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A Data News Weekly Exclusive

# Pay or Stay Sentencing in New Orleans Municipal Court

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# 'Pay or Stay' Sentencing in Orleans Municipal Court

by Charlie Michio Turner

The recent class action lawsuit against the Orleans Parish Criminal District Court has brought national attention to how New Orleans uses fees and fines accrued in court to pay for judicial services. It is less recognized that the Orleans Municipal Court, which handles minor offenses such as marijuana possession or disturbing the peace, doles out fines at a much greater rate, administering them as part of an ultimatum commonly referred to as 'pay or stay'. People facing minor charges are given the opportunity to plead guilty and pay a fine in order to go home that day. While this is an attractive option for anyone, low income defendants who make up the majority of municipal court, many of whom are homeless, are often unable to come up with the money. As a result, hundreds of individuals charged with minor, non-violent offenses end up in the notorious Orleans Parish Prison with debt still in their name.

Attorneys with Orleans Public Defenders are quick to point out that people should not fear going to jail if they are unable to pay their municipal court fine. In fact, Danny Engelberg of OPD says that fear of court fines can lead to the biggest mistake a defendant can make: missing their initial assigned court date. "It's rare that somebody who shows up [in court] will get in trouble for not paying." However, one missed court date can snowball into a massive amount of debt or a lengthy stint in jail.

"What really gets people in trouble is not showing back up for that hearing 30



Chief Defender Derwyn Bunton (Pictured above) announced that his office is facing massive furloughs and reduction in services as the 2016 budget is already projected to have a \$300,000 deficit. (photo courtesy of NPR)

days later. At that point, a warrant goes out for them, and the [court] will cite that person for contempt for missing court". Once a defendant is in contempt, 'pay or stay' situations are more likely to arise. Contempt of Court citations come with the option of either a fine of \$200 or 20 days in jail, emblematic of pressure 'pay or stay' sentencing places on low-

income defendants.

Lauren Anderson, a public defender for municipal cases, says that once somebody has arrested for contempt or another attachment, it is permissible for money to be accepted as a substitution for days in jail. "The court may take \$300 instead of 30 days or \$600 instead of 60 day. But these are people who

didn't have the money to pay the bond in the first place, they're definitely not going to have the \$300 to get out of jail... they may lose their house, they lose everything. And then they definitely can't pay what they owed in the first place".

If the concept of imprisonment over debt sounds like something that should be illegal, that is because it is. 'Pay or

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## DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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Cover Story, Continued from previous page.



stay' was not only categorically rejected in a 1972 US Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decision but was also ruled unconstitutional by the US Supreme court a decade later. The Bearden vs. Georgia ruling in 1983 stated that it is in violation of Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause to imprison an individual "who has made sufficient bona fide efforts to pay [a] fine".

Even though imprisonment over debts is clearly outlawed, a recently released report from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Louisiana details that the practice continues to be alive in the state. Within the 45-day span that the study took place, the ACLU found 12 people jailed for unpaid fines. These 12 imprisoned for their debts were hardly an aberration. An unnamed source in the report said imprisoning people who cannot

out for her arrest when she was late one of her final payments

After reading the stories of imprisonment over a court fine, it is perplexing how often those with the least amount of money are given large penalties in their sentence. No formal procedure is required to determine if a defendant is indigent and therefore would be unable to pay a fine. As it stands now, a judge has complete discretion in how much to fine which explains the inconsistent sentences from case to case. For example, Dianne Jones was sentenced to pay \$834, while Gregory Nogess, also charged with marijuana possession in 2013, was only ordered to pay \$400. Public Defender Anderson, sees no science in how a court fine is determined. "They try to get it to a round number, but every judge is different".

house. There is clearly potential for corrupt behavior in this system. This potential became reality in 2011, when it was discovered that some criminal district judges illegally used money from collected fines to pay for their own supplemental health and dental insurance. This specific incident, while not involving municipal judges, proves that Judicial Expense Funds open the possibility of judges benefitting from their own decisions.

Despite of the controversy circling "pay or stay" it is unlikely that the practice will change anytime soon. Too much funding for the parish's judicial system comes from the court fines administered in municipal court. The irony is that, while court costs and fees disproportionately harm the poorest defendants, their collection is critical to ensuring that these same defendants are able to have representation in court.

The state of Louisiana provides 85% of funding for the district attorney but less than half of the public defenders budget. Beyond these contributions parishes have to finance their own legal system. It is very likely that defendants like Dianne Jones, who struggle to pay their court finds, are paying the salaries of their court appointed lawyer.

The irony becomes even crueler once Orleans Public Defenders revealed that it is deep in debt, despite the massive number of fines imposed. Chief Defender Derwyn Bunton announced that his office is facing massive furloughs and reduction in services as the 2016 budget is already projected to have a \$300,000 deficit. Many at OPD see the office's financial troubles as a result of depending on the 'user-fee' system as a major source of funding. Because defendants often go to jail because of their inability to pay, it is impossible to predict how much court fines will yield in any period of time.

With the state government in fiscal trouble of its own, it is difficult to know how OPD will rebound. Major structural reform in how public defense is funded is probably needed to assure that the constitutional right of attorney is preserved. Some in the Louisiana statehouse may not want to change course, but they may not have a choice as national awareness continues to grow on the use of court fines and their disproportionate effects on people of color. Lawsuits filed against cities like Ferguson, Mo. and Montgomery, Al. have shown that the practice of using court fines to fund

government programs, and incarcerate those who fail to pay, is not something unique to New Orleans. 'Pay or stay' arrangements have been implemented throughout US history and the defendants with the least financial and social resources, the vast majority of whom are African-American, have always been the foremost victims. It may be complicated to fund a court system. But the perverse incentives that this system creates, not to mention the illegality of 'pay or stay', are all reasons why financial penalties should not be relied upon to fund basic legal services.



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**Living Longer, Living Smarter** 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2015  
**Medicare for Caregivers** 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon Thursday, Oct. 22, 2015

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**AARP** Real Possibilities in  
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pay their debts was "so common you stop noticing it." A case that received attention from the New Orleans community was that of Dianne Jones charged with marijuana possession in 2014. Jones was ordered to pay \$834 in court fines in a six-month period or risk arrest. She tried her best to keep up with payment plan but still had a warrant put

The seemingly arbitrary nature of court fines becomes more disturbing with the growing allegations that judicial officials benefit from collections. Every district court in Louisiana has a 'Judicial Expense Fund' that comes mainly from court fines. These funds can be used for court operation costs and even renovations of the court-



# City Receives Over \$2 Million in Grants to Hire Officers and Provide Body Cameras

*Federal Funding Will Fund 15 Officers, Boost NOPD's Community Policing Efforts*

## Data Staff Report

content: The City of New Orleans this week received more than \$2 million through two federal grants to hire more police officers and to purchase more body-worn cameras, both of which will help to enhance public safety, reduce crime and build trust between the police and the residents they serve.

On Monday, U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch announced the City of New Orleans will receive an estimated \$1.875 million over three years to fund 15 officers through the COPS Hiring Program (CHP). Also on Monday, the Department of Justice announced that the City of New Orleans will receive \$237,000 through the Bu-



reau of Justice Assistance's (BJA) \$20 million Body-Worn Camera (BWC) Pilot Implementation Program launched in May 2015 to re-

spond to the immediate needs of local and tribal law enforcement organizations. The City will provide matching funds that will be combined with the federal grant to purchase 250 body-worn cameras.

"Public safety is our top priority, and federal investments like these are critical to helping us build a stronger and more effective police department," said Mayor Landrieu. "These grants will help us to put more officers on the streets and add more body-worn cameras to the program, which has proven to be an effective policing tool. We will not rest until NOPD is among the best police departments in the country. I also want to personally thank Congressman Richmond

who has worked tirelessly to secure federal investments like these that make our community safer; we are very grateful."

"This is a major investment that will help us to continue to grow the department and provide our officers with the tools they need to do their jobs," said NOPD Superintendent Michael Harrison. "I want to thank Congressman Richmond, the Department of Justice and the NOPD grant writing staff for their efforts in bringing these needed resources to the department."

CHP provides grants to state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies to hire or rehire community policing officers. The program provides salaries and benefits for officer and deputy hires for three years.

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# DSEF to Empower Girls with GIRLS NOLA

## Data News Report

The Dinerral Shavers Educational Fund has announced its newest program, GIRLS NOLA (Girls Initiative for Reproducing Leaders in Society). Reproductive Justice is the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, social, and economic well-being of women and girls, based on the full achievement and protection of women's human rights. And so, this program's investigative methodology stems from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Funded by the Packard Foundation and the Public Health Institute of California, GIRLS NOLA is a girl's empowerment and mentorship program, based on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights. The program will take place every Tuesday and Thursday at the Ashe Cultural Arts Center (1712

Oretha C. Haley Boulevard New Orleans, LA 70113) from 6:00pm to 8:00pm starting on Tuesday September 29, 2015 and ending on Thursday, November 5, 2015. There will be a Girls track and Parents track offered which will focus on SRHR, etiquette, empowerment, physical health, mental health, emotional health, professional development, civic responsibility, and mentorship. DSEF believes that by understanding the challenges that young woman face in today's society, and supplying NOLA's youth with the tools needed to combat these challenges, the community will take the first step toward letting girls lead in this world. GIRLS NOLA will meet on both Tuesdays and Thursdays and parents will only meet on Tuesdays. Each night, dinner will be served, homework assistance will be offered, and mentors will



be present. This program is free, but spots are limited.

The Dinerral Shavers Educa-

tional Fund is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization founded in March of 2007. This organization was cre-

ated in memory of Dinerral Shavers, an educator, musician, entrepreneur, and New Orleans Civil Sheriff. In his passing, the Dinerral Shavers Educational Fund has hosted several programs and initiatives to promote youth empowerment, community development, and enhanced educational opportunities in the city of New Orleans. Additional to GIRLS NOLA, DSEF programs include its Scholarship Essay Contest, Back to School Extravaganza, Operation Giveback, and Music & Cultural Education Program. Dinerral Shavers' story and the notable works of this organization has been featured on 48 Hours Mystery's Storm of Murder, CNN's One Crime at a Time, Spike Lee Documentaries When the Levees Broke and If God is Willing: a Requiem of Four Acts, and most recently the 2nd season of HBO's hit series Treme'.

## Data News Weekly is Hiring

Data News Weekly Newspaper, The People's Paper, is hiring for two positions in our New Orleans Office.

### Editor/Reporters

#### About the Job

Journalists — tired of reading of layoffs, closings, the dire straights of the profession? Recent college graduates — think your job prospects are bleak? Not with us!

At Data News Weekly, we are expanding! This includes starting a print newspaper/digital endeavor in one of the most dynamic and exciting cities, New Orleans.

If you want to be an integral part of your community, tell stories in a multi-media environment — look no further.

If interested, send your resume, cover letter and at least three clips of your work to Terry Jones Publisher, Data News Weekly, 3501 Napoleon Ave, New Orleans, LA 70125, or via email to [terrybjones@bellsouth.net](mailto:terrybjones@bellsouth.net), or call (504) 821-7421.

### Sales Manager/Retail Ad Manager

#### About the Job

Data News Weekly Newspaper is the leading African American media company in New Orleans, publishing a weekly newspaper. Additionally, its website under [ladatanews.com](http://ladatanews.com) is the most read Black website in the region.

We are currently seeking a strong leader to proactively manage broad aspects of the advertising division. You will be working in a positive team-oriented atmosphere which has a modern press, leading website and award-winning newspaper.

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- Recruit talent

Our company provides a competitive salary, and an environment that encourages personal and professional growth. We are an equal opportunity employer.

If you are interested in a rewarding career, email a cover letter and resume to: [terrybjones@bellsouth.net](mailto:terrybjones@bellsouth.net) or mail to: Data News Weekly, c/o Terry Jones, Publisher, 3501 Napoleon Avenue, New Orleans LA 70125



# Edible Landscapes

By LMG Calla Victoria

More and more residents are opting to grow their own food because of rising prices and many scares at the grocery store. Last year it was killer cantaloupe, and contaminated lettuce, this year it is cucumbers, really cucumbers! Therefore, crop fields, orchards, and chicken coops are popping up in gardens all over America; hence the new term "the Urban Farmer." First Lady Michelle Obama has championed the idea of harvesting your own food, and has facilitated the planting of a vegetable garden on the White House grounds.

I was considering a chicken coop but my neighbor beat me to it, so now I am the lucky one. I get all of the large brown farm fresh eggs that I can eat. My neighbor's rooster announces the break of dawn every morning at 5 a.m.; I get all of the rich chicken manure to fertilize my garden, every now and then I get to chase one of the curious little chicks that find their way into my yard.

I have grown eggplants, cucumbers, broccoli, tomatoes, bell peppers, lettuces, strawberries, hot peppers, mustard greens, corn, okra, collard greens, corn, sweet potatoes, cabbage, basil, rosemary, oregano, carrots, grapes and had a yard full of watermelons over the years. My orchard consists of a lemon tree, Meyer lemon tree, key lime tree, pomegranate tree, a fig tree, Satsuma tree, orange tree, grape vine, and three passion fruit vines. There is nothing more satisfying than going out to your own backyard and harvesting fruits and vegetables that you grew. You feel secure with the produce because you know what was placed in the soil and on the fruit. There are no added preservatives to extend the shelf life of your fruits and vegetables, and the flavor is so much more intense than those pur-



chased from grocery stores. There is no comparison on the cost either, as from one bag of seed that may cost you \$1 you will have more food than you could ever eat. And many organizations give away free seeds. Even if you bought a seedling (small plant) for a couple of dollars, that seedling is going to produce so much more than you could eat. The last time I saw eggplant at the market it was \$2 per pound, and any decent eggplant is going to be about 3 pounds so you are talking \$6 per eggplant. However, you could buy

the seedling for \$2 and have eggplants to give away. The sheer economics of the situation makes it crazy not to grow your own. Because the yield is so great, most "urban farmers" plant a row for donations to homeless shelters and food banks, which is such a wonderful idea.

You don't need to have a large plot of land to have bounty in your garden. Vegetables grow very well in containers. You can grow bell peppers, tomatoes, and eggplants in containers if you are tight on space. I am growing tomatoes in a container, and I have a bay laurel (Bay leaf tree) that has been thriving in a container for the past three years. Also you can enter-plant vegetables and herbs with flowers in your garden. Plant herbs near your rose bushes as they both require dry soil and full sun, so you don't have to dig up other plantings to add vegetables. Now if you just don't see yourself as an urban farmer, you can still have garden fresh vegetables by supporting

the many farmers markets in our area, or you can get involved in a community garden near you, put in some volunteer hours and make groceries. Also look out of neighbors who have crops in their garden, a lot of them take orders and will deliver when the crops are ripe.

One does not have to look far to find urban farmers, and community gardens are popping up everywhere. There is the Hollygrove Garden, Grow Dat Youth Farm in City Park, Jericho Road

Episcopal Housing Initiative has a community garden on the corner of Sixth and Dryades Streets, there is a community garden on Filmore and Elysian Fields, also several schools and churches are adding veggie gardens and teaching students to grow their own food.

**Check out my "Gardening Tip of the Week" at [www.thegardeningdiva.com](http://www.thegardeningdiva.com)**

Remember, never get too busy to stop and enjoy the beautiful flowers!

## Connect to the Source

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# Gladys Knight

## A Candid Conversation



**By Mary L. Datcher**  
Special Contributor to Data News Weekly

Motown Records was considered the number one most influential company to lead in setting a precedent for talent, style, good music, swag and success. The Detroit label was founded on the same business model of automotive companies that ruled the blue collar town during that time. Founder Berry Gordy believed in building a company that scouted and signed raw talent, polished them and carried them through an assembly line of artist development that is sadly missing in today's music business.

Gladys Knight and the Pips were part of the 'golden era' of Motown Records. They contributed to its long illustrious line-up of catalog hits that included "Neither One of Us", "I Heard It Through the Grapevine", "If I Were Your Woman" among them. In 1976, the group left Motown and joined Buddah Records where they continued to create a string of classic hits like "Midnight Train to Georgia". After much success Ms. Knight moved on to embark on a successful solo career with Columbia Records and MCA

Records reuniting with the Pips in the 1980's. The lead vocals on each song belonged to Gladys Knight and her smooth and timeless voice still rings strong today.

We had an opportunity to engage the seven-time Grammy awarded artist and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee in candid conversation while in Chicago for a concert at Ravinia and to promote her latest single "Just A Little". The independent release of her single is available on September 25th and produced by Grammy award producer, S1. She's no stranger to overseeing her own music company but this time it's with the help of her husband and manager.

"I told my crew, please don't sign me to another record label. You can give people chance, after chance, after chance but it hasn't changed," Knight said. "Why do you think there aren't any record labels left? People got tired of not being paid while these mega companies are at the top with executives living in big houses, owning luxury cars and taking our money sending their kids to college. I have kids in college as well and I need my money."

With her new company, comes new talent and she's happy to bring on young

and fresh ears to the camp. Rising singer and current vocal arranger, R&B singer Avehre has managed to capture Knight's interest in becoming one of the premiere artists on her independent label.

"Avehre is an amazing, talented and respectful young man. My husband has taken him under his wing. They are in the studio right now," Knight said. "This man can write, produce and do his own thing."

As the business has changed over the years Knight has experienced challenges including the loss of her son James Newman who was also her manager, and her daughter and former manager who fell ill. She confesses that her spirituality and relationship with God has kept her going. As a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, she's noticed a cycle of social injustice that has continued to plague our community. Current day injustices have stirred past memories citing that the generational gap is not too different than when she was coming up in the Civil Rights movement.

"We were determined more than we were angry so we marched. We came together as a people. We held up our heads. Not only were we fighting for justice, we were fighting for respect,"

Knight said there's a difference between her generation's approach and the following generation. "You can't demand respect if you're not respectable. In our homes, when we try to teach our kids about being respectable – they get so much pressure from outside of the homes. They just got tired so they don't want to hear it, 'I'm mad now!' Growing up, they need what we've received on the spiritual side in order to keep them grounded," said Knight. "The concept of God was taken away from us and everything and everybody along the way. That's the primary reason why we are where we are today. We're too busy being politically correct."

Knight and her husband William McDowell of 15 years are happily married and reside in Canton, North Carolina. There they recently purchased the schoolhouse, where McDowell attended elementary school. The building has been abandoned for a number of decades and they are seeking to transforming it into a state-of-art performing arts facility for new students. It's a labor of love. She is looking forward to reaching out to her industry friends for assistance in bringing more opportunities to the community.

# Stand Up

## *If Not Us, Then No One*



**By Josiah Young**  
Executive Director  
of Stand Up

up in our country today will be the first generation of Americans who are less well educated than their parents.

Most of us believe in education as the great equalizer. Most of us believe that education is the vehicle to move you where you want to go in life, no matter where you started. Under these beliefs, the American public education system is one of the most important institutions in the world.

Is it delivering? The answer, unfortunately, is "no."

Consider the data: Nationally, 4 out of 5 African American students are not reading at grade level by 4th grade; about 6 out of 7 African American students are not performing math at grade level by 8th grade; and only 1 out of 25 African American students finish high

Most Americans still believe in the American Dream: if you work hard and do the right things then you can be anything you want to be.

So how is the dream going for Americans today? Not too dreamy: almost 66% of poor children will remain poor as adults and only 4% of Americans raised at the bottom of the economic ladder will rise to the top as adults. The children growing

“Most Americans still believe in the American Dream: if you work hard and do the right things then you can be anything you want to be”

school college-ready in their core subjects.

When we look at Tennessee specifically, the numbers are equally grim. In 2013, only 1 out of 7 African American 4th graders were proficient in reading. That same year, only 1 out of 7 African American 8th graders were proficient in math.

The numbers tell one of the saddest narratives in this country. But what or who is to blame for this story? Parents? Teachers? Principals? Violence? Crime? Poverty?

While we can focus on any of these players as part of the problem, the reality is that we can't spend time assigning blame. Our students deserve better and it's our responsibility, as adults, to drive toward solutions. We all acknowledge that social environments and the challenges of poverty disrupt the abilities of parents, teachers, and leaders to educate our children. Unfortunately, we can't do a lot to alleviate

these conditions. But there is one environment where we can have a great deal of control: our schools.

If we can improve the quality of services and education provided within our schools, we have a chance to make sure that more than four out of every 100 African American students are actually ready to make something of themselves in college. If we can exercise the courage to expect more of our students academically, to expect more of our teachers professionally, and to expect more of our parents socially, we have a chance to balance our communities of the future.

What will it take to do what so many have tried to do for over 60 years? Just as no one person or community has the answer, no one school has the model for all students. That means families need choices. No family should ever feel as if they're trapped in a failing school without options. We must ensure that we're utilizing

every possible opportunity for our children to have access to an effective school.

Now is the time. We can no longer wait. And our children certainly can't. As leaders in this community, we're ready to answer the call. We invite you to join us in this effort and ensure that the efforts to reform our schools are driven by the community for the community.

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# Trust Don't Come Round Here Anymore



**James Washington**  
Guest Columnist

Sometimes words alone cannot convey meaning and feelings the way we'd like them to. Trust for example. The reference point for my meaning is "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all things acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5-6.

Trust is such a complex thing. Have you ever been betrayed by

someone in whom you had total trust? Have you been able to totally trust another person since? See how easy misplaced trust puts you in a terribly vulnerable place. It's uncomfortable. It's abnormal. It ain't fun. Yet, in this passage we are instructed to put our trust in the Lord. The question is can you do it? Are you able to put trust in your heart after you experience devastating betrayal? And we've all been betrayed in one way or another; either by having our beliefs proven false or maybe your heart has been broken.

Every one knows someone who has been crippled by a lover or spouse gone crazy, or, watched someone stumble up on the truth about a situation that everybody but them knew the real deal. In the real world that kind of stuff hurts. In a

real sense, once destroyed, trust 'don't' come round here anymore. But now, wait a minute. Go out and trust in the Lord implicitly. You get my meaning? Extreme caution usually follows crippling betrayal. New relationships are founded largely on mistrust and 'prove it to me;' not, blind faith and unconditional trust.

Life teaches us that only a fool would allow themselves to be misused again. Therein lies my question about trust and what it means to you. Can you deal with this concept everyday? How much of a struggle are you having trying to trust people who have taught you not to give them the time of day? Do you treat all people this way or just the one(s) who betrayed you? Can you forgive? Can you ever forget? Do you really want to? And what does all of this have to do with

God? How are you treating Him in the trust area? "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." 1 Corinthians 4:2.

Now exactly, who's proving what to whom? Are you requiring God to prove something to you before you trust Him? Are you demanding from God those same things you demand from someone, anyone before you would even consider giving him or her your love? You see it is so easy to succumb to a lifestyle which requires proof before love is given. It's so easy to demand the impossible from people who are incapable of giving it to you. But how can you base your relationship with God on worldly principles grounded in betrayal and disappointment? Are you requiring God to prove His

love to you before you give yours to Him?

The key to this trust thing lies deep within each and every one of us. We first have to confront those demons which have plagued us for years. And yes, that means all the pain that goes with them. Then and only then can we begin to even accept the concept of trust and loyalty, total and without equivocation. Because then trust means knowing. Trust means truth. Trust means no matter what, I know that regardless of conditions and circumstances, I am God's child, made in His image and the recipient of His love.

**May God bless and keep you always,**

James,  
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# Straight Black Men Sidelined in AIDS Fight

By Freddie Allen

Heterosexual Black men were largely invisible at the 2015 United States Conference on AIDS last week, a long-term absence that will continue to impact the future of the AIDS epidemic in the Black community.

One in 16 Black men will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime, compared to 1 in 102 White men who will share the same fate.

Even though heterosexual Black women continue to outpace their White and Latino counterparts in the rate of HIV infections, little attention was paid to the role that straight Black men should play in combating the epidemic in the Black community.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Blacks account for 44 percent of all new HIV infections in the United States.

The CDC reported that het-

erosexual males account for 13 percent of the new HIV infections among Blacks, while women make up 25 percent and men who have sex with men (MSM) account for 51 percent.

In 2010, the same percentages of undiagnosed HIV infections among men were attributed to male-to-male sexual contact (19 percent) and heterosexual contact (19 percent).

The CDC also reported that, "From 2000 to 2010, HIV infection was the 7th leading cause of death overall for black men, but was not a leading cause of death for other races/ethnicities."

Health care providers struggle to bring heterosexual Black men into the health care setting, other groups protest louder and garner desperately needed resources.

Dawn Smith, a clinician and researcher at the HIV/AIDS prevention division at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said



Justin Wooley, a consultant with the Black AIDS Institute, speaks during a session on raising awareness about PrEP among heterosexual Black males at the Institute's annual PrEP summit in Washington, D.C. (Freddie Allen/NNPA News Wire)

that Black men who have sex with men (MSM) have a group identity that straight Black men lack.

"[Black MSM] want to get in a room together, because they have issues that they want to discuss," said Smith. "Straight men don't have that."

The Black AIDS Institute, a national HIV/AIDS think tank focused on the Black community, hosted a summit on pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) one day before the start of the 2015 United States Conference on AIDS that featured a breakout session designed to help health care providers introduce heterosexual Black men to PrEP.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) can reduce the risk of HIV infection by up to 92 percent in people who take the medicine, compared to those who don't take PrEP at all, according to AIDS.gov.

Kier Gaines, a college and career development counselor at Kingsman Academy Public Charter School in Washington, D.C., and co-facilitator for the session on men, said that for Black men specifically, health is usually only a concern when symptoms develop, "but you can contract HIV and for all intents and purposes you can look and feel fine for months."

Gaines said that getting straight Black men into the room to even talk about HIV prevention is a tall order.

Smith said straight Black men grapple with health care in ways that MSM and women don't.

"A lot of men feel like being sick is being weak and so they don't want to talk about health," said Smith.

Gaines encounters the same resistance pushing men to get tested for HIV as he does encouraging Black men to get prostate exams.

"It's the same thing with diabetes and it's the same thing with hypertension, so HIV testing is no different," said Gaines.

As a heterosexual man working as a health care advocate specializing in STD prevention and awareness, Justin Wooley, a consultant with the Black AIDS Institute, said that he constantly has to fight against the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and the misperception that HIV is simply a disease of gay men.

"There's almost no room for me to be an advocate," said Wooley. "If we were talking about saving puppies with three legs in Alaska nobody would ask me, 'Are you heterosexual or homosexual?' It would just be about saving puppies."

Wooley added: "I always have to validate why I care about [the epidemic] as a heterosexual Black man."

Some AIDS activists say that the lack of focus on the HIV infection rates of straight Black men is owed to how they have been labeled in the epidemic. Heterosexual Black men diagnosed with HIV who are also intravenous drug users (IDUs) are often characterized by health care professionals as IDUs, a message that often alienates straight men who don't inject drugs.

Yet, targeting Black IDUs is not completely unwarranted.

Black men account for 44 percent of HIV infections among intravenous drug users compared to White males who make up 23 percent of the HIV infections among men who inject drugs.

Even though new HIV infections among Black women fell 21 percent, when comparing data from 2008 and 2010, the HIV incidence rate for Black women was still 20 times the HIV incidence rate for White women.

According to the CDC, nearly 90 percent of new HIV infections among Black women are attributed to heterosexual contact.

After four days of plenaries, presentations and protests at the 2015 USCA, the absence of a vocal and targeted message for heterosexual Black men remained a blind spot in the fight against the AIDS epidemic in the Black community.

"We're trying to pretend that all the men who are having sex with women are also having sex with men," said Smith. "We have to break that up and we have to say that there are Black men who are only having sex with women and they need to be apart of the conversation, too."

Smith continued: "Nothing in the epidemic has happened without people from the various groups standing up and saying, 'What about me?' [Straight Black men] have to stand up, and say, 'How come you're having a whole conference and there are no sessions about me?'"

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# Obama Lauds Black Women at CBC Dinner

By Freddie Allen

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – During his speech at the 45th Annual Legislative Conference (ALC) Phoenix Awards Dinner, President Barack Obama celebrated the critical role that Black women have played in “every great movement in American history” and pledged to address challenges they face in the workplace and in the criminal justice system.

The Annual Legislative Conference (ALC) of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation focuses on issues affecting the Black community, domestically and abroad, and included policy forums on health, education, economic empowerment, Blacks in media and the criminal justice system.

In his speech, Obama touted national economic success following the Great Recession in the United States and the millions of people who gained access to health care through the Affordable Care Act. He also noted that none of it would have been possible without, “CBC taking tough votes when it mattered most.” Obama explained, “Whatever I’ve accomplished, the CBC has been there.”

During this year’s ALC Phoenix Awards Dinner, the foundation honored Fred Gray, the first civil rights attorney for Rosa Parks; Rev. William Barber, II, the president of the North Carolina State Conference of the NAACP; Juanita Abernathy, civil rights activist and wife of the late Ralph Abernathy and the late Amelia Boynton Robinson, who has been hailed as the “Rosa Parks” of the Selma, Ala. voting movement.

President Obama praised the leadership of Black women displayed during the Civil Rights Movement, even though their contributions were often marginalized.

“Women were the foot soldiers. Women strategized boycotts. Women organized marches. Even if they weren’t allowed to run the civil rights organizations on paper, behind the scenes they were the thinkers and the doers making things happen each and every day doing the work that nobody else wanted to do,” President Obama said. “They couldn’t prophesize



President Barack Obama delivered the keynote address during the 45th Annual Legislative Conference (ALC) Phoenix Awards Dinner in Washington, D.C. (Freddie Allen/NNPA News Wire/FILE)

from the pulpits, but they led the charge from the pews. They were no strangers to violence. They were on the front lines.

“Because all of us are beneficiaries of a long line of strong Black women who helped carry this country forward. Their work to expand civil rights opened the doors of opportunity, not just for African Americans but for all women, for all of us – Black and White, Latino and Asian, LGBT and straight, for our First Americans and our newest Americans,” Obama said. “And their contributions in every field – as scientists and entrepreneurs, educators, explorers – all made us stronger.”

Obama added: “The good news is, despite structural barriers of race and gender, women and girls of color have made real progress in recent years. The number of Black women-owned businesses has skyrocketed. Teen pregnancy rates among girls of color are down, while high school and four-year college graduation rates are up.”

According to a 2014 report on women of color and entrepreneurship by the Center for American Progress, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank, business ownership for Black women grew nearly 260 percent between 1997 and 2013.

Despite the success Black women have enjoyed in entrepreneurship and higher graduation rates in recent years, they still have a long way to go to achieve equity in the workplace.

the right thing to do,” said President Obama. “No family should have to choose between taking care of a sick child or losing their job.”

The president urged the audience not to forget the impact that the criminal justice system has on women, especially Black women who are incarcerated at twice the rate of their White counterparts.

“Many women in prison, you come to discover, have been victims of homelessness and domestic violence, and in some cases human trafficking,” Obama said. “And many have been sexually assaulted, both before they got to prison and then after they go to prison. And we don’t often talk about how society treats Black women and girls before they end up in prison. They’re suspended at higher rates than White boys and all other girls.”

President Obama said that he was confident that lawmakers could move forward to reform the criminal justice system and he pledged to work with the CBC and the rest of Congress on legislation that addresses “unjust sentencing laws,” encourages diversion and crime prevention programs, and supports returning citizens.

“We’ve got good people on both sides of the aisle that are working with law enforcement and local communities to find a better way forward,” President Obama said. “And as always, change will not happen overnight. It won’t be easy.

“But if our history has taught us anything, it’s taught us that when we come together, when we’re working with a sense of purpose, when we are listening to one another, when we assume the best in each other rather than the worst, then change happens.”

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