



# One Big Self

*C.D. Wright*

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"For a long while now, C. D. Wright has been writing some of the greatest poetry-cum-prose you can find in American literature. *One Big Self* does to the contemporary prison-industrial complex what James Agee did to poverty — it reacts passionately and lyrically (and idiosyncratically) to a sociopolitical abomination. This book, while angry and sorrowful and bewildered, has humor, constant levity and candor, and countless moments of incredible beauty." —Dave Eggers, *The New York Times Book Review*

"Wright has found a way to wed fragments of an iconic America to a luminously strange idiom, eerie as a tin whistle, which she uses to evoke the haunted quality of our carnal existence."—*The New Yorker*

Inspired by numerous visits inside Louisiana state prisons—where MacArthur Fellow C.D. Wright served as a “factotum” for a portrait photographer—*One Big Self* bears witness to incarcerated men and women and speaks to the psychic toll of protracted time passed in constricted space. It is a riveting mosaic of distinct voices, epistolary pieces, elements from a moralistic board game, road signage, prison data, inmate correspondence, and “counts” of things—from baby’s teeth to chigger bites:

*Count your folding money*

*Count the times you said you wouldn't go back*

*Count your debts*

*Count the roaches when the light comes on*

*Count your kids after the housefire*

*One Big Self*—originally published as a large-format limited edition that featured photographs and text—was selected by *The New York Times* and *The Village Voice* as a notable book of the year. This edition features the poem exclusively.

**C.D. Wright** is the author of ten books of poetry, including several collaborations with photographer Deborah Luster. She is a professor at Brown University.

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