Prisoners of Our Own Device

what distinguishes Heaven from
Hell is it the geographical
location NO. The same thing
that makes the Playboy Mansion
so great also makes prison
what it is its residents.

One of the things that life
in confinement affords is the
opportunity to reflect. As I moved
through the system trial,
court prison I couldn't help but
notice that there was something
vaguely familiar about it all.
Even though I was sitting in
a courtroom full of complete
strangers, I realized that this
was not the case. I knew this
because the invitation named me
as the host. After taking the
time to ponder what the felony
information filed against me
truly meant, I came to the realization that I was the sole reason the
gathering before me convened.
There was a particular sadness,
on that day I slowly admitted
to myself that I had become the
life-sustaining blood of the system.
I effectively employed my own
captors.

So there I was, prostrated
in the engulfing shadow of the
seemingly insurmountable cyclopean
walls of prison, and I had to
ask myself, who could possibly build
such a terrific marvel. At first
I couldn't begin to fathom, but
upon closer inspection, in minute
detail, the builder's mark stared
back at me unflinchingly. To my
surprise, it bore my signature.
This was impossible I told myself.
Yet little did I know that every
small and seemingly inconsequential
bad decision that I've made
was a building block of this fortress: ditching school, joining a gang, and failing to commit to anything but a crime. Like everything else that occurs in a society, nothing takes place in a vacuum. Therefore, like I had the help of others when I joined a gang, I had help in building this place.

Ironically, I was removed from society, but instead of being offered a place for penitance I am offered a sanctuary for the reinforcement of anti-social behaviors. The reason I say this is because the old principles of mine, which were the exception in society, have now become the de facto law of the land. To make matters worse, the fiendish determination with which my peers remain steadfast in their detrimental deviance
exhausts the overwhelmed state, which in turn is forced to give up on us, and the vicious cycle of dysfunction continues without interruption. Thus, most of the adversity that my cohort faces comes not from without, as we so rationalize, but is internalized. A problem that has long plagued minorities, like Zora Neale Hurston relates, "folks is too envious of one another. Dat's how come us don't get no further than us do. Us talks about de man keepin' us down, shucks! He don't have t'uh. Us keeps our own selves down."

As for the force attributed to outsiders, it is undeniable that it strikes a resemblance. I'd hate to say it, but again we have helped foster a culture of
aggression, setting the example through our own actions, that the only means to settle a dispute is through the use of violence. This in part because we simply refuse to mature and reevaluate the standing belief that there is no place for discussion in an environment so long characterized by toxic masculinity.

Just recently, I broke my hand fending off other inmates. On another occasion, I took a razor blade to the face, resulting in 14 sutures, just for refusing to participate in gang activity. In spite of being an interested party, sadly, there are times in which I find myself wishing certain laws are not enacted, because I would rather be incarcerated than witness
the indiscriminate release, into free-society, of those not ready.

In conclusion, this is a beast of our own creation, therefore its unraveling is also up to us and nobody else. Not the politicians, criminal justice advocates, nor the president. The other day, I heard someone complain about a minor transgression he had suffered at the hands of another. I asked him why he was so upset and if he recognized anything about the way he was treated. He said he didn't, so I had to remind him of how he himself had treated others. Just like we created a whole lifestyle based on self-sabotage and destruction, we can build a better tomorrow for everyone. But, before we can do this, first we have to overcome our own demons, individually and collectively.
I mean, how can we conquer the world if we can't even master ourselves?