater. In partnership with the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop, the Collective was formed as a space for writers to share work, discuss literature, and develop as an artistic community.

### **ADDITIONAL READING**

- Deborah Appleman, [\*Words No Bars Can Hold: Literacy Learning in Prison\*](#) (W. W. Norton, 2019)
- Jimmy Santiago Baca, *Immigrants in Our Own Land & Selected Early Poems* (New Directions, 1990 / Originally published by Louisiana State University Press in 1979)
- C. Fausto Cabrera and Alec Soth, [\*The Parameters of Our Cage\*](#) (MACK Books, October 2020)
- Zeke Caligiuri et al, [\*America Precariat: Parables of Exclusion\*](#) (Coffee House Press, 2023)
- Zeke Caligiuri, [\*This Is Where I Am: A Memoir\*](#) (University of Minnesota Press, 2016)
- Caitis Meissner, [\*The Sentences That Create Us: Crafting a Writer's Life in Prison\*](#) (Haymarket Books, 2022)
- PEN Prison Writing Awards Anthology

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