

**Incarceration in America:
A Dictatorship Inside a Democracy**
Garrison S. Johnson

For the past twenty two years, I have been imprisoned in America and this experience has been both positive and negative. What I shall attempt to explain cannot truly be comprehended unless you are an African American incarcerated in the United States. That is because you would feel that what you may have been imprisoned and punished for is related to the colour of your skin as opposed to the crime you were convicted for. This is difficult to articulate. However, prior to my placement in prison – at the age of 21 – I was illiterate but became self-educated through reading various books. I read about how slavery was practiced in the 1700s, how the slave owners operated their slave plantations, which has many parallels to how America runs its prison system in the 21st century.

For instance, African Americans are the majority of the prison population in the United States. The prisons are run and staffed primarily by White and non-Black personnel. The prison guards and management appear to be racially prejudiced against Black people. They innately implement racial segregation policies governing prisoners. African American prisoners are frequently beaten and subjected to the use of excessive force by prison guards whereas others are not. When a single Black prisoner is involved in some sort of prison disturbance the entire African American prison population is punished. I currently have litigation pending trying to abolish that practice. The case is *Johnson v. Sullivan et al.* case no. 1:06-cv-1089-ALA. If you are familiar with the history of slavery you will see the contrast. When an African slave ran away from the plantation the slave owner would punish all the slaves to deter the others from running away.

In my experience, the U.S. prison system is allowed to be a dictatorship inside of a democracy because there is no civilian oversight and prison administrators are given a green light to manage their prisons without interference from the courts. The ships continue sailing across the transatlantic, the *Pinta*, the *Nina* and *Santa Maria*'s, dropping off human cargo at the gates of America's prisons for economic gain and job creation. There are no reforms or rehabilitations, only harsh taskmasters subjecting their cargo to hidden prejudices.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in October 1964 in Philadelphia, *Garrison Johnson* grew-up in a single parent household with five siblings. His mother struggled to make ends meet so decided it best to move to California for employment. Living in California as a boy was difficult and confusing because of the issues that plagued the poor communities in Los Angeles. There was a dividing line between those who had and those who had not. Garrison discovered that he had a learning disorder, which resulted in his inability to read and write throughout high school. Submitting to the negative environment around him, Garrison chose a life of crime. In and out of juvenile facilities, he has been serving a life sentence since 1987. In attempting to gather evidence suppressed from his last trial, Garrison became self-educated inside prison walls. Some of his poetry has been included in a self-published book called *Poems from the Inside*, which is available at his website www.garrisoncorrespondenceinc.com.