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A Word to the People

by Kamau Tebogo Zulu Damali
(Raynell D. Morgan)

It is often stated that the youth are our future, and if we want our future to be a promising one then we must get involved with the youth and give them the guidance needed to be successful members of this society. In the Black, Brown and Red communities of Amerika, the youth are being sucked up by the prison industrial complex, falling victim to homicide and self destruction. If it is true, that the youth are our future, unless we step up to the plate, get involved in their lives and reclaim control of our communities, we're in a lot of trouble.

In assessing the situation of our youth and community and how it is being consumed by the prison system on both the macro and micro level, it must be noted that the United States of Amerika, at the dawn of the 21st century has a cumulative incarceration populace of 2.7 million citizens of varied ethnicities; a non-negotiable figure that exceeds the prison population of Communist China, which stands at 500,000, in a nation of over 1 billion people. Here in the United States the human population barely exceeds 291 million.

Throughout the first three quarters of the 20th century, the U.S. incarceration rate remained relatively stable at about 110 prison inmates for every 100,000 people. In the mid 1970's the rate began to climb, doubling in the 1980's and again in the 1990's. The rate now is estimated around 760 per 100,000; among adult men between the ages of 18 to 34 it is estimated at 1,160 per 100,000. 75% of those prisoners are people of color while 45% are of Alkebulanian descent.

It is no coincidence the majority of the people incarcerated in Amerika's gulags are poor people and people of color. Without question, the conditions of the Black, Brown and Red community(s) in Amerika are designed and rooted in the legacy of racism, kapital exploitation, and apartheid/Jim Crow politics. We too, are to blame for the current dismal state of our communities. The physical poverty of the community, for instance, is the result of irresponsibility and complacency. We have been programmed to believe that there is nothing wrong with being impoverished, not just financially but physically, and have accepted it. Therefore, the unemployment in the community is a result of us not coming together financially to build/create jobs and support each other in business. The genocide/fratricide in the community is the result of fear, self hatred, lack of respect, lack of unity lack of self-knowledge, and lack of concern for the welfare of others. The vast majority of our problems as a community could be solved by us. Our inactivity has only aided the overall assault that's been lodged against us by the government. We need to come together to work on ways to curb the pernicious behaviors that result from the structures of poverty, racism, kapitalism, unemployment, etc.

It must be emphasized that the youth emulate what they see us do and also what they witness in the community. If we act responsibly, so will they. If we demonstrate responsibility and positive conduct and instill such values in them, they will act accordingly. If we don't teach them how to be responsible and respectful, they will turn to the streets for guidance. And, if the streets are saturated in negativity and criminal conduct, their attitude and behavior will reflect such. I base everything stated herein, on personal experience, for instance:

My parents were a part of the Black consciousness movement in the 60's and 70's and tried to influence me and my two brothers with those experiences. They encouraged us to read, to be righteous and, to take pride in our Alkebulanian heritage, but didn't lead by example. Well, Mama did, but not Pops. Pops had his problems with drugs and alcohol and was abusive to Mama, and that's what I picked up. Pops and Mama split when I was nine years old, and although he stayed in touch, without his presence and discipline the household became fragile and we (my eldest brother and I) wandered. To top it off, Mama became preoccupied with three jobs and thus had really no time for us. So, we fell into the politics of street life and became the antithesis to everything our parents wanted us to be. Mama and Pops tried to reach out to us, years down the line, but it was too late. Had our parents and the parents of those we ran the streets with become involved in our lives on a consistent basis, led by example, and helped shape the community in a positive sense, most of us perhaps would've turned out to be productive members of society.

I've been in prison since 1993 and before that in and out of group homes and juvenile detentions, due to the lack of guidance in the community. All of the brothers (and a few sisters) who I came up with are either dead, in prison, or strung out on drugs and alcohol. The community failed us and it failed itself. I'm not suggesting that an individual is not responsible for his or her own actions, for I'm the first to point a finger at myself. I'm only highlighting the fact that such actions are shaped by one's upbringing and, like the Afrikan proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child." translation: the child belongs to

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the community and therefore the community is responsible for the child. If the child succeeds, the community succeeds, and likewise when it fails.

I'm not saying that investing in the youth/community, fighting poverty, building educational institutions, project (Programs) designed to edify the youth and community, as a whole, will obliterate each and every problem that we as a community face, but it will definitely improve our conditions and curtail the many dilemmas that result due to the lack of those structures and opportunities.

Here are some ideas for community development:

1. Form a coalition with concerned members of the community. This coalition should be based on resolving issues in the community, such as crime, poverty, and unemployment.
2. Form a committee that specifically deals with the economical, political, educational, and social reconstruction of the community.
3. Become acquainted with every member of the community, if possible.
4. Form a committee that deals with cleaning the community. If you don't have funds to purchase the supplies needed, petition your local politicians and ask to be granted access to the sanitation building in your city to acquire used brooms, rakes, and other suitable appliances. This committee should involve the youth, which will teach them the value of responsibility.
5. Form an economics committee. This committee shall consist of those advanced in economics so that they can teach the people business and how to properly manage money. A savings account for each household should be established. This committee shall teach the importance of spending money wisely and investing in ventures beneficial to one's cause.
6. Write complaint letters to local Legislators and ask them why your tax dollars aren't being spent on programs in prisons that actually help in the rehabilitation of prisoners. Programs such as accredited college courses, vocational training, business school, and similar curriculums would help the returning prisoner contribute to society. This is an issue that should concern all, considering that most of you have relatives in prison and that most of the people being released from prison will be returning to your community. So, you the people, must not remain silent on this issue. Become vocal and demand that your money (taxes) is spent to rehabilitate and not just punish people.
7. Create a Peewee football, baseball and basketball league in the community for the youth. This will give them something constructive to do, teach them the importance of sportsmanship, unity, and teamwork.
8. Form a book reading club for not only the youth but for adults as well.
9. Create a conflict resolution committee. The purpose of this committee is for peace treaties between brothers and sisters who are at odds with each other. A lot of social groups, labeled by some as gangs, if organized, could be true fighters for and protectors of the community. Most of these groups' teachings are rooted in community activism. It's just due to the lack of guidance, they have lost track of such teachings. Most of the conflicts that take place in the community are reconcilable, but usually blow out of proportion because no one ever steps in to mediate.
10. Form a community patrol task force. This task force will consist solely of people from the community, concerned with keeping it safe and watching out for each other. It's time we stand up and control the things we can.

Conclusion

I write these words, not only to persuade, but to encourage you to get involved with the affairs of the community and embrace all the youth in the community as if they were your very own children. We can't save the world but we can save our communities, and it's no one responsibility but our own to do so. On that note, I will conclude and pray that Allah (God) will bless us all with direction and guide us to greater promise, greater than this world can offer. Peace!!!

Yours in Continued Struggle,

Kamau Tebogo Zulu Damali * 279380

Wisconsin Secure Program Facility
P.O. Box 9900
Boscobel, WI 53805

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I'm no longer at Supermap
Now at: Kamau TZ Damali
Raynell D Morgan
CCI PO Box 950
Boscobel, WI 53901

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