



November 2011

## Students Against Mass Incarceration

Volume 1, Issue 1

### Upcoming Events:

- November 9th  
SAMI General  
Body Meeting.  
6PM on the 3rd  
Floor of  
Douglass Hall
- November 10th  
in the West  
ballroom of  
Howard Uni-  
versity's Black-  
burn Center  
come hear from  
Political Pris-  
oner Marshall  
Eddie Conway.
- November 16th  
at 7 PM the  
Nyumburu Cul-  
tural Center at  
UMD College  
Park come dis-  
cuss the impact  
of mass incar-  
ceration on the  
Black commu-  
nity.

### Introduction

Uhuru Sasa! Students Against Mass Incarceration (SAMI) at Howard University are proud to present the first edition of Unity & Struggle, a monthly newsletter which is dedicated to raising awareness and building a nationwide movement around the issues of mass incarceration, political prisoners, recidivism and other related matters. SAMI is a New Afrikan/Black student organization which was formed in February of 2011 on the campus of Howard University by students who felt that there needed to be a concerted effort to challenge and defeat the prison industrial complex (PIC) as it currently exists in the United States, especially since the PIC has targeted New Afrikan/Black people specifically for oppression. Ultimately we hope that this newsletter will ignite a flame of resistance in the hearts and minds of people and will lead them to organize similar groups and take action however they see fit.

SAMI is a New Afrikan/Black student organization that is anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and supports the prison abolitionist movement. We see capitalism, and more specifically the profit motive, as one of the major reasons for the expansion of the PIC over the past forty years. Groups like the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) among many others have been making a great profit off of the imprisonment of our people and we believe that the human rights of our people should come before profits. We also see that the ruling elite became increasingly concerned



with “law and order” following the social revolution of the 1960’s and 70’s when many people in this country began to challenge the status quo and where fighting for radical change in the United States. This led to a dramatic increase in the prison population which grew from about 200,000 people in 1971 to over 2,000,000 today.

We also believe that New Afrikans/Blacks in the United States are a colonized people who need to continue the struggle for national liberation. The idea that New Afrikans are a colonized people is not new as people such as Kwame Ture and Robert Allen have articulated this concept in the past. It is important that this theory is reassessed as it definitely relates to our current situation. We support prison abolition and not reform because we believe there needs to be radical change in this country which reformist measures cannot

## Introduction Continued

accomplish. We believe that prisons are the primary tool of social control used by an oppressive state and to maintain the gross inequalities which exist in the United States, colonized peoples such as New Afrikans, Puerto Ricans, American Indians and working class whites all have become targets for this repressive, money making scheme. Any claims that prisons, as they exist today in the United States, are anything other than tools of social control and a for profit industry are completely false.

Unity & Struggle will present the perspectives of SAMI members, prisoners, political prisoners and other radical and progressive thinkers on numerous topics related to mass incarceration. Many of the writings of

prisoners come from those in the Maryland/DC area whom we have a strong working relationship with. We hope to provide them with a platform to express their opinions on issues that affect them directly. Again we would also like to inspire other New Afrikan students and community members to organize around these same issues as we see mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex as the 21st centuries “New Jim Crow” system in the words of legal scholar Michelle Alexander. Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter and we hope that you will be inspired to take action and organize against all forms of oppression.

Alhaji Conteh- SAMI Co-Founder/  
Editor

*Most of today's black convicts have come to understand that they are the most abused victims of an unrighteous order.*

*George Jackson*

## The Perverse Slave Mentality

The 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution reads: “Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, nor any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution reads in part: “Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States, and subject to the wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liber-

ty, or property, without due process of law; not deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of laws.”

What does the exception clause in the 13th Amendment mean? What does the naturalization clause in the 14th Amendment mean? Ultimately, this means slavery in the U.S. was never abolished; instead it was institutionalized in the prison system. The government ended chattel slavery and instituted penal slavery. Today, in the U.S. prison system, 47% of all prisoners are of Afrikan descent. Do you believe this is by accident? Do you believe that 47% of 12.5% of the entire American population are consciously and deliberately criminal? When considering the naturalization laws

## The Perverse Slave Mentality Continued

of the 14th Amendment in light of its history, the question must be raised: Did Afrikans at the end of chattel slavery vote upon or agree to become U.S. citizens? Were they provided an opportunity to return to Afrika, to establish their own independence and nation, or have the opportunity to have dual citizenship between the U.S. and Afrikan countries? If not, why not?

When we look at the socio-economic and political state of Afrikans in the diaspora, it is important to consider to what extent the peculiar institution of slavery continues to influence behavior and relationships between and among people of Afrikan descent and between nation-states. Obviously, there exists an extreme problem of assimilation and acculturation, where the dominant culture has denied or severely undermined the indigenous culture and ethos of Afrikan peoples. The prevailing condition must be addressed in a struggle to rectify the ill effects of assimilation and acculturation. It will not be until people of Afrikan descent resolve this issue of identity, subject to the misfortune of slavery, when they will cease to continue to suffer the ills of the experience of slavery.

For example, many identify themselves as Afrikan-American, recently acquiescing to the ideals promulgated by the Black assimilation and the integrationist movement. However, the acceptance of this identity, I dare say, affirms and coalesces a form of schizophrenia as proffered by Frantz Fanon in his book, *Black Skin White Mask*. For the question must be asked, when has America been in support of Afrika? However, these assimilationists identify with a system of government whose interest in half of what they identify themselves as being, is in direct opposition to their very existence. The conflict is real, one in which psychological dynamic surfaces in thinking and behavior, with actions that are not in the best interest of Afrika. Obviously, the American side of their identity overwhelms and dominates their Afrikan side to the overall detriment of all Afrikan descendants.

Unfortunately, this reality is not isolated to North America; rather it is an identity crisis that hinders the advent of a Pan-Afrikanist movement. Afrikans in the diaspora have been divided into a myriad of nationalities throughout the Caribbean, North and South America as the slave experience, continues to adversely influence our existence, deny our common reality of national oppression no matter our geographical location. This reality should scream out from the very pores of our bodies, demanding and claiming an Afrikan heritage and reality.

However, this does not require a negation of the horrendous Afrikan experience in the Americas. What is required is rectifying the assimilationist/integrationist philosophy, and forging a socio-economic political and cultural determinant that coalesces in a New Afrikan reality. Hence, not only should this reality internalize the salve history in the diaspora, but also further incorporate the Afrikan history from the onset of the Atlantic slave trade. Who then are these descendants? In essence, we are the aggregation of all those parts of the Atlantic slave trade (Hausa, Fulani, Mandingo, Mandinka, Ibo, Dutch, Portuguese, English, Spanish, French, Taino, Arawak, etc.), a forced miscegenation of a genetic mix resulting into the New Afrikan.

It is here argued and postulated, we are not Afrikan-Americans, but rather need to identify ourselves as New Afrikans. Even more, we need to embrace this reality with our common histories and mix languages to speak to the rest of the world from that reality. The Dutch-speaking Afrikans of Suriname, the Portuguese-speaking Afrikans of Brazil, the Spanish-speaking Afrikans of Cuba and Puerto Rico, the French-speaking Afrikans of Haiti, the English-speaking Afrikans in other parts of the Americas have a unique historical voice that, when united in Pan-Afrikan unity must demand recognition from the world. Here, lie the true significance and demand of reparations, the need to repair what has been broken due to the experience of the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, assimilation, and acculturation. It is when we announce ourselves to the world as being New Afrikans that we will have divorced ourselves psychologically from the schizophrenia that ultimately denied our heritage and struggle for true liberation and independence.

## The Perverse Slave Mentality

Therefore, when we look into the mirror, I hope we all will see the prison that continues to enslave; the prison absent the bars, gun towers, and steel cages; but rather the prison of the mind imposed by a perverse slave mentality, adjusted and in conformity to the denial, we are New Afrikan people. Know that our salvation will be when we break the shackles that bind our minds to identify with those who never had our best interests at heart, and continue to deny reparations for their crimes against our collective Afrikan humanity.

I urge all to struggle to free ourselves from the prison in our minds, and in doing so, liberate ourselves from a perverse slave mentality that has denied our New Afrikaness in its totality. For America has never abolished slavery, only institutionalized it in the subtlety of making you believe yourself to be an American!

Excerpt taken from *We Are Our Own Liberators: Selected Prison Writings* by Jalil Muntaqim (Current



## New Political Prisoners

Now that economic interests are intrinsically linked to penal institutions and prisoners, the term “political prisoner” takes on a new meaning. Narrowly defined, politics is the mechanism in which humans use shrewd, deceptive and crafty means to obtain economic and/or social power. No one is immune to politics. Prisoners, simply put, are typically those not shrewd, deceptive, and crafty enough to obtain enough economic and/social power to eschew the rank and file of the downtrodden and oppressed.

America makes no apology for being a capitalist nation. Every resource within our economy must be competed for (through free enterprise). We built a multi-billion dollar military industry to defend ourselves against the tortures of communism or socialism. Who wants to labor under an economic system that allows for the resources to be distributed equally or fairly? Early in life, one must learn that we live in a competitive world, not a compassionate one.

In order for our system of economics (Capitalism—our way of life) to work, a huge percentage of the population must be marginalized or completely disenfranchised. Certain school districts and living environments have to exist to reinforce apathy and a sense of defeatism. For penal institutions have to be populated.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, it became difficult, perhaps even impossible, to promote communism (an economic system diametrically opposed to ours) as the greatest threat to our national security. Half a billion dollar stealth bombers could no longer be sold to the American tax-payers. The Russians were no longer coming. The evil U.S.S.R. was dissolved. Crime is now viewed as the great threat to the nation’s security. The tax-payers are now

## New Political Prisoners Concluded

bilked into purchasing half billion dollar crime packages (new guns and cars for police, cameras and high-tech prisons) for states and other municipalities.

The uneducated, undisciplined brothers on the ghetto street corners trying to make enough money to buy sneakers or to cover the rent at their girlfriends section 8 apartment constitute the greatest threat to the nation's security proclaim the deceivers. Of course, that is preposterous. It is simply an act of politics, a shrewd, deceptive, and crafty way to advance the social and/or economic interests of a few at the woeful expense of the many. Thus, a new form of "political prisoner" is created. And, I am among the ranks.

When I came to prison in 1985, prisoners were far less tractable than they are now. But the prison industrial complex had not reached its current size and strength at that time either. The tax-payers were still being hoodwinked into spending a half-billion dollars per weapon to defeat communism. This was being done because communism was seen as a direct threat to American imperialism and capitalism. The Communist Manifesto states "To each according to his need and from each according to his ability" and this was far too dangerous of an idea to prevail.

Alas, the Soviet Union and communism failed and, therefore, could no longer be sold or promoted as the greatest threat to our national security. That multi-billion dollar industry that marketed communism as the nefarious enemy of our nation had to find another target. For no nation's economy can allow a multi-billion dollar industry to disappear or dissolve.

The common criminals on the street corners became an easy target. Keep the poor folks in the inner-cities around the country marginalized and disenfranchised. Maintain schools in these communities that do not foster growth or equip them with marketable skills to compete. The dismal conditions and economically depressive circumstances that permeate their environment will perpetuate violent, criminal behaviors and the need for prisons will grow exponentially.

Folks in rural areas, who typically vote and consciously participate in the political process, will have the penal institutions built in their communities. They will no longer have to rely upon the farming trade, which pays \$18-20,000 a year. They will have lucrative prison jobs that pay \$40-50,000 a year if people from inner city communities with their failing schools, lack of job opportunities and dejected spirits continue to populate these penal institutions. No longer are political prisoners rare men and women of profound conviction. Political prisoners, now, are simply men and women who fail to secure enough social and/or economic power to protect themselves from the sinister industry that needs the downtrodden to advance its interests.

Arlando "Tray" Jones III- Prisoner/Author of Eager Street: A Life on the Corner and Behind Bars.



## The Racist Roots of Campus Policing

“Overseer, Overseer, Overseer, Overseer  
Officer, Officer, Officer, Officer!  
Yeah, officer from overseer  
You need a little clarity?  
Check the similarity!”

-KRS One, “Sound of Da Police”

On Sept. 16, the Students Against Mass Incarceration (SAMI) held a rally at the flagpole on The Yard in support of Troy Davis, inviting community members and the media to protest the injustice of the impending execution. Not only was the media barred from campus, but HUPD stated that because the protest was not authorized by the university, the rally could not take place.

When the point was raised that fraternal organizations did not need authorization to do stepping routines on the yard, SAMI was told “that’s a tradition.” Well, in the militant tradition of Howard student takeovers in 1925, 1968, and 1989 SAMI preceded with the rally, consequences be damned.

Why did the campus police attempt to stop the rally? In an article entitled “The Modern Campus Police” John Sloan shows that contemporary campus police are a response to the student rebellions in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Think about it, Black students all over the country were taking over administration buildings and the anti-war movement was in full swing.

Since campus security could not put down these rebellions, the National Guard often had to be called in. At places like Jackson State, South Carolina State, and Kent State some students were even killed in campus rebellions. Therefore, the campus police did their historical and assigned role: putting down any and all potential radical student activity.

Thus, the campus police and the American police force appear to have similar origins and purposes, maintaining “order” and squashing any potential acts of rebellion. Several scholars and commentators have traced the origin of American policing to the slave

patrols in the American south. Slave patrols were composed primarily of lower class whites who put down insurrections of enslaved Africans and caught those who attempted to escape enslavement.

Armed with this information, no Black person should be shocked by the over-policing in our communities or by that campus police officer who flies on his Segway to the scene of a student protest, but is mysteriously missing when you need an escort.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense stated that the role of the police in Black communities is similar to that of an occupying army. The primary purpose of police is to protect property: Howard University, its image, reputation (oh yeah, and you, the student [intellectual property],too). Whether on campus or in the community, understanding that the purpose of the police is primarily one of social control can only serve to enlighten and enhance our inevitable interactions with them as Black youth.

This does not mean that individual Black policeman are our inherent enemies, but the police are an institution. Although individual Black policeman are our potential working class allies, unfortunately, that is not usually the case at Howard, or in the world.

As students, acknowledging and challenging the racial roots and consequences of policing—in all its forms—is an important step towards stopping the trend of criminal injustice in our communities.

Benjamin Woods- Co-Founder of SAMI

This article originally appeared in the Howard University student newspaper the Hilltop.



## Personal Experience in Prison

As I engross myself in view and thought, to pass on to you just a stranger suffering the obstacles and appearing in a heart's cry behind "the walls of silence."

I am the lost human heart, imprisoned in the foul dungeons of man's dictates, tied with chains of earthly authority, dead and forgotten by laughing humanity, whose tongue is tied and whose eyes are empty of visible tears. Landing in a new world of what I call "The Walls of Silence."

I have extended considerable effort to overcome such a world by including the experience, the terrible price to pay just to stay alive, or should I say just to exist. Myself, however, is inexorably bound to my present, although in memory I can move into the past, and in imagination I can roam into the future.

What I want to explore now are a few of the subtle elements that I have observed to be optimistic. We all believe many things, and sometimes our beliefs are proved wrong, often with disastrous consequences, such as my situation. The question of the nature of knowledge, "Is there a real objective world outside the mind, or is the world in part at least constructed by the mind?"

So to meet those needs of controversy that we're faced with on a regular basis, always remember, the only effective challenge to power is one that is broad enough to make isolation impossible. So on that note, I'll leave you with this element...

The strong can afford to be incompetent or wrong sometimes without loss of face, because even the mightiest and most capable of men are only human.

So with that, I close with the viewpoint of a little child, hoping you will grow older into my words of knowing the stranger behind the walls of silence.

His name is Gary Baynor, The One

A Friend of Friend

## Contact SAMI

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All artwork in Unity & Struggle is by Kevin Rashid Johnson prison activist and author of *Defying the Tomb*

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## A FEW RESOURCES

### Suggested Readings

*The Greatest Threat* by Marshall “Eddie” Conway

*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander

*We Are Our Own Liberators: Selected Prison Writings* by Jalil Muntquim

*Women in Behind Bars* by Vernetta D. Young and Rebecca Reviere

“The Prison Industrial Complex” by Eric Schlosser

### Internet news sites

#### The San Francisco Bayview

<http://sfbayview.com/category/news/>

#### Black Agenda Report

<http://blackagendareport.com/>

#### People of Color Organize

<http://www.peopleofcolororganize.com/>

#### VOXUNION

<http://www.voxunion.com/>