

Cell Talk

By Asmar Abdul Seifullah
(aka Joe West # 40404)

On June 20th Uhuru Organization held a community forum entitled "A Two Way Street: The Black Community and Black Prisoners." The main objective of the forum was to enlighten the community on the ills of the criminal justice system and the needs of the Black prisoners confined in the Oregon Correctional System. In behalf of the total Uhuru membership and the general Black inmate population, I'm pleased to report for the first time the Black community has responded to the call for assistance.

The meeting began with a historical and psychological critique given by Professor James W. Gadena, Dean of Willamette University. Brother Gadena gave a very indepth view of the criminal justice system and its effect on the lives of Blackfolks. The highpoint of brother Gadena's rap came when he explained how a whiteman can kill a nigger and the outcome is manslaughter but when a nigger kills a whiteman the outcome is murder in the first degree. He stated that the police can kill a nigger and it's labelled justifiable homicide and to round off his analogy he stated that a nigger can kill another nigger and it's just one less nigger. This is an excellent example of the hypocriticalness of the criminal justice system.

Brother Ron Herndon Co-Chairman of the Black United Front followed with a smoking overview of institutional racism. In essence he stated that Black people should never be surprised when they encounter racism in American institutions. He stated that the system is built and perpetuated by racism and that until Black people become committed enough to attack it at the

root, it will continue to be the number one obstruction in winning freedom. Brother Ron further committed the Front to collective action against the racist inadequacy of the Oregon Criminal Justice System and its racist treatment of Black prisoners. When one speaks of Ron Herndon one word sticks in the mind - Dynamic. In my mind he epitomizes what the struggle is all about, his Blackness runs deeper than the skin.

Next brother Calvin Henry the critical president of the Oregon Commission on Minority Affairs followed with a collage of criticism on the apathy of Black prisoners to help themselves while incarcerated. He drea mixed emotions from the crowd but all things considered he was right on the money in many ways. It's always difficult to explain to the oppressed that part of their oppression is due to their own unwillingness to face oppression. He summed up his talk with a very strong commitment to get involved and offered the support of his organization in a maximum thrust for equal treatment for Black prisoners.

Last but not least on the speaking rostrum was sister Freddy Petette, the Director of the Portland Urban League. Believe me when I say that sister Freddy was not to be out done by her male counterparts. Ever since the enslavement of Black people in this country the black woman has played a very instrumental role in the struggle for Black liberation. Sister Freddy came with her guns loaded for Polar Bear and was diligent and vocal in her attack of the system. Her voice rolled in the sweetness of watermelon but carried the punch of a heavyweight. "Brother man this sister combined

speaking expertise with a strong flavor of humanitarianism, couple with with an excellent understanding of what it takes for Blackfolks to survive in the system and you have a portrait of sister Freddy Petette. She pledged the complete support of the Urban League and showed genuine concern for the problem that Black inmates face while incarcerated.

Picture, if you will, a room filled with Black faces - all of them shining with the culmination of hope and you'll have a small idea of what the Uhuru meeting was like. The only thing that marred the evening was the lack of adequate time for meaningful dialogue. Perhaps next time we can pick up where we left off, but in the meantime a list of grievances and concerns is being drawn up to send these brothers and sisters who gave their love and concern.

Also present at the forum were Chamers Jones and Hazel Hayes of the Oregon State Parole Board, William T. Russel also left us with a strong commitment and sister Lois Lewis Berry local Black poetess was her usual supportive self. There are many who are unnamed in this article but it's not a underplay of their presence or support.

on behalf of the entire membership of Uhuru Organization I would like to thank all parties involved.

Words can never truly express our gratitude but these words suffice, "prison is a pale constricting shadow that smotheres the souls of Blackmen, until other Blackmen and Blackwomen rise to shine their sun on the ugliness of racism in prison." We feel the sun shining between these bars and its warmth is a taste of freedom." All praise is due to Allah.

obtained. Living within a fixed budget is a strange and alien thing.

The ordeal of not being able to cope with the situation, leads to frustration and boredom, and one finds himself drifting towards past behavioral patterns, where entertainment and appeasement are readily available.

One is lost because of forced habit: regimentation. All twenty-four hours of your day have been allotted. Even your recreation is at prescribed times, and you find that those whose company you crave, are either occupied securing a living or engaged in other commitments. If, for some reason your job is terminated or you are released without one, as with terminal leave, job searching becomes a tiresome and endless chore. Hostility manifest itself and the desire to strike a blow at the establishment seeps into your brain.

These pit falls and situations can be laid on the door steps of the Oregon Correctional System, and in my opinion is a tremendous cause of recidivism, a factor that will not ease the burden of the taxpayers purse string until someone see fit to present proper orientation upon re-entry into society. To work toward

over coming these and other stumbling blocks, I enrolled at Portland Community College and became involved in a small amount of community service work. I also began spending more time partaking of free public entertainment; such as the library, parks, and other such places that offered arts and crafts. I became involved in a religious service group, that offered instant and verbal action, and that has allowed me to become aware of the fact that others are striving in the midst of troubles.

I realize that there is no set pattern or blue print for those who wish not to add to the recidivism list, and that with each individual the way will vary. However, it is my earnest opinion that defeat of purpose starts with idleness and one becomes prone to subjections that lead to illogical and unhelpful patterns of thought.

The creation of new interests and/or different values and modes of living, sometimes require a lifetime to accomplish, but unless one desires to repeatedly be on the recidivism list and never enjoy the fruits of life as God intended, one must look for ways to combat depression, boredom, frustration, loneliness and the absence and loss of material things. One must even learn to live on a smaller scale than one intended. A clear and concise presence of mind must be maintained, and one must strive with all their might to be an individual in society and not a number at OSP.

As a present parolee whose dedication is based on principles, principles of freedom and equality, I realize that these principles can not be realized behind prison walls.

Community

(Continued from P2 Col 6)

As a community, we stand firm in our resolve, and continue to do so. And one of these days soon, a white defender of racism, will ask, "Will the real Ron Herndon please stand up?" and a Thousand Black people will stand.

"Nothing under the sun is ever accidental." G. E. Lessing



Behind the Walls

By Larry Baker #35021
O.S.P. Correspondent

David Wright # 39816
Assistant Editor

By Glenn Gilbert
#38014

...I sentence you for the rest of your natural life.

The judge's words still echoed within me as I walked down the long hallway that took me into the bowels of this state penitentiary. It is too late to say I am sorry, or to say anything at all. I am here and I am living this harsh reality. There are no places to hide even if one wanted to. There is only the constant visual supervision wherever I go. At first, I felt paranoia with everyone looking at me. Even the convicts look to see who is invading their animal world. Existence and survival seem to be the necessary compliance but the longer I am here the easier it becomes.

I am no longer the new guy down the tier as he cries late at night. I too know of the abject loneliness that charges into me every time my cell door is slammed shut for the night, so I can sympathize with him in many ways. But what the hell, he is only serving a 18 month sentence for driving on a suspended driver's license and will soon be back outside these sinister gray walls. I don't know with any certainty if I will ever walk out of here. That in itself is a harsh punishment - the not knowing.

I try not to dwell on the thought. I have accomplished much for I now wake up every morning with a smile upon my face, mainly because I have survived another 24 hour day. Ya! I gave the state another day and the days stretch into years and the years blend themselves into my existence. Existence? Why at times I question my own existence and even God's existence, for how can a just and merciful God allow this place? At the same time I see the need for prisons according to our society that now clamors for longer and longer

prison sentences without thinking of the alternatives.

I am determined to benefit from this sojourn into another life and world. I have endless hours for introspection and quiet thought. I have adjusted to the loud endless ringing of bells that dictate all inmate movement. I have found my niche but I do not necessary like it. I am not supposed to. I am now almost comfortable living in this little cage. I am conforming, but, it is so very hard. One becomes even more conscious of the little things that we take for granted that are missing from prison life. The little things that we perhaps do not even see or hear, like the rain drop that falls upon a tree leaf and knocks it to the ground, thus, allowing it to complete nature's cycle. Or the laughing sound of children at play, the sounds of living. The barking of a child's dog as they romp and play.

These sights and sounds are foreign to me now and I can only relate with them in memories of my own children at play. Now I must visit with them in the sterile inhospitable atmosphere of the prison visiting room. I am so far removed from my family and loved ones that it hurts to think about it, but it's these very thoughts that provide the inner strength required to exist in here.

Strength is required in coping with the daily decisions that vary from day to day from "do I want to eat breakfast or not" to smiling when confronted by a fresh new prison guard wanting to exercise his new found authority.

Even in prison I realize that my living conditions are not permanent and are fragile to say the least, easily upset by the administration or fellow convicts. We are grouped together without many individual distinctions, this bothers me because I desire to maintain my own in-

dividuality.

Living in prison with a life sentence seem like the end of the road, the frustration of knowing that I have a mysterious unknown number of years before I can begin to utilize the existing programs available. Vocational training and programs that are an asset for a person getting out and the serious desire to "make it" are not approved for convicts with many years left to the parole board.

There are many small consequential frustrations that make it very hard to motivate myself in terms of rehabilitation and avoid stagnation and the inevitable warehousing that occurs.

I live with the same stress situations that are in one's every day life but mine are compounded by the omnipresent prison environment. I live for the day that I walk out of here, never to return. This is a constant thought, that is, when I allow myself to think any further than the here and now...



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Prison fosters dependency

By Nathaniel Scott

Re-entry, transition and recidivism: Words I often hear while at the Oregon State Penitentiary. (OSP) When one is actually confronted with release, you find that you are not properly prepared to deal with the situation, because no such programs exist within the State's correctional system that would have enlightened you to the tremendous psychological strain that transition entails.

The majority of us will have to deal in a world of economics all of our adult lives and this economic factor is probably the single most baffling factor with which one is confronted. During confinement one's needs are remedied through call outs, lines and wheeling and dealing to get in a position to be seen by whatever services are needed. One loses the sense of using currency, through forms and monthly spending sheets. One will make unnecessary purchases, hastening the depletion of their meager hundred dollar gate money, simply because the built-in security factor, a side effect of confinement, was not decoded, which is virtually necessary before adjustment can be

obtained. Living within a fixed budget is a strange and alien thing.

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FROM THE FRONT DOOR

By Tom Boothe

From the front door, I was asked by several readers to restate my solution for solving our Quality of Education problem, so that it could be presented in larger print, O.K. Here it is in larger print.

I believe that if every adult parent who has a child or children in the educational institutions in Portland would become accountable, responsible and respectful of his or her child or children in such a way as to build a positive attitude in his and/or child or children, this would solve (50) fifty percent of the quality of education problem; and then, if every parent would attend and communicate with the understandings of both the child and the teacher with a constructive positive attitude in P.T.A. meetings; and further, follow his and/or her child's progress especially, the attitudinal aspects toward co-operation in the learning process and would make a special effort to be present with a positive attitude at all parent, student, teacher review meetings, this would solve another (45) forty-five percent of the quality of education problem. The remaining (5) five percent would be left up to your child's individual temperament, personality and performance.

We as parents must never forget that it is the family and what goes on in the home that will build the foundation and give your children the confidence, sense of security and the respect on which to build a positive attitude.

A positive attitude projected from your child can transform an excellent teacher into a great teacher, and a good teacher into an excellent teacher and a poor teacher into a good teacher.

The positive attitude in your child is the MAGIC ingredient that should come from the home; and also lets not forget that our children were students in our home before they entered public schools and we, as parents were their teachers exclusively, before they started to attend public school.

Remember, whether a student is on the streets, or in a formal educational institution, there are no good, or bad teachers even though some are better than others; there are only those students who learned to succeed and excel and those who did not.

The net results are those who learn, succeed and excel will set the standards for the future, and for those who do not learn, succeed and excel will be subject to those standards set by those who learned.

From the front door, my appeal to all who have read this observation is: give your children values or respect, confidence and a sense of security and teach them a positive attitude is more important than all the gold in two worlds, and if they have a positive attitude, it is impossible to learn how to acquire all the gold in two worlds.

Teach your children that blame factors and excuses are nothing more than reflections of a negative attitude, and negative attitudes only produces poor performance, both in the person who has them and in the people who subjected to them.

Teach your children to be constructive and productive, and to produce good and positive things, and let them know they can only produce good and positive things, by being a good and positive person, and they can only be a good and positive person by having a positive attitude, in and out of school.

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