

## **Welcoming Remarks and Opening Panel Discussion**

*Setting the Stage: the Crisis of Juvenile (In)justice*

### **Laurent Alfred, Columbia University:**

My name is Laurent Alfred. I'm coordinator of the Africana Criminal Justice Project. I'd like to welcome you. And before I introduce Prof. Griffin who will say a few more welcoming remarks, I'd like to say thank you for coming out early this morning. We appreciate it. This is definitely a community *and* academic conference. And in a sense, in that order. So we'd really like to encourage you guys to think about questions for the panelists. All of the moderators have been asked to keep plenty of time for audience Q&A. So I encourage your interaction and again, thank you for coming.

I'd like to introduce Prof. Farah Jasmine Griffin, the Professor of English and Comparative Literature and African American Studies, who's been a strong supporter of the Africana Criminal Justice Project and all of our endeavors. Please welcome her, and thank you for coming.

### **Dr. Farah J. Griffin, Columbia University:**

Good morning, everyone. The real troopers come out early. So we know who you are. Thank you for being here. I want to welcome you to this most important conference—“Criminally Unjust: Young People and the Crisis of Mass Incarceration.” I'm director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies here at Columbia. And our mission is the critical examination of African-American politics, history and culture. This conference is sponsored by IRAAS's Africana Criminal Justice Project, which is a research, education and organizing initiative under the direction of Dr. Manning Marable—who's also co-founder with Geoff Ward here, sitting in front of us—and it's a project that we're very, very deeply committed to. Because it embodies our commitment to both academic excellence and social responsibility. And by social responsibility we also mean social change.

What I think is especially effective about this project is that unlike other projects and conferences that are kind of one time things—just hit or miss, you focus on it and then you leave—is that this is a long-term project. ACJP has committed its resources to an overwhelming problem, that of the overwhelming crisis of mass criminalization and incarceration and their consequences for black communities in the U.S., but indeed, as we are learning, communities of color throughout the world.

So in so doing, it is not only doing research and disseminating ideas, but doing both as part of building a movement. IRAAS is committed to the work of the ACJP and to those of you who are gathered here this morning. In other words, I can guarantee you that we're in this for the long

I now have the honor of introducing our moderator for the first panel. A colleague from whom I've learned a great deal and for whom I have a tremendous amount of respect—Dr. Manning Marable. Dr. Marable is a prominent lecturer throughout the country, an interpreter of the politics, the history of race in America. He was the founding director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies. And under his leadership it became one of the nation's most prestigious programs in black studies.

Dr. Marable has written more books than I can name. We would be here all morning if I did so. But we are all eagerly anticipating his highly anticipated biography of Malcolm X. So here, to open up today's session, Dr. Manning Marable.

Good morning. Thank you so much for coming out this morning. I wanted to say a few words before I asked the panelists to come up to the stage for us to start the first session. I wanted to say a few words about Africana Criminal Justice, the Africana Criminal Justice Project and its origins. In 1999, a brilliant research assistant who worked at the Institute as an associate editor of our journal, *Souls*, Kristen Clark, who was a law student graduating from the law school here at Columbia in, I believe, 2000, organized a conference on race, crime and justice that was, at that moment at that time, the most successful IRAAS conference that we had done up to that point.

There were over 650 registrants that turned out to the conference. It occurred in the wake of the slaying of Amadou Diallo. And there had been that spring of 1999 a mass mobilization in which over 1,200 New Yorkers violated the law in order to make a moral and political point about the immorality of the Street Crimes Unit and the slaying of Amadou Diallo by engaging in civil disobedience downtown at the police headquarters.

So a mass number of people turned out in part because we were raising the question of racialization in the context of the criminal justice system. At that time, six years ago, very few foundations and very few scholars in African American studies, other than Angela Davis, Joy James and just a very handful of others were raising these kinds of issues within our field. I believe that it was important for us to develop an ongoing project interrogating race, crime and justice. So in putting together a proposal in 2001 to the Open Society Institute, what I called for was a new way of thinking about the connections between race, crime and justice.

It seemed to me that there was a kind of triad, or unholy trinity between mass unemployment, mass incarceration and mass disfranchisement. I began calling it “the new racial domain.” And that, there needed to be a new civil rights movement. One that re-imagined the nature of the struggle against systemic or structural racism. And so much of that struggle had to focus on the criminal justice system.

All of us here this morning—because we’re either activists or scholars working in this field—are familiar with the statistics. But they do bear repeating. Not so much for the ritualistic content of them. But because they are so draconian that moral people tend to become numb when confronted with them. It’s important to remind people why we are here.

We live in a state—New York state—where 30 years ago there were only 12,000 people incarcerated in our state prisons. By the year 2001, there were 70,000. In 1978 there were 19,000 people incarcerated in California state prisons. By 2001 there were 160,000. Nationwide, in the last 30 years, the number of people incarcerated in state and federal penitentiaries and prisons grew enormously from a total of about 600,000, to 2.2 million. Today, nearly 7 million Americans at any given moment are in some aspect of the prison industrial complex. They’re either in jail, on probation, parole or awaiting trial.

The impact of this on the African American community and the Latino community is profound and undeniable. I will talk more about this later today. But part of what has driven the numbers are mandatory-minimum sentencing laws adopted in the 1980s and 1990s, in many states stripping judges from their discretionary powers of sentencing. Imposing draconian terms on first-time and even nonviolent offenders.

Parole has been made much more restrictive in New York State and throughout the country. And in 1995, Pell grant subsidies supporting educational programs for prisoners were ended. It was in 1995 that I was invited by the Rev. Bill Webber, who some of you do know, who in 1983 started a master’s degree program inside of Sing Sing Penitentiary for prisoners. I began going in with Bill. And it was a transformative experience. If there is a reason for ACJP—Africana Criminal Justice—it’s because of that experience I had lecturing in Sing Sing.

If you go into Sing Sing, it transforms your life. When you sit down and work with young Latino men and young black men who are in prison 15 years to life for a single mistake, and you see them struggling literally in the bowels of a leviathan, of hell, to earn a master’s degree, studying, working, and yet we take away Pell grants from them? We take away even the basic elements that most of us would say are absolutely essential to carry out a life of the mind. And nevertheless, these brilliant minds still flourish.

It was then that I became absolutely committed to this struggle. The struggle to overturn the violence that is being meted out against millions of American citizens. But particularly for citizens of African descent. This is the fundamental civil rights question of our time. And in constructing a new civil rights movement, if any kind of reforms are going to be achieved, it has to begin here. And that is why I’m so pleased and excited about the success of what the ACJP has accomplished, of what we have done over the last five years, and hopefully what we’ll accomplish in the future. So we have an exciting day today. I’d like to invite the panelists who

are here to come up to the front if you could. I’m going to go in the order of the presenters as they are listed in the conference schedule that is cited in your program.

First we have Geoff Ward, who is a professor of sociology at Northeastern University. Secondly we have Ras Baraka, the deputy mayor of the city of Newark, New Jersey. Thirdly we have Rosa Clemente, an organizer and public speaker for the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. And last, but certainly never least, we have Prof. Robin Kelley, professor of anthropology and African American Studies here at Columbia University.

The speakers have approximately 20 minutes each to give their initial presentations—I believe one or two of the presentations may involve multimedia or the use of the screen. That’s fine. They can come up here and do that. And then we will open it up for discussion and questions. As Laurent said in the beginning, this is a “communiversity” conference, where there should be no—well, contrary to what I think many of our colleagues here at Columbia University believe—there should be absolutely no separation or barrier between the community and the university.

So that intellectual engagement does not stop at the boundaries of 120<sup>th</sup> Street. We’re here to learn and to transform. So that we want community-based folk, activist folk raising critical questions, presenting information and interacting with the panelists.

So our first presenter is Geoff Ward, who as Prof. Griffin pointed out, made a monumental contribution in the evolution and development of the Africana Criminal Justice Project. He’s currently at Northeastern University. But I’d personally very much like to get Brother Geoff back here in New York. So Geoff Ward.

**Dr. Geoff Ward, Northeastern University:**

Good morning, everyone. It’s really a pleasure to be here, to be back at Columbia to speak on what is unfortunately a crisis situation. But to see so many of my friends and colleagues, people I’ve worked with on all these important issues. I don’t have a lot of time. I want to focus my remarks in a way that I think will be particularly useful in getting us started this morning talking about the crisis of juvenile injustice.

I think it’s particularly helpful to offer a bit of historical perspective on the crisis of juvenile injustice, including not only the problem of oppression, but its resistance. This historical perspective helps us clarify exactly what the present crisis entails.

Now I want to give a bit of a caveat to say that I’m going to focus in particular on the crisis of racialized juvenile injustice. This is of course a central problem in American juvenile justice and

in juvenile justice systems worldwide, but certainly not the only basis of oppression in our juvenile justice system.

The crisis I want to call our attention to is not simply the—as the federal government puts it and many of our reform organizations put it—simply the problem of disproportionate representation of black and other non-white youths in juvenile and adult prison. This is but the most visible problem, I believe. The crisis, on the other hand, that I think we need to focus on, is the problem of underdevelopment.

The crisis of juvenile injustice we must confront is the systematic oppression involved in denying our youth and ultimately, our communities, the possibility of developing and realizing our full potential. This denial of possibilities, this denial of developmental opportunity, is what is behind the statistics we see in our adult and juvenile prisons.

Now, on its founding in the start of the last century, the American juvenile justice system was hailed as an institution for citizen-building. The idea is that you would take the human clay of a wayward youth, a youth gone astray—however that’s defined—and reshape and remold that human being into a productive human actor. This was the notion of the rehabilitative ideal.

Of course, like all American institutions, juvenile justice systems were immediately enlisted in the project of selective citizenship building. And so they therefore privileged certain alleged “species” of human clay. Now, we must understand that the crisis that we’re here to talk about is a more than century old social problem, and that is woven deeply into the fabric of U.S. racial history.

To make this point rather clearly I’d like to show you something. This table shows you the proportion of incarcerated youth in the United States—these are male youths, data for females aren’t available—the percent of incarcerated male youth...I could speculate for you what the female numbers look like...it’s not a very different picture—the percent of incarcerated male youth who are nonwhite over the past century. The bottom dotted line is the percent of the U.S. population that is nonwhite over that same span of time.

And so what you see is a growing rate of disproportionate representation of nonwhite youth in public juvenile prisons from 1880 to 2000. In fact, you see that around 1970-80, nonwhite youth become the majority of these institutions. Now there’s something of an optical illusion in this picture in that it suggests that there’s a problem of increased inequality, that there’s a growing problem of inequality, a growing gap between that bottom dotted line and that line just above it.

This is a bit of an illusion, however. What we see actually here is the continued invisibility of black youth in a system meant to rehabilitate certain segments of the population viewed as “salvageable” human beings. And so in the first half century of American juvenile justice, it’s

more ideal era where we were more committed to rehabilitative principles, black youth were left out. Particularly in the South, in the context of Jim Crow juvenile justice systems.

In the second half of the twentieth century, as we’ve given up on the rehabilitative ideal, replaced it with an ideal focused on retribution, punishment, holding youth accountable, black youth—these are particularly black youth—have borne the brunt of this retributive turn. White youth have been moved out of institutions once they’ve been deemed not only limited in their rehabilitative effectiveness, but potentially damaging to youth so confined. You see a turnover of population rather rapid and dramatically. Now, a lot of other things are going on here as well, not the least of which is the Great Migration to the North where institutions were more willing to take black bodies and souls.

But there is a consistent story here notwithstanding the apparent change. And that is the continued devaluation of the moral and intellectual capacity of nonwhite youth. The notion that some youth are salvageable and some youth aren’t. In the early 1900s, politicians would stand up at rallies and say, “A Negro reformatory is a contribution in terms.” They would say this to their constituents to get their support.

Politicians don’t say that anymore. But the sentiment endures. The notion that some people have been saved, have some basic moral-intellectual foundation that can be awakened and built upon, and others don’t. And we see that persisting ideology in this chart.

Now, just as this crisis is more than a century old, so has been the resistance to it. I think this is important so that we understand that we are not just now trying to make a dent in this issue. Between 1900 and 1940s, black clubwomen in particular organized very seriously to dismantle the juvenile justice system, or what they called at the time—a woman in Alabama called in 1908—“the slavery of an iniquitous justice system” —their efforts were followed in the mid twentieth century by civil rights organization such as the NAACP and new black clubwomen’s organizations who shifted the focus from creating their own opportunities for black youth in their opportunities to pushing for integration of existing institutions, and pushing for a greater representation among decision-makers in courts and these agencies and so forth.

In some ways the irony of integration is that there was some success. *Brown v. Board of Education*, for example, forced the opening of juvenile justice institutions to black youth. What *Brown* and the integration agenda did not anticipate, though, is that these structures would be turned away from their original intend and to a more retributive agenda. There’s of course a resurgence of popular movement today, led most of all, I think, by youth activists throughout the United States who are taking on this issue. But certainly other organizations including the Africana Criminal Justice Project.

Though the strategies and results of these efforts over time have varied widely, they have commonly sought, I think, to eradicate the oppressive color lines of juvenile social control

because of the realization that we’re not just talking about an issue of fairness or equal protection under the law. What we’re talking about is a problem of underdevelopment. And I want to close by just emphasizing this point briefly.

We must understand the crisis of juvenile injustice as a crisis of general societal proportions. First of all, we know that the devaluation of our youth today, just as in 1900 or 1905 or 1920 or 1930, is a reflection of broader ideological aspects of our society. It is not simply a problem of the right policies in our juvenile courts, or the right policies in our juvenile institutions. It is a societal crisis. And how we value, how we scale people and their potential.

Secondly, as Prof. Marable pointed out, there are collateral social consequences to the mass incarceration of nonwhite youth. We’re not simply talking about the removal of bodies from communities, but the removal of bodies from schools, from labor market. The removal of voices from our political processes, and a removal that will continue over the course of many of these young peoples’ lives—into their adult lives, into their lives as parents and potential community leaders and so forth.

And so we must understand, witnessing the continued underdevelopment of our youth and, ultimately, our collective capacities. As W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in a 1960 essay entitled “The Immortal Child.” He published this in the *Crisis* when he himself was engaged in the struggle against racialized juvenile injustice. He wrote, “In the hands of our dark children lies the fate of the dark world. And therefore, of the world.” Thank you.

### **Ras Baraka, City of Newark, NJ:**

Good morning. I have the pleasure of being not just being the deputy mayor but the vice principal of a high school in Newark, NJ which services about 1,200 predominantly black and Latino young people in the city of Newark. So I want to be able to look at this from both kind of ways—from a city perspective in terms of prisons and juveniles in jail, to how it relates to school and how more and more young people are being pushed out of school, and the juvenile justice system or the judicial system is being used to solve the kind of social problems that education and the school social worker and attendance counselor are not able to handle, the juvenile justice system of the judicial system—because I really don’t believe that there is a real at this point, that there’s a real juvenile justice system outside of the real judicial system that exists...I think that there’s one system and young people are being funneled into that system.

And because we still have laws that don’t allow you to integrate younger people into a larger, adult prison, that is the only thing that may separate or segregate young people from adult prison. I know in New Jersey there are many young people who mistakenly go to the county jail with older offenders. Or they have a younger ward of the county jail, or a subsection of the county jail where younger people are sent. So a lot of times these young people are caught right up in the

jail or the prison system with older folks. And the whole idea of reform has been out the door since the 1960s or 70s, which was stated by Dr. Geoff Ward.

So when you're sending young people to jail, you're actually in some ways stiffening their resolve or strengthening their resolve to become criminals. For example, we have a growing gang problem in the country and we have a serious one in Newark. In the state of New Jersey, most young people that are sent to jail because of their offense, maybe vandalism—most of the crimes are property crimes, whether it be theft or vandalism or robbery or something like that—they go to jail for this. And the irony of that is, where gang activity began is prison.

And so when they get to prison they become further inundated into this kind of gang mentality, gang idea, gang culture. So when they come out of jail they're even harder or more involved in the gang than they were outside of jail. And all of the resources that we needed outside to help this kid or to intervene in the process, to make sure that they don't go to jail or they don't further this kind of gang activity or criminal lifestyle, those resources are no longer present. And so when they get to the jail they're even further and further pushed into the life of crime.

According to the FBI crime report, in 1995, while African American youth only represented 15 percent of the population, we comprised 28 percent of all arrests and 43 percent of the juvenile population in public facilities and 34 percent in private custodial facilities. And 1999 actually was the year when black men outnumbered white men in jail federally and statewide throughout the country, which is almost a ridiculous notion since the population of white males outnumber us 2, 3 to 1. Black men actually represented 45 percent of the jail population. If you include Latinos in that number, it grows to 64 percent of the population of prisons. In federal and state prisons, blacks and Latinos represented that huge amount of prison population.

Between the ages of 18 and 19 in raw numbers there were about 25,000 young people in jail. If you go from 20 to 24, the numbers jump to about 143,000, 150,000 young people in jail. If you talk about New York State, there's about 15- to 16,000 inmates between ages of 16 to 18 in New York State. And most of those inmates are in jail with adults. So I don't understand sometimes when we talk about the whole juvenile justice and the adult justice system. I'm starting to believe that it's one and the same.

And I think that it's completely related to what's happening in school. And that's a point I made earlier. Where education and social work is not being able to handle the kind of problems, the newer, complex problems that are coming in these schools. The judicial system is being used as a means to handle the problem. And the judicial system is ill prepared to deal with it. In fact, I don't believe the judicial system's intent is to deal with those kinds of problems that young people have when they go to jail.

For example, if a kid assaults a teacher or pushes a teacher or puts their hand on a teacher. When I say assault, I don't mean they put them on the ground and bust them over the head, while some



of those things may happen in very few amounts. A kid may get irate and push a teacher or put his hands on a teacher or any adult or security guard. The police will come to the school. The police arrest the kid. The kid is taken to the youth house. If it's their first offense, they're released on their own recognizance. Two, three times, the kid is maybe held. Or if they get in some other problem out in the streets, when that happens in school, they're kept.

A lot of these kids are special needs children or special education children. In the juvenile detention center that we have in Newark, which feeds the whole Essex County of the county population of that area, the average student there reads on a fourth-grade level. And they're holding kids from as young as 12 years old all the way to maybe 16, 17 years old. And the majority of the kids there read on a fourth-grade level.

So we're talking about how education or these school systems have failed these young people, have not adequately prepared them. And they have other kinds of issues—special education issues, special education issues, issues of literacy, issues of understanding and comprehension that are not being dealt with in the educational system. We don't have the resources or the manpower, the people power to deal with this kind of issue. And so the way to deal with it is to put the kid into an institution. They institutionalize the child. Which therefore hardens the kind of criminal activity, or the deviant activity that the child takes on to get the attention or whatever it is they're trying to get.

If we look at some of the numbers of graduation—how many young men actually graduate from high school—in some cities, in some states there are more young black men in jail than there are in college. So that in and of itself is a problem. If you look at Rochester, New York or Milwaukee, Wisconsin, they have a 24 percent graduation rate. Or Cincinnati, Cleveland, Ohio has a 19 percent graduation rate. St. Louis, Missouri—28 percent. Oakland, California—31 percent. Palm Beach County, Florida—33 percent. Charlotte-Mecklenburg—which should hold some kind of historical thing for us—in North Carolina, 34 percent graduation rate.

So this low number of people graduating from high school of course adds to the amount of us that are in prison or go to jail or are involved in this kind of negative lifestyle. What I do want to say, though, is that I believe because of these youth movements in the 1960s and 1970s, because of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or if you want to get even more radical with the Black Panther Party or the Young Lords increase the amount of young people. Or the SDS. Or people fighting against the Vietnam War. Or young people who decided to use the kind of rebelliousness and use their anger and use the things that they had and organize themselves to lash out against the system that they thought had organized itself against them.

Because of that, I think that the school system, the prison system has become less and less reformatory and more punitive. And they try to identify young people. And the irony of that is while we got black studies, Latino studies, women studies out of that, we still get more and more youth that are channeled right into special education because of their behavior, because of the

way they act, their fervidness, they're upset about what's going on in the system, they automatically say this kid is a special needs kid, this kid needs to be tracked, needs to be put in low classes. So I think that's a part of it.

Also, they're automatically sent to juvenile justice or juvenile detention centers where there are more and more restrictions put on these kids. Or you have kids going to school now with bracelets on their ankle. So they walk through the halls with regular school population with bracelets on their ankles. And they become more and more restrictive. And I think that that's done purposefully.

One of the things about this gang thing ironically is that it became larger after the destruction of organizations like the Black Panther Party, like Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, like [inaudible] or RAM—Revolutionary Action Movement. All these kind of organizations that kind of grab young people up and try to teach them about their culture, their history, where they come from, the real problems, why they have these problems, the causes of poverty, the causes of unemployment. Those organizations, when those organizations were destroyed or pulled away, it created a vacuum and the more criminal organizations came in their place.

If you look at some of these street organizations, as people are calling them, you can see that some of these kids, in some of the things that they write, have leanings towards Black Panther Party or they talk about the history of revolutionary kind of action. But because they have no real direction or no real education or no real leadership in that way, the more criminal aspect of it is more prevalent, is more dominant. While maybe five percent, 10 percent of those guys are real criminals, who probably would have been criminals before the gang existed, or who use the gang as the cover for their criminal activity are the leadership and become the more dominant factor in it.

If we had more political education, more cultural education, more social services, more people that were organized to grab these kids where they were and kind of give them some kind of direction and some kind of education, I think that that would be less of a dominant factor. Less kids would be going to jail. More kids would be graduating from high school. More of us would be in college.

And if you look at success stories around the country, you will see that in places where they have after school programs that center around African American studies or cultural studies or Latino studies, that they have more progress, a higher graduation rate. Or if you see in places where they have an African-centered school or multicultural-centered school, or even a school that's based on labor studies or based on people's struggles, that those kids actually have a greater sense of belonging, greater sense of self-worth, higher self-esteem, and they become larger in terms of the population of students that graduate from high school and that go onto college.

You can study that and see that that trend exists. And I think that there are administrators around the country that see that trend, but do not have the courage, or have not bought into it fully, to say okay, this is what we need to implement to make sure that our kids graduate from high school at a higher rate, to make sure that our kids are not going into the juvenile justice system, to not have us dialing in the office the prison or the police department. As soon as there is a small incident in the school, we call the police instantly and we give the child a record at 15 years old.

Until we become committed—and I want to close—committed, again, to educating, truly educating young people again, no matter where they are...I think public education is one of the most democratic institutions that America has to offer because we have to educate kids no matter what color they are, no matter what nationality or language we speak. In fact, as soon as they come from the country they come from, they're required to pass the test. How crazy that may be, they're still required to pass the kind of standardized proficiency tests that are given to the kids. So we have to take them where they are and educate them using the resources, the very small resources that are being taken from us by federal government, cut and cut and cut, to educate everybody's child, regardless of whether they're handicapped, if they have a special need, or if they speak Wolof, or if they speak German. Whatever it may be, the moment you set foot in a public school setting, you have to be educated.

And the resources that we have to deal with that in comparison to what's going on in the streets and the problems that are happening in these communities, it's just not enough. We just don't have enough. And we cry “we spend too much money on education, spend too much money on education.” We don't spend enough money on education. There's not enough money being spent on education. They try to spend this amount of money per child, \$8,000 per child, \$10,000 per child, which seems enormous to most people. But the highest cost in education is to human resources, meaning that the more people you have to have there, the greater the cost there is to the child.

But because you have more problems, the money is going to be greater. Because you don't just need a teacher, you need a teacher's aide for a special needs kid, you need to be able to deal with all kinds of problems and issues, you need to be able to deal with the resources that the kids don't have at home that you have to give to them in school at that time. So when we become more committed to putting the money in education as opposed to prison and juvenile justice, I think this kind of discussion or panel would be...we wouldn't have to have this today.

**Rosa Clemente, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement:**

How's everybody doing? It's early. We need some energy! How's everybody feeling? My name is Rosa Clemente. I'm an organizer with the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. I'm part of a coalition against Hot 97. And I'm a journalist with WBAI 99.5FM Radio here in New York and

the tri-state area. I also went to SUNY Albany and to Cornell University, where I received my master's in Africana Studies under the guidance of James Turner. And my work there focused on the counterintelligence program aimed particularly at the Black Panther Party, the Black Liberation Army and the Young Lords Party.

And I kind of want to speak to that because I believe that throughout the day you'll probably end up hearing discussions around hip hop and hip hop culture. And I really believe the hip hop generation is being attacked at every level. And I believe they're trying to teach us a lesson, like “If you want to organize, this is what's going to happen to you.” And for a lot of us, the memory of the Counterintelligence Program and the destruction that this program had on people—young people in particular who were trying to organize—still lingers.

So Counterintelligence Program was started in 1956 by J. Edgar Hoover. It really began to monitor the activities of Dr. Martin Luther King. But as the Black Panther Party grew and revolutionary movements within the U.S. grew, it spread to other groups, whether with the Black Panther Party, the Black Liberation Army, the Young Lords, the Brown Berets, Students for a Democratic Society. You have the state basically saying that the biggest internal security threat in the U.S. was the Black Panther Party.

So basically you have this young group of people basically in the ‘hood with no resources going up against the state. And the state found them so—they were doing so much amazing work that the state began using all of its resources to oppress that organization. Why is that important today?

It's important today because it shows that as we organize, we have to be very clear about the forces of oppression of a police state in that organizing, and what they will do to shut down that work. Second, because there's still political prisoners in the United States of America—people who are in prison because of the political work that they did. One of those prisoners is Jalil Muntaquin, who after 33 years is still sitting in a New York State prison with very shady—if you read the court documents of any of these political prisoners, you're very clear that they did not receive any kind of justice within the court system.

And it's important because we have to realize as young people that a lot of these cats were laying it down for us to even be able to walk at Columbia, to walk the streets with the relative freedom that we have. And that's very important because a lot of times young people think, “Is this new work. Are we the first being oppressed?” No, we've been oppressed ever since we were brought here illegally, right? Africans have always been oppressed.

So when I think about issues around police state and policing and criminal justice, I really just think about my experience. I live in Flatbush, Brooklyn. I'm an organizer. Within a two-year period in my one block in Flatbush, I saw 14 men—on just one block alone—get arrested, go



So now we were talking about preemption. Like, you know, preemptive war in Iraq? Preemptive policing. Let's just lock them up before they even think about doing a crime. And this is what the police is clear. And then we have public officials who we, most us don't elect, who get in by small, miniscule numbers of votes, and once they're incumbents they stay in for years, that for the most part, I would say 99 percent of the New York City Council, and then all the way to the mayor have no interest in black or brown young people.

They make it clear every day by the public policies that they pass, that they have no care for them. So what do we do as a hip hop generation? I think we know our history. Be very clear. Know your history. It is very empowering to know who you are, where you come from. And also, it's also very powerful to know the resistance that young people always put up. Right?

Second, find something that you're very passionate about. So if you're passionate, "I want to be an MC." Then I hope you're an MC that's going to rap to the issues of our community and not a 50 Cent type of MC, talking about bling-bling and a lifestyle that 99.9 of your people will never, ever see. If you're going to be a dancer, dance to the culture. If you're going to be a journalist, do investigative journalism, be a *real* reporter, not an opinion, editorial person or just wannabe that's doing journalism that's entertainment.

And I think if we begin to implement just these little things, then we can begin to make a dent in how our young people are feeling. Because I believe that most of the issues that relate to criminal justice, to public education, to all the ills, are really because young people lack a sense of identity and a sense of self worth. And I see it every day. I see the cats who have dropped out of high school who have the most knowledgeable brain as opposed to the most Ph.D. person from Harvard that can't carry on a community conversation. But that young person who has all of that has nowhere to go.

And lastly, I know that Dr. Marable has talked about this unholy trinity, this mass incarceration, mass unemployment, and disenfranchisement, your right to vote being taken away. We have to be very clear that when the State of New York says that 50 percent of African American men are unemployed—not because they're not looking for work, but because they can't get jobs—a) that number is higher. If the state is saying it's 50 percent. And b) cats ain't working. Cats are not working. And while cats can't get jobs, they're about to spend a billion dollars of tax money for a Jets stadium.

And where are people saying, "You know what, Sharpton, just because you agree with it, don't make it right." Where are the people who are standing up to these politicians and political unelected leaders that are getting kickbacks. This Jets stadium, if built, will be mass destruction for our community. It will lead to more rampant gentrification. It will lead to more policing. And as much as they tell you there will be all these jobs for contractors, you have to understand the construction business in New York and understand who really runs that business.

So in saying all of this, to me it's all connected to why young people are easily criminalized and tracked into what is economically sound, which is prison. Because at the end of the day, prisons are making jobs. Prisons are providing labor for companies like American Express and Victoria's Secret and Rocawear and all them hip hop clothing that cats are wearing, are all being made by prison labor. And then cats are spending \$150 to rock a Rocawear shirt. Or a Sean John shirt. But the person that looks like you that's being tracked into that system is being paid seven cents a day to do that.

We have to connect these issues. And as the hip hop generation, we have to be clear on why they're criminalizing us. And lastly, police brutality, and I'm sure someone will bring that up. But ever since Timothy Stansbury was killed January 1, 2004 by Richard Neri, who is now a PBA delegate. See, every time a police officer kills a black or brown person, they get promotion. That's the way they're rewarded. Eleven more African American or Latino men have been shot by the police with no indictment, no investigation, nothing. That's since January 1, 2004.

So I hope that y'all can kind of connect all of these issues and it brings up discussion and questions and conversation. But when I get here I have to be very clear on what's happening in the community, try to make the best of the information that I have. And hopefully that the younger cats in here will be that agent for change. Because they are clear that you are powerful. We have to be clear of the power that we hold as a people. Thank you.

**Dr. Robin D.G. Kelley:**

Well, I'm honored to be here this morning. Because you're sitting before great leadership. I'm always feeling depressed sometimes. But then I look around and see all these brilliant people who actually have vision and ideas and are actually doing something. And I'm just happy to be here. I think this is a very important moment. I appreciate the comments.

I want to briefly give you some historical context for why we have this crisis, particularly the last ten years. But before I do that I have to thank Laurent Alfred, for not just organizing this conference, but for giving me the opportunity yesterday to spend some time with his class in Island Academy in Rikers Island. And it was amazing to me to see all these kids, you know, boys...and I want to say boys. You know, they're not even trying to be men. They really are boys incarcerated. Brilliant. Talented. Thoughtful. They have ambition, intelligence. And yet they have fears, scars and vulnerabilities.

And if you see 40 of these boys lined up against the wall, or just talk to four of them. You begin to realize that as significant as the statistics are, and I'm going to talk about numbers today. In some ways, it's sort of like the slave trade issue. If we had 500 young people incarcerated, treated in an inhuman fashion, that's too many. If we have five, that's too many. And it's amazing to think how many are in there.

For black men, more than one out of four black men will be incarcerated. I shouldn't say *will* be, because that doesn't have to happen...*has* been so far. That can change. The other thing I want to say in sort of preparation was that I was so impressed by the Columbia students who actually work with these kids. One of the things that's very heartening to me is that we do have a whole generation, both of kids who are incarcerated but also young people who said, "Enough is enough."

And the humanity and love with which they engaged these kids inside was really impressive to me. And I just think that they ought to be thanked. And I'm just happy to see all that's happening. I know for my generation, I'm an old man, I can't say that my generation would have treated even kids that we went to school with who were incarcerated the same way. So I just think that things are changing in some very positive ways.

Now, why the rapid growth? I'm going to make just a few very brief points. Number one, one of the big changes that took place are the changes in prosecution and sentencing, obviously. During the 1990s, all states, including the District of Columbia, passed laws making it easier to prosecute juveniles as adults. And the methods are threefold. Judicial waiver is one way, where judges basically say, look, this particular case is egregious and you could be prosecuted as an adult. Prosecutorial discretion is another one. And of course, legislative statute, which is responsible for a lot of young people being prosecuted as adults.

That's one thing. The second thing, of course, which Mr. Baraka talked about today, the zero tolerance policies. And this is a real serious issues. A lot of these policies began in the late 80s during what was *perceived* as a juvenile crime wave. I say "perceived" because all these things are questionable. Schools passed rules. States passes laws, in fact, requiring the expulsion of students for possession of all weapons, drugs, other serious violations around school grounds.

But then they added to this school punishment compounded by criminal penalties. This is where you get the entrance of the—as Baraka says—the juvenile justice system is really part of one big system. And you get the intervention in this period of criminal courts. And so even nonviolent acts are then subject to citation, arrest, or referral to juvenile and criminal court.

And the fact of the matter is that though the image is that there's more violent crime in schools, fact is, since 1992, violent crimes in school have declined 50 percent. Nevertheless, juvenile incarceration continues to grow. And it's no surprise that black and Latinos are more likely than whites to be arrested, regardless of the socioeconomic status. And that's important. It's not just a matter of the fact that blacks and Latinos are poorer. It's across class lines. You're more likely to be incarcerated or punished. And black and Latino children receive more severe punishment, as well, even though their misbehavior is not greater than white students.



And right here in New York City [tape change] who was just a disaster. But he created a special team of NYPD officers to target 17 so-called “Impact Schools,” so called because of their high crime rates. So now you got cops in school who are terrorizing children. And there’s a case in the Bronx where one of the principals actually tried to stop an intervention on the part of the cop, who was giving citations to kids for disorderly conduct. And then the principal gets arrested. Yes, gets arrested. It’s like second-degree assault, battery and intervening in governmental operation, something like that.

In any case, the third factor is the War on Drugs. And I won't talk too much about that because this is a story that we all know. We know who are the victims of the War on Drugs. We know that most indicators historically and in current period suggest that white period have consistently higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse. And yet the War on Drugs is declared against blacks and Latinos. We know, as Prof. Marable talked about, the mandatory sentences for crack-cocaine. We know about the Rockefeller Drug Laws, three strikes laws. All of these things are actually increasing the prison population, in part by extending prison sentences.

The other source of increasing incarceration that we might think about, too, is not just drug offenses, though those are the main ones. The second most important one is immigration

But look at the economy. You have loss of manufacturing jobs accompanied by low-wage service jobs with little or no benefits. You have massive permanent unemployment, as Rosa Clemente was talking about. Permanent unemployment, where the possibility of jobs is out. You can point to the erosion of city services, the militarization of daily life in poor, urban communities. The decline of parks and youth programs. Public Schools are struggling. We definitely need more resources.

Now, to make matters worse, and this is something that [inaudible] was talking about last night at this forum, legal services have basically disappeared from urban communities. In Harlem, legal services are just not available. In some ways you've got to get on the phone. They move out of Harlem altogether. You have youth and job training programs that are cut back. Feeder programs that have basically been dismantled. Neighborhood Youth Corps.

In any case, the final thing I want to point to before I close is, why is this happening? One of the reasons, because it's all profitable. As Rosa talked about, there's money to be made. Just like the impoverishment of urban black and Latino communities produce more prisoners, those prisoners become the source of big profits. So shares in Corrections Corporation of America, CCA, for example, and the Geo Group, are trading at multiyear highs. CCA's stock rose by 75 percent in 2004. And the Geo Group by 125 percent.

So there are articles in the Wall Street Journal saying, “stocks in private prisons, that’s your best bet.” Because it’s a growth industry, for real. You talk about a 3.6 percent annual growth in the prison population over the last decade. Of course, 2.2 million people. One out of every 142 residents are in prison or jail.

Finally, consider the outside economic development issues of the prison industrial complex. You have increased home incarceration, which is tied to, as Mr. Baraka talked about, the anklet coming to schools, that stuff is all over. And what’s happened is, you’ve got offenders wearing electronic monitoring devices, which shifts the burden of support from the prison to the families and communities, who then pay for the upkeep of the prisoner.

And then it also puts that household under surveillance. Imagine the impact it has on families. You have secondary businesses benefiting like the gun manufacturers, National Rifle Association. It’s not an accident that Bush let the assault weapons ban expire last year. One of the wealthiest political action committees is the NRA. They fought against all kinds of bans constantly. And during the past 20 years, the gun industry banked on crime fears to sell their products, not hunting. That’s just...I won’t even say the word. But it’s just not true.

Hunting? It’s crime fears. And what they do, they focus attention on a market generated by fear. So after a sales slump in the early 1980s, gun sellers not only expanded their market strategy to women and teens, but brought back the cheap, semiautomatic pistols. And the biggest consumers are white, middle class families concerned about crime. And meanwhile we know that the statistics tell us that crime is going down. In 1992 alone, \$754 million alone was made as the result of firearm sales.

So in the end, we face an immense crisis. Part of this conference tries to figure out what to do. And by way of conclusion, I just want to make two points. One, racism is still a factor. Racism has not disappeared. Of course, I’m preaching to the choir. But it’s amazing how people are trying to shift the discussion to just class, just socioeconomic issues. But race is still a factor. You’ve got to talk about that.

And finally, we have to remember that these are our children that we’re talking about. We got to call them children. That’s what they are. There are not our enemies. They need our love and encouragement. We need to understand how this culture that we’re in criminalizes them from fourth grade—from fourth grade! It’s too easy for condemning these kids for embracing a culture of materialism unless we have some alternatives to give them. And that’s one thing I hope we can talk about. What are we going to give them, and how are we going to create that? Thank you.

**Dr. Marable:**

Thank you, Robin. Great opening presentations. I just wanted to add one more thing, just to underscore this. What this conference is about is analyzing what is the fundamental problem, the challenge to American democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Because what the war is about is not just the mass criminalization of young black and brown people, but the destruction of democracy itself. Over the last 25 years, you’ve seen something like a 500 percent increase in local expenditures for the police throughout the country by various municipalities. But the bulk of that increase over the last quarter century has been for the construction of extraordinary units within police departments that are based on extreme violence and the extreme use of excessive force.

Prior to 30 years ago, SWAT teams in most municipalities simply didn’t exist. Or street crimes units. But increasingly, in the last 30 years, something like 10,000 municipalities have constructed SWAT units. So there is an escalation of the use of excessive force against civilian populations, aimed at people of color in central cities. So there’s a link between the escalation of the state’s capacity to use violence, and the use of institutionalized violence against people of color, populations in the society. That’s part of the puzzle we have to look at.

So this conversation was very stimulating, and there was a great deal of important information in it. But we also want to hear from you.

**Question:**

So I’d first like to thank the panelists for your contribution today. It’s really informative. I have a comment and then a question for the entire panel. Rosa, you had mentioned taking back our communities block by block. But there is a place, in fact there are five of them in New York City, that are either in our communities or sort of in the downtown districts of our communities, where I think everything that you guys talked about coalesces. And the buildings that I’m talking about are the family court buildings of New York City, where the juvenile delinquency cases take place.

I’ve been blessed for the past year and a half to be working as part of an alternative to detention program for placement-bound youth, which means prison-bound youth. What I’ve been struck by, just visually, is that every time you walk into family court, what do you see? You see a flood of black and Latino young mothers and young brothers and sisters waiting outside of courtrooms, sometimes for whole days, sometimes coming back for several months. Obviously taking days off from work, compromising their ability to take care of their children who are elsewhere. And you have courtrooms that are filled with judges that are not from the same demographic.

In fact, what I was struck by is that, in this city there are about 12 judges that decide delinquency cases. So you have this really small group of people that are deciding the future of so many of our young people in our communities. So there’s a small group of people who decide the future

of these young people. But what’s most disturbing is how stranded all of those young people and their families are in the courthouse.

Geoff had talked about this rehabilitative ideal that started out in family court. We all know that that’s gone. But that’s the exact same language that’s used today to justify this incarceration. This is the language of the Family Court Act, which is the line that said, before every disposition, every time before a judge gives a sentence to a young person, they say, “What’s in the best interest of the community and the respondent?”

Now, I find it very difficult to believe that someone that isn’t part of the community can really make that decision appropriately. And in fact that’s what happens, is that often times, the dispositions—the sentences that these young people get are so out of whack...as Ras said, are so out of whack with what’s going on. And part of that has to do with all of these factors that you were talking about in terms of stigmatization. A lot of young people who are getting placed, they have to go for what’s called the Mental Health Evaluation. And if you read these mental health evaluations, they’re just rife with this “menace to society” stigmatization.

So my question is basically this: These courthouses are places that are very much off-limits to people in the community. And what’s unfortunate is that people in the community come to court and have no clue what their options are. And the only person that they have to rely on is either their [inaudible] attorney or their Legal Aid Society attorney. And there’s very little interaction with them and grassroots, community organizations in order to really educate them, advocate on their behalf, and report back to the community—“Hey, what’s going on inside the courtroom?”

What do you guys envision? And maybe Geoff could speak historically in terms of what has happened in terms of community organizations trying to get access to the courthouse. Because this is the point of decision-making where our young people are getting locked up. What can be done on a grassroots level to gain more access.

**Dr. Marable:**

Okay. Panel, why don’t we hear about three questions in a row, and then we can respond. Yes.

**Question:**

My name is Elsie Chandler. I'm the senior trial attorney at the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, which is a public defender office in Harlem. We've been in Harlem for 15 years. Actually, I personally have been working in Harlem for 40. But I've been with Neighborhood Defender for a long time. We started out a little bit bigger than we are now. Giuliani almost destroyed us. In any event, we're still here. We need your help, and we're also here to help.

We need volunteers. We're happy to represent people. We represent people for free. We represent people before they're arrested. In other words, if somebody's afraid that they're going to be arrested, we take the case. And we have a civil team. We do all kinds of stuff. And we look at the person—the whole person. So I'm the one who's particularly interested in representing people—young people. I've been doing that for a long time. And I just want to say I'm glad to be here and thank you for doing this.

I also wanted to say that people should know that New York State has among the harshest laws in the country with regard to children—young people. The harshest. You don't have to look to Mississippi or anything like that. Right here. And it's been that way since the 1970s.

**Question:**

Morning. My name is Carmel Norris, and I'd like to add my thanks to you all for coming and sharing with us this morning. I'm from South Central L.A., a community where the sight of the W.I.C. office has a huge sign that says, "Need a ride to prison?" I'm very frustrated with this issue. I've seen it in my own family, my own community. And I'm at the point where, yes, it's good to describe the problem in terms of what the larger society is doing.

But I think it's also time for us to describe our role in this crisis and what can we do about it in the meantime while we're waiting for our politicians and national leaders to address the problem. What can we do about it? So I'd just like to ask the panelists, what can we as a community—or what are we as a community doing or not doing for our youth to perpetuate this crisis?

**Dr. Marable:**

Okay. Since the second speaker was more of a comment, let's go to one more person and then we'll go to the panel.

**Question:**

Good morning, everyone. My name is Angela Burton. And I'd like to say that I had the opportunity a long, long time ago when Prof. Manning Marable was still at Cornell to study with him. He probably doesn't remember me. A long time ago, right. I have a couple of points. I'll ask my question first.

The young man who came up first basically pointed out one of the things that is important to me, as well, in terms of the family court being the center—the pathway that a lot of our young people end up taking into the prison system. We call them juvenile detention facilities, but they're prisons, right?

One thing that I wanted to point out is that in addition to the increase in the prison industrial complex, there's also a subset that's going on that's really hidden from view, and I'd like anyone to address it if they have any knowledge of it. Once our children—someone talked about the War on Drugs. But in fact, there's a war *of* drugs that's going on inside juvenile detention facilities in which many of our children—black boys, mostly—are being drugged and are being turned into drug addicts. And their brains are being destroyed by the use of these drugs.

They are brought into these facilities. If they have any tendency to disobey or act out or talk back, they're immediately put on these drugs, which are very serious psychotropic, anti-psychotic drugs, without any proper diagnosis—most of the time without any diagnosis at all of having any mental or emotional condition that would warrant or justify those drugs. And I just wanted to throw that out there and ask whether or not any of the panelists were familiar with that and what they might have to say about that.

And also, I just wanted to say that we talk about racism—it's slavery. So we should probably put the right name to what it is we're talking about. And all these things really flow from slavery and are continuations and evolutions of different types of slavery. And so when we talk about repressive techniques and tactics and increased violence, it's just the same cycle coming around again.

And finally, I just wanted to say, especially to Sister Clemente, in terms of her grassroots organizing, if she could share with the rest of us ways that we as individuals in our communities can really connect and interact with children. Because so many of us are afraid of our children, so we don't have the courage to connect with children eye to eye, and to really be involved in their lives so that their voices can be heard. So I just wanted to throw that out there and ask in what ways the community and individuals in the community can do that.

**Dr. Marable:**

Alright, wonderful comments. Okay. So the panel can—this is a kind of free-for-all. So whoever would like to begin?

**Rosa Clemente:**

What I just want to talk about is the work the Malcolm X Grassroots Society is doing? First, the sister from L.A., you can't get discouraged. It's struggle. We're going to be in it until the day we die. Even when the walls come down, there will be something else that we have to struggle. Even when everything is perfect, we'll probably have to then struggle about gender roles and how women are treated in leadership. There's always something to work on. It's important to note that.

Second I would say, look at the victories that L.A. youth and youth in the West Coast against the juvenile justice system. There's been a lot of victories coming out of the Ella Baker Center. Now, you're not going to hear that on ABC, NBC, CNN, but you'll hear it on Pacifica. You'll hear it here in New York on WBAI that highlights the amazing work that young people are doing.

You might not see that work because the media is never going to represent images of liberation to people. That happened in the 60s. And they were like, “That Vietnam War thing where we were showing everything, shut it down.” So really look at the media. And then look at the alternative media to tell the true stories.

Second, the lack of resources for organizations is very real. What Robin was saying about, you have 35 organizations fighting for a million dollars, that's crazy. How do we get away from that? How do we get away from organizations having to rely on funding? Until the people start thinking that our work is important, we're always going to be asking foundations to give us money, then having to go to Rockefeller and Ford and answer to a whole bunch of mostly white people who live in the suburbs why it's important that we deal with juvenile justice or electoral politics.

So until we as a community and a generation start thinking about a culture of philanthropy and of tithing like you tithe to a church—everybody who goes to church gives to a church. Why are people not giving to these organizations? And then the organizations have to look at themselves and say, “How is it that we're not connecting to make the people know that we're doing this work?” Often times it's because of the lack of resources. So it's like this vicious cycle.



But what Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the work that we try to do that speaks to what Brother Thomas was saying...as much as we try to be within the court system, we're an all-volunteer organization. We have lawyers in our organization that do Pro Bono work every day. We got real estate agents. We got professors. We contribute as much as we can, but there's only so much 15 cats can do. So I encourage anyone who's in Brooklyn and is interested in joining Malcolm X Grassroots Movement to talk to me because even within the constructs and constraints that we have, we've done a lot of amazing work, especially around highlighting the issue of political prisoners and dealing with hip hop artists and culture.

So what I'm saying is that I believe there's an organization out there that already exists for everybody. If you're about electoral politics there's the National Hip Hop Political Convention, there's the League of Pissed-Off Voters. If you're about women's issues there's Sister-to-Sister—yes, they're called the League of Pissed-Off Voters. Adrienne's right there, too. She can talk to you.

There's Sister-to-Sister that deals with violence against women. There's the Coalition Against Police Brutality that has just reemerged and reenergized themselves around police brutality. There's the Prison Moratorium Project. If you go to Newark and see the work that Ras is doing around gangs. You know, Ras is doing amazing work and is getting a lot of support, you know—and I'm sure he had to work very hard to get the support from people like Bill Cosby, that can kind of even switch the dialogue of what Bill was saying. I'm sure Ras got to him and was like, “Okay, now let's deal with the real stuff, you know.”

And that's just some of us here. That's just to say that the organizations exist. It is up to the individual to say, “I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired. And I'm ready to do some work.” And if people think it can't be done, Richie Perez, when he passed away last year of cancer, at his eulogy his wife said, “Richie was a worker, a father, a revolutionary. He went to work every day. He was about revolutionary activism, and he was able to talk to his mother every day before he went to sleep.”

That's talking about balancing the work that you do. But it also speaks to the fact that when people tell me, “I don't have time.” I'm like, “You always have time.” There's always time to struggle. So all of that is just to encapsulate the work that people are already doing. It's not about having to start your own thing. It's about going to the existing organizations that have already proven their track record, and bringing your energy, time, resources and hopefully money into those organizations.

**Dr. Ward:**

I wanted to kind of build on that point about organizing. I have the feeling that we have maybe too many organizations and too little organization. That is, we're ineffectively networked as organizations and inefficient as organizations. We often find our organizations in competition

with each other for the same year or for the same grant, or for everyone’s time. We all have only so much time to commit to organizing.

I think there are some lessons historically. Someone asked—the first questions asked about what we might glean from how people have organized around this particular issue of racialized juvenile injustice in the past, and I just want to make a few points about that. One is that they were incredibly well organized. So you have local, state, regional, national divisions of organizations working in concert to affect change around this issue. And they did all kinds of things, ranging from pooling money to buy properties that were established as neighborhood facilities for youth who were otherwise bound to chain gangs and the convict lease system and prisons.

Black clubwomen in particular pooled their money to create institutions when the state refused. Or to create places they could ensure would be more humane in their response to young people than what they could expect of the state. Aside from these self-help initiatives, they engaged in pressure group politics. Particularly when women gained the right to vote, black clubwomen then had the opportunity to leverage that opportunity and to draw allies who could put pressure on government to change draconian laws, to equally fund institutions. Okay, you’re only going to create a separate black institution, let us have some resources for this institution. So pressure group politics were a part of it.

Probably the most important thing second to organizing though, that they did, was they raised consciousness. They created a crisis of legitimacy. And they used their vehicles, such as the *Crisis* magazine, their newsletters, their black newspapers, to keep a constant drum going, saying, “We are in a state of crisis.” As Dr. Marable pointed out, there is a crisis of democracy here. I want to make the point that we have a crisis of underdevelopment here. Our kids simply are not expendable so much as people want to make us believe that.

The last point I wanted to make is you mentioned the demographics of the court professionals. This is something I’ve been looking at quite a bit. The reformers in the past century believed that formal integration would be the answer to many of these problems. That the elimination of discriminatory laws and the increased representation of people like us in those positions would eventually root out the problem of oppression. What we’ve found is that that’s not happened, of course.

Robin went to Rikers Island yesterday. When I went with Laurent last year, and his class, one of the things that struck me most profoundly was that most of the corrections officers that I saw were black and Latino women. In fact, in New York state, there are more black and Latino corrections officers than there are white men. In the state of New York. Now this is a historically white male dominated profession.

This has been a growth industry. And I don't mean to suggest that these are people who are cashing in. There's a complex political economy behind all this. But the fact is, we've got increased representation in the courts. We have increased representation in policing. We have increased representation in various other justice-related fields. It is incredibly segregated such that we are represented on the bottom levels of these positions. We are represented in large numbers in those roles that are charged with executing tasks that others define elsewhere.

But one of the things that we need to be doing, I think, is organizing in a way that we're focusing at the same time on many nodes of the problem. And we've talked about several of them here. And among these are pressing for not only increased representation, but substantive representation in these systems—not just symbolic representation. And that includes pressing our representatives, who look like us, to represent us. So I just want to—I think that historical context gives some perspective on what we can do now and some strategies we might take.

**Ras Baraka:**

Just to start where he left off, clearly in a place like Newark which is probably like Cleveland or East Saint Louis or places where there's a predominantly black and Latino population, not only in the city but in power, where we appoint black judges male and female, the kind of demographic is almost the same where Geoff pointed out. They may see a black man or woman in front of them when they go to court. Not necessarily, but there's a high possibility that that might happen.

But they in turn still get the same kind of treatment or the same kind of justice meted out that they would get in any other kind of normal circumstance or situation. I think that has to do with the substance of the people that are in there. That's one. And the political representation that we have in the city is also important. The kind of people that we have elected to office, that we put in office over the same period of time. What happens is we get these people, we elect them to office, and they don't do what we say.

What happens is that we become disheartened by that and we no longer participate. So then you have people coming up with strategies like we shouldn't vote at all because it doesn't matter whether we vote at all because we done put this black dude in there and we still get the same results. But you put a guy in there because he was black. You didn't put a guy in there who was African American and at the same time had the same kind of political framework that you had and came from some kind of historical background. Or Latino or whomever in there. So you still get the same kind of response that you would normally get.

So you get disheartened and it takes longer. So like in a place like Newark, if you have a mayor or a person that's been there for 25 years and the situation is still kind of the same, then people feel like, “Okay, I don't want to participate. I don't want to be involved. I'm not going to get involved.” Because the result is the same. Because we still have no real power.

All these organizations? Well, Mao said let a thousand ideologies blossom. So...there are some things called CDBG monies, community development block grant monies, that all cities get, that is being cut by the Bush administration. Most of this CDBG monies go toward churches. Right now they go toward faith-based organizational kind of things. They build housing or they have a little program that they want to have. Or to the mayors and council people's pet projects.

Pressure needs to be put on city officials so that you know what CDBG money is, and that the CDBG money is going towards grassroots organizations that are doing real work in the community. Because most people don't know that the federal government is sending money to your town for community development, for small-business development, for grassroots organizations that exist. But you don't get the money. Or they give money which is becoming increasingly, increasingly smaller. Because there's no results they're using it as a means to say, "We don't need this money anymore, let's take it back."

Bush and the administration is calling it "pork," and they cut it. The police will get crime intervention money or gang intervention money, because of the increased development in crime—in gang activity, excuse me. So they'll get gang intervention money. Police use gang intervention money for overtime for the Streets Crime Unit. And their response to that would be, to stop gangs or stop the growth of gangs we need more police. Or we need more police in this crime unit or we need more police around this time.

Not the intervention, not the Malcolm X Grassroots movement, of course. Not the other kind of cultural and political and educational projects that may exist. In Newark they use the gang intervention money to buy new police cars. And then on the side of it it'll say, [inaudible], which is a gang-intervention program that we have that's supposed to be in schools. So what they'll have is two officers assigned to the entire city to come and talk to elementary schools about not being involved in gangs. And they use the rest of the money to buy new police cars.

And then the mayor uses the rest of it to give to his friend who supports him during his campaign who has a boxing gym to have afterschool programs in his boxing gym. Which really helps maybe four or five kids whose parents know this thing exists, who they tell, "We have this money for that." And they go there and justify why the money should continue to come. And because we're not involved in the process, we don't have any say-so, we don't know about it, we don't know what's going on. We're not in the council meetings. We're not talking to our council people. We're not involved in what's happening politically.

I know when I was in college I used to think, you know, all politicians are crooks. That still stands. But I thought then that we shouldn't be involved politically. But that process that we've given up is making the decisions about the things that we're sitting here discussing right now. So the issue of money, the issue of what's happening in the courts, even the psychotropic drugs that are not just being given out in jail, they're being given out in schools. You know, kids come with

the drugs with them and they take them in schools. Or intervals. You know, we have kids...there's a kid that acts out in my school and they say, "Oh, he hasn't had his medicine yet."

So they send him there every time. I don't even know if he's supposed to have some medicine at this time. They send him there and make sure he gets his medicine. And sure enough, he cools out. But he's probably so addicted to this stuff now, and whatever kind of chemical reaction it has on him, that they look at that as the way to help him just be calm. They don't care about him learning anything, we just want him to be calm. That's basically what school is right now.

The schools are considered successful if the kids are calm. If you have less violence, less activity going on, more people in the class. It doesn't matter if they're not learning anything in the class as long as they're not in the hallways. Long as they're not in the hallways or being disruptive, then you're a successful administrator. It's a given that the kids are going to fail. We just don't want them to kill each other. That's basically where we are now.

**Dr. Marable:**  
Okay. Robin?

**Dr. Kelley:**

I just had one brief thing, because I know our time is up. But on the question of family courts, I think that's a really significant issue. And it's interesting, I was down in the South doing some research at these small county courts, you know, where the records are. But if you go into the county courts, that's also where the court is. So all these small courts, all you see is these black families just lined up outside. Every single little county in Alabama, North Carolina, you see—so in other words, it's a nationwide problem.

One suggestion, though, is...we could learn a lesson from the group Sister-to-Sister, who confronted the issue of domestic violence at first by saying, “Why do we always call the police to intervene, when the police and the military culture itself produces more violators of domestic violence.” And they began to sort of take things into their own hands. And one thing we might think about is expanding the notion of community policing to community justice.

You begin to try and change the culture in the community where you say, “Look, we're not going to press charges.” I mean, you're talking about young people who clearly didn't commit any serious crime. But to just try and convince the community, try and convince the merchants, try and convince everyone in the neighborhood. Do not press charges. Do not call the police. We will come up with a peer system ourselves. To try to not punish, and not even to produce a kind of justice, but to produce an intervention to try and help that community and try to help that individual.

So we need to think in real creative terms to sort of both engage the state, at the same time creating institutions that may be kind of outside of its purview. Now of course when you do that, as you've heard, you're also dealing with repression. You're also taking away the power of the police. But I think that's really important to try to take away that power.

Finally, tied to that, Sister-to-Sister believes in holistic approaches to transformation. So trying to create a healthy environment and making sure parents know the consequences of these psychotropic drugs. And it's a lot of work. It's work that progressive public health figures could kind of intervene, have workshops, say, “We need to avoid this at all costs.” And really try to get our kids healthy.

Because sometimes the issue is diet, you know? Sometimes the issue is sleep. Sometimes the issue is the environment, I mean, the environment that people live in, you know? So all these things we kind of got to struggle over. That's why it's all kind of connected. But that was it. Thank you.

Dr. Marable:

All right. Let's give the panel a real round of applause. Fantastic.

## Concurrent Panel Discussion I

### Russell Rickford:

Peace. Good morning. How we feeling? Feel alright? ...The initial format was to have each panelist open up with a brief, 10-minute statement or talk. We can still stick to that to a certain degree. But some of the panelists have also said that they'd like to open it up and have something of a roundtable discussion and kind of pass the mic among the panel in the opening portion of this panel. And then, of course, we'll open it up to the audience as soon as possible. But maybe we should start down at the end with Piper and move our way to the left.

### Piper Anderson, Blackout Arts Collective:

Good morning. How y'all doing today? So, I work with an organization called Blackout Arts Collective. And we are a grassroots coalition of artists, activists and educators working to empower communities of color through the arts. We use the tools of culture and education to raise awareness and catalyze action on the critical issues that impact our communities. We believe the power of the creative process to transform lives in black communities and build a more just society.

The key word being “process” in that last line. And in order for me to talk to you about the work that we do, and why I do this work, it’s important for us to talk about the importance of process, and the importance of the process that we went through over the last couple of years.

In 2001 we started doing this national tour called Lyrics on Lockdown: [inaudible] the Prison Industrial Complex. And we took on this project out of a desperate need to contact the lies and misinformation that was being perpetuated about our community in the media, through television, through the newspaper, through public politicians, public policymakers.

And the most powerful tool we had available to us to make that happen was our art—was our performance work, was our spoken word, was our poetry, was our abilities as teachers who use the tools of popular education to work with young people. So we did start doing this tour. We went across the country, did performances, did workshops in detention facilities and halfway houses and community safety shelters. Wherever the folks were, that's where we went and we did our work, we did our performance, we did our workshop. We started talking to young people about the prison system, about policing, about how these things affect our community.



And then what would happen is that [technical malfunction] so all of a sudden different chapters of Blackout started to sprout up all over the place. Now we have seven chapters nationwide who are based in communities and who are doing work ongoing and working with young people. And then in 2003 we decided that we wanted to make this a year-round thing that we constantly did. And so [inaudible] was a year-round campaign. And in talking to young people—we would go into facilities and talk to young folk. And some of the most brilliant, intelligent minds are behind bars.

We’d go inside a facility and the guard would be like, “Be careful, don’t touch them, don’t get too close, don’t do this, don’t do that,” right? And we get in there and we start having conversations with young folk and brilliant, brilliant minds that completely understand what’s going on. Completely understand what’s going on. Why the prison system exists, why they’re there. They understand all of that.

So what we did was we created a forum [inaudible] to express this. Because they have the most powerful information about how to change the system. They have lived expertise. And that’s the most important expertise that you could have. What I have to say, right now, sitting on this panel in front of you is not important compared to what they bring to the table.

And so, in creating this publication, this youth justice publication that’ll be out later this year, that is a compilation of all of the writings and artwork and thoughts of young people across the country about the prison system, about the police and how it impacts them, their families, their communities and what alternative needs are being created. Because there are alternatives, but some of them aren’t effective. And so we need to hear from them in order to come up with the alternatives that really are effective and that really do work.

The only way for you to really understand what I mean about the young people that we work with and that we meet along the way on this Lyrics on Lockdown is for you to hear some of their work. Before I do that I just want to say that...I’m just going to read this because this whole dynamic is driving me crazy—of me sitting here and you being down there. So I’m just going to read this piece. I’m going to come down there.

“I am covered in black and white, behind iron poles of loneliness and a world of confusion, helplessness. My cries for help are repressed by the boot-covered, cold-hearted and with money in their world while survival is mine. Throughout this union, our brothers and sisters that are clueless as to why they are being secluded from the outside world. Expression is not wanted. Differentiation is banned. Adding need to their pain. Live no more. Have no hope.

“But I do live. A few walls, some bars and they try to paint that. But I know who I am. What I can do. I don’t live for glory or pain. I live for escape. Covered in my own [inaudible]. I wait in my time.” [inaudible]



So I thought what I would do here is not recount the statistics, because everybody has already mentioned all of the statistics, but rather to tell the stories. Because I believe my little one string guitar is to always use an ethnographic approach. And that really means giving stories and narratives to unearth the structural violence that’s underneath all of these peculiar incidents that are taking place—that underneath these individual instances there’s a structural violence that equates to social injustice.

So I’m going to mention three things. One is the whole business of the concept of transfer itself—of transferring kids from schools to prisons. That has a precursor in the system itself whereby there is now built into the educational system itself something called S.O.S. These schools are called “second opportunity schools.” And so if a child, if a young man, a young woman gets in trouble in the school system itself, he or she is transferred into the second opportunity schools.

Now, because that wasn’t enough, there’s another wave of these second opportunity schools called “new beginning schools.” All these things have these wonderful acronyms. And then, in No Child Left Behind, the Bush administration has created what they say is the “opportunity”—and they make it sound like this is something they conceived of in a brilliant and generous way—they’re saying that when schools are persistently dangerous, that students can be transferred into other, safer schools. The only problem is No Child Left Behind does not provide the money for creating those safer schools.

So the result is that there was a small amount, a miniscule amount in the education budget for something called the “small schools initiative,” better known as smaller learning communities. This year the Bush administration took that item out of the budget. So now there is zero money to create these schools, which everyone, everybody who I know—and I shouldn’t say “everyone”—but almost all the researchers that I know who have looked at the situation say that the smaller schools, the smaller settings are the places that are safer, because that’s where students can get individualized attention. Yet the Bush administration has X-ed that out of the budget, saying that those schools are ineffective without giving any reason for that. They don’t give any research data. They just say these schools are ineffective.

Moving right along from the “transfer” notion, let me also say something about “cuffing.” By that I mean putting students in handcuffs. Twenty years ago when I started this program at NYU, back around 1983-84 in Crown Heights and different places around Brooklyn and Manhattan and the Bronx, what would happen would be, if a kid was hanging out, being a truant on Franklin Avenue in Brooklyn and he wasn’t planning on going to school that day, Richard Green—anybody know Richard Green? The Crown Heights Youth Collective? Richard Green and his crew, with a modest amount of money for this from the city, would go around in their van and they would talk to kids on the street and ask them why they’re not coming to school that day. Groups of kids that are hanging out and have just decided not to go to school.

And they would convince them that, “Why don’t you come back to school?” And they would get in the van, they would come back to the school. And when they would come back to the school they came to our program. We had this miniscule tutoring program. And they would introduce the kids to our NYU tutors or mentors. And then we would work with the kids in order to bring them back into the school system.

Okay, that was 20 years ago. When Guiliani came in and in 1995, basically what happened was all those kinds of programs, the funding was cut. The job was turned over to the police. And the police’s method was not to talk the kids back to the school, but to immediately handcuff them. So you begin to see groups of kids throughout the city on the street being cuffed for no other reason other than that they were truants. So this is the beginning of indoctrination into the criminal justice system.

Last night while I was reviewing these notes in preparation for today I had CNN on at 10 o’clock. And the second story, I don’t know if you saw it last night, was a 10-year-old girl—I’m sorry, a five-year-old girl in Florida being cuffed and crying. A little five-year-old girl crying—a black girl—being cuffed and being put into—you’re doing very well saying, “ouch”—and this girl was in tears. It would break your heart. She was sitting there quietly minding her own business. I don’t know what she had done. Oh, she had torn some paper or something off the wall. And for this she was being handcuffed.

Let me just stay on this cuffing business for a minute. And I won’t bore you with this all morning. But I recently did a workshop—in the discussion I’ll be happy to go into the why’s and wherefore’s, why we’re doing these workshops—but I did a workshop with the school safety agents. And these were new recruits, people who were being recruited into the school safety agent corps by the NYPD in order to get jobs as school safety agents.

And at the end of the training—it was four nights of training—I asked them to write one paragraph and to tell me what they were most afraid of as they move into the school safety agent job. They were about half men and half women. And by the way, they were practically all African American and Hispanic, the recruits. This one woman wrote, “I fear that I might have to arrest someone’s child. That is one of my greatest fears. I wish that I wouldn’t have to put the cuffs on one child. I don’t think that no one should have to go through that experience, especially a child.”

So I think that what all these anecdotes are getting at is that underneath all of the individual incidents, there’s a structural violence that means that violence is becoming normalized in our society. So it’s the normalization of violence that we’re looking at. Another indication of it is treating the kids in the schools—there’s still students, that’s all they are is students in schools. But they’re defined by the system that’s responsible for discipline and order in the schools as “perps.” The police who are in the schools known as peace officers. They’re taught to handle any incident in such a way that if challenged, it can stand up in court.

So that’s part of the training, is to say that if you’re involved in an incident with a kid, then it’s your word against his word or her word when you go before the court. So therefore you have to learn how to defend yourself. So therefore, under this mentality, the S.S.A., the school safety agents, are trained to take down notes about the conversations. So the encounters with the kids are not interactive encounters between an adult and a child, but they’re used as items to be used in court. The student is immediately identified as the enemy, as the person that I’m going to have to go against.

The school setting itself suddenly becomes defined as a crime scene. So therefore, this is more than just the business of transfer from education to the criminal justice system. This is where the two systems—education and criminal justice—are blending into one. So we have now lost the dividing line between these two systems. They have to be thought of as one system. So the systems become confused.

I’ve already gone beyond my time. But let me just leave you with two concluding thoughts. And that is that I think what we’re dealing with here is a phenomenon that is so profound and so important that it may cause us to rethink all of our assumptions. That is to say, all of our assumptions about education. No Child Left Behind and the dominant themes of education would have you believe that the only things that matter in education is cognition and academic achievement. That’s not the history, even in the western world, of good schools. Good schools going back for centuries have always stressed, number one, moral development, respect for others. And where that takes place, then, good academic, good learning and achievement takes place. Thank you very much.

**Kecia Hayes, CUNY Graduate Center:**

Good afternoon everyone. One of the things that I wanted to talk about is what I think tends to be underdiscussed in the whole school-prisons pipeline, and that’s the convergence of educational practices and policies and the incarceration system and how that impacts young people of color. Particularly from urban communities. I think that there’s a need to begin to reassess how they experience education as they transition into, through and out of different court-involved settings.

There are several reasons why I think that this is really important. One, if you look at the work of [inaudible] she documents the extent to which contact with the criminal justice system itself negatively impacts an individual’s success in the labor market. She found that ex-offenders are only one-half to one-third as likely as non-offenders to be considered by employers, and that there’s a persistent, effective [inaudible] such that blacks are less than half as likely to be considered for employment.

Furthermore, the whole issue of G.E.D. credentialing I think has been an incredibly huge disservice to court-involved youth in that most of the programming that we do and talk about for court-involved youth involve G.E.D. credentialing. Meanwhile, G.E.D. credentialing has it's been proven in the research does not compare to a high school diploma in terms of earning or post-secondary education. So once we get children into these systems, we are not thinking about how do we restructure our educational policies and practices so that they can come better outcomes.

Without any kind of structural reform to education, particularly the urban education discourse, we're going to have a lot of court involved youth who are educated, whether we're talking about schools or we're talking about prisons, who are ultimately going to be rendered economically, socially and politically irrelevant. And that's a significant problem.

I think one of the things we need to think about is the history of education and it's connection to incarceration. John Devine mentioned that if you look at education historically you will see that education was not only about the inculcation of particular skills. And that much is true. But there was also this notion that we had to inculcate students, particularly students from racialized and immigrant and poor communities, with a particular form of morality. So that we wanted to make sure that we would preserve and protect the property of the ruling elite. We wanted to make sure that they fit into the social order.

According to David Nassau, the guiding force behind the common force crusade was not so much the education of the children as the maintenance of social peace and prosperity. Because the republic and its private property were endangered more by immoral than by illiterate adults, the common school's responsibility for character training and moral instruction overrode all others. If you look at the work of David Tyack, he clearly documents that social control mechanisms were often used by the common schools to discipline the minds and the bodies of young people to conform to the prevailing social order.

Through an elaborate system of gradation, program, curriculum, examination and rules for deportment, the pupil learned the meaning of obedience, regularity and discipline. As schooling became more bureaucratized in the 1800s, there were students who were being expelled and excised from schools via pushout or involuntary pushout or dropout procedures. And a lot of this was facilitated by educators relying more on standardized curricula and intelligence tests to do those kinds of things. These exclusionary practices were essential for the maintenance and preservation of a particular social order within the school system. Even after the wake of compulsory attendance laws, educators continued to rely on these practices.

The exclusionary practices of the school and the efforts of the child [inaudible] correctional institutions for the labeling, processing and management of troublesome youth facilitated the conversion of the education and incarceration system in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. So the schools-prison pipeline is not necessarily a new phenomenon, but it's something that's deeply entrenched

in how we have structured education in this county, and how we continue to structure education in this country.

Unwanted youth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who were excised from schools and ended up in reformatories received the same type of education as they had been receiving in the common schools. According to Anthony Platt, the [inaudible] promoted correctional programs requiring longer terms of imprisonment, long hours of labor, militaristic discipline and the inculcation of middle class values and lower class skills.

One particular reformatory that had a significant number of black children, Platt notes that the educational program consisted of teaching the young people how to cook, wait tables and to do laundry work. By focusing reformatory education on the vocational and manual training of youth, what ultimately happened is that the reformatories were able to do what the common school could not do because it excised the student because it needed to maintain a particular social order within that school. And these children ultimately were prepared for subordinate roles within the society.

If we look at our current practices with respect to education, particularly with zero-tolerance policies, we see that schools remain reliant on exclusionary practices to get unwanted children out of the school system. I’m not going to talk about these policies. I know you’ve heard a lot about that. What I do want to talk a little bit about is now inclusionary practices that schools are taking on. That’s where they allow the criminal justice system to co-opt the educational space of schools.

The cooptation of educational spaces is best reflected in New York City’s 2004 implementation of Operation Impact schools, which was specifically designed to establish a climate of order and safety by intensifying enforcement against low-level crime and disorder, vigorously enforcing the discipline code and correction of school conditions that are conducive to school disorder. This is much like the rhetoric of the 1800s with respect to schooling. There’s a need to maintain a particular order in the schools. It’s not about education. It’s about how sedate are children. And that’s the sign of a good school.

Interestingly, in fiscal year 2004, the U.S. Department of Justice allocated \$60 million to school districts and police departments to hire police officers. Of these funds, the New York City Department of Education was awarded \$6.25 million. Meanwhile, George W. Bush and the U.S. Department of Education presented New York City students with \$1.17 billion less than promised under Title One, \$1.32 billion less for students with disabilities, \$31 million less to improve teacher quality, \$21 million less for better educational technology, and \$18 million less for innovative learning programs.

Simultaneously New York State continues to evade court orders to allocate the additional \$5.6 billion annually to New York City schools as a result of the [inaudible] lawsuit. These funding

patterns clearly demonstrate the extent to which we have redefined the ideological function of schools from providing young people with a sound basic education to establishing a climate of law and order.

The problem isn't that school safety is a priority, but that it supersedes the pedagogical process of teaching and learning. School safety should be about ensuring the well-being of the mind by creating small class sizes, providing students with instructional resources, i.e. experienced teachers, appropriate technology, academic support and so forth that will facilitate their learning, that will create a safe space for students to use their multiple intelligences, to produce and discover knowledges and skills. And it should also include protecting the physical. But to the extent that we have privileged one over the other, students are being significantly disserved.

Despite the rhetoric of the current urban education discourse, the fiscal policies impacting schools demonstrate this greater concern for the physical security as opposed to the development of the mind. As we underfund these pedagogical practices to develop the minds of students, we're imposing greater standards and measures of accountability on these same students through high-stakes testing and other types of standards-movement efforts.

In New York City, a regimen of tests determines how and when a student progresses through the system. I'm not suggesting that we don't have standards or that we don't have measures of assessment, but that students should be evaluated by standards that are directly aligned to what the deliberate curriculum is, not the designed curriculum. And that an assessment of their academic achievement should consist of multiple and differentiated means of demonstrating knowledge and skill attainment. Alternative assessment models clearly allow for this type of thing. But New York State in its own regulation and practices does not. The result is that children of color are negatively impacted by these experiences.

If you look at data compiled by the Citizens Committee for Children, you'll see that high-needs community districts such as [inaudible] Bed-Stuy, East New York and Bushwick, the same communities that recorded significantly higher-than-average rates of police department incidents and the highest rates of youths under the age of 20 years old being arrested for felony, misdemeanor or violation charges during 2001. They also recorded lower-than-average results in terms of meeting or exceeding the New York State standard on the English language arts exam and the mathematics exam.

These students also suffered a wider gap in terms of those who were not meeting the standards. It's important to remember that 46 percent of New York State's prison inmates come from communities served by the city's 16 worst public schools. Ninety percent of New York's imprisoned men are former dropouts of the New York City public schools. Black and Latino students in New York City recorded the greatest growth of dropouts from 1992, when the rates were respectively 16.4 percent and 21.3 percent, to 2002, when the rates respectively escalated to 22.1 percent and 26 percent.



By their own research, the New York City Department of Education acknowledges that there is a connection between the increase in the standards and the increase in the dropout rates. But they feel that it is too soon to make a causal link between the two. In focus group discussions that I’ve had with court-involved boys about their classroom experiences, here’s some of the comments that they’ve made:

They felt that there was the need for less pressure from teachers. “Teachers would have to come down to earth and relate to kids as people. Teachers wouldn’t use words that the kids didn’t understand to teach topics they didn’t know anything about. And when asked questions about the words or topics, the teachers wouldn’t tell the kids to tell their peers to explain it. Classes, i.e. the subject matter, and teachers would be more interesting. There wouldn’t be testing for the sake of testing—that’s silliness. And people would acknowledge that we’re doing our best.” In reference to the types of knowledge, i.e. street knowledge versus school knowledge, one boy noted, “Both are important. But school folks don’t believe it, except those teachers who can relate to the community experience. Teachers don’t let kids share their knowledge. If I’m letting you give me knowledge, but you don’t let me give you knowledge, then that’s disrespectful.”

They all agreed that any demonstrations of knowledge outside of what is sanctioned by the school would result in some kind of suspension. The exceedingly poor experiences that court-involved youth have with elementary or secondary education impacts the extent to which they are engaged and attached to the process of learning and education. I don’t just mean schooling. I’m talking about a broader context of learning and education.

The other problem that results is that these students feel less competent to compete in this arena, which is absolutely not true. If you have discussions with them, it is very clear that there is a very high level of intellectualism. But it may not be appropriately defined or demonstrated in the narrow assessments that we tend to use in our schooling. In terms of education in the pipeline, I want to refer to the Hanbury v. Thompson lawsuit, because I think that that very appropriately demonstrates what’s not happening, or has not been happening at Rikers Island.

In this lawsuit, the school-aged plaintiff alleged that they did not receive or received extremely limited educational instruction for significant periods of time in violation of general education laws. They also alleged that defendants failed to provide special education services to those who were entitled to it. Lawyers who worked on the Hanbury lawsuit found that inmates—there were inmates who were never enrolled in schools. And some only received a few hours of education a week. The court ended up ordering that the Board of Education and the Department of Corrections had to come up with an education plan. And that meant that there had to be compulsory education for inmates under the age of 18 years, a minimum of three hours of education services daily for five weeks, and verification of inmate assertions of G.E.D. achievement.

I’m told that time’s up, but I just want to...I want to focus in on this for just a second. The notion that three hours per day for five days a week of instruction is sufficient to remediate educational deficiencies that these children are coming into the system with, and then prepare them to do something other than or even get the G.E.D. is just ludicrous.

And so when we talk about what we need to do educationally, we need to think about how do we disrupt what’s going on in the urban education discourse and restructure how we think about education and what we’re doing.

And we need to get really creative about that. The children who are in the system have not done well with our traditional methods of education. So we need to change that. The expectation should not be on students to somehow change how they engage the system. The system needs to change how it’s engaging the students. And we have not done that. A lawsuit was filed by the Legal Aid Society in 2004 alleging some of the same problems with regard to how kids are being educated. So before we can absolutely think that we’re going to get some kind of change with the outcomes, we have to change the input. And it has to be significant. Thank you.

**Fernando Restrepo, El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice:**

First of all, I just want to give thanks to Laurent Alfred and the Africana Criminal Justice Project for putting this together. Because I feel like it’s rare that you get an opportunity to have different people speaking on a particular topic, often in different languages, in many ways. But coming from a space of wanting to build and really move and shake the system. I was like, sitting back listening to Kecia’s presentation saying like, I feel you 100 percent. Being someone who knows pretty intimately, to some extent, what Hanbury’s all about, having been a teacher at Island Academy.

I want to kick it off by asking, how many people in here listen to Dead Prez? How many people in here know the song “They Schools?” How many people in here can sing the chorus? “They schools don’t teach us [sh--]. Our people need freedom, we need all we can [get]. All my high school teachers.... Telling me....”

I was an undergraduate at State University of New York at Bimington working on, on graduating. Trying to listen up. And I was listening to that album often, trying to reflect on my own education, trying to think about what the purpose of education is. And at some point I realized, having read Walter Rodney and a lot of other different other folks, that the purpose of becoming a scholar, the purpose of becoming someone who can read and critically analyze the world around them, like Paolo Friere says, is actually not to do it so that you can write not just an amazing thesis, put it up on a shelf and say, “Yo ma, I did this,” but to really engage the world around you so that you can change it and you can engage it.

And I decided that I wanted to engage not by force and policy or by doing the kind of research that’s necessary for us to affect change in that manner, but I wanted to be hands-on. I wanted to

be in the classroom. I wanted to be working with people. I wanted to learn what people were saying about us so that we could then translate and have that kind of dialogue in the community and act on it. So I decided I'd become a teacher.

And part of that process was me figuring out where I would work. And I had the opportunity to work with the Critical Resistance conference that happened here in New York City in the year 2001. And upon completing that project and seeing how powerful it was, I saw the importance of working directly with people who were incarcerated. My whole thing was, “Look, I want to work with working-class people of color. I would love to teach them on a college campus. But the majority of the working-class people I want to work with are not reaching the college campus. A lot of them are landing in jail.”

So I started working at this place called CUNY Catch doing transition work out of LaGuardia Community College, helping people make that transition from Rikers Island or a bid upstate to go back to a G.E.D. program or go to CUNY or go to wherever they can go. And Kecia was saying, folks getting G.E.D.'s really gives them a particular kind of limitation because they're not getting into Columbia University as quickly. They're not getting into Harvard. They're not getting into Yale. They're going from jail, they're not going to Yale. They're going to like, BMCC, often times. They're going to LaGuardia Community College. They're going to these schools right there. And these are good schools, too. These are schools that offer a lot of opportunities. But the reality is that there's a serious disparity in terms of where the leaders of the country come from and where our folks are ending up.

I was working on helping folks come in and out, and I was working as a transitional counselor. And I felt that that wasn't even being as impactful or meaningful as I could be. I had such an intimate kind of knowledge of what was going on at Rikers Island in terms of the schools, because I was doing outreach to the different schools. And I decided to actually finish up my masters and teach there. So I ended up at Island Academy.

Kecia mentioned Hanbury. And so Hanbury is this lawsuit that's really talking about the educational services are not really being provided the way they should be for people who are incarcerated. Now let me give you a little bit of knowledge of what it looks like at Rikers Island. These things are difficult for me, because I haven't really organized my thoughts. I haven't written about this, yet. I'm still reeling back from the lived experience of it. I'm still working on gathering my thoughts. But I can give you some anecdotes and hopefully give you a window, or a glimpse of what I've seen.

At Rikers Island, people are there for the most part as a parentheses on their life. I'm a humanities teacher, so bear with me. If a life is an essay, or a narrative, being on Rikers Island is either a parenthesis or a sentence. A year or less—we call it a bullet. Or it's just a parenthesis and you're there for a couple of months or a couple of weeks, sometimes a couple of years

waiting to find out what the punctuation will be. Is it going to be a sentence, an exclamation point or a big fat question mark. Where are you going next?

So we've got people from the age of 15 on up at Rikers Island. And I'll be honest with you, we've got people younger than 15. Because if you're undocumented from a village in Mexico and you've been locked up and you're 13, and they don't know, you can be in Rikers. Because I've had young brothers in my classroom, in my ESL classroom in the Sprungs, that were obviously very young.

So you go to Rikers Island. Now this is a parenthesis in your life. Imagine this being your life at the age of fifteen or sixteen or seventeen. You should be in school. You should be getting the tools you need to make a better life for yourself, make a better life for your family. Improve your community. But you're in Rikers now. So Rikers has to respond to the fact that they have young people in this parenthesis. And so they respond by providing a school, Island Academy. So Island Academy is available for people between the ages of 15 and 18 to go to school, and it is compulsory education. That means they must go to school. I'm going to leave that aside for a second.

On the flip side, if you're 18 or over, actually 19 or up, you have the opportunity to go to school at Horizon Academy. That's the other high school. So they're two high schools on Rikers Island that are run by the Department of Education. Horizon is an option. It's a possibility. Island Academy is a must. You must attend. Now, I ended up in Island Academy. I wanted to work with the young brothers.

And I realized after being there for over a year, even though I was trying to engage in everything I could think of, anything I could dream up in terms of libratory education, really trying to create the safest space possible within a classroom, really engaging with the tutelage of amazing professors who put me onto the work of Paolo Frierre and all kinds of other things—I could try all I could try inside of the classroom, and we could do amazing things. But that classroom itself did not have the power to change the reality of the entire Island.

That classroom itself, that one hour we spent together or those few hours we spent together, were just a drop in the ocean. The reality was, that classroom, by virtue of it being compulsory, by virtue of the students having to be there, was actually another cell block. Every single morning at about 8 o'clock in the morning, young men were lined up at ARDC, the Adolescent Reception and Detention Center, from the Sprungs, lined up, berated and yelled at in the yard and told, “Don't cause any trouble today, or you will lose certain privileges.”

They were lined up and brought into the school area. Now the school area was a trailer, a set of trailers that many people can't even imagine. Filthy. They stunk. These places were really horrible. When it rained and it snowed it was freezing in there. In the springtime they still didn't turn the heat off. We'd be like sweltering heat in there. And they'd have the young people come

on in. And they'd have them like move in to the classrooms. And that classroom became the cell block. That classroom became the cell for those young people for the rest of the day.

They were there until lunch. Then they'd get lined up, go out for a really un-nutritious lunch. And then, after lunch, which was really like atrocious, they'd come back to the classroom and they'd be there all day. That was the reality. And so I'm the visionary teacher, I'm really trying to create a safe and loving space because I really am on the Island because I care about working class people of color and the situation that we're in, right? And I'm engage in the everyday workings of trying to engage in literature.

We're looking at Assata's autobiography. We're looking at works of Tupac Shakur. We're looking at Malcolm X's Autobiography. We're looking at whatever we can get our hands on. We're looking at Albert Noah Washington, Mumia Abu-Jamal. We're looking at all of this literature under the guise of a multicultural literature class, which is what it is. And in the process of doing that we're able to get a lot of things accomplished. But there are interruptions.

Occasionally the corrections officer needs to check and see if somebody stole something. Occasionally they need to see if the person that stole something has decided to hide it inside their body cavity. So I'm asked to step aside. My lesson is now put on pause. Another pause in a life that's put on pause. And young men are stripped naked, facing the wall, checked in a humiliating and degrading manner, and then expected to just go on learning after it's said and done.

In the ESL classroom, I had an incident where an officer, a white officer as white as I—a light-skinned Latino officer comes in and says, “Ay, mira, we have to do some checking around the things today, and I'm going to teach you a couple of things, you know?” He tells me, “Watch. Check it out.” He thinks we're in cahoots, because I'm the teacher, he's the cop. And we're working together, right?

He asks all the students to lift up their shirts and demonstrate what kind of tattoos they have. And he goes around asking them about the tattoos that they have on their body. And he tells me in English, assuming that the young men don't know English, that he knows more about these tattoos than they think he knows. So he's going to be looking for gang tattoos and he's going to ask and see if they admit that these are gang tattoos or not. Because if they admit it then it will be a little easier for them. But if they don't admit it, then they're in serious trouble. They might go to the hole.

And I am a teacher. And as a teacher, I believe that it is my job to love my students and work with my students because I care about how they learn. I care about my classroom. I want to provide a safe space in my classroom for us to critically engage the world around us. And here I'm powerless. Here all of a sudden I'm this teacher inside this school. I'm part of the D.O.E. But we're guests of the D.O.C. We're guests. This is not our house.

Department of Corrections will let you know, “This is our house.” And the educational programs? That’s good. That keeps the kids out of trouble for the day. But this is our house. This is really about control, and then care. Custody control or care, okay? So I’ve watched kids get stripped. I’ve watched kids get pulled out of the classroom because of a particular tattoo that they have. I’ve watched kids get beaten.

The amount of violence at Rikers Island is incredible. People don’t even begin to understand. I was working on the Island when the atrocities of Abu Ghraib happened. And I brought that kind of information in to the students. And I was working with the young men talking about the torture. Talking about how horrible it is, the spectacle of it all. And the honest reaction from the young men was like, “Well what’s the big deal? We deal with this shit everyday.” And I’m like, “You’re right. But people outside don’t know that. People really don’t know that. And that’s what we need to do.”

And part of it is, I feel we need to expose that not so that people then have this amazing amount of knowledge and they put it back on the shelf, right, but that they take that knowledge and do something with it. Because it doesn’t need to be like this. After working on Rikers Island and seeing the violence of a space like that, I had the opportunity, when I was really sinking, I mean I was really drowning in the everyday of this experience, I had the opportunity to go interview for a position as a teacher at El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice.

And I played hookey from my job at Rikers Island one day to go check out El Puente. And I’ll tell you, I didn’t want to leave the place. I cried on the way out. El Puente Academy is a school for about 150, 175 working class youth of color, like ninety-something percent Latino and then African American. And at El Puente, there are no bells. At El Puente there aren’t hundreds of police officers. There’s one school safety officer. And she has been instructed to handle every situation with love. And if ever she felt that there’s a serious safety concern, that she’s to get other facilitators. (Facilitators being the teachers.) And that they collectively handle situations so police never have to enter El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice. We avoid that at all costs.

So I got the gig. I’m like El Puente now. And I’m seeing what it’s like on a daily basis. What a school that places emphasis on education, on building critical consciousness, on people loving their community can be like, and a school that’s based on control is like. There’s a clear difference. The schools like Island Academy, the schools like Horizon, they are necessary. We need schools. We need programs for people who are incarcerated. But we need to look critically at what kind of programs they are, and who’s running them.

I was alone, I felt like many times, as a radical teacher at Island Academy. There were maybe two others, and we were all in different locations. We really cared about our students. It was very difficult to make those links and be able to make some serious changes in the system. My suggestion is, we need more people to be involved and organized. We need people to join organizations like the Prison Moratorium Project, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the

Audre Lorde Project, DRUM [inaudible], Critical Resistance in New York City—these are organizations that are working on the organizing front, really trying to affect some serious change. Change the funding, put more funding into alternatives to incarceration. Don't put the funding into more beds when the crime rate is dropping. But I also think we need educators. I also think we need really dedicated and loving people. Working class people of color, hopefully, because we've got a lot of working class people of color suffering in these situations.

We really need a lot of working class people of color to really step it up and become teachers and educators and specialists of all sorts, so that it's not one person going into this school, or another person going into these schools, but cadres of people going into these schools. Because had there been five of us in Island Academy really working together on a regular basis out in the Sprungs, the most lily-white location of Island Academy in terms of the staffing, then we would have seen some serious changes. But that wasn't possible.

And I also believe that we have to advocate for more serious community-based schooling. Community control of the schools and accountability from the schools to the community. Because what happens at El Puente Academy, that kind of visionary piece, that doesn't happen on an everyday. That happens when a community-based organization that's based in the community serving it for a long period of time decides they're going to open a school. Not when a school's imposed on the community with some people from the outside coming in. Okay? So let's fight for that.





The most formative years of one’s life, I heard or read somewhere, is ages one through nine. But I believe that all in this room will agree with the opinion that you can reach a 16-year-old, a 17-year-old, an 18-year-old, even a 19-year-old, if you try. Again, before I went to jail I attended Brooklyn Technical High School. Did well. Was freshman class president. Honor student. Did well. Ended up on Rikers Island. Because there was no support. There was no one there to tell me that whatever it is you’re chasing can wait. Whatever it is that you want can wait. Whatever it is that you think you need now can wait. Do this first. Do school first. Get an education first. No one was there to tell me that.

And when I got to the Island, No one was.... Again, how do you worry about education, how do you worry about education and you haven’t had a shower in three days? How do you worry about education and you’ve been hungry for the last 15 months. Fifteen months—you’ve been hungry for 15 months. You’re not worried about education. How do you worry about education when there’s no one teaching anything—when there’s a bunch of people standing around you telling you, “Well, I got mine. You’re locked up now, so you worry about getting yours. But I’m telling you, you’re a screw-up. You’re a nobody.”

Who in the hell wants to hear that? I’m trying to get mine together, so who in the hell wants to hear that? But that’s the reality of things, you see? Island Academy, at least where I was, which is where Fernando was, as well—it’s where we met. There was a mindset there that anyone there, students, all the students there are screw-ups that were all on our way Upstate or we’re all on our way to these long lives of crime that will end in a long prison sentence. And unfortunately, it’s true. Unfortunately.

Unfortunately, a lot of friends that I’ve made are in prison. Unfortunately a lot of friends that I’ve made are drug dealers, are stickup kids, are scam artists, are con artists, because no one’s reaching out. And they all have families like I do that can’t even begin to understand, that can’t even begin to know what it is for their children out there. And you can’t blame them.

There are families of 10 and 12 whose mothers are worried about other children. And when one gets locked up, that’s just one that’s locked up. I can’t be worried about it—I have eleven more. It’s almost as if we have been forgotten. It’s almost as if my generation has been forgotten. It’s almost as if the world stopped caring. It’s almost as if we’ll let happen what’s going to happen. It’s a damn shame. There’s absolutely no reason for that. Because all we’re asking for is guidance.

I spent 15 months on Rikers Island, met thousands of people. And none of them, not one of them, were criminals. Not one, I met not one criminal. I met people who perpetrated criminal activities. No doubt. I did not meet one criminal. So these are kids asking for help. *I’m* a kid asking for help. I’m a kid that doesn’t understand why. I’m a kid that doesn’t understand why everyone

around me is willing to pat me on the back and tell me how smart I am and not willing to help me get anywhere, not willing to help me do anything. Why?

I'm a kid that's wondering why, why did I have to end up where—why, why was I even there? Why? What the hell was I doing there? What the hell is any 15-year-old doing in a jail cell? What the hell is any 15-year-old doing getting jumped for a pair of speakers. Doesn't belong there. Doesn't belong in those situations. We don't. They don't. I have no answers, either. Only for me I have answers, you know? Only for me I have answers.

I can only say, “I have to do this” and “I have to do that.” Because it's too much. It's too hard to figure out. It's too scary to figure out. It's too.... I'll use this: day before yesterday I was in Brooklyn. I was stopped by the police. I carry two cell phones. I usually throw my shirt over them. It can look like a gun, at times. No problem, I understood that. Whatever. And I was stopped, questioned. “What's that?” Those are some cell phones, whatever. Pull my shirt up. And the cop's partner is in the car and he says, “Damn.” Damn. Like, “not a gun.” It's cell phones. Like, “We didn't get one.” Why?

**Russell Rickford:**

Thank you, Brother Kenny. Now it's clear to you why we're so proud of this brother. And of course there are so many more like Kenney. Few are as articulate as Kenny. But certainly there are many, many more who think just as critically as Kenny, and are just as committed to their communities. So the problem is before us. Clearly all of the panel members have reminded us that there is an onslaught, an assault against our children.

I want to take about 15 minutes to do some Q&A. I know that you're eager to interact with this panel. That will mean that you'll only have about 50 minutes for lunch. Be forewarned. Go and get your lunch on real quick. But I do want to get some Q&A in.

**Question:**

Thank you. Thanks so much. Thanks to this panel and all of the work that you do. It's wonderful that this conference is open to the public. Two quick announcements and a question: Robin Kelley talked last week at the Left Forum and he used a beautiful term. He talked about “creating liberated futures in the present.” And I hope that's something that we're doing here.

And talking about that, just very briefly, 51<sup>st</sup> birthday of Mumia Abu-Jamal today. Not to conflict and have even less time for lunch. But 1 o'clock, people will be meeting at the Harlem State Office Building, marching from there up to Salem Church. You have details on flyers.

Secondly, this is less of an announcement and more of an offer of material support. A group of us started in East New York, Brooklyn an artist and activist collective. And all of you by definition are members of that. We have a friend that's offered a house that's been in his family

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for 100 years as a free community meeting space. We're doing a variety of programs and events. Everyone here is welcome to come, and you can use that space for to your advantage.

Of the programs, we’re doing a free monthly breakfast program. This coming Friday it will start. Last Friday of every month we’re doing a free legal clinic. I’d ask the young brother to be part of that. [inaudible] the writer of the *Little Black Book* is going to be part of that. A number of [inaudible] a monthly program offering monthly hip hop and spoken word night. Here’s the question, in deference to the brother:

In creating liberated futures in the present. We know that [inaudible] there are not enough conferences like this and not enough—this Green Tea House is a model of something that we’d like to do across the country. But would members of the panel and members of the group like to speak to that? Creating liberated futures in the present. Thank you.

**Kennith Robinson:**

Basically, again, it’s easier for me—and I’m going to speak for everyone who’s in the same boat as me—it’s easier for me to worry about myself than worry about 100,000 or a 1,000,000 other people. But, at the same time, we’re not naïve. We’re not stupid. We’re not even lazy. We just don’t know where to go with it. We’ve seen things in the past tried and failed. We’ve seen things torn down. So we have nowhere to go. We have no outlet for it.

Sure, we’re not stupid. We can see what’s going on. But what do we do with all the energy? What do we do with it? It’s a lot easier for me to go out...it’s a lot easier for me to take whatever intelligence I may have and go out and make a million dollars for myself than it is for me to try and liberate a people. Because I know that me using it for me is going to be definite. Me using it to try to liberate a bunch of people who are losing hope—we are losing hope. We’re losing hope, here. Someone, I mean, the warriors of old. Come one. Come back. Show us something. The warriors of old need to return home. Because we’re lost here.

We’ll be in complete—it’ll dissolve. We won’t even be worried about it anymore in a little while. Truthfully. We’ll all be out for self. And that’s when all hell will break loose. And that’s when you’ll really have a problem. I mean, you think it’s bad now. Wait until then. You think schools are bad now. You think there’s a lot of children locked up in prison now. Wait until then. Wait until all hope is gone. Then you’ll see. The warriors of old need to return, basically. Show us a way. A little glimmer of light somewhere so that we have something to follow.

**Russell Rickford:**

Thank you, Kenny. I would just point out the obvious, which is just that along with the warriors of old, whose input we always need, we have the new warriors, today’s warriors. And some of them are sitting beside you. Some of them are sitting out in the audience. So that we know that we can take instruction from the past. But ultimately we have to out of relative obscurity seize our destiny and either fulfill it or betray it. That’s for our generation to do.

**Piper Anderson:**

I was just going to add that Robin Kelley also talks about the radical imagination. And that is where it begins—our imagination. And that is what my work is about. I’m committed to activating the radical imagination with the folks around me, so that we can create that vision of what the world can be. And it starts by breaking down all of these audiences.

You know, we’re taught to be audiences in the world. We watch TV, we’re an audience. We come to a panel, we’re an audience. We go to a performance event, we’re an audience. We’re audiences all the time. In a classroom you’re an audience and the teacher is there performing for you. What does that teach us? It teaches us to sit back and listen. It teaches us to take information in and watch as other folks do the work. But we’re not taught to actually get up and act and move and do things.

Even the first step of doing that is so difficult, because everything in you is being taught to just sit back. Don’t move. Don’t do anything. Just listen. And young people, the young people that we work with, have so much information and know exactly what’s going on. But they’re taught to be audiences. So they’re like, “Well I don’t know what to do. I know what’s messed up, but I don’t know what to do, because I’m not supposed to know.” But it begins there, breaking down those walls.

**Russell Rickford:**

Thank you, Piper. Okay, so I’m going to have the next two questions consecutively. I’m going to change the format. Please address your question to a specific panelist. Unfortunately we only have time for one panelist to respond. So we’ll take these next two questions, respond to them, and then the last three questions.

**Question:**

I guess this question would be for Kenny, or for Fernando. I was here with a student of mine. She’s a part of a group of young people from our community center in Harlem. And we’re doing a youth conference on Tuesday. And the topic that they wanted to focus on was juvenile justice and education. Turns out another group who is doing a panel wanted to do the same thing, which I think says that our young people are interested in the topic.

And so we kind of tried to focus it in. And they’re really interested in the transition from—we have a transitional school at our center. And so we have a lot of young people who have been coming out of OCFS facilities Upstate, and trying to really talk to them about what the education is like up there. But I think that I could extend it to Rikers also.

I was really surprised, and a lot of our young people were surprised, to find out that those students felt like they learned a lot more in the facilities. Granted, it was only a couple of those students. It was the structure. They said they had caring instructors. And I’m sure there are



Part of that was because there were people on the Island telling him, “You can do it. You can still do it.” But part of it was like, Kenny came through with mad skills. It’s not like we were making miracles happen in there. Kenny was Kenny. He came through the way he came through.

I’ve seen situations where, depending on the student, depending on the teacher, they’re able to build the kind of relationship that will help foster a particular kind of learning. So for instance, at Rikers Island I’ve seen people learn how to read. I’ve seen people move a couple of grade levels in terms of their reading. I’ve seen some people become much more interested in a particular subject matter, and so they gain knowledge in that way and they want to come out and they want to continue to pursue it.

But overall, as a structure, there’s so many things that are standing in its way. If we’ve got a budget, it there’s some accountability around budgets, why put all of the money into putting people in cells? Why don’t we put that money into community-based organizations and community-based alternatives to incarceration where people can go. We can create more alternative ways of gaining that knowledge and gaining the skills that are necessary. We don’t have to go with the traditional school knowledge. But that doesn’t mean locking kids up.

**Russell Rickford:**

So we’ll have the next three questions consecutively and try to finish up in the next five minutes. Again, please identify a panelist.

**Question:**

This is for Fernando. Fernando, you know me. I work at Rikers Island, so I know what’s happening. But it’s directed to Kenny, as well. Don’t you feel, Kenny, that up at Rikers Island that sometimes the C.O.’s—which they get out of line—sometimes they treat us...and I’m from the old school, I try to give directions, I’m an old dog—that they see that the students are beating each other down, that they’re going to treat you the same way? You understand what I’m saying here? You see? And before you answer that question, I’m going to give a little leeway, okay?

What happens is that, one of the things from the old school that I teach these guys when I go in there—and they’ll tell you I’m one of the radicals, I’m one of these people—that if a C.O. beats one person down, then everybody stay locked down. Don’t come out your huts. Because they treat you the way they see you treat each other. Bottom line. That’s what I think. You can answer that question, but that’s what I think. Often times I open the classroom and let the kids know, no one told you today they love you today, I love you. Yes, they do need some direction up there. There’s no getting around it. And you need to come down. You need to come down there and find out what’s going on.







**Kenith Robinson:**

I’m simply going to say that behavior is learned. So if all I’ve seen all my life is people beating other people up. And all I’ve heard is how my uncles and my father and my older brothers have come down and they talk about all of the people they’ve beat up and all of the notches on their stick, then that’s what I’m going to do. Especially when I get to jail, because that’s what I hear right here—that in order to survive, you have to fight.

And if I walk in and the first thing that happens to me is that I get knocked over the head and a pair of sneakers taken off my feet, then my next impulse is to knock someone over their head and take the sneakers off their feet. It’s simply learned behavior. It’s not something that you come up with on your own. It’s learned behavior. Someone needs to un-teach it, so we can unlearn it.

**Fernando Restrepo:**

You want me to speak to the last brother’s comment?

**Russell Rickford:**

You can speak to whatever comment you want, but your three minutes are running, brother.

**Fernando Restrepo:**

Alright. I think Kenny kept it real about what’s going on the Island. I think it’s an interesting thing, having worked there. There are people who are loving and caring who come in as teachers. And there are people who are loving and caring who come in as C.O.’s, you know? There are people who are loving and caring—it’s really complicated—who come in all these different capacities. But the reality it, we need to be really critical. We’re there, and you’re a trooper, brother, for being there. You’ve been there for a minute. I know you’re going to be there for a minute longer.

It’s really difficult to be there and to be loving and caring all the time. That system’s completely broke. It’s a plantation system. You’re looking at a serious reinvented, reincarnated plantation system. And it’s scary. What I think people can do about it is join an organization that’s doing serious, proactive organizing around the issue.

I like the idea of gardens and teahouses and spaces for people to build and nourish ourselves as we engage in struggle. But I don’t think those envisioning and alternative spaces alone are the answer. I think we need to be visionary and have these amazing ideas about what we want to put in place and start practicing those relationships right now.

But at the same time that we’re doing that at a community level, on a personal level, on a family level, I think that we need to engage in serious warfare against the state.

I mean, very honestly, in the form of direct action, civil disobedience, protest, by any means necessary. And what I mean by that is, yes, hold the elected officials accountable. Talk to your city councilperson. If your city councilperson ain't doing it, go down to City Hall and sit down and make sure people hear you. Join organizations that are developing really strategic campaigns to engage in these kinds of changes, because there are organizations out there.

The No More Youth Jails Coalition had really proactively worked against like having a whole lot of funding go into building more jail cells or beds for young people when there's no need for that. You've got organizations that have been fighting against the Rockefeller Drug Laws. And some of these things have been amended and changed, dropped, so on and so forth. So this is really the tactic.

I feel like people do come to conferences. And we gain a lot of knowledge. But at the end of the day, do we belong to an organization that's doing some work around this issue? Do we volunteer at different organizations? Do we put ourselves on the line so that other people can live free? Do we put ourselves on the line for freedom? That's my question. I suggest that we go out and think about that? Do we put ourselves on the line for freedom. And if the answer is, "no." If you at the end of the day say, "Yo, I don't put myself on the line for freedom," find a way to do so. Because we need to do that. Put yourself on the line for freedom. I do. Thank you.

**Kecia Hayes:**

I would echo everything that Fernando is saying. I think we also need to get out there. And when we're looking and talking with politicians, we have to demand that they answer questions about why we're funding prisoner education in the way that we are funding it. There's tons of research out there that talks about critical pedagogy, which Fernando was absolutely doing in the classrooms. And it talks about how that can help youth actually engage in the process. We need to demand from politicians that they create policies that allow teachers like Fernando to do more of that type of thing.

Right now there's nothing. There are no frameworks that allow for those types of things. So you have teachers like Fernando that do become an island and who are isolated. And that's not good for anyone in any type of circumstance. So we need to make sure that Fernando, who's out there on the front lines, is supported. And the only way that we can do that is going out and making sure that politicians know this is what we want. We can go out and we can use frameworks like charter schools to create situations like El Puente, so that we can make sure that we take back the educational discourse and we take back educational practices in view of what we know is best.

The indigenous knowledge, the subjugated knowledge of people in this community is phenomenal. The history of blacks in terms of education in this country is about the community educating themselves, educating themselves so that they were empowered to do things differently. We need to get back to that. These are our children, and we need to make sure that

we build the structures that allow for that. And I think the only way for us to do that is for us to go out there on the front lines and demand that it happen.

We’re funding all of this stuff. We pay taxes and we fund it. We need to start de-funding it. And the only way we’re going to de-fund it is if we actively go out there and take back our revenue and take back what we have given the state permission to do.

**Dr. John Devine:**

I think that our whole panel can be summed up with the little exchange you just saw here between Kenny and Fernando. Kenny said something very significant, I think. He said that when he first encountered Fernando, he didn’t care whether he had his hat on sideways or backwards or whatever. What he was really saying is that Fernando was not afraid of him, that he’s...in other words, if our teachers can look at students, even the tough kid that’s leaning up against the wall and is looking very threatening in the corridor, and realize that there’s another side to that kid besides the side with the hat turned on the side....

So in other words, it’s all about the distance that we adults have created between ourselves and the youth. And I think in terms of what your question was, which was, “What can we do?” We can start a national conversation about this. That we as adults, as parents, as grandparents and teachers, what we’ve really done is abdicated the job of interacting with our youth. Just like the suburban parent who says, “I can’t deal with this kid, so I’m going to turn the kid over to a psychiatrist because it’s beyond me.” Well in a sense we’ve done that with our entire culture, and said, “We can’t handle these youth,” So we’ve turned it over.

The teachers have turned it over to the school safety agents. The school safety agents weren’t working, so we’ve turned it over to the police. So we now have 150 police walking around Thomas Jefferson High School with a gun on his hip. They’ve all said, “We can’t handle it,” so we’ve turned it over to technology. And so who’s driving the culture? It’s the firms that are creating the technology which is now all over our schools. It’s not only in Iraq. They’re selling technology in the prisons and in the schools.

And so what’s really supervising youth now is not even human beings. It’s technology. So who’s crowning the culture? It’s these corporations who are also selling the sneakers that are convincing the kids that this is where it is? So we adults have to take back the entire culture—the culture of technology, the culture of commercialization, and the commercialization of violence through the media and video games and television and movies and so forth. So it’s a question of starting a conversation about how we change this entire crazy culture that we’re living in.

**Piper Anderson:**

First, to answer this question about getting the information out to the folk, what you were doing is exactly how we get information out to the people. You make your own flyers if you need to. You go out to where the people are and pass out the information. One of the things that one of our chapters in [inaudible] does is this thing called “Jump Out Poetry,” where they go to the housing projects and they sit on the corner and they start spitting poetry. And folks will sort of gather round like, “What’s going on?” And then we start passing out information to them about the prison system, about the work that we’re doing to inform folks.

And don’t underestimate the problem of the word and the problem of art and culture in order to mobilize people, in order to organize people. One of the things that you mentioned was the fact that the people that already know about this are here. So when we see something about the criminal justice system, we’re like, “Oh, hell yeah. I want to organize around this. This is something I care about.”

But to a lot of folks in our community, they’re like, some folks are really like, “We need prisons. Prisons are necessary. Where are we going to put the folks who act up?” We have bought into a lot of the propaganda that the media has perpetrated about us as community members, saying that young black males are dangerous, they’re violent, young people are violent, they’re aggressive, we need to put them someplace. So what are we going to do with them? Let’s lock them up, because there’s really no other place to put them, right?

But they don’t know about what’s happening behind bars. They don’t know about the violence that’s happening to young people in prisons. How they’re being treated in prisons. They don’t know about the alternatives that exist that are far more effective. And how do we get that information to them? How do we educate them and school them on what the prison system is really about? We do that with our art. We consider our work on-the-ground media.

While we don’t have access to a satellite to broadcast our stuff on TV, we don’t have a FOX News network, we have our art. So we go to where the people are and we perform for them and we share with them and we use the arts and culture to mobilize them and to begin to activate the imagination about alternatives. And then we plug them into organizations like Prison Moratorium Project, Critical Resistance, organizations that are doing the concrete work of changing policy.

But don’t underestimate the power of getting people in the door with the arts and culture, and educating them and getting their minds working around how these issues operate in their lives. And that’s how it has to go down. And we’re actually doing a workshop this afternoon called “Lyrics on Lockdown: Movement building through the arts.” So if you want to hear more about the work that we’re doing, feel free to come to that workshop.

And also to speak to the last thing that you were talking about, brother, about solutions, it comes back to us doing the footwork. Us doing the footwork and getting out there and using our words, using our arts, using our movement, using whatever networks we have access to bring people in. Because it's not just us that's going to make this happen. The few people who are in this room, who are at this conference today, or the folks who are organizing who are already a part of organizations, it's going to take a whole lot more than that in order for us to make this happen.

We got to bring all of our folks in who don't know what's going on, who feel like it's necessary and they don't have anything else that they can do, we have to bring them in, as well. And we can bring them in. So we have to do that work. So go back. When you leave here, take that information to somebody who you know. You know, the elder or whoever. The teacher who's like, “Well, what can I do about prisons?” Or “I'm scared of this young brother who's walking down the street next to me because his pants are baggy or whatever.” And talk to them. And let them know what's really going on. And bring them in. And speak to them in a language that they understand. And that's how we do it.

**Russell Rickford:**

Thank you, Piper. Please join me in thanking the panel.



The dynamics of what is occurring in the onslaught, in the warfare, against black children and youth, and black students, is so overwhelming that it seems unprecedented. But there are historical predecessor events that prefigure what we are experiencing today. And it's important for us to frame our argument in a historical context.

Another reason that it's important is because the dynamics of what are occurring now aren't adequately being addressed in most African American Studies Programs. About a year ago, the Africana Criminal Justice Project contacted a large number of black studies departments throughout the country to ask them are they developing courses or curricula that address the prison industrial complex. And we were shocked to discover that barely—only a handful of black studies and programs were even developing curricula that address the dynamics of such a central issue within the lives of millions of black people.

And so ACJP developed a curriculum, thanks to Geoff Ward, thanks to Laurent Alfred, and next year with the coming on board of Keesha Middlemass, all of us are very excited about Keesha joining us, that we have tried to develop a curriculum that is grounded in the historical experiences of our people, but also has a very clear view of the structural dynamics of where racism is taking us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The separate but equal structure that was sustained in Farmville, Virginia, that was in existence under Jim Crow segregation, is now being transformed into what in my writing I call the “new racial domain” of “colorblind” 21<sup>st</sup> century racism. The signs reading “White” and “Colored” have been taken down. But we now have a new regime of racial domination centering on what I call three deadly institutional processes: mass unemployment, mass incarceration and mass disfranchisement. All three of these coming together to create a new enslavement of African American people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And that new enslavement targets more than any other group within our community our young people.

The modern cycle of racial destruction starts with chronic mass joblessness and poverty. Real incomes for working poor people actually fell significantly during Clinton's second term in office. After the 1996 Welfare Act, the social safety net was largely pulled apart. After the Bush regime took power, chronic joblessness spread to black workers in the manufacturing sector and in other areas. By early last year in 2004, in New York City, about a half of all black male adults were outside of the paid labor force. By January 2004 the numbers of families on public assistance had fallen to 2 million, down from 5 million on welfare in 1995.

But the poverty index had hardly fallen at all. So in other words, people are poorer than ever. But millions have been thrown out of public assistance. So the so-called welfare state has continued to shrink. Federal money for employment, for job training, that is for public schools, continues to decline. Meanwhile, billions and billions is spent on a war that was not necessary, and did not advance the issue of democracy.



Now mass unemployment inevitably feeds mass incarceration. And you look at the statistics. We talked about this at length today. I only want to cite a couple of them. One third of all prisoners are unemployed at the time of their arrest. The vast majority of those in prison who do have jobs prior to their arrest earn less than \$20,000 a year. Parole, as I said this morning, has been made much more restrictive. In '95, Pell Grant subsidies supporting educational programs for prisoners were ended.

What is the impact politically? As Keesha Middlemass has talked about, in about 18 states, prisoners and people who go through the prison industrial complex, in roughly about 18 states they are either permanently or temporarily disfranchised. About 15 percent of all African American males nationwide today are either permanently or currently disfranchised. In Mississippi, one third of all black males are able to vote for the remainder of their lives. In Florida 818,000 residents cannot vote for life. For life.

And GW theoretically won the presidency by less than a thousand votes. If 818,000 people are disfranchised, what does all of this mean for our children and young people? In the not too distant future lies the social consequences of the new racial domain—an unequal, two-tiered civil society characterized by a governing hierarchy of middle- and upper-class so-called citizens who own nearly all of the property, all of the financial assets, and a vast subaltern of quasi- or sub-citizens encumbered beneath the cruel weight of permanent unemployment, discriminatory courts, sentencing procedures, dehumanized prisons, voting disfranchisement, residential segregation, the elimination of most public services for low-income people and the poor.

This latter group is virtually excluded from any influence in national public policy debates. Institutions that once provided space for upward mobility and resistance for working people such as unions have largely been dismantled now. Integral to all of this—all of this—is racism, sometimes openly vicious and unambiguous, sometimes presented in a colorblind, race neutral language. This is the new racial domain that is threatening the futures of our children.

I only have about a minute. I want to emphasize what is to be done. It is not surprising, as you've seen if you've been here today, that resistance is already occurring on the ground in thousands of neighborhoods, in community centers, block by block all over the United States. In local neighborhoods, people of color, young people, are fighting against police brutality, excessive course. You have local community-based organizations fighting against mandatory-minimum sentencing, fighting for prisoner's rights. In the fight for a living wage and expanding the rights of working people, in the struggles for working women, for daycare for their children, healthcare, fighting for public transportation and housing.

These social and economic struggles are not disconnected from the battle against the prison industrial complex. Because, in effect, it is a battle for democracy. You have the right wing that wants to construct a theocratic state that is based upon their false and hypocritical construction of

faith-based—so-called faith-based—institutions. It’s always intrigued me that the right wing cares so deeply about the right of embryos, but when a child comes into the world, they could care less. They could care less!

They want to destroy all social institutions. They want to get rid of public education. They want to privatize everything. They want to get rid of public housing. They want to get rid of investments in college or scholarships for minority students. They want to destroy the lives of our children. And we will not let them do that.

And so it’s important for us to see that all of these struggles are interconnected, that the authoritarian, draconian state that they are constructing...there is a connection between this illegal, immoral war that they are conducting, spending a billion dollars every five days, instead of investing in public housing, healthcare and education in our own county, that there is a connection between the Patriot Act, between the draconian use of excessive force, and the buildup of S.W.A.T. teams in policing this country. Thirty years ago there were hardly any S.W.A.T. teams in police structures in the United States. Now there are over 10,000 of them.

So what used to be extreme and extraordinary uses of force and violence now become increasingly routine. That’s a direct relationship between the kind of state they are trying to construct and the fact that they want to eliminate the futures of our children within it. They want to eliminate their voice and vote. This is what mass incarceration is in part about—the elimination of democratic checks and procedures on their control of the state, and in part eliminating the voices of black and brown and poor and working people from democratic processes. We cannot let them do that.

And so this conversation is very important. Because it is through our interrogation of these processes that we can have informed, critical action on the ground in the real world in struggling for a better world for our children and for ourselves. Thank you.

**Dr. Geoff Ward:**

Thank you, Dr. Marable. As Manning mentioned, activism on these issues, around these issues, political engagement with these issues has been ongoing in this city, around the country, around the world for some time now. I think this is a rising tide. I certainly hope it is. And events like this will hopefully contribute to focusing and building that energy. Among those at the frontline in this struggle in terms of activism and political engagement, is our next speaker...Please welcome Kate Rhee to our panel.

**Kate Rhee, The Prison Moratorium Project:**

Hi everybody. How’s everyone feeling. I know it’s definitely 3:30 nap time, that afternoon time that happens to us a lot. I’m going to—you know, I’m actually going to slow down a little bit with myself. It’s been a crazy week. If anything I think we’re in a mode of deep reflection right

now—organizationally, politically, personally, in every level. And so, along the lines of the topic of this panel, there are two things that I wanted to kind of focus on.

One is stepping back and really kind of...I just want to kind of give three examples that strike me as relaying the depth and scope of structural racism to oppression. But more than that, I really want to share some learned lessons from our work in our everyday work, in our everyday building work, in our everyday dismantling work. When we talk about prison abolition, no more prisons, how that translates in our campaign work, how that translates in our organizational development, how that translates in our interpersonal dynamics is deep. It's painful and its never-ending.

And part of why I want to share that is because I think the second point that I want to talk about is, I think especially at conferences we talk about a lot of—you know, I think we're all pretty much on the same page here, or else you all would not be here on a Saturday afternoon. Let's just be real, alright? Ideologies, rhetoric, political discourse, all these languages, what we need to do, where we need to go—I think we're all on the same page.

I think where the hard work comes is how do we translate that? We talk about one, the structural racism stuff. How does that seep into our day to day lives? How does that translate into our internalized oppression? I'll share just one or two examples. And two, how do we translate our ideologies in our work? I think this is like the biggest challenge for us all, especially as organizers, right? Especially as activists, especially as oppressed people working on this. How do we come together?

So that's kind of the spirit in which I prepped this session, this talk, I guess. There are kind of three things that I want to quickly put out that I share with a lot of folks. Some of you have probably heard this three times. But that's the point. Everyone knows 2 million people behind bars....So I want to kind of share three examples in terms of their agenda, what we would put as their agenda.

One is—well, before that, let me just say part of what we kind of view, when we talk about abolishing the prison industrial complex, it's very much thinking about, and it reflects what I'm going to focus on, very much thinking about like prison. We talk about stopping prison expansion. But it's very much at the end of the day, how do we identify and stop the prison conditions that exist amongst us and the communities. So to me, these things are very much reflective of the prison, pipeline, condition, however you want to put it.

So back in 1970, there was...I forget all the official names. I used to have it once upon a time, but I don't think it's really that important. Other than the fact that a whole bunch of academics came together and put out another paper. Certain academics, right. University of Chicago, Stanford. You know, University of Chicago, bastion of neoliberalism. (I actually went to that school). So they put out a study. Basically, a whole bunch of experts, academic researchers

And why do you think that is? Why are they so interested? What is their argument that they were able to explicitly put out there as a reason why abortion should be accessible to low-income women, and mostly women of color? Population control, right? Because they basically projected that these are the women—this is back in the 70s—twenty some odd years later, these are the women that will give birth to children that will end up behind bars anyway, right? Let's nip it in the bud. The throwaway population, let's nip it in the bud. That's how deep it goes.

Two. And I'm sure many of you have heard this story or reality and work to legitimize we're doing that research work of kind of finding the sites and actual numbers and stuff, but the information that's like reading level of third and fourth graders are actually being drawn upon when legislators and different agency folks decide that they're going to project prison bed numbers. Right? Another projection. Starting from third grade.

And third, just to take it to how all that plays out. You think it's just kind of concept papers. How that played out? Basically, 2001—most of you probably know this work—is when we found out about \$65 million being in the city's budget, \$65 million being in the city's budget in 2001, to expand two youth jails by 200 jail beds. And you guys have probably heard this number broken down many times, but I'll do the math for you real quick. For 200 jail cells, at \$65 million, that's \$320,000 per jail cell, just for construction cost, right?

Now, when we found out about that, we basically galvanized, brought together and started fighting—stop the expansion, stop the expansion. And then we had to find out all the research. One of the things that we found out, is that these two facilities, two juvenile facilities, one in the Bronx in Horizons, and one in Brooklyn, in Brownsville—Horizons and Crossroads. This is in addition to Spotford, which is now called Bridges. Don't you love these names? It's all part of the colonizing tactic. Bridges, Horizons, Crossroads.

These are the three juvenile detention facilities in the city. Now Spotford is no longer called Spotford. It's called Bridges and it's being used as an intake facility. When they had this money in the pot, which passed under Guiliani's administration and passed over to Bloomberg's administration, the two facilities were under capacity, which is one of the biggest arguments we use as one of the grounds upon we definitely got people to listen and whatnot. They were under capacity at 70 percent.

So when the city council members—after we talked to them and educated them and all this stuff—when they were grilling Department of Juvenile Justice, Neil Hernandez, who had just come on board, how are you going to justify \$65 million to expand youth jails when it’s under capacity, he didn’t have that much to say. Part of it is that the whole thing went under before his day. But two, first of all, city council members didn’t even know that this was in the budget until later when it was pointed out, which is another story. But one of the answers that they gave was, he had his assistant answer, and it was like that clinical, “whatever” answer—it’s based on population projection, baseline population projection.

So I share those three stories to say, when we talk about their agenda, they are very much thinking ahead. They have their agenda in place. The projection is enormous. Having said that, and we talk about, wow, look how deep it is. And look at the structural racism and all that stuff. And I want to take that to how that plays out, how that feeds in our lives, I guess, amongst us. So I’m going to do it through specific examples, in terms of how it plays out in campaign work, how it’s played out in general building work.

One thing I want to say is this: I went to a retreat called “Progressive Communicators Network.” It’s a nationwide retreat of communications practitioners, you know communications practitioners are the ones that are supposed to be in charge of progressive messaging, right? I mean, it’s a good thing. I’m not saying....Progressive messaging. How do we get out there with this issue like prison issue, the most controversial and...issues. Prison reform. How do we put out prison abolition messages, right? No more prisons. We can barely talk about prisons without the red flag. You should see what happens to us when we put out “Prison Moratorium Project.”

So I went to this retreat. And it was great. It’s a group of folks who are doing great work, you know, from prison abolition to prison reform. And in the middle of it I realized that we’re coming up with all the PC languages, right? Language is powerful and it’s true, and we need to start reframing and we need to start looking at the oppressive language that we use that they have used to oppress us and all this stuff, right? But at a certain point I just realized, message is as only good as the work being done.

You could come up with the most PC, the right word, whatever word it is, to talk about different formulations. But at the end of the day you’re talking about lives, right? Everyday lives. The way we live and how it’s actually going to change. If we can’t actually put that into action, if we can’t funnel people, if we can’t point to actual examples, right? And I’m not saying that that effort should not go on. It’s important. We need to be conscious about our language and the power of language. But that’s where it brought me back to, okay, how are we doing our work? So let me share some examples in terms of how that plays out.

We go out there talking about “no more prisons,” you know, prison abolition. When we worked on that campaign, for example—this is some immediate context—when we worked at that campaign, No More Youth Jails was the name of the campaign, to cancel the \$64.6 million

allocation. We're like, let's stop that expansion. And we definitely talked about, okay, we need to reallocate those funds. And we had community assessment forums to figure out from the folks on the ground, from young people, from service providers, from teachers, what it is that we need in these communities that are very much targeted by the police and by the prison system.

Where the split happened was a whole bunch of us—one of the first things that came up was alternatives to incarceration programs. Everyone know what alternatives to incarceration programs are? I worked in one. So I know it pretty deeply. Now alternatives to incarceration programs definitely have a recidivism rate that's much lower—recidivism rate being the rate at which you return to prison—they definitely work better, because obviously they have a whole different approach.

And they cost a hell of a lot less. You're talking about \$130,000 about, to lock up a young person in a juvenile detention facility a year. You're looking at about \$3,000 to \$10,000 a year for an alternative to incarceration program. One of the splits that happened is, you try to win. And what's a quick way to win a campaign? You can give the city council members and the different decision-makers—city council members were like the secondary decision makers—if you could give the big decision-makers—the mayor and whatnot—the quick alternative, you can put that money in alternative to incarcerations and alternative to detention programs.

“Alternative to,” okay? Let's go to the alternatives that exist, alternatives to prisons. Fact of the matter is, right now, if we don't have anything set up in the communities with our politics to absorb people out of the court system other than alternatives to incarceration programs. So as much as we are very critical of ATI's in many ways, because it can act as a way of widening the net. Because essentially how it works is, you basically have to report to court.

So you get a second chance, you go to an ATI program. And if you mess up, and it's hit or miss, depending on your counselor, you can go right back. And sometimes, for longer. So the condition would be, you take an ATI now, and you'll get a year. For a year I'm going to monitor you, and then you're going to be off. But if you mess up, you're going to get five years. Okay? This was one of the cases with one of the young people I work with.

So this is still the entrapment of the system. Now ATD's, alternatives to detention—the detention program's run by the probation department, okay? Now you mess up there, it's just a faster pipeline back into the system. So the reason why I go through this in terms of technicalities, is because when we start doing work on the ground, we have to get nitty gritty in terms of what is it really going to take for us to talk about alternatives to incarceration, not just in terms of programs but in terms of what is it going to take with us.

We had a split. Because the quick win would have been, reallocate the funds to ATD's. And those of us who were like, “That's just putting the money within the Department of Juvenile Justice from here to there.” But then you know where we got stuck is—we were like ATI's are

better than ATD’s—but where we were really stuck is, programs like ours, that could really absorb the young people, programs in the communities that could really absorb the young people, without perpetuating, that don’t perpetuate the same ways of the prison system.

That’s one of the reasons why I say, it’s not just the prison cell. It’s the mentality. If you go to a lot of the ATI’s, the same ways. You’re dealing with a C.O., in many ways, with some of the managers. So we do work with ATI’s because they exist, and right now we don’t have the resources to absorb and do that diversion program. But we work with them to politicize them and work with them to maybe be better educators with their young people. So that’s how we’re going to apply our abolitionist strategy with the limited resources that we have.

I’m sharing that because that’s where we’re stuck. So we could talk about great political rhetoric all we want. But if we don’t start building those alternatives in our communities, like Dr. Manning Marable was saying, we’ve got to start not just identifying and building, we’ve got to start reclaiming what’s ours.

So the next example for us would be, the biggest learned lesson was, we stopped the expansion, where do we go from there? We talked about reallocation, but it was a rhetorical tool. Because reallocation, what I just talked about—and then the next thing was, let’s shut down Spotford. Because all the research came up. And we were like, “We don’t need Spotford.” These two facilities are at 70 percent undercapacity, the intake could very well be done there. Spotford was reopened after it was closed. We need to stop being—it’s not about stopping. I mean, we’re always going to be reactionary because we’re always on the defense. But simultaneously, we’ve got to really get intentional. We’ve got to get real hands-dirty in terms of what we want and making it happen.

So for example, with Spotford, we definitely talked about closing Spotford for like a whole year after we won the expansion stopping thing. But where people went to was, “Whoa. Let’s not even talk about closing Spotford until we figure out what we want in its place and how we’re going to take it over.” That means, as organizers, the kind of research that we do is different. The kind of building that we do is different. As organizers we can criticize researchers all we want. But the point is, they’re going to take direction from us.

So the kind of research that we’ve been doing and the kind of storytelling that we do, in our youth program and everything, we could talk about how messed up the system is forever, until we’re blue in the face. We get going. And that’s important. Because we need to start really seeing where different things interact and intersect and all that stuff. When we come to what do we want? Whoa. Silence falls after five minutes. Right?

So in terms of the whole Spotford thing, in terms of the kind of research that we do...the research that we have been doing, just to give you an example, is like poking holes in the system. That’s the easy part. But the kind of research that we’re not going to just be able to find in reports, is the kind of research that we need to do on the ground. [tape change] whatever you call it—“participatory research?” The kind of research that’s building with each other. And really confronting.

Because the research will always tell you how many “nonviolent” offenders—and I say that in quotation marks because it’s a horrible term—in prison, right? Okay. So are we going to start talking descriptively about what it is? What those charges are? What about the violent offenses? What are they about, right? So that kind of research I want to think about. And I’m mindful of the fact that we’re here in an academic institution. I want to kind of push us as we do this school to prison pipeline stuff.



The easy stuff is—you know, I talked about it in the other workshop—the easy stuff is the extreme examples. Like the five-year-old getting handcuffed on national television. I mean, I’m not saying that’s an easy story to talk about at all. But what I’m saying, you can get a lot of people on board. That’s why it’s getting covered on MSNBC, right? The stuff that is not going to get covered, the stuff that falls on our plate is the other stuff, right? And I want to close by saying the alternatives actually exist amongst us.

One of the regional superintendents was at a forum. And he was sharing the story of he’s from the community. He’s in the Bronx. He’s like, “Yeah, gang incidents happen in my school all the time. I don’t call in cops. I make everyone come to my room. We push out all the furniture. We have a truce right there. ‘You said,’ ‘He said,’ ‘She said,’ right there.” Of course, he’s also from the community. He’s not just someone who’s just walking in and saying, “Let’s mediate.”

So it’s about—and the more we rely, and what the prison industrial complex system has done, I think, in our day-to-day life that’s most detrimental, and I’m just going to share two stories and close up, right? The most detrimental thing that it’s done? It’s weakened us to a point where we don’t know how to negotiate problems amongst each other.

Do you know I recently moved into a coop building, and the first story I heard about is this guy who’s in charge of their thing, someone was urinating in the elevator in one of the buildings. They wanted to bring surveillance camera in. And bringing in AD8—and by the way, they have AD8 precinct come every other week. And I’m thinking—and this is one thing I want to say—local governing bodies. Infiltrate, please. The conversations and the things that go on in these places—unbelievable.

So they’re having this meeting about putting in surveillance cameras, right? And actually, a colleague and a friend of mine that actually lives in that building, he was telling me, “Wait a minute. You could probably have a conversation with a couple of people and do process of elimination and talk to people about watching out for...it could be someone’s husband or someone’s visiting. Whomever. Whatever the case is. And then just watch out and talk to each other. ‘Hey. Did you know blah blah blah?’ Why do we need a surveillance camera?”

And this thing happens...that’s part of how...What I’m saying is the school to prisons pipeline stuff, the Impact Schools initiative, yes, Bloomberg’s doing a lot of horrendous stuff. That’s the easy part to talk about. All the horrendous stuff. I want to talk about what are we doing. How are we taking on those...you know, one of the things in our youth program is that there are no taboo subjects in our youth program. How are we building those places to do that. It’s not because we know how to talk about all the topics. It’s just our willingness to talk through a lot of our own issues. So that’s my closing comments for the day.

**Dr. Geoff Ward:**

I bet you that's not your closing comment for the day. Our next speaker is Bakwari Kitwana....

**Bakari Kitwana:**

How's everybody doing? It's really great to be here. It's funny, when people hear the title, they laugh. I don't understand what that is. I think it's a serious topic. But I'm not going to talk about that today.

It's interesting when the folks who organized this asked me to participate in this, I was a little bit stunned. I love New York. I'm from Long Island. And anytime I get a chance to come to New York I come back. I live in Cleveland now. But I didn't feel that...you know I've talked about the impact of prisons on this generation of young people in my book *The Hip Hop Generation*. And I see the prison crisis as one of the major crises of our time.

And so I could understand why they might—and I mean, the book has had an impact, I like to think. So I can understand why they would have invited me out. But as an intellectual, I know many people such as Geoff Ward and everybody sitting out here who know much more about the topic than I do.

But what I think I'd like to share is, as a person who has been traveling the country engaging young people for much of the last decade and documenting the impact of hip hop and understanding the impact of hip hop, I want to just talk...as a person who's been around activists most of my adult life. I used to work with Third World Press. Came out of the Black Arts Movement. I've worked with countless activists most of my adult life. People like John Henrik Clarke to Haki Madhubuthi, Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez and others.

And so, I've been around the activist community for a long time. And as I look at the prison issue, I've been hesitant about getting involved in the activism for a lot of reasons. I think a lot of people might feel that way. And I want to just try to go through some of these things that I think will be helpful to people who are doing this work, as a person who's kind of inside and kind of outside, and as a person who's seen and observed political movements for a long time.

Let me first say that in terms of my book, *The Hip Hop Generation*, you know I said this, I think the prison crisis is one of the major crises of our time, and it was impossible to talk about the hip hop generation without talking about prisons. You all have heard countless statistics and details. I'm not going to bore you with that. But one of the most important statistics that I think can't be glossed over is, when you're talking about the hip hop generation, and people, we talk about this generation gap. What's different about this generation? The prison thing is different.

Because in our lifetime, the prison crisis has been created in our lifetime. So in 1970, before many people who most certainly are in what people call the millennium generation were even

born, the prison population, entire population, was only 200,000. And in our lifetime it's escalated to over 2 million. This is a major, major, major impact on our community.

As we start to talk about hip hop and the changing of hip hop. If you look at hip hop in the 80s, there wasn't a lot of talk about bitches and hos. And the N-word wasn't used that much. And many of these rap artists came out of middle class backgrounds. Many of them had gone to college. By the time we start to move into the 90s, we start to see a different shift. And a part of that shift is the frequency of young, African American men in and out of prison and the impact—I try to talk about this in the book—how vast these impacts are.

It's so much and it's so fast and it's so furious, that half the time I think we're just absorbing it. When we start to talk about what hip hop looks in the 90s and beyond, hip hop is a culture, most certainly at the commercial level, that the prison culture has entered into in such a way that it's hard to make a distinction between where prison culture ends and hip hop—when hip hop ends and prison culture ends. Or street culture and even popular culture. So I think these are some of the important issues.

One of the other things that's really important is, it's impossible to me to really talk about prisons without talking about globalization. Globalization and the escalation in the globalization of the economy is key, because it changes everything. It changes the way people work. It changes the way people are or are not working, or the way people are able to put a roof over their heads. And this means everything for us as a generation or young people.

I think the other point is, there was a study that came out of Northeastern University about a year and a half, two years ago, that was called “Left Behind in the Labor Force.” And what it documented was the numbers of young people, teenagers, who were out of work and out of school. And so what that said to me was for the first time, we're starting to see a second generation that's been impacted in the same way as the hip hop generation was by the prison crisis and by the job crisis and by the education crisis.

I want to just end with these—I've got about eight little points here—that I just want to throw out here. These are random thoughts that I have as a person who's kind of observing this prison activism movement kind of on the periphery. Although we hope that we have a big impact with the convention. But here it is.

I think the youth are attempting to create solutions via hip hop-specific activism and politics. These organizations and these youth leaders need resources. This is one of the major crises that I see as I move around the country. A lot of young people have a lot of innovative and original ideas. They don't have resources. And then I see this election go down. And everybody's coming up with all this money for all this voter registration and blah, blah, blah. Millions and millions and millions of dollars. Just throwing it around. Meanwhile these activist organizations, many people you heard from today, some of them individually, you know, they got their own gigs

lined up that's correct so that they can provide their own situation. They're out here trying to fight this war. So I see that as one of the big issues.

Two, youth activists and organizers who are working to move a political agenda in terms of the electoral process, they also need our approach. This kind of speaks to the generation gap, and I'm kind of talking at this point to some of the older folk. Because I think some of the older folk are not ready to embrace a youth leadership. This is a problem, because young people have new ideas. There's nothing new about this. But we need to support this youth leadership.

As young people are moving to run for office, we need to support them financially, and we need to give them our vote. Because they may have some answers that people may not presented yet. And I think that we are waiting too long, playing the same game with the same old relationship that's saying the same ole stuff that they've been saying.

And Ras Baraka is a good example. He's someone who I believe should have won several times over. But we didn't support him financially at the level that we needed to for him to be in office. It takes money to run a political campaign. If we want the people in office to move a political agenda, we can't keep talking to the same old people who are doing the same old nothing. We have to move people into office that we really feel strongly about, and support them. And then maybe the same old people that ain't doing nothing will realize that they have to start doing something if they're going to continue to be in those positions.

Number three. The old guard organizations across, you know, I'll just name the ones in our community, because we all know who they are—NAACP, Urban League, Operation PUSH, National Action Network—we need them to get on board with these issues. The prison issue is one of the major crises of our time as a generation. If these organizations don't realize that, why are they still out here? Why are we still even listening to what they're even talking about? They need to be moving this agenda. Because this is what is destroying our communities. Not getting the N-word out the dictionary, or not worrying about whether some racists are flying some Confederate flag. Racists are going to do what racists are going to do.

Number four. In terms of media, we need to keep working to intervene when it comes to media representation and criminal images in hip hop. And the misogynistic ones. We're not talking about the women question today. But to me the women question is a question that does not go away. And it should be a part of every conversation we have.

One, we talk about hip hop. These criminal images that buy into this self-fulfilling prophecy amongst young people, the mainstream media continues to blur these lines between prison culture, street culture, hip hop culture. Young people are tuning into these images, and it is having an impact. I just want to give a couple of examples. I mean, there are people who say, “Oh, it doesn't have any impact. It's just music. Blah, blah, blah.”

That is just not true. There’s an 18-year-old man who I talked to in Greensboro, North Carolina recently. And I had given a talk talking about the negative impact of the imagery. I don’t hold no shorts when it comes to hip hop. I love hip hop, but hip hop is not always right. But anyway, this young man came up to me afterward and said, if we give up the criminal image and the thugging and all that, then what do we have left? That’s what he’s saying to me—that’s what we are as people of African descent in America.

The second example was a young, white minister who I met in Pasadena, who has a youth ministry working with young people. And he said to me that many of his students only knew about Public Enemy because of “The Surreal Life.” That just blew my mind. I mean, that blew my mind. I mean, one of the interesting things about hip hop that we have to keep challenging our young people is, I mean, people talk about us not knowing history, many people who say they love hip hop, they don’t even know hip hop history. I think it’s a critical point. And most certainly, you can’t be telling me you love hip hop if you don’t know who Public Enemy is. But I think if “The Surreal Life” can be our gateway for a generation that identifies with hip hop, then certainly glorifying images of 50 Cent and The Game and other thugs goes further than we’re willing to admit.

Five. I’ve been advocating and will continue to advocate that we need intervention on the issue at the federal and at the legislative level. We need regulation of the entertainment industry. This is not a hip hop thing, it’s an entertainment thing. And I think as a society we let the entertainment industry off the work under the auspices of a free market and free speech. And I think that it’s wrong, because it’s affecting our children and it’s destroying our children. You have grown people, so-called adults presenting adult situations, selling it as entertainment to people. It is wrong and we cannot accept it, and we have to fight it every step of the way.

I’m almost there. Number six. I think that in terms of the activists within the prison movement—and I don’t think that this is specific to this movement, but I think it’s something that I see—I think that we have to continue to think about ways to redefine the terms of the debate. As a writer, as an editor who works in every level of media, one of the things that’s clear to me is that sometimes, what affects whether or not an issue moves is the messenger. Sometimes it’s the packaging. Sometimes it’s the language. And I think that we need a new language sometimes for discussing the prison issue, that gets folks excited about it and moving an agenda, rather than evoking the feeling, “we’ve heard it all before.”

A good example of this is the reparations movement. The reparations movement is not new. And it was not new when Randall Robinson wrote *The Debt*. But it was something about the synergy around that book that had people across the country talking about reparations for the first time, who never had even thought reparations was an issue. And I think that is an example there.

Seven. What are we doing—this question keeps recurring to me—what are we doing at an institutional level, in terms of creating institutions, to bring young people back into the

community who spent 10, 20—I mean, what are we going to be doing 30 years from now when these people are coming back into our community? We know the government is not going to do anything unless we get these right people into power to move that agenda. But what is being done right now to prepare, to bring those people back into the community. I think that’s a serious question, because we’re talking about millions of people that are being affected by this.

And then lastly, I think Dr. Marable covered this territory. But I think it’s important. And we can not ever stay off this issue. We need transformative and affordable education that works. We need jobs for our young people that pay a living wage. I know that I’m preaching to the choir. But it has to be stated again and again that we live in the most prosperous country in the history of this world. And why is it that our young people have to come of age having to choose for life options either incarceration or being a mercenary fighting in an unjust war. Thank you very much.

**Dr. Geoff Ward:**

Thank you, Bakari. I got two more points over here we can add to that eight. We’ll have a ten-point program. No, thank you very much. Our final speaker before we open up for discussion is Councilman Bill Perkins....

**Councilman Bill Perkins:**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here with you discussing what is perhaps the most significant issue facing out community, because it has so much to do with our young people. It’s an honor to be with this panel. I want to talk about a very specific instance with which I’ve worked. I’d like to take this opportunity to resurrect for you the case of the Central Park Five. A case with which I was very much involved. And which today we’re celebrating the month of the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of that case.

Some of you may be aware it began around April of 1989, in which five young people from the community were arrested allegedly for raping a white woman in Central Park. It became the notorious Central Park Rape case. And the young people involved were put in jail for a total of about 46 years. Some serving from seven, and others serving up to 13 years.

It was a case that exemplifies a lot of what we’re talking about today, in terms of what is happening with our young people. Because these children ultimately turned out to be innocent, and ultimately turned out to be convicted on the basis of false confessions. Nevertheless, during the course of the arrests and the trial and the predetermined convictions, many things took place.

Some of you may remember that the terms “wilding” and the terms “wolfpack” which became common definitions not just for them, but for many other young people, as well. In addition to that, many of you may remember, I would dare say, probably forgot, the fact that what drove this

case in the sense of a vigilantism, was the fact that Donald Trump took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* and other local newspapers calling for the return of the death penalty. And if he had his wishes, those innocent boys, those innocent young men would not be with us today.

You know, this case is sort of the second Scottsboro Boys case. And it is in fact a case that is seen time and time again in our communities. Which I have to say, at the time, was such a case—such a public campaign against these young boys and their families, and the community, that even the community turned against them. In fact, even as they have been found innocent, some folks still assume that they must have done something wrong in that park that night. Otherwise, why were they there. Sort of like why are you here? You must be doing something wrong. And therefore you should be arrested and charged with whatever we can come up with.

The reason, I guess, that I resurrect this is because, not only is it important to us not to forget, because but for the grace of God there go all of us. And while many of us during those formative years were involved in getting our college educations or falling in puppy love and all those things that we do from the time of 16 to 23, they were spending that time incarcerated. Not to mention that the trials and tribulations that their mothers and families had to go through as they tried to make the best out of the situation.

And I must say that it was commendable in terms of how the families responded. Because they instead of being in despair created a movement not simply to address the needs of their children while they were in prison, but also the needs of other children who were in prison, as well. And I bring this up because there are many cases like this that are going on that may not gain the prominence because of the fact that a white woman won't be raped, or for some other reason the case won't get the same notoriety, it won't get the elected officials or high profile individuals to represent their case. But there are two very, very important things I want to mention with respect to this case, and I won't be very long.

Number one, these young people were convicted on the basis of false confessions. The case was overturned as it became apparent that false confessions—that the confessions that convicted them were actually coerced. And despite the fact that those confessions were coerced, and despite the fact that an individual by the name of [inaudible] came forward to admit, and to be proven with DNA that he did it, a long struggle took place that ultimately resulted in those false confessions being proven to be coerced, and ultimately the district attorney decided along with the courts to throw the cases out. So that was a great victory. But it was a great lesson in terms of how long sometimes these struggles take to get justice.

And in fact, the second point I want to make is that despite the fact that they are no longer incarcerated, justice still has not been done. Because there's a price that has to be paid for the false convictions and the 13 year or however many years each of them individually suffered, not to mention their families and their loved ones while they were in jail. So the families now are pursuing a case so that they may be made whole in terms of their suffering. And those lawsuits

that are being defended by the district attorney and the city’s corporation council need to be supported. Their lawyers and their families need to be supported so that they can get paid for the suffering that they endured.

And then secondly, and perhaps most importantly, in terms of prevention, is a piece of legislation that I have that’s calling for the videotaping of confessions prior to the actual—at the point at which the arrest begins. In other words, what happens with these confessions is that after they get from you what they want, they then videotape it and then they show it as then you voluntarily, along with your family or whatever, making an honest confession. When in fact, we want those confessions, that videotaping, to begin before the actual confessions are given. At the point of the arrest, the videotaping needs to begin.

It’s a very, very important piece of legislation if we’re talking about incarceration. If we’re talking about unjust incarcerations in our community, because it happens time and time again. This was not the first time that such confessions were revealed. And this type of legislation is legislation that is not an original idea. It is being used in other jurisdictions throughout the country and in other parts of the world. And we need to get support for that type of legislation in New York City and New York State.

So that story I wanted to resurrect because I think that it’s very, very important that we never forget what we’re dealing with in terms of what’s happening with our young people, particularly as it relates to the police department and the criminal justice system. I want to also mention one or two other quick things.

Number one, there’s no more important movement right now for us than the reparations movement, quiet as it’s kept. And if we’re really looking at how to overcome what we’re talking about, then we really have to be as aware of how important this reparations movement is in terms of recognizing the injustices that have taken place in our community and amongst our people.

Because what we’re talking about in terms of this incarceration is racism. The residue, the continuation of the racism that has been taking place in this society. It may be institutionalized in terms of our public school system. It may be institutionalized in terms of the extraordinary amount of unemployment that is constantly being reported. You know, we have a situation in New York City government where we have great disparities in terms of who is getting management jobs and who is getting other types of jobs in our city. We have reports that point to us that people of color don’t get managerial positions, people of color don’t get the good jobs that the cities has to offer, as well as the state, which we just had a report on yesterday.

But a lot of this institutional racism is what underlines, as I guess has been said more than once, some of what we’re going through with this incarceration phenomenon. And I think that we have to face the fact that the reparations movement is critical in terms of overcoming that type of institutional racism. Thank you.



**Dr. Geoff Ward:**

We have just about a half an hour, twenty minutes to a half an hour for dialogue. So what I'd like you to do is, the panelists have presented a great amount of material, some provocative ideas, some suggestions, and invitations to dialogue around some important issues. So if you would, if you're interested in presenting a question or making a comment to the audience, please—preferably questions, I'm told—in fact, brief questions.

**Councilman Bill Perkins:**

I’m going to have to apologize if I get out of here too quick. There’s a Free Mumia action taking place in my district right now in Salem Church, and I’m expected to speak. So I’m not going to be able to stay much longer. But I want to hear some questions and comments.

**Question:**

Thanks. My name is Tom Weiss. I’m publisher of *Up Front News*. And I’m glad to hear the encouragement for young people to enter the political process. I may not qualify as a young person, but I am entering the political process. Mr. Perkins, you may be interested in hearing about this, because I am going to be running against Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primary. Part of the reason is because of her total abandonment of the issue and her toadying up to people like Donald Trump.

But my question is, with respect to the hip hop matter...I’m very involved with music. My sense about hip hop is what has contaminated hip hop, as has contaminated much of the rest of the music industry is the overwhelming influence of mega money. There’s the irony of this guy labeling himself 50 Cent, yet staggering around with mega money. Hip hop seems to have become almost a testament to success. Puff Daddy walking around with all these fancy clothes on, while the people buying his stuff are homeless and on welfare.

And it’s not just hip hop. But hip hop seems to be the most conspicuous example of this kind of excess beyond means. And it really goes against everything Jesus said and all the other stuff. So I’m wondering how to address that in a way that transcends the racial issue. And I also think it relates to reparations. Because all of us are in need of reparations, because the people that are ripping us off are those corporations, and some of those are the ones that finance hip hop. So that’s my comment-question.

**Dr. Geoff Ward:**

Thank you. Why don’t we do two things procedurally: One is that we’ll ask people to limit their question to a limit, so that we can make sure we get people in. I want to take a couple questions at a time, because the line is building up there. So if the next person could proceed. And then we’ll address your question, sir, as well as theirs.

**Question:**

I’m Cheran Salaam, the mother of Youssef Salaam and the Central Park Jogger Case. And my question is this, because I have heard Perkins talk about this case, and a lot of people are talking about it. And a lot of people are talking about reparations. And to me, one of the biggest issues facing our people today is this self-imposed hatred that we have of each other. We cannot deal with reparations, we cannot deal with incarceration or anything else until we deal with how we feel about one another and get beyond that.

Many of us who talk about the Holocaust remember when that period ended and the Jews were freed, there were social service agencies put in place to assist them. There was a list of names that was put up for them to find their lost ones. None of this stuff was done for us. And so when people talked about us like dogs, and wondered why I had such a dog-ridden son, it was out of that self-hatred that we have.

Many of the people who talked about us like that are people who looked just like you in this audience. Black people, white people, yellow people, red people, all kinds of people talked about us that way. Some continue to talk. Because we have to figure out how we can get institutions like Columbia to start to deal with the institutional racism that we have inside our own bodies that need to be healed in some kind of way. So that at that point we can start seeing ourselves worthy of other things beyond incarceration. See ourselves worthy of reparations and other types of things. How do we get to that level?

**Geoff Ward:**

Before we go any further, are there any responses to the first two questions?

**Councilman Perkins:**

I'm going to try, because I have to run. But let me say this. We are as a people worthy, period. Now, we could be worthier, or more effectively worthy, if we are more loving. There's no questions about that. There is a self-destructive tendency sometimes amongst ourselves. But we don't want to start with having to earn reparations or anything that we've already paid for. So that's number one.

And I think those of us that are public servants have the responsibility of making sure that as much as possible, we support those community-based efforts to protect our young people and to protect their families and to protect their communities. But I don't want to connect that with reparations, because that's just part of returning your tax dollars back. That doesn't take into account what you are entitled to by virtue of past deeds. And that may not necessarily be defined in terms of dollars and cents, necessarily. So that's number one.

Number two, I don't want to belabor the point, but there needs to be a movement coming out of this room in support of the Central Park Five. They are your contemporaries, they represent the most horrible expression of what has happened to our young people who are innocent, and who are victims of racism. And it captures eloquently, though horribly, what it is that this conference is all about—innocence, suffering, incarceration because of racism. And talent and potential being crippled that needs to be made whole.

The district attorney's office, Bob Morgenthal's office, needs to hear from you, needs to hear from you in terms of supporting the lawsuits that are being put before the city to give these

families some compensation for the injustice that they suffered. If we can't take actions that direct and that explicit, then what can we do? That's number one.

Number two, much of what we talk about is reactive. It doesn't have to be. We have to figure out how do we be proactive, preventative, in terms of what's happening to our young people. There's no question that government will fail you if in fact you depend on us to be the answer, because we are reactive but for your proactive behavior. When you are ahead of us, we're at our best. When you are behind us, we're going to lose. So I want to say that, because we are in very much a reactive mode. And when you're in a reactive mode, that means we're going to lose. I don't want to be negative. But I'm just telling you the name of the game as I understand it in the electoral arena.

Now, all politics is local. All politics is local. Find a local way to represent this conference. Find a local way to be a part of what's going on out here. Because your leadership, your input is very, very important. It's most important. If you can't be invited, then do it without invitation. Don't wait for someone to invite you to protect yourself, to take care of your issues. If you find that I or any other elected officials are in your way, then get us out of the way. Get registered, get voted and vote us out.

And that reminds me, last but not least, there's a very, very important issue that's ahead of us right now, which happens to do with the Help America Vote Act. This city and this state are behind in terms of upgrading its technology for voting. And as a result, we are probably violating the Justice Department laws that are here to protect us as a result of the gains we made in the Civil Rights Movement. You need to pay attention to that, as well. Thank you.

**Dr. Manning Marable:**

I wanted to address two things in the initial two questions. There's a great African revolutionary leader and teacher named Amilcar Cabral, who wrote that the greatest struggle of any oppressed people is the struggle against their own weaknesses. And there's a deep truth in this, and it does relate to educating and working with young people. Because over the 30 years of experience I've had as a teacher in college and universities, one of the things that I've learned is that the most pernicious aspect of structural racism is destroying—the racialized effort to destroy the capacity of our young people to feel that what they do actually matters, that they have futures that they can imagine that are glorious, that are beautiful, that are fantastic; that they have genius and bravery and courage.

Destroying those embers of agency is what the objective of the racist is. And we fight against that in all kinds of ways as a teacher. As someone who has dedicated his life to the pursuit of the idea of a belief in young people and the majesty of their thoughts and their creativity, it is very difficult now. Cabral's insight in the struggle against our own weaknesses, to me, speaks to me about how structural racism today seeks to reproduce criminalization among young people. So

that we fear young people. We turn away from them. And they themselves feel disconnected from a sense of agency and purpose and future.

So much of what we have to do as teachers and as students, is to struggle against those weaknesses, to engage a sense of agency and possibility again. And the only way people acquire that, is by fighting back, is by fighting back and actually seeing that they can change the way things are through struggle with their own hands and minds. And that changes everything. But it's that grassroots work, as Kate is talking about, on the ground, that gives people a sense of agency and hope and courage through practice, through actual work that people do and learning from the circumstances on the ground, in making change possible in their daily lives.

The last thing I wanted to say is, on this issue of reparations, which I heartily agree, I've written about. The reparations discourse is really part of a larger global discussion about the South versus the North, people use that metaphorically. But it's really about structural adjustment and about the dynamics of globalized capitalism, and the displacement and marginalization of racialized population transnationally. That is, the global South versus the global North.

The global South is overwhelmingly poor and working class and people of African and South Asian and Latino and Caribbean descent that are marginalized and exploited viciously. And discussions about reparation, the discussion, the discourse in Africa about African Renaissance, the Jubilee, about debt forgiveness, structural adjustment, all of that is a piece. It's the same stuff. And what it's about is redefining the haves and the have nots, like Malcolm said at the end of his life. That is the nature of the struggle. And here in the United States, our struggle is a piece of that.

**Question:**

Yes. My name is Rolando Beeni, I'm a Latino immigrant. I'm from Parents In Action. My question is about reparations. And basically, should not we include, as part of reparations, the present system of foster care? I see foster care as a continuation of slavery in a subtle way. It violates the four amendments—the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the ninth Amendment, but above all it violates the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment about slavery.

Of the 19,000 children at present in foster care in New York City, 98 percent of them are black and Latino, less than one percent white. So my plea is to please include present foster care as part of present slavery. It needs reparation. We need to create a human rights movement around this issue to stop it on its tracks.

**Question:**

Good afternoon. Prof. Kitwana, I believe it was your sixth point, where you spoke about redefining the terms of the debate. And as a graduate student and an educator that's frustrated by the limitations or seeming limitations of prediscursive linguistic associations, as well as the ability to criticize rather than put those things into action, I'm wondering if you could talk

through or articulate what that new discourse would look like, or how it is that we arrive at a space where we can talk about old problems with an old language.

**Bakari Kitwana:**

Well this is interesting. What I mean by that is, I think there are ways that a conversation can shift based upon the language, and ways people can be receptive to it. I think that one of the things that hip hop, as an example, is doing right now relative to the fact that you have so many white kids involved in hip hop and people across race, I think it's forcing a new conversation around race amongst the younger generation. It's forcing the younger generation—when we start to raise the question of hip hop origins, for example, then we get into a conversation about slavery, because we have to talk about colonialism and neocolonialism and imperialism.

And I just think that that shift in hip hop is an important one. Because before, people would just say that hip hop is a black thing. And then other groups would say, “Well we did this? Well what about Latinos and Puerto Ricans and Dominicans?” So I think that this is an example of a shifting conversation that's taking place in hip hop in terms of the way the conversation is changing. Rather than us talking about white people didn't create hip hop or white people don't run hip hop or so and so doesn't run hip hop, we're having a conversation about race and looking back to how these issues that American society socializes us to not talk about, which is slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, and how they're manifesting themselves in globalism today. I hope that makes sense.

I wanted to answer the initial question, which was this idea of how do we address the conspicuous consumption in hip hop in a way that isn't racist. That's what you're saying, right? How do we talk about the fact, basically, that these American Negroes are selling these products? How do we talk about it without saying, “What's wrong with these young black people, and why are they doing this?” I think it's part of America. [Inaudible response from audience.]

I think that what we have happening relative to hip hop is, most people who are really serious about hip hop, what I see happening at this point, is going back to a local level with hip hop. They are seeing the images at the national level. But they've been played out so many times over and over again. I mean, part of what makes hip hop work is the inventing of something new. And mostly, that's generally happening under the radar.

And so what I see is, people who are deep into hip hop are embracing the local artists in their own communities, listening to their local deejay's mix tapes, listening and buying local music. That's where I see the trend in hip hop. And you see the sales dropping, and the industry blaming it on Internet downloading, but I think it's something more going on there. The industry can't control where the music is going, and so they're trying to find a way to control it. So to me, that is what's happening to counter that image. [Inaudible response from the audience.] Well, go to the local hip hop spot, go to the local spoken word.

**Dr. Geoff Ward:**

We’re going to move on now. We have time now for two last questions. So I think there are a couple people waiting at least. We only have time for two more, so if you could both ask your question as quickly as possible, and then we’ll leave the remaining panelists to speak.

**Question:**

Okay. I guess one really important question that I had was that in all these discussions throughout the day it seems as if there are two things going on, there’s what’s being said and what’s actually happening. So I was wondering if the panel could just comment on whether or not you think that political discourse or rhetoric or academia—not so much academia, because I think academia is calling it like it is—but do you think that the problem...when we hear about the emerging prison population, it’s always put in these nonracial terms. Do you think that that will break down? Do you think that one day soon, hopefully, before I turn 50 years old, we can actually speak about the problem in the way that it is currently. Like the way that it’s impacting our community. That’s firstly.

And next, I would want to know since you all deal with kids and youth, I wanted to know what is the biggest challenge that you face, not so much when you’re explaining these problems, because obviously we’re all aware of it. Is it just raising awareness? Is it trying to connect them into seeing these larger issues at hand? Thanks.

**Question:**

Sorry, I’ll be brief. My name is Shandarka. And this is not really to the panel, but it’s really to the audience. I just wanted to point out that, we’re talking about being activists. And of course we all are, right, because we’re all active and we’re all here talking about prisons and stuff. I just wanted to bring it back to the prisoners themselves, to those who are behind bars, right? Because that gets left out of the dialogue or the equation, right? We talk about what will happen to the communities once these people come back home. But what about those who are already there? What about the 2 million that are in prison, that are facing violence and medical neglect.

We don’t really talk about how there’s a 500 percent increase of women of color behind bars, and how in New York State, your kid will be taken away after one year, right? So how about we start to really open the dialogue between those who are inside and us on the outside, right?

And also, there’s a really important quote that I always live by. It’s by Assata Shakur. “Walls are just walls. They can be broken down.” And also it’s really important—yeah, I’m pretty sure each of us know one person at least that’s behind bars. Although that’s sad, we could be proactive about it, right? We could communicate, open lines of dialogue. Start supporting these artists



behind bars who are, like, doing all this good stuff, you know? A lot of them have, like, these pamphlets that they want to be published. A lot of us belong to organizations, great organizations, like PNP and stuff, so like, why don't we just like, each communicate to one person and like, really break down those walls of communication?

Dr. Geoff Ward:

So panelists, if you would, take a few minutes, respond to our last questions, comments. Then if you have any closing words on the theme of this panel, which is “New directions in the struggle for juvenile justice.”

**Bakari Kitwana:**

One of the things that I was thinking is a couple of resources that I just wanted to mention that I think people might find useful. One is a documentary called, “Yes, In My Backyard.” I don't know if you have not had an opportunity to see it. It's a brilliant documentary that looks at Upstate New York communities. The filmmaker's name is Tracy Huling, and I just wanted to mention that. “Yes, In My Backyard.” And the documentary just kind of looks at how these farming communities turned to prisons as an industry. And generations after generations working within the prisons. And most of those inmates coming primarily from New York City.

Another thing I wanted to mention is a new documentary not out too long called “Juvies.” I don't know if people have seen that. The filmmaker's name is Leslie Neal. It deals with the juvenile system and young people caught up in it across race. And then the book *Lockdown America*. I think it is an important resource. *Policing and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* by Christian Parenti.

And then someone—you had raised the question about...I think what you're saying is, is this why we're not talking about this in racial terms, and I think many people are. But in my book, the *Hip Hop Generation*, I call the chapter on prisons “race war.” And I think the last thing I want to say is to kind of piggyback off your point, which was, you know, reaching people that we know. I think that everyone, most certainly in the African American community, has a friend, relative or associate who's caught up in the criminal justice system. If they don't, they got to be living under a rock or just dropped down to the planet.

And I think if we can do nothing else, we need to be reaching out to these people. Because as I talk to brothers who are incarcerated, they feel that many of their own families have abandoned them. And I think that cousins, relatives, whoever, people you grew up with, we need to try and reach out to them and be there for them. Thank you.

**Kate Rhee:**

In two minutes, there's just so much. So many thoughts. I'm going to try to address a couple of them. In light of talking about the issue in racial terms. I mean, it's not just race. In terms of the space that we build, it's talking about all of the different identities and all of the different realities that exist in the phenomenon of prison industrial complex. So actually, that takes place every day if not every minute.

But I wanted to address something in terms of along that line, changing the terms of the debate. You know, that comes up all the time. And obviously there's not one prescriptive answer. And there's not one prescriptive framework that's going to lead us there. And I say this all the time. You know, in two minutes in a conference, what can I say, kind of thing? I always think, okay, I should think of better examples to share, kind of thing.

But one I would say is, we need to start confronting our worst fears and our identities. So we need to be descriptive in terms of—for example, I just got into...and these conversations happen informally and then we just drop them. We need to, like, flesh out the very terms that we use as tools to talk about repression. So, “people of color.” Definitely we could go into a whole discussion. I just got into a conversation with an indigenous brother from an indigenous nation in Alaska whose name I'm not going to try to butcher, about this term “people of color.” And this comes up as a point of discussion in so many of our different places. It's used as a term of unity. It's also used because it's expedient. But a lot of people, even who identify as people of color, have issues with that term, right?

Where do we build that space to really flesh that out? It needs to happen with us. Whatever spaces you guys have, if you need help convening that space, that's why I keep saying, the building spaces need to be popping up everywhere. And we talk about America, there's no public-intellectual space. Well, it doesn't need to be in the newspaper. I mean, it needs to happen. Whether it's in the dining room. Whether it's just like, keep following up with it. I mean, we dropped the ball, I'll admit. We dropped the ball, as well, because we get caught up by work. So that's just one quick thing.

And one last thing I would say is, it takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of willingness to work through it. But that also means who sits at the table is critical. It's not just about having multiple terms that are other terms that we can use. It's about actually questioning our positionality. All of us sitting in this room occupy some form of—participate in some form of hegemony. The dominant culture. And the only way we're going to be confronted in terms of our own stuff, is if there's another person facing you. And that humanity is what's going to confront your humanity. So all that to say, youth panel, great, but there's no young person sitting up here. And also, I partake in taking up that responsibility. So thinking about that, as well, in terms of being critical of our spaces everywhere.



Cambridge, but I don't believe in that here in Harlem, okay? I believe that there's another kind of black studies that we can put forward.

My last point is—I can get away with that, because he’s a good friend of mine—my last point is that, that’s why I’m teaching intro to African American studies in the fall, and we’re putting in a component of theory and practice, so that like a third of the grade that the students have—it’ll be a class of around 60, 65 people—is practicum. That is, the student has to be an intern in a community-based organization. Either working with women of color, working with prisoners, doing political education, etc. on the ground. They have to write about it. They have to work with community-based organizations. And that is a component of learning what does the black experience mean today.

And so, when knowledge empowers the community, then that individual her- or himself becomes empowered. She or he sees the ability to realize change through their lives by what they do, by putting their body on the line. And that is what we have to do. We have to put our bodies on the line every day.

**Dr. Geoff Ward:**

You all have put your bodies on the line for being here this afternoon—a prolonged Saturday afternoon—for important work. I want to just make one closing point, because I think that it’s important that we recognize that the question is not when are we going to do something. We are in the midst of doing something at this very moment. Consciousness-raising, building injustice frames, deciding what our resources are and how we can mobilize them better, that is the work. The question is, how are we going to do more with what we have?

And so I hope you’ll leave here not with the sense of, well, we didn’t manage to change the world on a Saturday afternoon at Columbia, but with the sense that the movement is continuing to develop, and a better awareness of where that movement is strong and where it needs to go further. So let’s thank these panelists for their comments. And having organized a conference like this for ACJP last year, talking about putting bodies on the line, please thank the organizers of this conference, including Laurent Alfred, who is coordinator of Africana Criminal Justice Project. And thank you all, again, for coming today. I think Laurent wants the microphone back.

**Laurent Alfred:**

Yes, just real quick. I learned from my best in terms of scholar-activists—Dr. Marable, I want to thank you for being an inspiration for those of us who really see the need to blend theory and practice as one. Geoff Ward, thank you for your model. I want to thank Farah Griffin, the director of the Institute, for supporting us today. This is why it happens, because decisions are made to support important events like this, and our Rikers course, so I want to thank her tremendously for that.

I want to thank all the volunteers that worked on this, especially Anthony Johnson, Shawn Mendoza and Sharon Harris, and all of my students who came out. Finally, I'm tired, you guys are tired, let's eat some food. So please come to the reception. It's only three blocks away. What you do is walk out on Amsterdam, take a left, take a right on 114<sup>th</sup> Street, and it's 522. Say that again? Five-Five-Two. It's in your programs. Check that, come to the reception, eat some food, and let's build. Thank you.