



“Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now”

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My Sister’s Keeper Just as Important

In all the hoopla surrounding President Obama’s “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative, overlooked is that fact that our young girls also need to be targeted for special attention. Sure, they outpace Black males in college attendance and, in many instances, in the workplace. Still, that does not mean they do not also need special attention and encouragement.

Nothing illustrates this better than events of the past week. Sandwiched between President Obama’s White House announcement of his special effort to help Black males and jubilation over Lupita Nyong’o winning an Oscar for best supporting actress in “12 Years a Slave” was news out of Florida that Marissa Alexander, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison for firing a “warning shot” in the direction of her estranged and abusive husband, will be retried and could face 60 years in prison instead of the original 20.

Florida State Attorney Angela Corey, the same prosecutor whose office failed to win murder convictions against George Zimmerman in connection with the death of Trayvon Martin and, more recently, against Michael Dunn for the death of Jordan Davis, announced that instead of the 20 years originally given to Alexander, she will seek to triple that by requesting that her three 20-year terms be served consecutively rather than concurrently.

Alexander was convicted of three counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon in 2012 and was sentenced to 20 years under



THE CURRY REPORT

George E. Curry

Florida’s 10-20 law that requires stiffer penalties for crimes committed with guns. On appeal, the conviction was overturned because Circuit Judge James Daniel placed the burden on Alexander to prove that she was acting in self-defense. In his instructions to the jury, the judge

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said Alexander had the responsibility to prove that she had been battered by her husband.

In a cruel twist, the prosecutor has announced that she will re-prosecute Alexander, this time seeking a longer sentence.

Marissa Alexander shouldn’t have ever been prosecuted, let alone convicted. If Florida’s Stand Your Ground law should apply to anyone, it should be Alexander, not George Zimmerman and Michael Dunn.

If convicted a second time,

Alexander will join other Black women who make up the fastest growing segment of prisoners.

According to the Sentencing Project, the number of women in prison increased by 646 percent between 1980 and 2010, from 15,118 to 112,797. As of 2010, more than 1 million women were under the supervision of the criminal justice system.

Black women are three times more likely to be incarcerated than White women. While most men are in prison for violent offenses, women are more likely to be in prison for drugs or property crimes. Many, like Kemba Smith, become romantically entangled with drug dealers, often serving as

their “mules” to transport drugs and money.

While Florida was gearing up to triple Marissa Alexander’s sentence, there was some good news out of Hollywood. The fact that Lupita Nyong’o was awarded an Oscar at Sunday’s Academy Awards lifted the spirits of dark-skin girls across the country and indeed around the world. African Americans, especially females, are told in so many ways that when it comes to skin color, White is right. And if you can’t be White,

light is the next best thing.

Of course, there was the famous dolls test conducted by psychologists Ken and Mamie Clark, which was instrumental in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing racially segregated public schools. When asked to pick out the most beautiful doll, most Black girls selected White dolls over Black ones. When the test was repeated in recent years, the results were the same.

Muhammad Ali described racial brainwashing this way:

“We’ve been brainwashed. Everything good is supposed to be white. We look at Jesus, and we see a white with blond hair and blue eyes. We look at all the angels; we see white with blond hair and blue eyes. Now, I’m sure there’s a heaven in the sky and colored folks die and go to heaven. Where are the colored angels? They must be in the kitchen preparing milk and honey. We look at Miss America, we see white. We look at miss world, we see white. We look at Miss Universe, we see white. Even Tarzan, the king of the jungle in black Africa, he’s white. White Owl Cigars. White Swan soap, White Cloud tissue paper, White Rain hair rinse, White Tornado floor wax. All the good cowboys ride the white horses and wear white hats. Angel food cake is the white cake, but the devils food cake is chocolate.”

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Brother’s Keeper: A Mixed Obama Legacy

President Barack Obama announced a “My Brother’s Keeper,” an initiative to help young Black and Brown men succeed. Many present in the East Wing of the White House described the announcement of this initiative as “an emotional moment” for President Obama and for many of the others gathered there.

Several of the African American men who were present at the announcement took to the airwaves afterwards, talking about how it felt to be in a room where the nation’s first Black president talked about his own background and his identification with troubled young Black men. The parents of slain teens Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis were in the room, reinforcing a statement the president made a year or so ago when he said that if he had a son, he would have looked like Trayvon Martin.

While President Obama says he will ask government agencies to work together to create more possibilities for young Black men. He emphasized that the “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative is not a new government program. Indeed, early funding will come from private foundations. Few specifics of the program have been released, but preliminary activity will include a review of existing programs to determine what works and what doesn’t. Still, the presi-



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

dent has used the power of his pen, the phone and his pulpit to raise awareness about the many economic challenges African American men face.

Using the term “no excuses” President Obama told young men

Keeper” has tremendous potential, given the socioeconomic status of African American men, there is not yet enough meat on the bones of the announcement to judge. President Obama has three years left in office. Is this as good as it gets?

For all the good he will do with the “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative, the president may leave a different kind of legacy with his recent set of nominees to the Georgia district court. With six vacant seats on that court, our president has chosen to appoint four Republicans, including two

Mark Cohen, who successfully defended Georgia’s voter ID law in court? Despite opposition from Rev. Joseph Lowery, as well as by civil rights veteran and Congressman John Lewis (D-Ga.), the president has refused to rescind the Cohen nomination. The young men he lifted up in his “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative may be the same ones denied the right to vote through voter suppression. Cohen, in his late 50s, may serve as many as two decades on the bench. What kind of anti-civil rights rulings might he make?

Rev. Lowery and Congressman Lewis are among those also opposing former state legislator Michael Boggs because of his conservative legislative record, which includes opposition to marriage equality, his vote to keep the confederate insignia on the Georgia flag, and his efforts to restrict access to abortion.

Through his votes, Boggs has indicated his opposition to the African American community, to women, and to the LGBT community. What kind of votes might we expect from Boggs, who is in his early 50s, in the decades to come? And why won’t President Obama listen to those African American stalwarts who strongly object to this nomination?

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that they had to take responsibility for their own success. That comment gave CNN anchor Don Lemon the opportunity to mouth off at Obama critics, to chide his own critics, and to demonstrate why he might be a more effective opinionator than journalist. Lemon was one of many, also, to describe “My Brother’s Keeper” as part of the Obama legacy. Many said they expect the president to continue be involved in the empowerment of Black and Brown boys and men.

While I think “My Brother’s

social conservatives. In a state that is 31 percent African American, there is only one Black nominee. These judges are appointed for life. Judicial appointments are a clear part of a legacy.

President Obama has been vocal about people’s right to vote, and disdainful of voter suppression tactics from long lines to voter ID. Attorney General Eric Holder has brought suit against counties and states engaged in various gerrymandering and voter suppression tactics. Why, then, would President Obama nominate