

OUR VIEW

Save Our Men

America jails its young. And its old, and its infirm, and its mentally disturbed. And its behaviorally challenged. But America has a special fervor for jailing its brown-skinned citizens, particularly Black men (though it should be noted that the incarceration rates of Black women has exploded in recent years). For years we've been told that there are more Black men in prison than in college. A close look at Census and Department of Justice statistics shows that that's not true, that it's numerically impossible, that this myth has been peddled by mainstream America — and repeated by many in Black America — so much that it's become an accepted truth.

What is true, however, is that there is a statistical inequity in American incarceration rates. Blacks are more likely to be imprisoned for crimes that Whites receive probation or more lenient jail sentences for. An outgrowth on America's let's-get-tough-on-crime era, mandatory minimum sentencing has effectively criminalized a generation of low-level, non-violent offenders. The creation of special operations units to crack down on gangs has made entire neighborhoods ripe for framing innocents. The long arm of the law is longer and stronger when it comes to African-American suspects. Often they receive harsher punishments for the same crimes committed by people of other races. And young Black offenders seem more likely to be tried as adults and sentenced to adult prisons rather than juvenile correctional facilities.

According to an article in the *Washington Post*: "An August 2003 Bureau of Justice Statistics analysis shows that 32 percent of Black males born in 2001 can expect to spend time in prison over the course of their lifetime. That is up from 13.4 percent in 1974 and 29.4 percent in 1991. By contrast, 17.2 percent of Hispanics and 5.9 percent of Whites born in 2001 are likely to end up in prison."

America, we have a problem. We could talk all day about how laws, law enforcement, economics, racism, environmental discrimination, welfare and a host of other factors conspire to suppress Black Americans in general and Black men, in particular. We know the enemy, and it is everyone — including us. Too often, we're our own worst enemies. Too many Black men have demonized each other. Drugs, gang tensions and easy access to weapons exacerbate tensions and create a climate where violence is viewed as the way to solve problems. We must, as a community, begin helping the masses of lost young Black males find their way back. We need more efforts like the Black Male Initiative at the City University of New York, whose goal is to "increase, encourage, and support the inclusion and educational success of under-represented groups in higher education, in particular Black males." It's discouraging that efforts like CUNY's, which are being replicated across the country, have come under attack by Ward Connerly types, castigated as discriminatory and antithetical to civil rights laws. It's probably only a matter of time before the Bush Administration bows to conservative attack dogs like Michael Meyers who wrote in a February 2008 post on www.mindingthecampus.com:

"At a recent Manhattan Institute forum, Ward Connerly, the fierce opponent of race and sex preferences by government (who's leading a state-by-state referendum drive to abolish affirmative action) admitted how the Bush Administration has disgraced itself by endorsing racial and gender-conscious policies and practices. Connerly did not give examples, but one glaring illustration is President Bush's Education Department's failure to address racial and gender discrimination underway in public schools and higher education in the guise of helping Black men through differential treatment and separate programming."

Meyers, Connerly and their ilk would have you believe that these programs are robbing the federal government's coffers. Please! Whatever these programs get, consider it recompense for slavery, racism, misogyny, lynchings, Jim Crow, police brutality, economic apartheid, police brutality, emasculation, drugs, oppressive laws and disenfranchisement. Kudos to all the individuals, groups, businesses, colleges and entities who invest time, money, resources, as well as affection, patience, love and even their lives to molding Black boys into men and restoring dignity and a self of self-worth to all Black men.



Critics: Disassociate or else

By George E Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

A third person has suddenly appeared in the contest between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton — Minister Louis Farrakhan. Though Farrakhan hasn't shared the stage with the two Democratic candidates, he has become the litmus test for Obama and any African-Americans seeking public office.

Before addressing the presidential flap over Farrakhan, it should be noted that Obama isn't the only Black office-seeker being pressured to repudiate the Nation of Islam leader. In Indianapolis, Andre Carson is seeking the congressional seat held by his deceased grandmother, Julia Carson. A special election will be held March 11 to the fill the vacancy.

Farrakhan delivered a eulogy at Rep. Carson's funeral last December and though Andre Carson had nothing to do with funeral plans, he is being criticized for Farrakhan's presence.

Not only was Carson uninvolved in planning his grandmother's funeral, the candidate says he has never been a member of the Nation of Islam and is, in fact, a Sunni Muslim.

In Minnesota, Keith Ellison, the first Muslim to serve in Congress, is facing criticism because he spoke favorably of the Nation of Islam as a college student. He denounced the Nation of Is-



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lam during his successful 2006 campaign, but he is still being dogged by his past affiliation.

Former Rep. Cynthia McKinney was defeated in Georgia and is trying to revive her political career by running for president on the Green Party ticket. McKinney claimed that she was targeted for defeat in 2006 by major Jewish organizations after Farrakhan campaigned on her behalf.

Of course, Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign became sidetracked until he repudiated Farrakhan, one of his earliest and strongest backers, in a Manchester, N.H. synagogue. And Kweisi Mfume, then serving as chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, was forced to back away from a proposed covenant between the CBC and Farrakhan.

As Obama would later learn, even when Minister Farrakhan is denounced in the strongest possible terms, that still will not satisfy voracious critics.

On the eve of the Million Man March in 1995, President Clinton, speaking in

Austin, Texas, said: "One million men are right to be standing up for personal responsibility. But 1 million men do not make right one man's message of malice and division," a reference to Farrakhan, organizer of the march.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole of Kansas blasted Clinton for not being even stronger in his criticism of Farrakhan.

"I am shocked and dismayed that President Clinton did not find the moral courage to denounce Louis Farrakhan by name in his speech today in Texas," Dole said.

"Farrakhan is a racist and anti-Semite, unhinged by hate. He has no place in American public life, and all who would lead must say so."

NBC's Tim Russert raised the Farrakhan issue at the debate last week, asking

Obama: "Do you accept the support of Louis Farrakhan?"

OBAMA: You know, I have been very clear in my denunciation of Minister Farrakhan's anti-Semitic comments. I think that they are unacceptable and reprehensible. I did not solicit this support. He expressed pride in an African-American who seems to be bringing the country together. I obviously can't censor him, but it is not support that I sought. And we're not doing anything, I assure you, formally or informally with Minister Farrakhan.

RUSSETT: Do you reject his support?

OBAMA: Well, Tim, you know, I can't say to somebody that he can't say that he thinks I'm a good guy. (Laughter.) ... I have been very clear in my denunciations of him and his past statements, and I think that indicates to the American people what my stance is on

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