

Systematic Population Control

AKil Brown

My name is AKil Brown, I am of African American, Indian and Latin descent. I'm 29 years old, going into the 9th year of a 13 year sentence and I have two strikes. My ethnicities, age, and two strikes hold prominence with my, and thousands of others, situation due to a very clear reason: population control.

In 2012 between the months of June and December I was being courted off to court weekly from prison to face possession of marijuana charges. A possession that was the result of a bad cellmate who refused to man-up to his wrongdoings. The first thing I was told as the proceedings were underway was that I could and probably would receive "25 to Life" for the possession charge if found guilty under the three strikes law. My heart dropped. Not simply because it was not mine to begin with or just a few crumbs of marijuana but because I'm under 30, serving my first term of incarceration, and didn't have the financial means to defend against the allegation.

Although noteworthy, my encounter was not unique. During the duration of my incarceration, from the time spent in county jail amongst numerous individuals fighting a wide range of charges to the few different prison yards I've been on, I've met or have heard of thousands of young minorities in similar predicaments. Under 30, serving a significant amount of time, with two strikes looming over their heads. Most, like myself, have never been incarcerated as adults before the current term. That is without mentioning the slightly older men who suffered similar fates a generation before. The common thread, in addition to all being poor, is that upwards of 70% of these young men are of Black or Hispanic origin.

Youthful minorities take up the lions share of individuals incarcerated. Half of which are given double digit sentences that include enhancements and two strikes that would ensure their prison stay until near middle age or life. Most of those who are fortunate to be released after serving a substantial

amount of time are unequipped and therefore placed in a "set-up" situation where if reincarcerated could spend double the time previously served if not life.

It's systematic population control based on race and socioeconomic status. To be incarcerated is to live in a coffin, to have life is to be buried alive. In the U.S. Justice system minorities are being used as target practice, thrown away as a result. All of which has led to the over-insaturation of jails and prisons and the mass incarceration of inner city youth.

In November 2012 the Three Strikes Reformation Act passed. Which was a Godsend for all of those serving life sentences for nonviolent and petty crimes. It was also a blessing for myself because after the seventh reminder that I was facing 25 to Life for that marijuana possession, I was afforded some relief. My maximum time faced would be eight years, double the original max for the offense due to the strikes already attached to my name. While eight years for a blunt of marijuana is ridiculous I knew it was a far cry from a life sentence. I am also aware that while drug offenses and theft among other minor crimes that won't raise too many eyebrows, those found with weapon possession; even while not in the commission of a crime, aren't afforded the same breath of relief.

I could argue about the number of single parent households in the inner-cities and minority predominate suburbs. Or the fact that public schools in these neighborhoods are behind the curve, underfunded, and understaffed. Usually without new or current equipment, electronics, and books. Or that this form of "eliminating the threat", this over-punishment leads to a continuous cycle. A cycle where fathers, sons, uncles, brothers, - minority men are taken away from the only people who truly want to see their correction and success, and placed in prison for disproportionate amounts of time. Placed in a Department of corrections that doesn't essentially provide correction or rehabilitation. While the "Three Strikes Reformation Act" may have provided a speed bump on an otherwise speedway to slow down

on the amount of individuals being convicted for life behind minor crimes, it did not provide a roadblock to halt harsh sentences being distributed based on race or socioeconomic status.

I keep this in mind with not only thoughts on my situation and countless others but also the situation of my current cellmate. Who after being taken into custody at seventeen, was sentenced to 24 years with two strikes a year later, four months after the Three Strikes Reformation Act passed. Like many, he is the product of a single parent household; his father served 12 years for a drug conviction, grew up in an area that offered inadequate or too few jobs, and was the witness of a failing school system. The question is: when does it end?