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"Food for thought is better than a meal!" KRS One

## **The Attorney General: My Mistake, My Apology**

*by N. Carnell Robinson, Chairman*



**Disclaimer:** The following editorial does not represent the views or consensus of the North Carolina Black Leadership Caucus or its members. It is totally and exclusively the work of N. Carnell Robinson

On November 9, 2005 I wrote a letter to the Attorney General asking that he not appeal the stay of execution that a judge had granted Steven McHone. The letter went on, ..."we ask that you not inject your own personal views and allow the judicial branch and the judge the opportunity to investigate the flaws in Steven's case."

The second paragraph stated, "Apparently recognizing the flaws in North Carolina's use of the death penalty, Speaker Jim Black has created a study commission. This action should indicate to you the serious concerns of many North Carolinians who want to insure that the death penalty is administered fairly in our state."

The letter ended with a statement that could have been questioned, "I still look forward to attending your Sunday School Class. I'd like to hear your explanation to the children of the commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Kill."

On November 14, 2005 I received a call from my good friend, an attorney from Durham. He stated that he ran into a member of the AG's staff at a ballgame. The lady, he did not provide a name so I am referring to her as Sally so that you can follow the story. Anyway, Sally told him that the AG was upset. That day, I sat down and drafted a letter of apology to the AG for the statement in question.

The apology letter ended with the following statement: "Again, please accept my sincere apology and make sure that any staff member offended also gets the opportunity to view this apology." I, mistakenly, thought that the apology ended the matter on a very positive note. I was wrong, again.

At the December 17<sup>th</sup> Caucus Meeting, an officer brought the matter up again. Her position was direct and to the point. She had been in Greensboro where she ran into Ms. Sally. According to the officer, Sally stated that the AG was upset and did not intend to work with the NCBLC in the future. Although, I do not personally believe that Mr. Cooper made that statement, I apologized to the caucus members present for any damage I might have caused and promised not to violate the organizations protocol again.

Until the 2008 elections, the NCBLC fully intends to have a good working relationship with the Attorney General. We need his assistance with the Centex Prison Construction scandal, the constitutionality of the lottery vote, economic inclusion and the eradication of North Carolina's barbaric use of capital punishment. And, again, I regret any damage I might have caused to the reputation of the North Carolina Black Leadership Caucus. This has been epiphanal! Nat Turner died in 1831. He is not dead!

## **CALENDAR**

**\* North Carolina Black Leadership Caucus Regular Meeting, Saturday, Jan 21<sup>st</sup> NC Justice Center 224 South Dawson Street, Raleigh General Body 11:00 a.m.**

## **BOOK of the MONTH**

Read: Toure's

**The Portable Promised Land**

## **CONGRATULATIONS:**

Erskine Bowles

President of the UNC System

Representative Thomas Wright

Wilmington Race Riot Commission

Bill Thorpe Re-elected to the Chapel

Hill City Council

## **Questions of the Month**

Who said, "Politics and crime... same thing"?

When will Speaker Black resign?

Will someone please wake up Jerry Meek?

**Is prison the new form of Amerikkka's black genocide plan?**

Who was Sally Hemmings?

**Does your church support the death penalty (state crucifixions)?**

## Slavery in the New Millennium: Prisonomics

by Erin Byrd

Some would say that framing the Prison Industrial Complex or Criminal *In*Justice System in terms of slavery is irrational, emotional and unjustifiable. There are several characteristics shared by both systems. First, they are based in racist systems. Secondly, they mandate forced labor and poverty for people of color and build incredible wealth for whites. Third, they destroy families and by ripple effect communities. As a matter of fact, the history of the prison system is strongly linked to slavery. Because of the devastation of infrastructure at the end of the Civil War, antebellum leaders found themselves in desperate need of a work force to rebuild the south. At that time in history a majority of those incarcerated were white. The tide began to turn when leaders found that they could incarcerate former slaves with relative ease, especially because many of them were homeless, hungry and destitute.

The practice of convict leasing began. At first, the prison system would pay plantation owners and others to take the prisoners off of their hands. But as they say how prison labor could build wealth, they began leasing prisoners and profiting. David Oshinsky describes this in detail in his book, *Worse than Slavery*. Convict leasing was worse than slavery because convicts were not considered property. Convicts were expendable; hence their leasers would work them to death because they were easily replaceable. One in four of these convicts were children. Laws were passed called "Black Codes" to control the labor supply. For instance, vagrancy was considered illegal and defined by those that did not have "written proof of a job at the beginning of every year." Before long, they were arresting folks right off the street to increase the prison population and lease their labor. Sound familiar?

Today's crisis is not too far removed from the post-civil war period. The prison population continues to increase exponentially. Many in our society feel that high incarceration rates solve the problem of crime or at least reduce crime. They feel safer knowing that "those dangerous people" are locked up. However, National Victimization Surveys have shown the violent crimes-homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault remained steady from 1975 and 1995 and then declined rapidly. Conversely America has undergone a massive imprisonment "binge," between 1980 and 2000 the rate of incarceration zoomed from 100 to over 500 per 100,000. This is a five-fold increase without a corresponding reduction in crime.

The populations most affected by high incarceration rates are African Americans. African Americans are approximately 13% of the US population. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 44% of all prisoners in federal, state and private adult correctional facilities are African American. One in four African American men between the ages of 18-45 is incarcerated. African American men make up 45% of the male prisoners under state and federal jurisdiction. In North Carolina, that number is closer to 65%. In all prisons roughly 60% of those incarcerated are in prison for non-violent drug offenses. Over half are in prison for non-violent crimes that, **in other western industrialized/civilized countries, would not be considered crimes**. In addition stronger sentencing mandates, longer terms and the War on Drugs appear to target particular populations. Drug raids and other types of urban warfare are not done in suburban, white communities. In addition crimes committed by wealthier individuals or "white collar crimes" have relatively light sentences. We have to ask ourselves why only certain laws continue to be pushed when they do not reduce crime.

Why are drug crimes defined as such? Does color play a role? Who does it benefit? We know that African Americans are more likely to be profiled, arrested, convicted, sentenced longer, and more likely to receive the death penalty. Most prisoners were poor before they entered the prison and remain so after they leave. In 1996, more than half of jail and prison inmates reported pre-arrest incomes below \$7,200 a year. One third of jail and prison inmates were unemployed at the time of their arrest. Two-thirds of men incarcerated have less than a high school education. About 70 percent of the prison inmates in the United States are illiterate. We should also be concerned about the zero tolerance policies now finding their way into the public schools. In NC, about 40% of those suspended or expelled are African American students. What is the next step for them if they are forced from the schools without access to a sound basic education? One has to ask is this a *War on Crime* or a *War on the Poor and Undereducated*?

Then there is the question of capital. Convict leasing was a tool used to build substantial wealth for white landowners and developers. Today we are experiencing increase in the expenses that American's spend and wealth they earn from prisons. It is important to recognize that companies providing the goods and services earn every dollar spent by our prison system. As a matter of fact, prisons are being framed as economic development tools for poor rural counties across the country.

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# The Leader

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*"Protecting, Promoting, and Pursuing African American Interests"*

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In, America's Imprisonment Binge, Irwin and Austin discuss the future of corrections. They make an argument for reducing sentencing lengths to cut down the cost of incarceration. Their article is insightful not only because of their discussion on the hidden costs but also because they extrapolate on the future cost of corrections under the current policy environment. They argue that there are financial, familial and community costs to the imprisonment binge. When prison and jail administrators calculate their operating costs, they divide their annual budget by the annual daily prison population. This system can exclude the cost of food, medical care, legal services and transportation. They also discuss the future costs if policies to be tougher on crime are implemented over the next decade. These costs include more police officers, truth in sentencing measures, mandatory minimum sentencing efforts, increasing conviction rates. They argue that these reforms could create a prison population as high as 7.5 million with an estimated cost of \$376 billion. This will require that up to a third of all state revenue be dedicated to prison operations. There is also wealth generated from prison costs. Prison construction, materials like cuffs, guns, bully sticks, commissaries (where prisoners purchase food and personal items), phone calls, and reduced labor costs (less than \$1.00 per day in some cases) create about \$500 billion dollars in wealth for those who provide these goods and services. In addition taxpayers typically subsidize prison construction. NC plans to spend at least \$170 million over the next several years to build 11 new prisons. Even though the state appointed Sentencing Commission which outlined options to reduce prison bed space needs (including restructuring the sentencing grid to reduce sentence lengths for non violent offenders). Little has been accomplished.

Finally there is the devastating effect that incarceration has on the family and community. There are millions of children that must live every day with their parents in prison. In some cases this is necessary, especially if the parent has committed a violent crime. But for those convicted of non-violent drug offenses, why are we not placing them in drug treatment programs so that they can work, pay taxes, support their families and get help if they need it? It is certainly less expensive than the \$28,000 per inmate a year that taxpayers dish out now to incarcerate them. Better yet, why not send a portion of the income they earn in prison back to their families instead of to the profit margins of major corporations. Instead we cage them like animals, isolate them from society and all things human, and force them to work (with little pay in some cases). We do not provide adequate healthcare services. We have cut funding from rehabilitation programs, job training and education programs. Then we expect them to return to communities and integrate into society that has deemed them less than human and pushed them to the margins. In addition they return to an economy that had no place for them in the first place.

The expansion of the prison population has crowded prisons and turned them into warehouses. Some argue that prisons function to warehouse able-bodied men that would otherwise be on the streets looking for work that doesn't exist. (Where would they find work today)? The criminal justice system has usurped resources from other areas like social services, healthcare and education. It has destroyed families. It has NOT reduced crime. This, in turn, leaves communities less healthy, and less apt to receive a quality education, less apt to earn adequate wages and more likely to commit crime. In Search and Destroy: the African American Male and the Criminal Justice System, Jerome Miller argues that the criminal justice system itself has been a major factor in the breakdown of inner cities and African American families. "It has sustained law enforcement intrusion into the homes and urban lives of African American families, mostly in inner cities for minor reasons and has left the inner cities with a classic situation of iatrogenesis—a 'treatment' that maims those it touches and exacerbates the very pathologies that lie at the root of crime". It has spawned a criminal justice industrial complex which must produce new inmates to validate its existence and justify the call for more police, more arrests, more prosecutions and more prisons. This damage must be acknowledged and addressed.

A relationship exists between the prison system and the slave system. In the Emancipation Proclamation, blacks were freed from slavery except if convicted of a crime. We need to be clear about the harm that the criminal justice system has perpetrated on the African American community, other communities of color and the poor. We need to demand certain remedies. For instance, we need to cut sentence lengths. We need to fund programs focusing on rehabilitation. We need to build better schools, not better prisons. We need to move from policies of vengeance to policies of compassion that encourage and facilitate restorative justice programs addressing the underlying conflict and resulting injuries to the victim and offender. In this way the victim and offender are given the right to participate in process of achieving justice, rather than the deferring the responsibility to the state. We need to fight poverty. We need an education system that does not produce peons and prisoners. The majority of those incarcerated are poor, undereducated or mentally ill. But most importantly, we need to see the Criminal Injustice System for what it is: A Slave System in the New Millennium and fight against its stranglehold on the black community.

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# The Leader

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***"Protecting, Promoting, and Pursuing African American Interests"***

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## **CRIPS & BLOODS: STANLEY 'TOOKIE' WILLIAMS, VENGEANCE OR JUSTICE?**

by Pastor M. Ajabu *Courtesy of SF Bayview*

The author of the article below writes "Stanley Tookie Williams' murder by the State also proves the powerlessness of the African American community and its leadership.

But I won't get into that here.

Snoop called 'Tookie' the "Teacher" which is true.

But Arnold the terminator and the ruling class was not limited to looking at 'Tookie's' teaching ability.

They also saw his ability to organize an army.

- 'Tookie' was the African community born in America's Colin Powell.
- 'Tookie' was Black youth's general while Powell was general for white supremacy.

The difference is Tookie's army was a threat to white supremacy.

Colin Powell commanded the army that would help to sustain white supremacy. Granted, at this moment 'Tookie's' army is misguided. However, if the white supremacist let 'Tookie' live then all legal threat was removed from his life. If they give him life without parole then there is nothing else legally with which they can threaten him. Now he becomes free, without threat of legal death, to redirect his army to address the proper people who are oppressing their people.

Crips and Bloods are not each other's enemy.

They fight to control territory and what makes money in those territories, still they are not each other's enemy. To give 'Tookie' life without parole would have made him a potentially powerful man. More powerful than the President of the United States. More powerful because Bush, even with his power is under the threat of death. If those insurgents in Iraq, or Afghanistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc get their hands on Bush he is out of here.

The Sept. 11th assault on the pentagon, the world trade center were in conjunction with the plane that went down in Pennsylvania. That plane was speculated to be headed for the White House. That means that whoever was responsible had passed a death sentence on Bush and company. Bush lives under the threat of those people's legal system's pronouncement of his death sentence. No matter what folks would do at the guidance of 'Tookie,' given life without parole, he would legally not be under the threat of death!

So the system did not look at him as "Teacher" they saw him as Commander. The system feared, and fears his army.

The system gives the Crips and Bloods drugs, guns, so they can fight, kill one another, and the neighborhood unsafe because each group is protecting its turf while trying to invade the other's turf. This is the strategy of the system to keep them divided and controlled. The little money they make off of the drugs is in the system's eye well spent because it keeps other potential leaders high and neutralized. The right leader redirects that army toward their real enemy. The question that the future holds is who is going to succeed 'Tookie' in his death?

Is Snoop Dog ready to remove the threat of death that his people exist under every hour of the day. I would advise that this "food for thought is better than a meal." Will Snoop dare to think this food for thought? Will someone please ask him? Can the Crips be redirected to be about their people's protection instead of their people's rejection? The Crips reject our people by being in the drug game, killing each other, maiming and killing innocent people trying to get at one another. This behavior is a rejection of the very people who they are supposed to protect. 'Tookie' could have turned rejection into protection. Who will step up and take his place?

Time will tell.

What say you Snoop?