

# Cradle-to-prison pipeline has to be broken

By Marian Wright Edelman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The founding fathers drafted the Constitution as a roadmap to, as the Preamble says, "establish justice, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

Somehow, over the last 220 years, our nation lost its way and developed a system that has established America as the prison capital of the world.

There are more than 2 million people incarcerated in America, including 837,000 African-American men — our fathers, brothers, children and grandchildren. A growing number of our sisters and mothers are also behind bars.

On September 25 and 26, the Children's Defense Fund convened a national Summit on America's Cradle-to-Prison Pipeline Crisis at Howard University to focus on the looming national catastrophe for all Americans but especially for the African-American and Latino communities.

A Black boy who is 6 years old today has a 1-in-3 chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a Black 6-year-old girl has a 1-in-17 chance. A Latino 6-year-old boy has a 1-in-6 chance, and a Latina girl has a 1-in-45 chance.

Tens of thousands of children and teens

are sucked into the pipeline each year as they struggle to grow up at the dangerous intersection of poverty and race.

It's time to name and change the cradle-to-prison pipeline and stop the feeder systems that are sentencing our children to social and economic death and eroding the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, which were built on such great toil and sacrifice.

At the Howard Summit, CDF released a report on the problem, and everyone should read, share and discuss this problem in your homes, congregations, communities and organizations. Decide how you are going to be a part of the solution rather than the problem.

It's time for all adults to hear and respond to the cries of our children for help.

It is time for the adults of every race and income group to break our silence about the pervasive breakdown of moral, family, community and national values; to place our children first in our lives, and to struggle to model the behavior we want our children to learn. We do not have a 'child and youth problem,'



Marian Wright Edelman

we have a profound adult problem.

CDF's report documents the convergence and accumulation of multiple social and economic risks and a national ethos that too frequently chooses incarceration over healthy child and youth development. The cradle-to-prison pipeline crisis can be reduced to the simple facts that (1) the United States of America does not provide a level playing field for all children, and (2) our nation does not value and protect all children's lives equally.

Jena, La., is just the latest glaring example of how poverty and race converge to pull poor males of color into the cradle-to-prison pipeline. A Black youth is 48 times more likely than a White youth to be incarcerated for the same or similar drug offense.

CDF's report describes the conditions that force many poor infants in rich America into the prison pipeline from birth because they enter the world with multiple strikes against them.

These are the children of poor single mothers without prenatal care; children who have no access to health and mental healthcare,

whose family and community supports are inadequate to prevent abuse and neglect. They have poor or no early childhood education opportunities to prepare them for school, and they attend schools that expect little, teach little and that exclude and criminalize them at younger and younger ages. These are the children with too few positive role models and no alternatives to the streets.

Other factors and systems that feed children into the pipeline include dysfunctional families and failing schools that are not preparing our children to read and compete and that are criminalizing our young children of color. We can also look at the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

But, the biggest problem is you and me and the lack of focused attention and outreach; the lack of a visible, organized voice from parents, the faith community and political leaders to protect children.

This pipeline is not an act of God; it's the result of human choices, actions and inaction, a result that we can and must change now and together. The report is available on CDF's website, [ChildrensDefense.org](http://ChildrensDefense.org).

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council.

## Black America under attack from so many areas

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In case you haven't noticed, Black people are under full attack in this country. The Jena Six case is just another in a long line of travesties heaped upon Black people by our so-called criminal justice system. All over this country, there are cases of gross injustice against Black people, so much so that we could conduct a march every week if we chose to deal with them all. Maybe that's the point: I wonder how many of those who went to Jena, La., have similar situations in their own cities. I also wonder if they have marched and protested in their own backyards about that injustice.

Let's put it right out there, brothers and sisters. Black folk are a mere afterthought in this country. The following is an excerpt from my book, "Black Empowerment with an Attitude — You got a problem with that?"

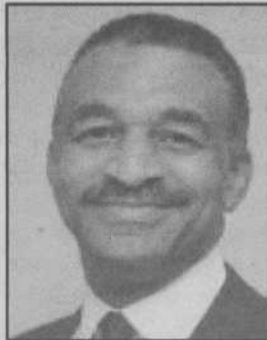
Read this part of it, and think about our standing in the USA.

"After our 'official' arrival in this land, in 1619, up until now, we have been overlooked, mistreated, denied access, used and abused, enslaved, auctioned off, whipped, branded, raped, lynched or otherwise murdered, unjustly incarcerated, corralled in urban centers and then destroyed by urban renewal,

shot 27 times, 41 times, and 50 times by police officers, hosed down, bitten by dogs, beat down for trying to walk across a bridge, cheated by banks and insurance companies, used in wars, used as guinea pigs for medical experiments, denied the right to vote even after the 15th Amendment, excluded from economic development projects, paid less than White

folks for doing the same jobs, denied employment and promotions, discriminated against at every turn, gerrymandered, firebombed, maced, tasered, choked, prodded in the rectum with a broomstick in the hands of police officers, abandoned to drown in the polluted and alligator infested water left in Katrina's wake; and then, to add insult to injury, or just to really let us know how much of an afterthought we truly are, nearly two years after Hurricane Katrina, Black people in New Orleans are still homeless, still jobless and still suffering."

A Black teenage boy in L.A. was beaten by a cop; the officer sued and received over a million dollars. In Palmdale, Calif., a young sister, 16 years of age, was manhandled by a school security guard after she accidentally



JAMES CLINGMAN

dropped some birthday cake on the floor; the brute threw her across a table and broke the girl's arm.

Another young sister was kidnapped, raped and tortured by a group of degenerates in West Virginia; the feds said it was not a "hate crime."

William Mayo still sits in a Georgia prison after 15 years; it

sure would be great to see 50,000 folks marching on his behalf and sending in money for his defense. Genarlow Wilson is still in jail, too. A minister, Lennox Yearwood, was gang tackled by police outside a U.S. Congressional hearing room as he stood in line to get into a hearing on the Iraq war; they broke his leg. And 14-year-old Shaquanda Cotton was thrown in prison for seven years for shoving a hall monitor.

A Black woman in Cincinnati was sent to jail without bond because a dead dog was found in her backyard, while a White woman was not even prosecuted for leaving her 2-year-old daughter in her car for eight hours, where the temperature rose as high as 140 degrees. The baby died.

Another Black woman was sent to jail for leaving her 6-year-old in bed asleep while she walked down the street to the drugstore. She gets back to find seven police officers and television news reporters with their cameras in her home. She was also arrested and kept in jail until the Cincinnati NAACP rallied to get her out, as was the result in the "dead dog" case.

A Black man sits in Cincinnati's jail with a \$100,000 cash bond because he forgot about a small knife in his backpack as he went through the metal detector at the courthouse. No, he was not trying to sneak it in; he just forgot it was in the bag, as some of us forget

things in our bags when we go through airport security.

The Black man "forgot" about the knife, but instead of confiscating it, the police arrested him. The White woman "forgot" her child, who died a horrible death, but instead of charging her with child neglect, the prosecutor said "it was mistake... an accident... she didn't mean to do it." Obviously, the "I forgot" defense does not work for Black folks.

We have young Black children across this country being assaulted, handcuffed, threatened, and intimidated by police and security guards, and we even have laws on the books that 7-year-olds can be electrocuted with Taser Guns. What have we become? Or, as my Letter to White Americans points out, we are what we have always been: a country where Black life is just an afterthought, so much so that we are contributing to our demise by abusing and killing one another. Self-fulfilling prophecy?

We are at war with those who are supposed to protect and serve us, and we are at war with those among us who have succumbed to the death-grip of crime, thuggery, gangsterism, self-hate, and fratricide. What must our young children think about us, their parents? How do you think they feel about our failure to protect them from this madness?

Yes, we have Jena's all over this country. Let the marches begin everywhere. Let the collective work and responsibility begin. Stand up against injustice and crime wherever they exist, regardless of the perpetrators' skin color. Oh yeah, and let your dollars do the talking and the walking when it comes to dealing with police brutality and discriminatory courts.

James Clingman is an educator and author of a Black Economic Empowerment book series.

### Reed

(Continued from Page 8)

Rather than resting on their laurels after abolishing apartheid in South Africa, African-Americans need to take another look at South Africa and focus on ways to build the economy and infrastructure through policies and programs that encourage businesses, provide job training and empower the population.

The African People's Solidarity Committee and Uhuru Movement "African People's Solidarity Day" events take place Oct. 13 - 21 in the following cities: Oct. 13 - 14 in Oakland, Calif.; Oct. 16 in St. Petersburg, Fla., and Oct. 20 - 21 in Philadelphia, Penn.

William Reed is president and CEO of Black Press International.