

EDITORIAL / OPINION

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY NOW

by Benjamin F. Chavis

Amnesty International has been joined by hundreds of human rights groups throughout the world in the recent launching of a new international campaign against the death penalty. Here in the United States the issue of capital punishment continues to be hotly debated. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Commission for Racial Justice and numerous other civil rights and human rights organizations in the United States have long argued against the death penalty.

John G. Healey, Executive Director of Amnesty International, USA stated, "the death penalty is a human rights violation. It is cruel and degrading. It is barbaric and should be stopped immediately." In a 268-page report that details how and why the death penalty is applied worldwide, Amnesty International concluded that in many nations the death penalty is used "for blatant political reasons and/or disproportionately against the poor or racial and ethnic minorities." Since 1979 it is estimated that more than 40,000 women, men and even in some cases children have been officially executed in some 90 different nations as a result of the imposition of the death penalty. In the United States the report cites statistics that "86% of prisoners on death row in 1987 have been convicted of killing whites. Forty-five of the ninety-eight prisoners executed between January, 1987 and May 1988 were Black or Hispanic and 98% of them have been convicted of killing whites." Capital punishment in the United States has been rarely imposed when the victim was an African American or Hispanic. Because of racism, the values of the lives of the victims of crime and violence is socially determined by race and socio-economic circumstance. The point here is, however, not the color or the race of the victim or of the accused. The issue is that the imposition of the death penalty is immoral and unjust in any situation. The state does not create life and the state does not have the right to take life.

Although African Americans today are approximately 15% of this nation's population, African Americans comprise 41% of those on death row. Hispanics, Native Americans, and other racial and ethnic communities also disproportionately are sentenced to death.

In those states where capital punishment has been made legal, the argument that the death penalty is a deterrent to crime has failed. In fact, there has been a gradual increase in the murder rate in those states where the death penalty is routinely imposed. We, in the United States, should join the international campaign to abolish the death penalty by first taking this action here. The Supreme Court of the United States needs to be petitioned, and the death penalty should be outlawed. But, of course, the present members of the Supreme Court would only take such a vote in the wake of a national public outcry against this type of inhumane cruelty and barbarity.

The New Myth About The Black Poor

By John E. Jacob

I'm increasingly annoyed by the acceptance of a new myth about the poor. You've probably heard it, too.

It goes like this: "The success of the new immigrants to these shores proves that we don't need new government programs to end poverty."

Baloney. Our home-grown poor, and especially the African American poor, face a lack of economic and educational opportunities, as well as persistent racial discrimination, that makes such comparisons and conclusions odious.

Instead of dealing with the very real problems faced by America's poor people we're romanticizing an immigrant experience that has little relationship with reality.

A look at the facts suggested that many new immigrants are not riding rockets to success, and that those who do have certain advantages.

The new immigrants aren't making it to the extent that many think. Asian American groups are rightly protesting the stereotype that all Asian immigrants are affluent professionals.

In fact, a recent study of Asian Americans in the New York metropolitan area -- over half a million people -- found that thirty percent live in poverty. That's a higher poverty rate than the non-Asian population.

Of course, many of the new immigrants are making it. But that shouldn't surprise anyone, since immigrants are a self-selected group -- only the most ambitious, driven people leave their families and countries to start life in another land.

Those successful people are similar to the many black Americans who fight their way out of poverty. Those who crow about how well the immigrants are doing forget that in just one generation, significant numbers of blacks moved out of poverty and into the middle class.

The African American drive to succeed is every bit as strong as that of other peoples, and when disadvantaged African Americans get opportunities such as education and training, they do as well as others. They succeed for the same reasons so many immigrants have been able to make it -- education.

We shouldn't forget that many of the current immigrants to America are drawn from the educated middle class of their countries, so they come with advantages yesterday's immigrants and many of today's American poor don't have.

Of course, a lot of immigrants have backgrounds that are not middle class. Many, including large numbers from south of the border, come here to escape starvation. They're willing to do anything at any price.

But young African Americans are products of our own system and rightly expect the economic opportunities other Americans have.

Finally, too many of our kids are ground down by discrimination and grow up in crime and drug-ridden ghettos, racially isolated, consigned to schools that don't educate them.

Half of all black youngsters grow up poor. In middle class neighborhoods, adults go to the office every day. In poor neighborhoods, unemployment and marginal jobs are the norm, so many of our kids lack role models.

We're not going to solve our problems by glibly romanticizing the experiences of some of the newcomers. And we can't allow that fictionalizing of the immigrant experience turn us away from doing what is necessary to bring our own disadvantaged into the mainstream.

Sabin/Irvington Heights Neighborhood Chairperson request a peaceful new leadership

If we are going to save our children in this city, state and world, the adults in this society are going to need to show a change. Prevailing incidents relating to human degradation must cease.

If we are going to save our children of this world, we must begin to respect others who have difference of opinions and not blatantly accuse them of

Attorney holds press conference in desperate plea to save the life of Adam Abdul-Hakeem (formerly known as Larry Davis) sentenced to be executed

Attorneys Alvaader Frazier and Harry Kresky of the International Peoples Law Institution and Michael Warren, Esq. held a press conference on Friday, May 5, on the steps of City Hall at 11:00 am. They announced plans to file a motion in Federal Court to save the life of their client Adam Abdul-Hakeem (formerly Larry Davis) by asking for his removal from the Rikers Island corrections facility. Abdul-Hakeem's attorneys requested that he be placed in federal custody in order to stop the brutal physical and emotional attacks he suffered since his placement at Rikers Island in January of 1989. Dr. Lenora Fulani, national chairperson of the New Alliance Party and leader of the Coalition To Free Adam Abdul-Hakeem, issued a statement that was read by Barbara Taylor, principal and founder of the independent Barbara Taylor School in Harlem.

His incarceration has been marked by continued attacks and threats on his life that began almost three years ago after he exposed the 44th Precinct's police drug-running operation in the Bronx as well as the 34th Precinct in upper Manhattan, in which he was forced to participate at the age of 15. Formal demands to Commissioner of Corrections Richard J. Koehler and Mayor Koch to remove Mr. Abdul-Hakeem from Rikers have fallen on deaf ears.

Acquitted in two separate trials accusing him of the quadruple murders of drug dealers and the attempted murder of six police officers, Mr. Abdul-Hakeem was subsequently convicted on the minor charge of weapons possession. Unlike subway gunman, Bernhard Goetz who received only one year for a possession of weapons felony charge, Mr. Abdul-Hakeem received a five to fifteen year sentence for his weapons conviction. He is appealing that verdict and sentence through his prior counsel William Kuntler.

On the day of his sentencing, one thousand or more members of the Policeman's Benevolent Association demonstrated outside the Bronx courthouse calling for "Death to Larry Davis" and demanding that he receive the severest penalty under the law. Some proudly said they would get even with him in any way possible.

Attacks on Mr. Abdul-Hakeem in jail have ranged from being pushed down a staircase handcuffed to a wheelchair, to being attacked with a

baseball bat, to having a group of corrections officers attempt to gouge out his eyes with keys.

Last Sunday, in blatant disregard for his lawyer's presence, inmates threw urine and feces on his face and body, and hit him in the back of the head with a hard object, causing him to cough blood. Appeals for help were met with laughter by corrections officers who had observed the incident. He was subsequently denied medical attention.

Mr. Abdul-Hakeem's attorneys had already filed a plea of habeas corpus on March 6th to have their client moved to presumably safer quarters at the federal Metropolitan Corrections Center, where he had been taken after previous attempts on his life at Rikers in 1987. But Judge Richard Lowell has pushed the court date back to May 22.

Attorney Frazier of the International People's Law Institution, said, "Each day my client sits in Rikers Island his chances of being killed or brutalized to the point of incapacitation multiply. Here is a man whose only offense was to defend himself with an unlicensed gun from being assassinated by drug-running cops. The Policeman's Benevolent Association made it clear that they not only condone his death but are gunning for him. Where is Mayor Koch and where is Corrections Commissioner Koehler? What does it mean for them to remain silent when this young Black man, an American citizen, has been stripped on his democratic, civil and constitutional rights? You can be sure that if he were a young white man from the suburbs, federal, state and local investigators would be all over this case looking into whether his allegations were true. Yet no one has approached Adam Abdul-Hakeem to hear how the police came into his community and used him and other kids to make money off the addiction of our youth.

"Right now in New York," Ms. Frazier continued, "there is a coalition of community support, independent leaders, and elected officials that is demanding a federal investigation of police corruption and the role of the police in drug abuse. Dr. Lenora Fulani is leading that coalition, and she's taking the story of Adam Abdul-Hakeem aka Larry Davis out across the country. Every decent and progressive citizen in New York must come forward and join with Dr. Fulani to save the life of Adam Abdul-Hakeem."

things we know not of; for no one can determine what they will or will not do until that situation actually faces him or her.

AMERICA IS MULTICULTURAL. AFRO-AMERICANS, EURO-AMERICANS, ASIAN-AMERICANS and many more geo-cultural groups. And as we proceed through our past, there is truly no other human being on earth that can claim these lands as heritable burial grounds except the AMERICAN INDIAN.

So if, we are going to save our children, if we are going to save a society, we are going to need to change the way we think. We must work on ourselves. We need to show mutual respect for mankind. For how can we teach our children to show respect for one another, respect for the adult, if we are not showing respect to each other?

The bottom line is that our society is failing. We are far too short-sighted. Children did not make drugs. Children do not buy homes and allow them to deteriorate. Children did not make up the word "gang". For this is from Old English. And from our national history we know the term to mean a group of people organized or associated together for illegal or disreputable purposes.

The bottom line is that we need to focus on saving our children. We need to focus on what society can do for our neighborhoods in order to reclaim them. For it is AN AMERICAN DOCTRINE, a political belief that "all men are created equal".

The bottom line is that we need help as a group of people living in a society heading for destruction.

The bottom line is that many people are not satisfied with the leadership we have elected or those whom have elected their own person to lead.

To allow freedom of speech as it pertains to the press is within our Constitutional limits. For the First amendment ensures us that Congress "makes no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for redress of grievances.

Secondly Amendment IV says "the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers; and effects...shall not be violated".

And finally Amendment V says "no person shall be held to answer...infamous crime unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury..."

We must begin to lead our society into a productive homefront. Tarnishing the name of people can only backfire and leave our communities in the degraded state they have sat in for so long.

It is time for old leaders to train the new. It is time for new leaders to lead the way...for change is inevitable. We can do it peacefully. We have come too far to go back. There will always be two schools of thought.

Innocent people are being hurt...In Portland, the Church and State no longer separate. Racism and insensitivity now one. Let us get back on the right track. For the City should remain in the business of caring for our city. The church for its congregation; and racism is and always will be "a doctrine or belief that inherent differences makes one race, especially one's own, superior to another" As far as insensitivity, well, we've all had our share."

Fighting Back Against Systematic Child Abuse

Under a new California law which holds parents responsible for the criminal activity of their children, Los Angeles police have arrested the mother of a 17 year old suspect in a rape case on the grounds that she condoned his membership in a gang. The mother and her son are Black.

A New York City parochial school teacher whose students are mostly Black and Latino recently told an interviewer that the school curriculum places primary emphasis on language skills. The reason? "Many of our children come from single parent families," he explained, "and their mothers don't take the time to talk to them."

Sue Simmonds, a Black educator and community leader who holds a master's degree in elementary education from New York's prestigious Columbia University, is locked in a court battle with the city's Special Services for children department; her kids were taken away from her months ago by SSC, which falsely accused this sister of child abuse.

The nightmare started when cops armed with shotguns and wearing bulletproof vests staged a midnight raid on Sue Simmonds' independent school in Brooklyn early last fall.

The invasion was part of a harassment campaign which the city, siding with her landlord in a dispute over the school property, has been waging against her. Sue was thrown into a Rikers Island jail for five days. When she came out, her kids were gone--taken into SSC custody "for their own protection."

Sue Simmonds is not the only mother whose children have been taken away by the authorities--family courts, so-called child protection agencies and "special services" for children--under the pretext that they were in danger at home. All over the country tens of thousands of our children are being plucked from their families on the say so of judges whose court proceedings are closed to the public, shunted from foster home to public shelter and back again, transferred from one school to another--always new, rarely wanted or welcome, never "at home." Neglected, brutalized physically and emotionally, with no one to watch out for them or care about them, these children are systematically abused by the very institutions that are supposed to protect them.

It's no coincidence that most of their mothers are poor women of color. Poor families, and poor women in particular, come in for a big share of the blame from those who cry crocodile tears over the breakdown of the American family. It's the pious politicians, the professional "experts," the self-serving sermonizers and sales-hungry sensationalizers who, by blaming us, condone and help to perpetuate systematic child abuse.

We're so dumb, they say, that we let ourselves get talked into sleeping with men who won't marry or even support us; we're promiscuous sluts who don't care if we get pregnant because "the welfare" will pay; we're lazy, irresponsible, unloving and unfit mothers who don't look after our children or discipline them or teach them the right values, just as our own mothers didn't teach us (we're third and fourth generation welfare recipients, which proves it); we are the carriers and perpetuators of a "culture of poverty" that turns children into anti-social monsters. We don't have the moral right to be mothers, they say, nodding their heads in approval when the authorities come into our homes and walk out with our kids.

Last November Sue Simmonds' legal defense committee transformed it self into Communities Organized to Stop Systematic Child Abuse. I am an active member of COSSCA. As a developmental psychologist, as a political activist, and as the mother of two Black children, I am deeply, deeply concerned about the systematic abuse of children in our society.

COSSCA is taking on a case of systematic child abuse that involves Native American Children who attend the Diamond Valley School in Alpine County, California in the mountains just across the border with Nevada. All of the teachers at the school are white; more than half the children who attend are Indian. It's common for the teachers to call these kids "stupid," and hit them. Diamond Valley, which goes from kindergarten to the eighth grade, is the only school in the county--so parents have little choice but to send their children there. Desiree and Terrance Cruz, Washoe Indians who have two children in the school, have been leading a community protest against the abuse that goes on at the school. In retaliation, local police officers have begun harassing them, and Mr. Cruz is in danger of being driven out of business. On June 1 COSSCA will issue a human rights report for Alpine County, exposing the abuse; a lawsuit is being prepared against the county by COSSCA attorneys and founding members Alvaader Frazier and Harry Kresky.

Thanks to COSSCA the Indian parents of Alpine County don't have to fight alone anymore to put a stop to systematic child abuse. None of us does. If you want to stand up with us, call Alvaader Frazier at (212) 956-5550.

Dr. Lenora Fulani is the national chairperson of the New Alliance Party and a practicing Social Therapist in Harlem. She can be contacted at the New Alliance Party, 2032 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10027 and at (212) 996-4700.

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