

We fall down: Recidivism among African Americans

Written by William Reed

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As a result of tough crime policies and a discriminatory War on Drugs program, thousands of Black Americans have taken a fall from which they can't get up. Racial disparities in education, jobs and social practices all contribute to Blacks' presence among America's booming prison population.

America has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. Its \$40 billion-a-year criminal justice system that's extremely dysfunctional in regards to African Americans. For example, at the time most youth are charting their life's careers, one-fourth of young African American men are in penal systems or on parole. These systems' punitive processes put those African American inmates' futures, and that of their communities', at peril. After these people fall, often between the ages of 16 and 24, most never get up.

The likelihood of Black males going to prison in their lifetime is 16%. After that, within 3 years, almost 7 out of 10 released males go back to prison. This is due directly to their social environment of peers, family, local law and politics. Incarcerated at seven times the rate of Whites and more than likely to go back again, isn't it time African-Americans step to the fore to find better forms of rehabilitation?

To turn prisoners into productive citizens it is critical in-prison rehabilitation programs are employed. To change Black recidivism rates competent remedies need to be put into place. Once they fall down, when they are released from prison Black youth have a good chance to fall again. With no new skills or preparation, they return to the same negative environment they'd left; usually plagued by drug addiction, criminal activity and economic depression.

A term that describes ex-offenders who return to prison as a result of continued criminal behavior, recidivism means "I fall". It's the act of people repeating undesirable behavior after they have experienced negative consequences of that behavior. To eradicate criminal behaviors, proven treatment and training programs are needed. Current prison practices feed and care for inmates at a cost of about \$20,000 each a year, while creating more intense criminality. Crime continues inside prisons. Gangs exist and flourish on the inside, often with many key tactical decisions being made by inmate leaders.

One in five young Black males is in prison at a cost that could them to college. There should be concern among African Americans about current practices that destroy our youth. "The American prison system is degrading" says Jerry Anderson of the La Red Business Network. Degradation, not rehabilitation, appears the main purpose of America's penal institutions: serial numbers, buzzers, bells, strip searches, inadequate privacy and strict rules are means to annihilate prisoners' psychics. A veteran producer of prison rehabilitation programs around the world, Anderson says "Many prisons encourage violent and aggressive behavior among their prisoners, and prison guards are some of the worse instigators". Anderson contends that most prisoners America releases "have not been prepared to participate productively" in society. In current systems judges, wardens, guards, etc. are all at fault. Now, national and local dialogues are needed to re-examine correctional systems and whether ways can be introduced that effectively prepare offenders to return to society and increase their potential for survival in

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“normal society”. Corrective programs can cause productive, crime-free citizens to emerge from incarceration and help probationers succeed in their reentries.

A partnering of African American and Hispanic communities is needed to demand that the penal system and lawmakers research and find solutions to the devastating effects of high imprisonment, recidivism, and prison reentry rates occurring among inmates of color and their children, families, and communities. La Red, a Berlin, Ohio based company has had remarkable success around the world rehabilitating prison systems and helping former prisoners become productive citizens. The La Red Business Network is a faith-based achievement system engaged in self-help justice programs that affect populations from judges to janitors in South American and Caribbean countries. Similar education and training programs and processes are needed in U.S. systems. Making prisons places that instill restraint, humility and forgiveness among populations will return us more productive people.

(William Reed – www.BlackPressInternational.com)