

Cell Talk

By Asmar Abdul Seifullah
AKA Joe West

"Cell Talk," salutes Ulysses Tucker Jr., for the fine work he presented to the public in a recent production on the Criminal Justice System. The impact on the community behind the walls and the outer community appears to be very favorable. Numerous comments have filtered in from various sectors of the Correctional and Judicial systems about the need for more information on the subject of just justice for minorities and other prisoners confined in the Oregon penal system.

The program Ulysses presented was well produced and his commentary was a professional as any that I've seen. It's clear that this brother hasn't lost contact with his soulbone, his commitment to bring the community up to date on the effects the criminal justice system has on the Black community is worthy of note. For years the community has taken for granted that justice was distributed equally but the formula for justice has never included Blacks or other ethnic groups. Ulysses's attempt to shed valuable light on the question of JUSTICE vs. just-US is a sweet change from the old bitter justice of racism.

The use of the media as a means of resistance and protection from the forces of oppression has historically been denied to minority groups. When people are cut off from a viable means to articulate their dissatisfaction with a particular system they are sitting ducks for any propaganda program that comes along. At some point they will begin to view themselves in inferior terms, they become pawns in someone else's game and the overall outcome is one of apathy and self-destruction. The Great American Nightmare for Black people has rooted itself into the Criminal Justice System. And that System has been used effectively to stifle Black people's resistance against oppression and its advocates.

Significant points of the program were the duality of the criminal justice system and how there are a set of standards for Black inmates



Ulysses Tucker discusses prison life with members of the Uhuru Club at Oregon State Penitentiary.

(Photo: Richard J. Brown)

and a set for white inmates. This earmark of racism begins in the judicial system where Blacks are sentenced to consecutive sentences more often than whites. Blacks receive longer prison term parole sets, even though two members of the Parole Board are Black. Blacks don't fare well under plea bargain agreements. Geographical location appears to have a great deal to do with the length of sentence and the duration of prison time. A large percentage the Blacks confined at Oregon State Penitentiary were filtered through three or four hardcore Multnomah County Judges, Jones, Davis, Ellis, and Crookham; the more lenient judges seem to be reserved for whites only! Mandatory minimum sentences are imposed on Blacks with greater regularity than white felons. To cap everything off, Blacks and other ethnic groups are subjected to a parole system that was designed solely for whites - the parole system in Oregon closely resembles Reagan's Tax Cut Bill and its racist effect on minorities and poor people.

Voice was also given to

Vocational Training and how some Black inmates feel that the types of program they want aren't offered. It's important that we clarify the fact that there are adequate Vocational Training programs at Oregon State Penitentiary. The point that wasn't made clear on Ulysses program is that most Black inmates aren't psychologically prepared to deal with a training or educational program. Motivation is a factor and the penal system doesn't want to take the responsibility for motivating Black inmates. Perhaps it isn't their responsibility but if prison is going to become a building house or warehouse, much depends on the systems ability to motivate and guide inmates of all colors.

Community apathy was one of the strongest point in the entire program and Ulysses handled the issue very well. It isn't a question of whether the community wants to take responsibility for its wayward sons but rather the fact that the community has very little to say about the issue. First of all, most of us are going to return to the community by choice and those of us

who have suburban dreams will be sent to the community because the system doesn't want us anywhere else. It would behoove the responsible members of the Black community to get involved in the criminal justice system to waylay any future problems that might occur from returning felons. Halfway houses are needed; counseling centers; treatment programs, and think tanks to channel the pent up anger of returning Black felons. All these things would generate revenue inside the community; they would offer a job market where Blacks would be helping Blacks and also it would remove the stigma of Black law enforcement.

"We are just beginning to educate ourselves to the ills of the criminal justice system. The disease that leads to Black crime must be stopped. We must find a cure or perish. Understanding that we are all tied to one another whether we like it or not is the beginning to the formula that will solve the problems of Black crime, Black victims, Black prisoners...it will strengthen us and our strength will allow us to triumph over our oppression."

A wide-open town

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"houses" located in known red light districts, Ms. Lee caused them to be kicked out into the street as is evident by the many "street walkers" seen on Union and Grand Avenues each day, all hours of the day and night. Gamblers could not, however, operate in the street. Since the police were actively enforcing anti-gambling ordinances that had been passed by the City Council some time before, a place had to be created to accommodate such activities; a place that would not draw the attention of the police or private

citizens; a place that could operate at a time of least notoriety after the hours that most places of business, even night-clubs and taverns, had ceased to operate.

Ms. Lee's conduct, while cleaning up the city, had unknowingly opened up a new market: "After Hour Clubs."

(This is the first of a three part series on Portland's underground entertainment. Next week, we'll focus on some of Portland's more prominent "After Hour" establishments.)

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