



The Amplifier

Plug into news that informs and encourages

January 2017

Interview with Bert Stabler



So Mr. Stabler, where are you from?

I'm from central Ohio by way of Baltimore and spent a year in Ecuador as a two year old, then Toledo, then from ages three through twenty-three Columbus was home. But my adult home I think of as Chicago.

Tell me a little bit about what took a two-year-old Mr. Stabler to Ecuador.

My dad worked for the national bureau of standards in DC; he was helping Ecuador adopt the metric

system. My dad loves the metric system. I learned a fair amount of English and Spanish. I was a language sponge when I was little and now I'm sad because my Spanish is so lousy. A lot of the people that took care of me at that time spoke Spanish. Another fun fact is that I had dysentery the whole time I was there, so I was a very poopy baby.

Before we get too deep into this interview, congrats on the new daughter. How is fatherhood treating you?

That is a good question and kind of you to ask, but it is difficult to answer. One thing that I didn't foresee is how strange it is to care so much and make so many plans for a person you really don't know that well yet. And you may never know them as well as they know you.

I don't think I've ever heard anyone answer that question in such a strange and accurate way.

My wife knows our daughter better than I do, having had her in her body for so long. But for me she's a little being that I've only known for eight months, notwithstanding that I'm very fascinated by and emotionally attached to her.

Tell me a little about the kind of student you were growing up.

I was basically an only child. I have three half-sisters that are way older than me from my father's first marriage so I spent a lot of time by myself reading and drawing. I did great academically. I was weird but it didn't matter that much in grade school. I also had weird friends. Starting in fourth grade I spent a lot of time drawing in class while the teacher was teaching. I should also mention that I skipped kindergarten so that was yet another social obstacle I had to overcome, being younger than the rest of the kids.

What is your area of study?

I'm a PhD student in Art Ed at the U of I and I was a high school art teacher full-time for ten years in Chicago.

What are you writing your dissertation on?

I'm writing about an artist whose art is advocacy surrounding criminal justice law. Her name is Laurie Jo Reynolds. She is now an art professor at UIC.

That's interesting. What does Ms. Reynolds do?

Her work has mostly been about [prison policy]—not limited to but mostly lobbying. Her biggest visual project was called "Photo Requests from Solitary."

Wow, this is mind blowing. What was "Photo Requests from Solitary" about?

It was a project in which men in Tamms could write about an image they wanted to receive in the mail. And she would then open it up to any artist willing to shoot or create what the men described.

Tell me about how you learned about EJP's existence.

I interned at the U of I through the College of Education. One of my fellow grad students facilitated [at EJP] through the theater program. I got to see the video of their production of *The Tempest*. Which I thought was much better than the production on campus that same semester.

What was your first experience entering DCC like?

I came out for an open house, and I sat in on David Schrag's anthropology of violence class. We were expected to go to two different classes, but I enjoyed it so much that I just stayed there the whole time.

What keeps you motivated to continue your work with C.A.V.E. (Chicago Anti-Violence Education), and with EJP as a whole?

The opportunity to assist with, but mostly witness, a group dedicated to building each other up and building up the communities they come from.

What does your future involvement with EJP look like?

I'm hoping to graduate this spring, so my main priority is trying to get other people involved so that C.A.V.E. can grow and spread.

What advice would you give a ten-year-old Mr. Stabler?

It's going to be okay, but try to make good choices with how you spend your time.

One of our other C.A.V.E. facilitators, Ms. Quintana, asked us a pretty cool question: If you could have lunch with anyone living or departed who would it be, what would you eat, where would you meet, and what would you talk about?

I have six people: Harriett Tubman, Shulamith Firestone, Simone Weil, Ralph Ellison, Lygia Clark, Dave from De La Soul. We eat from vegan raw buffet, in Mexico City. We would talk about art, politics, and religion.

—Terrance Hanson

Road Warrior

On November 9, 1999 I left my home intending to have a little fun for the night. I embarked on a journey that has forced me to traverse 1,014 miles across the Illinois landscape. I was a seventeen-year-old high school dropout without any life skills. I was also unquestionably unprepared for the life I was thrust into by my own stupidity. It has been seventeen years since that night, and I've been a homeless vagabond ever since.

After seven years of blind ignorant wandering and haphazardly surviving in this prison system, I realized that I wanted something else. I wanted to live with a purpose. I wanted to evolve and prosper. And education just seemed like the only available means to help me accomplish that. My attempts at acquiring an education were full of unforeseen challenges. However, overcoming those challenges has brought me here to Danville, which has afforded me the opportunity to become an EJP student.

Those of us in the program know that there are huge differences between community college and EJP—the atmosphere, resources, cohorts, and instruction. I officially became a new EJP student in August and so far it has exceeded all my expectations. When I first started my educational journey, EJP wasn't my goal—I didn't have any goals. But as the years went by I wanted the hours I spent incarcerated and in the classroom to count for something. I wanted to know that my efforts were carrying me somewhere even if I couldn't see it right away.

My initial attempt to acquire an education occurred in November of 2006 after I had traveled 152 miles from the miserable pit of Menard CC to Lawrence CC. I wasn't looking to transfer for an education; I just wanted to get out of there. In both prisons my movement was limited. I was confined to my cell twenty-three hours a day with the opportunity for a shower every other day. The one obvious difference between the facilities is that Lawrence offered college courses. At the very least this offered an opportunity to spend time outside of my cell.

We often think that these life-altering decisions begin with some noteworthy event. My first step was simple and without any fanfare—I filled out a request slip. Sometimes it's just that simple.

I was really only interested in one class: culinary arts. But I discovered that my placement on the vocational waiting list was determined by the length of my incarceration. Guys who have less time left to do are higher on the list than people with longer outdates. Unfortunately, I still had sixteen years left to serve at that point. Instead of stuffing my face with fried chicken and chocolate cake, I had a steady diet of academic classes. From the very beginning I was challenged, because my first class was Public Speaking. I wasn't mentally prepared to be thrust in front of a class to give speeches. The first couple of years were intense. I immersed myself in the books and took copious notes. I took pride in the work I put in, and I was rewarded by the grades I earned. I began to wonder what prevented me from trying this hard in high school.

I had to contend with the obstacles that are inherent to this environment. Disgruntled officers liberally voiced their belief that inmates don't deserve a free education. Lockdowns were staunch impediments; not only did they disrupt the flow of a class, but they also caused many classes to be canceled because they could not be completed on schedule. Cellmates are often

unintentionally (or intentionally) disruptive. The reality is that I have to share an eight-by-eleven foot cell with another person. I call them disruptions because they interfered with my studying, but they were simply living out their lives. All these different external factors had to be dealt with along with the anxiety of having to serve a twenty-three year prison sentence. No matter how studious or focused I was, I couldn't help but notice that the face in the mirror was becoming unrecognizable. The peach fuzz was replaced by a coarse beard. That youthful sparkle in my eyes was fading. Beyond the physical changes I was going through, I started to notice changes in my outside support group. What was once a corps of caring and concerned loved ones had thinned down to just a few loyal and loving crusaders. And all this was happening while I navigated the physical dangers of prison. But even all this seemed dwarfed by the sense of purpose that I felt while I was learning and engaging in the course work.

After a while, though, I started feeling oppressed by my environment. The attitudes of the officers along with the institutional policies were stifling my sense of purpose and worth. And the rumors of better institutions had captured my imagination. I heard that so many other places offered more and better educational opportunities. I heard rumors of unlimited movement, showers every day, twice a day if I wanted to. After my third attempt I was finally approved to go to Dixon CC. I was beyond happy. To me this was the dream, the promised land—it just wasn't meant to be my dream.

While I waited to be transferred a tornado touched down on the grounds. The impact caused significant damage to one of the buildings. Those of us who were approved for transfer were immediately shipped out, but not to our approved institutions. We were sent to whatever institutions had room for us.

In July 2008, after eighteen months at Lawrence CC, I was transferred. I was shipped 193 miles southwest to Pinckneyville. I know prisons are not the most productive environments, but Pinckneyville was a wasteland. My experience with college was a debacle. The classes were disorderly. Most students were there to spend time out of the cell and were not earnestly seeking an education. The teachers were disconnected and uninspired. They showed up to collect a paycheck. They came in regurgitating the same tired ineffective lesson plans they'd been spewing for years. I quickly learned that if I wanted to learn I would have to read the book and figure it out myself. The courses were low-level, therefore nontransferable, which means that unless I received my degree with Lake Land College no other college would accept the credits. The administrative security policies (lockdowns) made it almost impossible to finish a course. In five years I managed to scrounge up twenty-one credits.

I used to look back on my time there with resentment. I had to fight the feeling that my time, my life, was a complete waste. This feeling was fueled when I found out that only *three* credits were actually transferable.

It took a long time and some serious reflection, but I realized I was wrong. My time there wasn't a waste. I can't change anything about my experience at Pinckneyville, but I gained something far more valuable than credit hours—I gained endurance. For five years I showed up to every class, I took notes, I finished all my assignments on time, and I passed all my tests. I could have easily sat back in the cell, watched TV, and let my mind turn to mush, but I didn't. I decided I deserved

something better and that was only going to happen if I was better.

Thankfully my time there came to an end. So again I packed up all my earthly belongings—which amount to a handful of clothes, hygiene products, snacks, cassette tapes, a Sony Walkman, family pictures, letters, and art supplies. I put on the yellow transfer jumpsuit. And since I chose to transfer, I willfully submitted myself to handcuffs, shackles, and a waist chain, and boarded a moving tuna can. I couldn't see where I was going. I endured the dizzying and nauseating prison bus experience. I don't know why guys refuse to shower before they board a small and sealed container that they must remain in for at least four hours.

On October 23, 2013 I traveled 225 miles northeast to Danville. Upon arriving I was met with some disheartening news. The first part of it was that the CAAP (Certified Associate Addictions Professional) program wasn't operating anymore, because the teacher was going to retire. I didn't really know much about this program; the counselor that submitted my transfer at Pinckneyville was the one that suggested that I should look into it. The second part of it was that credits I earned at Pinckneyville would not transfer over to DACC. I was crushed. We submit for transfers with the expectation that the new institution will be far better than the one we left.

I contemplated giving up on school. I had been striving for seven years and I had nothing to show for it. I questioned the actual benefit of a "prison degree." I was wrestling with the mental and emotional fatigue of imprisonment. I was disappointed with my collegiate experience. I needed a reason—100 reasons—to endure it all over again. I needed to believe, again, that my sacrifices would someday pay dividends, and amount to something better. I didn't know what, when, or how, but better than what I have now.

I sought some guidance from an old friend and EJP student Michael Tafolla. And if you know Mikey you know he is neither shy nor subtle. I endured a 45-minute barrage of insults and insights. His point was that education, not leisure-time activities, will set the foundation for a successful re-entry into society. I have never taken the opportunity to thank him for that conversation, so "Thanks Mikey." For the past three years I have completely devoted my time and effort to acquiring an education. I finally accumulated enough credits to be accepted into the EJP program, even though my objective to earn my Associate's degree remains elusive.

I am not the only road warrior here. I am not the only one who has endured the transportation and resettlement process. I'm not the only one who has hoped for a better life even if it is in prison. And I know I am not the only one here who has traveled long distances for many years in order to educate themselves. There are many of us who fought and pressed forward in spite of opposition, discouragement, and counter-influences. Let us take this moment to celebrate our accomplishments. We were not sentenced with the expectation that we would pick ourselves up from the debilitating ignorance that led to our incarceration—but we did! While others smothered the embers of their potential we stoked the flames of ours.

Let us keep one last thing in mind: our journey isn't over. We have not arrived at our final destination. We are simply passing through the lush grove of resources that EJP has to offer. At

some point this part of our journey will come to an end. On November 9, 2022, this portion of the road will come to an end for me. I will travel another 177 miles north, because that's where home is—at least that's where it used to be. I have no idea what I'll find there now. I can no longer call it home. At this point it's a hope—a hope that I'll be able to find a familiar face or two. A hope that I'll be able to subsist the way I did here. My challenge now is to transform all the education I've acquired into shelter, sustenance, and strategies that will allow me to survive in a world that often seems crueler and more unusual than the one I'll be leaving behind. . . .

—Angel Pantoja

Anthem Protest

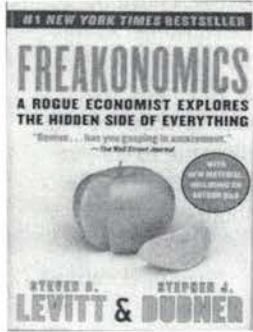
Should an American citizen always stand for the National Anthem? You may be saying yes to this question, but if you're NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, you'd say no.

On August 14, 2016 at the San Francisco 49ers' first NFL preseason game of the year, their second-string quarterback opted to sit rather than stand during the singing of the National Anthem. This man is none other than Colin Kaepernick. In an effort to attack ongoing social injustices in our country, the oppression of black people and people of color, Colin decided to voice his opinion in this unusual way. Colin continues to kneel throughout the NFL season as a way to protest the repeated incidents of police brutality in America.

Most of the world was blind to this brave and bold protest until it went public during the 3rd week of the NFL preseason games. Once Colin's protest made national headlines, many Americans considered his way of protesting offensive and very disrespectful to the American flag, veterans, and the troops still serving. Colin responded to his fellow Americans in an interview by saying, "I refuse to stand for a flag that don't represent what it's supposed to represent. Until it represents what it's supposed to represent I will continue to sit. I'm going to continue to stand with the people who are being oppressed."

After hearing his reasons for refusing to stand, many of those Americans who had disagreed with his actions had a change of heart. Although more Americans still disagree with his actions, there's no sign of Colin slowing down his pursuit to end these social injustices. I love this story because I hate when an unarmed kid gets shot and killed by the police and months later nobody hears about it anymore. This story is bringing these pointless murders back to the forefront. It also reminds us of people like Nelson Mandela and Dr. Martin Luther King, showing us their non-violent teachings live on. As an American citizen, I proudly love and respect the American flag, veterans, and troops still serving. I'm patriotic, and patriotism is defending your country all the time and your government when it deserves it. However, if I were a celebrity like Colin Kaepernick, I would hope to be as brave as he is, and I'd use my own celebrity as a platform to protest for what is right. It's very American to stand up for justice. Aren't we always calling out celebrities to join the fight against the many injustices that plague our society? Well . . . this is Colin Kaepernick's way of answering.

—John Cunningham



University of Chicago PhD student Subhir Venkatesh stood in a pissy project stairwell looking down the barrel of a gun. He was supposed to be taking a survey for his graduate

advisor and somehow had managed to become the hostage of a group of junior-level crack dealers. The men were members of one of Chicago's largest street gangs. Over the next 24 hours he was able to develop a sort of camaraderie with his captors and was eventually released. "He was relieved but he was also curious. It struck Venkatesh that most people including himself had never given much thought to the daily life of ghetto criminals." He wanted to learn how the gang worked from top to bottom, so he returned to the project that very same day.

After some wrangling he managed to convince the leader of the gang to let him gather information on them. For the next six years Venkatesh embedded himself with the crew. He would move from one family to the next, washing their dinner dishes and sleeping on the floor. In the end he compiled a ledger of four years' worth of the gang's financial transactions along with records of incarcerations, deaths, and injuries. After his study was complete he went on to be awarded a three-year stay at Harvard's Society of Fellows. It is here that he met a brilliant young economist named Steven Levitt. Levitt—a free thinker who, like Venkatesh, had an interest in crime—was anxious to apply the tools of economics to the data that Venkatesh had collected. The resulting analysis revealed that the lavish life usually associated with being a dope dealer, when viewed through an economist's lens, was really not lavish at all. In reality, "Crack dealing is the most dangerous job in America with an average salary of \$3.30 per hour."

If this type of unorthodox investigation of real world situations intrigues you, then Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner's

Freakonomics is for you. In it, these two fearless young minds take us on a journey into the worlds of crime, abortion, class consciousness, and parenting, often arriving at conclusions you would never have imagined. Levitt injects life into the usually dry world of economics by applying its tools to the riddles of everyday life. His particular gift lies in sifting through the data to reveal answers that no one else has considered. If you learn to look at the data in the right way, you can explain mysteries that otherwise might have seemed impossible. There is nothing like the sheer power of numbers to scrub away layers of confusion and contradiction.

Levitt peels back a layer or two from the surface of everyday life in the search for answers to difficult questions: Do schoolteachers cheat to meet high-stakes testing standards? Was crack the worst thing to hit black Americans since Jim Crow? Do parents really matter? The answers are extracted by examining the economic incentives that change the way people think and behave in a given situation.

Levitt's co-author Stephen Dubner, a former writer and editor at *The New York Times Magazine*, writes in a vivid, fun, and conversational style that will have you laughing one minute and shaking your head in disbelief the next.

While interesting, many of the issues may also make people uncomfortable. In the last chapter, titled "Would a Roshanda By Any Other Name smell as Sweet," the authors confront the question of "why black parents give their children names that may hurt their career prospects." A better question might be how we fix a culture where people are judged by their names. In another chapter titled "Where Have All the Criminals Gone?," they investigate high abortion rates as a possible cause of reduced crime levels. The fact of the matter, Levitt tells us, is that "*Freakonomics* style thinking simply doesn't traffic in morality. Morality represents the way that people would like the world to work—whereas economics represents how it actually *does* work."

The stories told in this book are not often covered in Econ 101, but that may change. It is an intriguing reminder that no subject, however offbeat, need be beyond the reach of the science of economics.

From *Freakonomics*:

- On April 15, 1987, when the IRS changed the rule requiring a social security number for dependents on tax returns, there were suddenly seven million less children claimed. (pg 22)
- In the late 1990s the appearance of insurance price comparison websites resulted in Americans paying \$1 billion less a year for term life insurance. (pg 63)
- On dating websites 56% of men and 21% of women never get a single response. (pg 80)
- In the 1920s Chicago had more than 1,300 street gangs. (pg 109)
- As late as 1964 a black infant was twice as likely to die as a white infant, often of a cause as simple as diarrhea or pneumonia. (pg 111)
- During the 1990s nonviolent crime fell by 40%. (pg 120)
- Between 1980 and 2000 there was a fifteen-fold increase in the number of people sent to prison on drug charges. (pg 121)
- In early 2004 40% of third graders in the state of Illinois read below their grade level. (pg 176)
- The likelihood of death by swimming pool is 1 in 11,000 while that of death by gun is 1 in 1 million-plus. (pg 150)
- There are roughly 1.5 million abortions in the United States every year. (pg 145)

—CJ Shea

Submission Guidelines

Comments and submissions may be addressed to *The Amplifier* and placed in the EJP suggestion box or handed to Ms. Cumpston or a member of *The Amplifier* editorial staff.

Submissions may be in any legible format.

Submissions will be selected for publication according to:

- 1) EJP values and standards as outlined in the EJP handbook
- 2) Editorial needs

Submissions will be edited for clarity, length, and technical issues, using the *Chicago Manual of Style* and AP guidelines as authoritative. When possible, editing will be done in cooperation with the author, and greater latitude will be given to creative/personal pieces.

The deadline for the March issue is January 27.

The Amplifier is a publication by the students of the Education Justice Project, a unit of the University of Illinois, at Danville Correctional Center in Illinois.

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Newsnotes

Writing Opportunity

Online magazine *The New Inquiry* will be producing a prison-related issue for February/March, 2017. *TNQ* is looking for "essays, letters, poems, conversations, interviews, forums, and texts." Work by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated writers will be prioritized. The issue will be titled, "Abolish!" Deadline is January 6.

Submissions can be sent to *TNQ* at:

Rachel Rosenfelt
P.O. Box 24681
Brooklyn, NY 11202

Guidelines for general editions of *The New Inquiry* can be found on the resource room bulletin boards.

Illinois 2016 Election Results

From the office of Rep. Carol Ammons Election results for Illinois were a mixed bag. Republican state Comptroller Leslie Munger was defeated by Democrat Susana Mendoza in one of the most expensive races in the state, with more than \$12 million dollars spent between the two candidates. In the House of Representatives, Republicans picked up three seats and in the Senate they picked up two seats. This leaves the General Assembly makeup in the House 68 – 50 with Democrats holding the majority and in the Senate 37 -22 with Democrats holding the majority. Democrats no longer have a "supermajority" in the House, the magic number of 71 needed to override a veto by the Governor.

Civil Rights Docs 1/16/17

Turner Classic Movies will be airing three important civil rights documentaries in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. day.

At 7pm, *You Got to Move* traces the role of the Highlander Folk School in fighting segregation in Tennessee. At 9pm, Sundance prize-winning *Freedom on My Mind* tells the story of the drive to register African American voters in the 1960s. And at 11pm, 1963's *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* looks at the University of Alabama as the last U.S. college to open its doors to black students. (All times Central.)

PBS Specials in January

Jan. 17-18 8pm *Frontline: Divided States of America*
Frontline looks back at the events during the Obama presidency that have revealed deep divisions in our country and examines the America the next president will inherit. This two-part program offers an in-depth view of the partisanship that gridlocked Washington and charged the 2016 presidential campaign, the rise of populist anger on both sides of the aisle and the racial tensions that have erupted throughout the country.

Jan. 23, 9pm *Independent Lens: The Witness*
Follow the efforts of Kitty Genovese's brother as he examines the circumstances surrounding his sister's rape and murder in front of 38 witnesses on a street in Queens, New York.

Jan. 24, 10pm *Illinois Lawmakers*
Governor Bruce Rauner's State-of-the-State speech and Budget Message in January and February.

EDDIE'S ENIGMAS—LETTER LIST

Except for Q, every letter of the alphabet is contained in the names of the 50 states. In fact, those 25 letters are contained in the following list of just eight states: ARIZONA, FLORIDA, MICHIGAN, NEBRASKA, NEW JERSEY, PENNSYLVANIA, TEXAS, VIRGINIA. Can you prove that there is no list of seven or fewer states that contains all of the letters except for Q?

Rating = ●●○○○

Solutions to EDDIE'S ENIGMAS can be found on the bulletin boards in the Computer Lab and Resource Room 1.


Readers Write!

The Amplifier would like to print your answers to the question,

"If a space probe was sent to another planet, what three items would you put in to represent our culture?"

Responses can be of any length from 3-1000 words. Address your answers to *The Amplifier* and drop them in the EJP suggestion box.

January

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday				
2	11:30a Convocation Comm. 5p Workshop: Statistics	3	4	5 9a Newsletter 5p For-credit course: 199 Finance	6			
9	11:30a Convocation Comm. 5p Workshop: Statistics	10	5p Workshop: Personal Finance	11	8a Spring Convocation	12	9a Newsletter 9a CAVE	13
16	17	5p Workshop: Small Business	18	19	9a Newsletter 9a CAVE 5p For-credit courses: 396 Russian Revolution 420 Journalism 486 Linguistics	20		
5p WAMP	23	8:30a Python 5p WAMP 6p Advising	24	6p Library Program	25	26	9a Newsletter 9a CAVE 5p For-credit courses: 396 Russian Revolution 350 Intro to African Art 420 Journalism 486 Linguistics	27
5p WAMP	30	5p WAMP 6p Advising	31					

LETTER LIST HINT:
BFGJPUXZ

Learning without thought is labor lost;
thought without learning is perilous.
Confucius (551 - 479 BC)

SAVED SEVENS SOLUTION

Either the divisor is 53 and the first digit in the quotient is 9, or the divisor is 59 and the quotient's first digit is 3. ($9 \cdot 53 = 477$, and $3 \cdot 59 = 177$).

So the divisor (either 59 or 53) times 7 (the middle digit of the quotient) must equal a three-digit number with 7 as its middle digit. $7 \cdot 59 = 413$, so that doesn't work. But $7 \cdot 53 = 371$.

The last digit of the quotient can only be 1, and the rest of the puzzle is easily filled in.

$$\begin{array}{r} \\ 53 \overline{) 51463} \\ \underline{477} \\ 376 \\ \underline{371} \\ 53 \\ \underline{53} \\ 0 \end{array}$$