

Black females victimized by justice system

By Dr. Elsie Scott
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When the subject of the criminal justice system and its impact on the African-American community is discussed, the emphasis is usually placed on males.

This is understandable if we focus exclusively on numbers. Black males are victimized, arrested and incarcerated in much greater numbers than Black females. For example, in 2007, Black males were incarcerated at a rate of 3,138 per 100,000 Black males in the population; Black females were incarcerated at a rate of 150 per 100,000.

The number of females arrested and incarcerated has been steadily increasing, but the criminal justice system has been slow to make the accommodations necessary to address their needs. The physical facilities and institutional policies are often designed to address a male population.

When I worked for the New York Police Department, I headed a group that looked at the integration of female police officers into the department. We found that the precincts were built with no female showers, locker spaces and bathrooms; there was no pregnancy policy, and no accommodations were

made for officers with children. Similarly, female prison facilities tend to be designed by males for a smaller female population. Maximum-security inmates are housed with nonviolent offenders; and in the older jails, female detainees are confined to spaces that were not designed to accommodate the special needs of females.

The unique social needs of female inmates often are not addressed in prison policies and programs. The cost of incarcerating a female tends to be higher because convicted females are more likely to have dependent children, and female inmates are more likely to need mental health services.

It has been estimated that over 60 percent of incarcerated Black females have dependent children. Many of these children have to receive governmental assistance after their mother is imprisoned.

Many Black female inmates were victims of abuse as a child and/or as an adult. The history of abuse contributes to the need for mental health services, which may not be



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available at the facility where they are incarcerated.

President Obama's agenda calls for support for ex-offenders, eliminating sentencing disparities between crack and powder-based cocaine, and expanding the use of drug courts. If implemented, these programs will help improve the plight of males and females who are caught up in the criminal justice system.

In addition, the agenda also calls for measures to reduce domestic violence and strengthen domestic violence legislation. A number of highly publicized cases of Black female domestic abuse draw attention to the need for these measures.

There is, however, a need for additional policies and programs to target specific conditions and circumstances that directly affect females, especially Black females. The president's agenda calls for job training, substance abuse and mental health counseling for ex-offenders. Similar programs are needed as crime prevention tools and for females in prison.

Job training at female prisons tends to prepare women for "female" jobs such as cosmetology and culinary arts, which is needed. But there is also a need for training that will prepare them for the new technology-driven jobs. Mental health counseling can help them prepare psychologically for what they will face in the job market after they are released.

One of the biggest needs relates to keeping mothers connected to their children. Studies have shown that the disconnection to a mother can lead to psychological scars to a child. The female prison in many states is located in rural areas, creating challenges for family visits, especially for poor families and young children.

Most Black female inmates are from urban areas, and most are poor or in the lower income category. Creating more community-based corrections programs can help incarcerated mothers remain connected to their children and can create more job opportunities for those inmates who qualify for work outside the prison facility.

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Prisons filled with some of Black America's best

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

America became the leading nation in the world through its victories and leadership during World War II. Our 65 year reign is the shortest in history and we are a far way from having any kind of seniority in this position. We have made many mistakes along the way such as slavery, land theft and apartheid.

The good news is that we are finding ways to correct our faults and move forward. There is one serious fault that we have yet to actually address. That is the medieval prison system that we have implemented and have actually enlarged over the last few decades.

No other nation imprisons its citizens the way America does. For a free democratic nation we have a system that belongs with some sort of tyranny or oppressive order. It is oppressive and targets people of color — particularly African-Americans.

There are more African-American males in prisons than in college institutions. That is not the stuff that makes a nation great.

I have a degree in Correctional Administration from the University of Wisconsin. It

was during internships that I noticed the actual prison systems did not match the scholarly material I was studying.

There was no direct attempt to address recidivism or actually rehabilitate offenders. The prisons were warehouses that eventually developed into "cash cows" by the manipulative and greedy U.S. prisons for the most part have become predators on the general population.

Most people who enter prison are there because they could not afford to have adequate legal representation. Once they enter the system there are programs and "catches" that keep them returning or not leaving at all.

I believe that 80 percent of those who are currently incarcerated should not even be there. They are no threat to society and should come out and start contributing.

That is not going to happen too soon. First of all, there are a lot of people who rely on a good population within prison grounds. Labor unions representing the guards lobby and



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ensure that they lock up as many as they can and keep the revolving door going for those who get out but are destined to return.

The construction lobby keeps the state and federal budgets flush with new capital for building more and more prisons. As they build them the demand for more inmates increases. Then there is the slave labor within the prison cells which is also known as "prison industries."

The incarcerated are forced to work 10-14 hours a day for the total pay of about \$1.70 per day (not an hour — a day!). The owners of the prisons and the outside contractors sell the products of this work for whopping profits and personal gain. Privatized prisons are the worst as the profit motive greatly increases.

The families of the incarcerated are exploited as well. They have to send money to their loved ones, as the prison cannot adequately provide nourishment and necessities.

The money is used to buy items from the Commissary which is a total rip off joint. As an example, a seven ounce can of Folgers coffee will cost an inmate \$7.50. That is triple the amount Safeway or Kroger would charge. Who is getting the big profit?

If they make a call to family members by the only method, collect calls, it won't be through AT&T, Verizon, Sprint or someone like that. It will be with some kind of private venture and it will cost \$6 — \$10 a minute. It is just a set-up to rip off families who can afford it the least.

Many inmates make good use of their free time. They get educated and train themselves. But can they ever put these new skills or formal training to work? Right now the only logical path for them is entrepreneurship.

That is something prisons refuse to teach them. If they become entrepreneurs, they probably will never return and that will hurt this Prison Industrial Complex.

My wife and I work with a few prisoners all the time. Our aim is to stay focused on this issue and do what we can to get them freed.

We have successfully stayed with one sister, who is now back into the general population, and our aim is to get her economically stable to ensure she doesn't get caught in the revolving door. We also are helping a young brother in the Patuxent Correctional facility in Maryland.

He has been there for 14 years with no violation whatsoever. He has obtained two college degrees and is a serious computer programmer, which the facility exploits for \$1.70 per day.

Fourteen straight years and they won't even give him a parole hearing, let alone a parole. He has become a victim of his own genius. They don't want to lose him.

America, we have got to end this prison system now!

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campuses are not welcoming places for students of color, whether or not they are athletes."

In a report issued in February comparing racial and gender progress in all sports, universities received a C+ for race, lower than the professional sports leagues.

"The primary problem, regarding racial hiring practices, is that Whites still dominated key positions," said a racial and gender report card issued by the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports. "They hold between 88-97 percent of all positions in the following categories in Division I, II and III: university presidents, athletic directors, head coaches, associate athletic directors, faculty and athletics reps, and sport information directors. They hold 100 percent of the confer-

ence commissioner positions in Division I excluding Historically Black Colleges and Universities."

Looking at the numbers more closely, universities did the best job hiring Black head coaches in basketball, where they were given a grade of A. In football, by contrast, universities received an F. Of the 120-top division football coaches, only three were Black during the 2007 season, a figure that rose to seven by the end of the 2008 season.

In other key positions, Blacks made up only 7.2 percent of the athletic directors in Division I, 3.8 percent in Division II and 1.8 percent in Division III.

Of the 120 Football Bowl Subdivision schools, formerly known as Division IA, 111 (92.5 percent) were headed by White presidents. Three — Middle Tennessee State, Ohio

University and Washington State University — were headed by Blacks.

Sports Information Directors were described as "one of the Whitest positions in all of sports when HBCUs are excluded," the report said. "It is 95.0 percent, 93.4 and 95.0 percent White in Division I, II and III respectively. This is very important because the SID is usually the key decision maker in what and who is publicized among coaches and student-athletes."

As we relax in the afterglow of March Madness, let's not forget the racial madness that still permeates the highest level of college sports.

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