

# final final jeff and rahmel

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, prison, write, feel, book, class, tears, jeffrey, speaking, chess, program, unit, play, letter, paper, hear, ethics, argue, learn, deal

## SPEAKERS

Rahmel, Jeff

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00:01

As a warning, this podcast service contains material about emotional and physical trauma that may be upsetting to some audiences.



Rahmel 00:12

When I was incarcerated, I went to class so many times, but I never did. It wasn't so one of my best friends went on right here, Jeffrey, that I broke down and cried. I just cried in front of a unit of 90 people in a prison, you know, tears running down my face, and I was tasting them. I was tasting tears, tears, a joy for you going home tears of pain from being in prison and being away from my family. There was just a mixture of tears for different reasons.



Jeff 00:43

Did you feel any embarrassment just being on the tear in front of a whole bunch of guys full of absolutely testosterone?



Rahmel 00:50

That memory is like it was yesterday. I remember when I started crying. I remember you saying, bro, what are you doing? grabbed me and put me in a headlock. And somehow you like, like a turtle. And you started like crying too. But you were still hiding in. The thing I loved about that moment is you try to hide me. I remember you trying to put your arm around me to make sure you could shield me like, because it was a vulnerability that we shared. Yeah, I was kind of open with it. But I was still like, enjoying that my brother was protecting me at that in that moment. But now we broke barriers. Barriers made us people came up to me and jokingly said, Oh, you crying? You two weren't even like each other last week kinase going home? My brother?

**J** Jeff 01:35  
Bill Yeah, but

**R** Rahmel 01:37  
they were saying things but I know we've done a sigh when they're easy for them to be themselves.

 01:48  
From the greater Boston area, you are listening to my turn conversations brought to you by tufts education reentry network. These are stories of life during and after incarceration told by people who've lived it and are working to overcome the odds.

**R** Rahmel 02:12  
I met Jeffrey, when I made it to Concord medium. We got close because we both had a hunger to learn. We we clicked up because we had a lot of mutual friends. And we happened to be on the same housing unit. In one day, we had a conversation about books. And I told him some of the books I read. And he told me some of the books he read. And from there, we just talked about the books we were reading. So I spent many days in front of his cell. He had his cell was like a library. He had a bunch of different books in it from George Jackson. But in my eye, I remember him lending me that book. And he told me how many days I had to read it before he wanted it back. How do you remember the beginning of our friendship?

**J** Jeff 02:54  
I remember being in myself. He brought a book called our prisons obsolete reminds the Davis. I made it while I was locked up in a maximum security penitentiary. And we and I got there. He's we spoke about the book. And he had a lot of important views. And it opened my eyes and tells him he was

**R** Rahmel 03:20  
when I first read Angela Davis, our prisons obsolete, it made me feel connected. Throughout my entire conversation, I put a lot of blame on myself. When I read that book, I know that blame went away, I felt like connected to a much longer, much larger struggle. I felt like a raindrop being a part of the ocean. Like I just felt like I was connected to you know, the struggle of slavery and the struggle of everybody that's incarcerated. And that helped me really see things differently. You know, I started to realize that there was more more factors than myself that played a role to my incarceration. And that made me feel liberated. I remember like the walls feeling like they weren't there. Like the sun was coming through how to make you feel

J

Jeff 04:08

upset. Angry, I don't know, drew a lot of different emotions out of me only because a lot of what was spoken about in the book I know was factual. Especially when she talked about you know, the prison industrial complex and how I mean it resonated with me it automatically because I was in the belly of the beast at that point in time and and definitely woke me up.

R

Rahmel 04:37

Once the first time you read Angela Davis is our prisons obsolete.

J

Jeff 04:42

It was 2014 I believe, or 13. I was certainly Max. That was probably like day eight of like a two week lockdown. A person had just been murdered on the unit. He had been beaten to death with a cane And so we weren't able to actually pass books back and forth because they had, obviously the outside homicide unit come in and they had no bits here, kind of in a fashion where nobody was able to communicate with each other do anything. And I remember getting the book actually out of the library in in the maximum security prison that I was at, and it sat on my sat near my bunk for probably weeks before that. But at that point in time I was I was desperate for some type entertainment at that point, being locked in itself for 24 hours and I started reading and I fell in love with. It is a program that was introduced to conquer by Tufts University, the program gives inmates the opportunity to earn an associate's degree. One aspect of the program was the Inside Out program, where Tufts University brings in students and teachers and they actually teach a class with the inmates on the inside. It kind of gives us a humanizing and the Collegian experience all at once. What, what made you What compelled you to feel like signing up for the in and out course that we didn't make it? Because we didn't make it into the first and then of course, I remember that. So what compelled you to kind of sign up for it?

R

Rahmel 06:33

You, not just you for everybody that I was in the prison with that had that eagerness to learn, I gravitated to people who wanted to learn. So when the program came in, everybody was signing up. And the ones that were, you know, the ones that I hung out with, we're getting accepted. I was, I was paying for my letter. Then when I got mine, I know you got yours and my other friend, we were all in that program. That excited me. How about you? What compelled you to sign up for the inside? Of course,

J

Jeff 07:03

speaking to one individual, he said something that stuck with me. And it made me always question everything that I came in contact with, right. And what he said was condemnation without affirmation is the apex of ignorance. And that always kind of stuck with me, it never left. In that, that kind of propelled me to just always, always search for something deeper than

what was on the surface. So my opportunity presented itself to being the first cohort that we found ourselves in. Honestly, for me, it was more about getting out of jail, like I was looking at it, like, let me get out of jail, Let me hurry up and get the good time. Because that's what they were given up for participation, it was given you a reduced time off your sentence. And it changed, it changed, I had to kind of my views on it change, I had to kind of step back for a second. And think with that perspective that the individual gave me and kind of engage with the material from that perspective. class, the class that we took on philosophy impacted everybody. Because we all had a particular way of thinking that we that we had, and we were open to different ways of interpretation. You know, and I think that changed a lot of things. The one thing that I can honestly remember about that philosophy class had nothing to do with a particular assignment, it was more about what we were reading in Plato's Republic. And I remember I asked Rommel, and Ken can tell if they could write me a short paper about what they thought that I could do better, or work on better as a person. And they wrote it and gave me honest feedback that I needed to hear, but I took it and absorbed it. And I don't think if it had not been for that philosophy class, we probably wouldn't have been thinking outside the box. And I probably wouldn't have even thought to have somebody write me purely based off of things that they didn't like about me. I don't think I did that. But it was cool.

R

Rahmel 09:29

The philosophy, the philosophy class was really big for all of us, right? Because most of the time in prison, that's what we do. We debate all the time about sports and music and movies. So philosophy introduced us into a new way of debating about other things outside of those topics. And we learned so much about the philosophers in they had all these funny names Plato Socrates, they're similar case and we you Use those names with each other as like nicknames. And that caught that caught fire like we were doing outside of class and people seeing us talking and being joyful about, about what we were learning. And we had a glow about us that, you know, we started the whole class on the units, right? Like we were having class on the units, I became a professor, I became a student right on the unit. And we were just like slowly converting, you know, that prison into college,

J

Jeff 10:28

when you come out on a tear and you see, maybe 50. Guys, some not even participate in any type of school programs are sitting there enjoying a conversation or intellectual debate amongst people in the class. I'm talking about all different age groups, varying from people who just walked into the building, the people who've been down 2030 years, everybody participate in

R

Rahmel 10:51

the Ethics Bowl is a structured debate where two opposing teams argue using philosophical approaches, preparing for the Ethics Bowl, change the way we argued, we learn to use I statements, not to generalize our opinions. Like they're based, in fact. And I think just that alone, helped us develop better relationships with each other, the way we communicate with each other started to improve. And you've seen groups of 50 people hanging out with now where before there was only like, it was all broken off into ciphers. Right that so there was a,

there was a movement, a positive movement going on. The pushback was from the police, like Jeffrey mentioned, they really didn't like that we were receiving the education for free when they're paying for their children to go to school. And we're not. So there was there was some jealousy there.

J Jeff 11:44

The Ethics Bowl was a unique experience only because the way arguments were shaped in the Ethics Bowl kind of reshaped the way people argued in real life. Like people started using philosophical perspective to argue when prior to that, it was like, I'm punching you in the face. And we'll go into the hole like, so people really started opening up and actually having discussions about certain things that are certain topics that were uncomfortable, whether it was about family life, relationships, whatever it was people use, like this philosophical approach to explain it. And I think it was cool. Definitely was a, it definitely had a family feel to it, I think the most important aspect of it all was that we were all in a place together that we would not be at. Otherwise, outside of this, outside of the school program. And being in that particular area, everybody had their prejudices. Everybody had their preconceived notions about each other. But when it came to, like, schoolwork, and when it came to like, just being on top of each other for doing schoolwork, and participating and showing up to class, everybody was accountable for everybody. That was the one time in prison where I've visually seen the culture change. And like you could you hear chatter about people doing things, but visually seeing how the units change how the call for movement was even different when CEOs called movement for each building. And we had to go to school how that was different. And it was some good, some was bad. I mean, you also have to realize that although we were doing a good thing, it was still a pushback from the DLC. Because if you turn this prison environment into a college environment, then these people have job security. I think whenever you do something outside of the norm that's always pushed back. There's always a judgment that comes along with it. I think the one thing that kind of made people feel more comfortable gravitating towards it, that pushing back against it, unfortunately, was I guess you can say the reputation that came along with some of us that was involved in the program. We weren't perfect angels. And people knew that. And so when people seen a transition from where we were at to where we were currently, where we've been to where we were currently at, I think a lot of people respected the maturity and wanted to be a part of that. I

R Rahmel 14:27

want to know, because the program kept me busy. And I wasn't focused on other people anymore. I was focused on doing my work. I was I had to be like the most dedicated student on the blog because I had to work twice as hard as my fellow classmates, they, they were just completing assignments way faster than I was. So I was like, kind of like the face because I was at that table every day struggling to write these papers to do my homework. So when people see me I was I was 100% dedicated to school. I'm more concerned With the people who wanted to learn with me, the people who came and sat down with me and helped me I don't know about the people who didn't like what we were doing, I don't know their opinion, and I don't really care for it. Yeah, I've seen my dedication school bring people closer to me, I was just amazed at how smart they were, they knew they were teaching me and I was teaching them about this topic, some topics, but they knew more about some of them than I did. When we were on a unit together, Jeffery would take 30 minutes and write an essay, and he'll get a good

grade, it will take me two hours to write an essay to get half the grade or close enough grade to him. So I felt I didn't have confidence in the beginning being next to all of these giant figures, you know, I was sitting beside him and another friend of mine who also was biggest statue in and intelligence. So that's a difficult because I tried so many different styles and so many different ways to write paper. One of the common ones was, you know, people told me to just look at it like, you know, the introduction, the body and the conclusion, you know, stature argument in the beginning, just the way to format it.

J Jeff 16:07

Can you explain what the environment is like while trying to complete work in the prison environment.

R Rahmel 16:14

So there's a lot going on in prison, especially on a housing unit, where there's 45 cells, there's 90 people on this small unit, and we're using as eight phones as eight people on the phone, there's people watching TV, there's people yelling as people cook, and as people playing chess people playing cards, there's people working now people taking showers. So to try to focus on doing your homework was a challenge itself. If you had a cellmate that was not in school and made it even harder, because now you're in the cell, you're trying to focus on writing and paper, but he's, you know, watching a sports game and you're being distracted. So I just tried to find time, where I could just dedicate to school without the distraction. So I ended up moving into a cell with someone who was in a program with me. And that made it easier for me to really like start writing, getting my thoughts on paper. What was it like for you to write papers inside

J Jeff 17:12

scraps of paper everywhere. I use the pad that I bought on canteen, I mean, the way that I write is different. Anyway, I could write the same sentence 1000 times on different pieces of paper. And just because I don't like the way it looks, I could trace it and not write it at all. In a weird way. I found that easier to actually write in prison, not easier to write in prison on and say that I found it easier to write papers in prison. Because it wasn't as personal as writing letters, letters was hard for me to write. So writing papers in prison was kind of like, okay, writing about a particular topic. Let me just write about it. There's no, there's no visceral reaction to it. It's just my thoughts on a piece of paper. By the time again, that said, I had a hard problem writing in prison when it came to like personal

R Rahmel 18:00

note, I want to ask you, I've noticed you right, real small. And I didn't know at the time, but after speaking with can tell, you told me that you gave him an explanation on why you write so small, and he told me is because you feel like you don't have a voice. But I've noticed your progression. And it seems like you've been speaking louder. Thanks. Don't think so.

J Jeff 18:21

I've been trying, I've been trying. But um, it's funny, you bring that up, because we were just, we were just around. I don't know what we were doing. But we were just analyzing a lot of things about ourselves. And that kind of came up. Even the way that I project my voice and how soft spoken on you kind of reflects how I write on paper. It's because it's not that you're dealing with childhood trauma, but it comes from that comes from not really being heard people kind of silencing your voice and even though I feel like I'm strong and courageous and all of that thing, but you still deal with a lot of self doubt in the process of things. So it's just a constant battle. But

R Rahmel 19:01

so we spoke this past Saturday. In your fashion, you're speaking low, but louder than I'm used to. And you know, somebody intervene and ask the audience Hey, can you guys hear him? Is everybody in the back from every table? raise their hand? Did that make you feel a type of way? No.

J Jeff 19:22

Not really, I think throughout the course of time, I kind of understood that even though I wasn't the loudest person. I think the words that are the words that I like, come on my mouth speak loud, funny. So whatever No need. I never felt the need to be like the loudest person in the room. I've never felt like that. I don't like attention. Hate it. But deal with it. And I mean, it was cool. So but what was it like when I left?

R Rahmel 19:49

It was hard. It was hard and easy. Honestly, it was hard and easy. It's like I know a lot of stuff going on with me too easy. Was Was for Jeff left before we had that moment, on a tear, Jeff throw everybody in the class a letter. And he wrote mattify. He wrote me two letters. He wrote me one, as he mentioned earlier, he asked me, Hey, bro, like, I respect you, you're my brother, I want you to write me a letter and tell me what I could do to work on myself. This was right after Jeffrey got into a fight with another friend of mine, we were all friends. But, you know, two of my friends got in a fight. And I was mad at Jeffrey at the time, because I'm cool with both of them. And I felt like, you know, we were all in prison, we were bitter. We had a lot of stuff going on, we were depressed. And some of us dealt with it in ways better than others. And I felt like Geoffrey could improve his way in dealing with some of the stuff he was going through. So I wrote him a letter, and I told him how I felt to see how much my letter meant to him, and how seriously he took it. It's a beautiful thing. Honestly, in the letter, he wrote me before he left, just just inspired me. It motivated me, it gave me hope. And it made me go back into that class and turn up. Honestly, that was the good part. The hard part was that he wasn't there. And I made sure no one sat in that seat,

J Jeff 21:09

honestly, I mean, even if they fail this seat, I don't think it would have filled the space. But not that I think highly of myself. It was just the way that classroom operated. Everybody had a particular position that they play. And as much as he likes to make it seem like he learned so much from me, I learned more from him. You learn so much more from a person that knows that. They like certain things. I know I like certain things. And sometimes I don't I don't want to say hubris gets involved. But sometimes you learn to like feel, especially when you come from like an environment where not many you know, here, I'm proud of you too much. You don't hear too many people say I believe in you at all. Actually, I don't think I've ever heard my mother and my father say I'm proud of you. I believe in you. So to have people feel that way about you. It was almost mandatory that I wrote those letters because it was a real bond and a real friendship that I have.

R

Rahmel 22:18

A first name Jeffrey 2022, like a year after I was released. When I moved back to Boston, I met up with Jeffrey, I hit him up on Snapchat, I got to Snapchat, I hit him up and he came to pick me up and we went to went to his house. And there was a he had a cookout, and I ate there. And we play chess. That's one thing. I mean, did all the time in prison, we played chess together. And he told me when he came home, that he missed me so much. And he thought about me so much that he named a character in chess on his phone after me. So he was eager to play me he was been playing. So he prepared to play me in chess for a long time. When I got to the cookout, he whipped out this chessboard like out of nowhere. And we played chess.

J

Jeff 23:10

Sometimes I felt really misunderstood. And he gets me way away. Honestly, because me nicknaming him, the computer him in chess was kind of just a way to kind of feel some type of comfort, I guess. Especially because the relationships I had with people, when I got out of prison weren't as strong as the relationships I had with people in prison. And, you know, it's hard to even talk to family about it, because they like, prison. There's no good people in prison, except for you as if though I'm only meet us in prison. Right? So, you know, it was kind of hard to articulate that. And it was even kind of hard to articulate that to him. Because, you know, he might have conversations on the phone once in a while. But it's kind of hard to articulate, like, I'm struggling out here without cost some type of support. Like people don't understand that. And it's not, I don't know, it's just back here deeper than what most people might think. On the surface, like, I really don't give a fuck, I guess. Can I say that? On the surface. I really don't. I guess I'm not smart. I can be stoic at times. But I care deeply about a lot of things. And I guess I don't have a good way to show.

R

Rahmel 24:31

I knew he had a heart bigger than his body. But he's definitely said things that let me know he has a huge heart. He cares a lot about people. And in ways that was shocking, because at first he wouldn't when I got to know him. You would think he doesn't care about anybody. But I realized that was far from the truth.





24:55

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