

People of Colour and the Prison Industrial Complex

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This camp brings out the very best in brothers, or destroys them entirely. But none are unaffected ... I *know* that they will not be satisfied until they've pushed me out of this existence altogether. I've been the victim of so many racist attacks that I could never relax again.

– George Jackson, April 1970¹

In recent years there has been a concerted move by the conservative right in the United States to dissolve federal mandates that once promoted a higher standard of social equity. In addition, there is also a push to enhance and further define state-rights sovereignty over the rights of individuals, once the condition that allowed the existence of socialized slavery.

The central theme of any historical event is how that event shapes our lives. The institution of state-sanctioned slavery is a construct that sets the underlying doctrine in the political and economic atmosphere that exists in the United States. Nowhere is this more highly visible than in the country's criminal justice system.

The purpose of this paper is to look at the concept of the "Black Dimension" from the perspective of a prisoner. Perspectives of prisoners are compelling in such studies because they are free from the inherent factors that tend to detract from such concrete observations made by the community-at-large. In essence, prisoners are not burdened with paying rent, taxes, food bills, or the physical rearing of families, and as such can spend time digesting the various incongruities that exist within a society beyond the fences and walls that surround their existence.

And yet, a prisoner's existence is not far removed from the conceptualizations that define the world beyond the walls. In one of the many ironies of life, prisoners are often dismayed by the amount of freedom that is voluntarily divested by the community, especially in communities whose predominant

¹ In Jackson's *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. Foreword by Jonathan Jackson, Jr. (1994) Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books. Jackson's younger brother Jonathan was shot to death during a hostage-taking in which he demanded the release of the Soledad brothers from San Quentin Prison in 1970. Almost a year later, George Jackson was shot to death by a tower guard inside San Quentin in a purported escape attempt.

population is people of colour. Often, as the fate of that community population goes, so goes the fate of their unfortunate peers within U.S. prisons.

This paper, then, serves as a warning. It is an observation that calls to task those who would espouse a philosophy of situational growth for black people and other people of colour within the United States. Divisive apathy is our greatest enemy.

PROVING GROUNDS: CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICIES

The criminal justice system in the United States is the proving ground of social policies that exacerbate and extend social and cultural racism in the country. Through the incarceration of people of colour at disproportionately higher rates than that of their white peers, the black community-at-large is slowly being relegated to a third-class citizenship status well behind other minority groups within the U.S.

In the United States, people tend to be apathetic toward problems that lie on the fringe of their awareness. This is especially so when those problem areas are not directly perceived as ones that affect the individual person. As such, problems within the U.S. criminal justice system are simply "prisoner-related" and not worth the effort of thought in the conduct of everyday life. Because of this apathy, the black community in the United States is not far removed from the abuses suffered prior to the passage of legislation that was ultimately designed to incorporate blacks into the mainstream of American society, legislation that in a fundamental sense is currently being rethought.

The dialogue on race in the U.S., according to political pundits, is an essential factor for the growth and expansion of improved race relations within the country. Yet, the conversation has always been a convoluted and one-sided one, especially when it addresses the country's criminal justice policies. Despite varied dialogues, Black Americans still live in a world divided that is governed by a dual "class-based" hierarchy even within its own ranks. Though men of colour have always been treated with this approach, women and children of colour have been targeted over the last decade in ever-increasing numbers.

Black American communities-at-large, as a result of these policies and an extensive shift to the right, have stalled their growth potentials. This is disconcerting in light of the political environment that revolves around another Bush presidency and his appointments. This is in spite of the "colour" that Bush has nominated to his current cabinet. Regardless of the current president's

seemingly good intentions, the fact still remains that the move right is far removed from the interests of black American communities.

Those who wish to halt the gallop to the right need to be able to envision a convincing political alternative if the cause of racial justice, and indeed of radical democracy, is ever to resume its advance (Winant, 1998). The advance, however, is stymied by the country's inability to measure its maturity by the way it treats its citizens.

INCARCERATION AS A RACIAL POLICY

We as a society are witnessing the debasement of humanist respect toward fellow human beings with ever-increasing intensity. Sheldon, in his pamphlet *Voices from Within the Prison Walls*, speaks about the humiliation that occurs when a society attempts to re-image itself by trying to instil a sense of "colour-blindness" when involved in discussions aimed at social parity (1998).

Current criminal justice practices in the United States seem to be mandated to remove forms of individuality – both cultural and social – from prisoners. In the social strata of prisons, terms such as "offender" and "inmate" might be used to deconstruct the image that terms such as "prisoner" or "convict" might portray. In the same light, similar practices attempt to remove any reference to race by promulgating doctrines of "colour blindness," appearing to be, on the surface, equally tough on criminal actions regardless of the perpetrator's race. That point, however, is belied by the campaign that politicians and the mainstream media have propagated in the "race doesn't matter" concept. In fact, many crime statistics released to the public infer that, "if not for black criminal conduct – especially from its males and youth – the U.S. would be a cultural Utopia."²

Disagreeing with that analogy, Angela Y. Davis writes, "When the structural character of racism is ignored in discussions about crime and the rising population of incarcerated people, the racial imbalance in jails and prisons is treated as a contingency, at best as a product of the *culture of poverty*, and at worst as proof of an assumed black monopoly on criminality."³ Contrary to common perceptions, laws defining criminality based on race are not that

² D.A. Sheldon (1998), *Voices from within the Prison Walls*. Chicago: News and Letters, p. 6.

³ From her essay "Race and Criminalization," in *The House That Race Built* (1998). Edited by Wahneema Lubiano. New York: Vintage Books, p. 265.

uncommon in the United States, and are reminiscent of such race-oriented laws as the Fugitive Slave Act. Among those laws is legislation geared toward quality of life and community policing.

WHOSE QUALITY OF LIFE?

In 1999 the U.S. Supreme Court decided to review a decision of the Illinois Supreme Court that deemed a Chicago ordinance unconstitutional. The ordinance made it a criminal offence for anyone to stand in public without an apparent reason. The ordinance was defined as a “quality of life” and “community policing” issue, with standards that specifically targeted gang members or any person perceived to be a gang associate.

One of the astounding things about such ordinances is that they never specify the criteria determining gang membership (or association) of a person who is standing in public, leaving it to law enforcement to decide. Consequently, such boilerplate laws create potential violators of people of colour based upon the suspect standard of “what one appears to be.” Though such laws do not specify colour in their language, the lack of specific criteria opens the interpretation to the enforcer’s bias, so that the word “gang” is synonymous with “black” or “people of colour,” thus criminalizing race.

What is even more astounding is that the authors of such generalized and highly controversial laws feel that the enactment of their legislation in black communities especially, offers those community citizens and their rights a better sense of protection. As author David Cole writes, “... they argue that criminal laws no longer must be clear in places where minority groups have a voice in the political process and can protect themselves.”⁴

One of the most vehement and direct attacks on minorities under the quality of life standard was California’s “Proposition 21.”⁵ This law, like many similarly enacted laws, was not based on actual statistics but on “predictions of future

⁴ In Cole’s article “Standing While Black.” *The Nation* 268(1), January 4, 1998, p. 24.

⁵ Among Prop. 21’s components are mixing children with adults in prison, eliminating informal probation, eroding the confidentiality of juvenile records, providing for the filing of adult charges against children as young as fourteen without prior judicial consideration, expanding the list of three-strikes criteria, creating new crimes and penalties for youth only casually associated with groups labelled by police as street gangs, requiring youth registration with police after a conviction of gang related offences, and expanding the number of crimes punishable by death.

criminality.” In writing about the law, The Fortune Society’s Julian Liu noted, “supporters of Proposition 21 claim that a ‘crime wave’ threatens the state, pointing to the predicted increase of California’s youth population by one-third over the next 25 years.”⁶ It should be no surprise, then, that crime statistics show that juvenile crime, in particular, is decreasing. Crime rates, overall, were at least 25 percent lower in 1996 than in the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁷

In prison, administrators implement their own forms of “quality of life” standards, especially in the proliferation of supermax prisons. As in the community, men and women are often locked in these prisons-within-prisons based on predictions of future criminality. As in the community, those who find themselves more likely to be housed in these units are people of colour.

In the community, the perception of “future criminal intent” has a dual effect on communities of colour. On one hand it is a move to ensure the safety of the community’s future, while ensuring that a significant number of black and Hispanic males will not be a part of that future. That concept further exacerbates the situation by guaranteeing that a label is placed on the individual that will be further acted upon by prison administrators upon the person’s entry into the criminal justice system.

Such racial policies are easily compared to South Africa’s former regime of apartheid, attempting to give the appearance of civility on one hand, while promulgating abusive conditions on the other. As one prisoner commented, in viewing the celebrations surrounding the release of Nelson Mandela, “Why should I concern myself with apartheid in South Africa, when I see it right here?” By ignoring race as an issue – especially in terms of community policing, quality of life, and ultimately incarceration at disproportionate rates – the concept of “colour blindness” in both white and black communities only compounds an already complex social problem.

Fraught with such a high degree of disparity in its management, the most consistent aspect of the criminal justice system in the U.S. is its controversial nature. “The least controversial observation that one can make about criminal justice today,” writes sociologist David J. Rothman, “is that it is remarkably ineffective, absurdly expensive, grossly inhumane, and riddled with discrimination” (Rothman, 1994). This is an argument that is supported by the system’s own statistics.

⁶ In Liu’s article “Californians Approve Prop. 21.” *Fortune News*, Spring 2001, p. 1.

⁷ Jamie Fellner (2000), *Punishment and Prejudice: Racial Disparities in the War on Drugs*. Human Rights Watch, <www.hrw.org>.

CULTURAL GENOCIDE: THE “WAR ON DRUGS”

Contrary to popular belief, the remarkably high rates of incarceration in the United States and their spiralling growth have not been driven by an increase in violent crime. Rather, the burgeoning prison population is the result of changes in penal policies and practices, and of the soaring number of drug offenders given prison sentences. Human Rights Watch, in a June 2000 report,⁸ found that several states incarcerated black males at rates 27 to 57 times higher than white males arrested in drug cases. What makes these statistics even more compelling is that most drug offenders are white. The study also found that fifteen states have double-figure black-to-white rates of incarceration with the Midwestern states of Minnesota and Wisconsin ranking one and two respectively.⁹

One of the ironies about race-discriminatory patterns leading to disproportionate numbers of imprisoned blacks is that state and federal constitutional laws do not apply. Such racial disparities in law enforcement are legal as long as they are not perceived to be undertaken with discriminatory intent or purpose (Fellner, 2000:3). The problem with intent and purpose, of course, is that these concepts are defined by the same federal and state legislators who enacted the laws causing the disparity in the first place. As a result, the integrity of the laws, the criteria for enactment, and their underlying purpose pose the issue of equal enforcement.

In essence, the current trend of disproportionate incarceration of blacks specifically and people of colour in general is indicative of the continued “plantation-oriented” mind-set within all levels of U.S. policy making. The effect on the black population in this country is stifling: unchecked growth of the prison industrial complex, continued racial profiling both in and out of prison, ill-conceived social reform programs, and other cultural-specific – and as such, divisive – policies. All are designed to lessen the impact of black Americans on the social, economic and political spheres of influence within American society.

Social psychologist Wade W. Nobles warned over a decade ago, “Substance abuse, in many ways, is becoming an American condition. However in relation

⁸ *Supra*, n. 7.

⁹ According to Human Rights Watch, Minnesota incarcerates blacks at a rate of 26.8 blacks for every one white. Wisconsin is at 21.3 to 1.

to the African American community, substance abuse can be judged as an instrument of genocide.”¹⁰ Also in 1989, another social activist, Jawanza Kunjufu, noted that obstacles placed in the path of the black community are conscious, aimed at black youth in particular, and economically based. Kunjufu further stated that drug policies are a means to an end, noting, “there is a conspiracy to destroy black males ... This country no longer has a need for black male labour. Why were we brought to this country? To work on plantations. That need does not exist today.”¹¹

Wall Street, however, and international investors would probably beg to differ with Kunjufu’s statement. U.S. incarceration rates, like slavery, have become virtual bonanzas for their investment capital. Additionally, adding a new wrinkle to the equation is the proliferation of private for-profit prisons and related services which, though rife with controversy, occupy about 10 percent of the total number of prisoners incarcerated in the country.

PRIVATIZATION: THE NEW SLAVE TRADE

Most people think of the most simplistic view of the prison industrial complex, the physical plant of a prison, its guards, and prisoners. But the prison industrial complex, like slavery, has a much wider impact on black communities, as well as other communities of colour. Like slave ships of old, second-hand buses and vans crisscross the country in the dead of night. On board are men and women destined for a cell in either a private, state, or federal facility. At one time the province of federal marshals, privatization has taken over even this aspect of incarceration.

For blacks in this country, such a concept should be alarming, as it is reminiscent of the Middle Passage.¹² And like the slave trade, prisoners’ families might find their family members shipped across the country at a moment’s

¹⁰ Quoted in “Endangered: Black Men,” written by Joanne Ball, *The Boston Globe*, June 4, 1989, p. 88.

¹¹ *Supra*, n. 10.

¹² The Middle Passage is defined as that portion of the Atlantic Ocean between West Africa and the Americas where European vessels transported African people into slavery in the Americas between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Middle Passage is also defined as the actual journey from Africa to the Americas, being one of the legs of the infamous Triangular Trade Route that involved Europe, Africa, and the Americas. See www.middlepassage.org/detail.htm.

notice, kidnapped by modern-day slavers working in conjunction with government and private interests.

The universality of the prison industrial complex is frightening. It is the new colonist, populating economically depressed rural towns with black, brown, red, and yellow gold. And like its ancient counterpart, this new breed of colonialism ultimately breeds racism and the enslavement of people of colour on a universal level. Global privatization is a modern-day act of ethnocentric and economic contempt that does not simply affect the so-called “defined criminal element” in this country. Each new prison represents a monumental economic and political windfall for the receiving community, and another cog in the prison industrial machine that – with over six million people under some sort of judicial sanction – leaves very few Americans untouched.

Globalization also ensures that the U.S. prison industrial complex is not an encapsulated environment, for it involves much more than a police-state infrastructure of law enforcement. In the United States it has become a means to globalize trade at the expense of prisoners, their families, workers within the country, and workers in other lands. The prison industrial complex, especially on the private level, ensures its perpetual state by monopolizing all aspects of its existence. By doing so, it ensures that payments received for goods or services do not trickle down to people of colour, even though its main source of revenue is those same people.

Prisoners and their friends and families are required to purchase from certified vendors that make their money solely on that market. Health care and food services are provided by private prison-oriented concerns that need not worry about securing competitive bids, since most have some sort of stock or are owned by the prison consortium. And then there are the incidentals: linens from India; blankets and clothes made in Mexico and distributed by Bob Barker; cheap toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, lotion, deodorant, and shoes made in Taiwan, Malaysia, China, and other impoverished Pacific Rim countries.¹³ This enslaves imprisoned American citizens economically, but also relegates the indigenous peoples of those trade countries to a form of economic slavery.

¹³ A survey of all items sold or distributed by several private prisons revealed that at least 90 percent of those items are created in Pacific Rim countries and then distributed by companies in the U.S. This list also includes such items as lamps, hot pots, shower shoes, and even game items such as chess and checker sets.

One of the ironies of incarceration during the rehabilitative period of this country is that convict labour produced many of the products now purchased in the Third World, often making more in prison wages than their global counterparts are currently paid. The growing prison industrial complex, then, not only serves to provide a means of warehousing people of colour, but it also serves to expand economic colonialism at home and abroad, ensuring that any hope for the future is defined by the barred steel doors of this redefined form of industrialized slavery.

BLACK WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

Most black women in prison today are serving time for drug charges. Often these charges are simple possession. But like their male counterparts, this possession is usually in the form of crack cocaine, which often leads to much higher penalties than if one were in possession of powder cocaine. Most women who are in prison have also been abused in some way, and this abuse does not end upon their entry into the system. Prisons that are charged with the rehabilitation of its prisoners often promulgate further abuse.

One of the most viral and violent attacks upon the black dimension in this country comes from the destruction of the family-at-large. With the incarceration of black women, especially those who head a single-parent household, it is almost a guarantee that one or more of her children will eventually be incarcerated.

In 1998 half of the 84,000 women confined in local, state, and federal prisons were black. Today, there are more than 100,000 women in prisons across America. While nearly two-thirds of the women on probation and parole are white, nearly two-thirds of the women confined on all levels are minorities. With these numbers also comes the inevitable effect on their children. Over 156,000 children are directly affected by their mothers' incarcerations, and more than half never visit their mothers during important times of their development. Substantial reasons for the severing of these family ties are economic and/or geographic which make the trip to the prison impossible. Mothers often lose custody and visitation rights with respect to their children, even after they get out.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Supra*, n. 2, p. 27.

And the impact on those children is disturbing. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the conviction and incarceration of women has a profound intergenerational impact.¹⁵ In fact, children often suffer the same traumas associated with incarceration that plague their parents. Experts say that when women are separated from their children, the toll is exacting. Children generally experience the most harm, and mothers sink into deep depression.

About three out of four women in prison are mothers. Fewer than one in four can rely upon the fathers of those children to provide care while they are incarcerated. Children whose parents are incarcerated often end up in the care of relatives or in foster care, and are five times as likely to commit crimes as adults than are children of mothers who have not done time (Bloomfield, 2000: 6, 13).

Although black women represent only 6.3 percent of the national adult population, they constitute 7 percent of all drug admissions to prisons.¹⁶ As with disproportionate numbers of black men in prisons, especially in drug related cases, black women were more than eight times as likely as whites to be in prison in 1997 (Fellner, 1998:22). Additionally, the rate of incarceration of women has grown nearly twice as fast as that of men over the last twenty years. With that growth comes an increase in the numbers of children confined, both as juveniles and later as adults.

BLACK YOUTH: AN INTERGENERATIONAL WAR

The current generation of youth is nearly 70 million strong, and many feel that it is prudent to head off the "predicted" problems with their numbers by fuelling discord in the community. Black youth and youth of colour are especially targeted as the war on drugs has ultimately become the war on black and brown youth. A direct result of the war on drugs is that urban youth of colour are seen as "super predatory, ultra violent, drug-infested gang bangers."¹⁷

¹⁵ According to Diana Block of the California Coalition for Women, the number of women prisoners in California has risen 600 percent. California has the highest number of women prisoners in the world. The impact of this phenomenon on the children of imprisoned women is rarely studied, except by groups like CCWP.

¹⁶ Fellner (2000:23) reports that between 1986 and 1996, the number of women incarcerated on drug charges had risen 888 percent, compared to 129 percent for non-drug charges. White women, in comparison to black women, only represent 5.4 percent of drug admissions.

Current estimates note that the median age of incarceration for 62 percent of the prison population is under 30 years of age. Other estimates state that over 100,000 youths under the age of 18 are incarcerated and with laws such as Proposition 21 on the books, we are liable to see the median age of incarceration skewed downward to the mid-twenties or lower. The catch-all justification for such initiatives lies within the single word. As Pintado-Vertner and Chang comment, "The War on Youth's buildup began in the late 1980s, as jurisdictions increasingly fretted about rising juvenile crime rates and 'out-of-control' youths were labelled within a single racialized code word: 'gangs'."¹⁸ Suspicion of gang affiliation, like suspicion of drug involvement, is stigma that youth will carry for life, affecting their ability to pursue education and employment because of their entry into gang reporting databases.

Databases indiscriminately criminalize youth, identifying suspects before any crime has been committed. Racial profiling, it seems, is most virulent when it comes to youth of colour.¹⁹ Unfortunately, there are those in both white communities and communities of colour who say, "We know who the real criminals are – let's get them before they have a chance to act out their criminality."²⁰ This label comes at a price, which is more often than not the welfare of the black community and the impact that it has on the social, cultural, and economic strata of the United States.

CAPITALIST FUNDAMENTALS: ECONOMIC AND REPRESENTATIVE RACISM

What is the most compelling aspect of disproportionate black incarceration? Though many may labour the point, it is the opinion of this writer that representation would be the major point of contention. Though economics would run a close second, the lack of representation and the attendant disfranchisement that walks hand in hand with incarceration is perhaps the most damaging aspect that weakens the black dimension and its ability to grow.

Political representation is a cultural governor in the United States, and without proper states of their own, no social entity can survive. As we have found in

¹⁷ As described by Ryan Pintado-Vertner and Jeff Chang in "The War on Youth," *ColorLines* 2(4), Winter 1999–2000, 10.

¹⁸ *Supra*, n. 17, p. 11.

¹⁹ *Supra*, n. 17, p. 12.

²⁰ *Supra*, n. 3, p. 270.

election year 2000, not since slavery have a larger number of blacks in this country been exempt from the political process. In numerical terms, 1.4 million black men, or 13 percent of all black men in the country, have been disfranchised at a rate of seven times the national average. It was only in 1865 after nearly 350 years of legal racial suppression that the United States enacted the Voting Rights Act.²¹ However, the ink was barely dry on that document when black males were being barred from the process again.

In barring such large numbers, either through enacted legislation or incarceration, the prison industrial complex and society-at-large maintains a status quo that is skewed toward white dominance of the political, and hence economic, reins of control. The lack of representation in urban areas is a gain for rural representation. Few prisons are located in urban areas, and even though the overwhelming majority of black prisoners come from those areas, their incarceration in rural areas (while strengthening those areas) has a negative impact on the social, economic, and political integrity of the communities from which they hail. Rural areas that house prisoners receive an estimated fifty billion dollars each year. Such gains are realized via employment, infrastructure development, education, and, most importantly, political representation.

Criminologist Nils Christie (1993) describes prisoners as “captive consumers,” prized commodities in economically depressed rural areas.²² Like the slaves of old, prisoners place a high demand on the necessary services required to run a prison, but place little strain on the infrastructure since they do not use roads or other community resources that would diminish the benefits of the arrangement. In turn, huge financial and political rewards are gained as they relate to prison-oriented functions. One of the ironies of this arrangement is that more often than not, when those same rural communities would frown on black intrusions into their enclaves, they cheer the predominately black prisons built in their backyards, often competing vehemently for the opportunity to host one.

With the loss of people from urban locales, so go representation and attendant funds needed to grow. Communities cannot develop without funding, support, or political representation to plead their cause, especially with the liberal

²¹ In Randall Robinson's "America's Debt to Blacks," *The Nation* 270(10), March 13, 2000, 5.

²² In *Crime Control as Industry* (2000), New York: Routledge.

Democratic retreat from support of black issues. Even in the best of times, racial issues tended to exacerbate divisions in the liberal coalition upon which Democratic electoral victories depended. As the policy swung to the right, liberals in the Democratic Party came under mounting pressure to downplay or sidestep racial issues.²³ In fact, both Democratic and Republican parties are moving quickly to gain ground with the Hispanic community, empowering them with concessions that were, until recently, the province of the black community.

The Democratic Party's shift to the right can be linked to the disproportionate loss of such a large voting bloc of blacks in an already challenged arena. The ravaging effect of the war on drugs, then, can be seen as a turning point in black community development, disfranchising three decades of hard-won gains.

CONCLUSION

In writing this paper, the term "black" rather than "African American" was used. This was not an accident. The term was used to define a sense of universality with black struggles everywhere. As much as racial bias plays a part in the problems facing the black dimension in the United States, it is necessary that black struggle is recognized as a universal premise that is not bound by national origins, or internal, cultural, or geographic divisions. It is important that all aspects of the black dimension play a role regardless of their condition, for only then can we reverse the trend toward third-class existence, revisiting the precepts that once defined chattel slavery in this country.

The lack of viable and aggressive black leadership both at home and abroad is a transient cause of black downward trends. These leaders must be willing to address black problems in a more assertive manner, beginning, of course, with learning to work together for a common goal. It is easier to dominate a section of society if that element is already alienated, depersonalized, and subjected to deculturalization from within.²⁴

When Representative Maxine Waters first called attention to the influx of

²³ In Stephen Steinberg's essay, "The Liberal Retreat from Race During the Post-Civil Rights Era," in *The House That Race Built* (1998). Edited by Wahneema Lubiano. New York: Vintage Books, 13-86.

²⁴ From the author's essay "On Race and Class," published in *News and Letters*, June 2000, 8.

crack cocaine into her district, prisoners were disheartened to find that other black leaders chose to be less than supportive, even though similar trends were also occurring in their communities. There are no quick-fix solutions to problems facing the black dimension, and yet no fix will be forthcoming if black leadership cannot define a consistent and unified response to problems that face the black community-at-large. Additionally, any response must take into account all members of the community, regardless of social standing and national origin. When Amadou Diallo was killed by New York City police officers, they were not concerned that he was an "African American." Rather, they saw his black skin without regard to his country of origin. In defining the trials and needs of the black dimension, we must take care to not use terms or concepts that distract us from focusing on and pursuing the much larger and more pertinent issues at hand.

Those who feel that prison issues and community issues are separate should look at the fulcrum upon which the uprisings of Attica, California, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Ohio, and Georgia rested. Compare them to the community uprisings in Los Angeles, Miami, and Cincinnati and the causal factors will be the same: underrepresentation, frustration, class, and economic discrimination, summed up in one word – racism. When a community becomes self-deprecating, it gives *carte blanche* to the bourgeoisie to attack that weakness and find ways to criminalize its members. Community self-deprecation is a precursor to the conditions necessary for totalitarian government, giving the agents of over-control a lasting foothold in the community from which there is no viable escape.

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