

# OPINION

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## COMMUNITY HEALTH FORUM

SEPT. 4<sup>TH</sup>, 2003, Thurs., 6:00–8:00 pm  
KEY BANK COMMUNITY ROOM  
5330 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

## Racism And The Impact On Your Health

Presented By Corliss McKeever  
AFRICAN AMERICAN HEALTH COALITION

• Beverages, vegetable and fruits served

- Registration available for 1<sup>st</sup> "Wellness Within Reach Walk"
- African American Health Coalition, Sat. Sept. 6<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 am.
- Obi Hill of Reflections Mirror Image Bookstore will display books available on health and wellness. 503-288-9003

Sponsored by the African American Chamber of Commerce, Health and Awareness Committee. 503-244-5794.

Walk The Path Of Health

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## Are We Punishing the Children of Prisoners Too?

BY MARIAN  
WRIGHT  
EDELMAN



Supports needed for kids  
of incarcerated parents

When you think about prisons, preschoolers don't usually come to mind. But a growing number of children of all ages are finding that prison has become part of their everyday world. That's because the number of children with parents in correctional facilities is growing at an alarming rate.

The U.S. Department of Justice reports that close to 1.5 million children had a parent in state or federal prison in 1999, a 60 percent increase since 1991. Hispanic children were three times and Black children were nine times more likely than White children to have a parent in prison.

The growing numbers of children with mothers in prison is especially troubling. Between 1991 and 1999, the number of children with a mother in prison nearly doubled to over 125,000. Nearly three-fourths of the mothers in federal prisons are there for drug offenses. Mothers are also more likely than fathers to have experienced homelessness or unemployment shortly before going to prison.

Since the majority of incarcerated mothers lived with their children before being sent to prison, many of their children had already been experiencing instability at home before this major upheaval.

Both mothers and fathers say they try to keep up communication with their children while in prison but circumstances can

make this difficult. Over 60 percent of parents in state prisons and nearly 85 percent of parents in federal prisons are being held over 100 miles away from their last residence. As a result, more than half of parents in prison say they have never had a personal visit from their children.

While adults are in prison because they've made mistakes, children end up suffering too.

In response to this growing crisis, some communities and correc-

*There is a role  
for all of us in  
reaching out to  
these children.*

tional facilities are creating innovative programs that help parents in prison maintain closer contact with their children and learn better parenting skills.

Some facilities offer parenting and child development classes and other life skills training to help parents get back on their feet. Some promote literacy for both inmates and their children by tape-recording parents reading bedtime stories and giving the tapes and books to their children. Others have developed special child-friendly visiting areas within prisons where chil-

dren can visit their parents, sometimes even overnight.

These programs serve both generations. Parents who are able to feel connected to their children and have been taught specific ways to be better parents have a very strong incentive to continue these positive behaviors and avoid old behaviors that might send them back to prison. And children are able to feel more secure and reassured that their parents still love and care about them.

There is a role for all of us in reaching out to these children. Faith-based and other community organizations can offer mentoring and other supports for children of incarcerated parents and sponsor activities that will promote parent-child interaction and strengthen parent-child relationships, parenting supports, and life skills training.

The children's surrogate caregivers also need help and support. And we can push for alternatives to incarceration for parents convicted of non-violent offenses that encourage parent-child interaction.

Having a parent in prison is not a child's fault but sometimes children end up feeling like they are being punished too.

Marian Wright Edelman is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

## Thurmond Memorial is Insulting

Honor not  
deserving for  
man who  
promoted bigotry

BY KWEISI MFUME AND HILARY O. SHELTON

The late Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., who passed away earlier this year served in the U.S. Senate longer than any other member. Unfortunately, his 48 years in the Senate were marked by a bigoted and segregationist philosophy that drove almost all he did.

During his tenure, Strom Thurmond was well known for giving exclusive representation to his white constituents, often at the expense of his constituents of color. Furthermore, Sen. Thurmond holds the dubious record for the longest filibuster in Congressional history,

24 hours and 18 minutes, in his attempt to derail passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act.

In 1948, then-Presidential candidate Thurmond, ran on a platform of states' rights to preserve the "prerogatives of the people of a sovereign state to deal exclusively with domestic problems" such as "voting, qualifications for voting, segregation, law enforcement and private employment."

It was during this campaign that he told a group of supporters "there's not enough troops in the Army to force the southern people to break down segregation and admit the nigger race into our theaters, into our swimming pools, into our homes, and into our churches."

Unfortunately, there is currently a movement in Congress to name the planned Visitor's Center in the U.S. Capitol, which may cost as much as \$400 million to construct, for the late Strom Thurmond.

A bill has been introduced in the House of Representatives (H.R. 2661) by Congressman Gershman Barrett, R-S.C., and one is expected soon in the Senate to be introduced by Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C.

The NAACP opposes the bestowing of this high honor upon a man of such low character, and led by the South Carolina NAACP State Conference of branches is working hard to see that neither the House or Senate bill become law.

The United States Capitol is meant to be a building of the people, all the people of the United States, and to name its visitors center after a man who fought so hard for exclusion and division is insulting to American citizens as well as the building itself.

Kweisi Mfume is NAACP president and chief executive officer. Hilary O. Shelton serves as director of the NAACP Washington Bureau.

## Salary Outrageous

The Multnomah County Commissioners Charter gives authority to the chair to fill director positions. We rely on her to make prudent decisions based on recommendations from a salary review commission.

However, in light of the recent plea to Multnomah County voters to approve a 1.2 percent tax increase on their own salaries to provide critical services and the implementation of a 2 percent cut in cost of living increases for non-represented county employees in fiscal year 2004, it seems unconscionable to increase the Library Director's salary by 27 percent.

Lonnie Roberts, Multnomah County Commissioner

## Bush on My Street

I live at 9115 N. Portsmouth. I got home late last night from a trip to Moscow, Idaho and crawled into bed. This morning I woke up to find my car has vanished without a trace.

At first I thought it was stolen, but then as I walked around looking for it I noticed an a-frame sign one block down from my house that read "no parking." I tried to remember whether they were planning construction on the street or not when I suddenly realized Bush was coming today.

My neighbors began coming out of their homes to go to work just as I had to find their cars missing as well. I still don't know where my car is, nor how much it is going to cost me to get it back. Suffice to say many of the people on this street, myself included are quite irate.

To top it all off Bush isn't even here on some important matter that I should be concerned about. He is here to raise money for his own political campaign.

With all the stuff he has gotten us involved in I don't understand how he has the time to go gallivanting around making even more money for himself.

We are irritated that simply because Bush wants to have a lunch for his own private gains we now have to find a way to get to work without our cars and most likely pay close to \$100 each just to get them back.

Don Elliott, North Portland