

A N A F R O - A M E R I C A N  
**P O I N T**  **F** **V I E W**

## *Latino Perspective*

### REAL STORIES OFFER FREEDOM FOR IMPRISONED PEOPLE

*By Elizabeth Cardona*

30 year-old Latino, Daniel F. Ventura, tells his story to youth in state custody, incarcerated men and women, criminal justice students, individuals in drug rehabilitation programs, and anyone willing to listen to how he was able to turn his life around. Ventura who spent more than six years of his youth in detention centers and incarcerated observed, "My problems were a result of not speaking."

According to <http://www.prisons.org> "almost two million people are behind prison and jail bars in the United States. 70% of the incarcerated populations are people of color." While the American justice system's solution to deviant behaviors is to expand prisons, there are other alternatives. One such alternative is The Performance Project, which through its creative initiative of using the visual arts as a tool of expression, is able to provide an opportunity for people who have experienced "many forms of oppression" to become liberated. The Performance Project uses real stories from program participants, who write songs, poetry and plays, to teach and offer support to individuals looking to find their identity, understand their struggles, and take responsibility for their actions.

Growing up in an abusive home, Ventura never was able to express his inner thoughts, fears and frustrations. "Part of the problem," Ventura says, "is that in our culture we are taught to be silent. We have enough societal problems because of discrimination, stereo-types, and so much negativity that we don't want the world to know what is really happening in our communities. Therefore, we do not discuss the truth about ourselves and the issues of child abuse, sexual abuse, drug abuse, etc."

According to Ventura, "What ends up happening is that we remain spiritually and mentally imprisoned." He further states that while the issues may be similar to "Whites," because of poverty, Latinos and African Americans have a tougher time getting the support they need to become rehabilitated. Through the help of The Performance Project, Ventura has been able to find hope. He recently was part of the live stage performance of "Walk with Me" that took place on October 14-16 at Springfield College.

To learn more about upcoming events please visit <http://www.PerformanceProject.org> or call (413) 586-4960. n