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*AFRICAN JOURNAL OF CRIMINOLOGY & JUSTICE STUDIES:
AJCS; Volume 4, No. 2, April 2011*

Editorial: RESOLUTION AGAINST THE WAR ON AFRICAN AMERICANS

By Biko Agozino

*The meeting of the African Criminology and Justice Studies Association which owns this African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies adopted this draft resolution in November, 2010, San Francisco. A similar draft resolution was submitted to the Association of Black Sociologists (and published in their newsletter, 'Resolution Against the War on African Americans' in *The Griot: Newsletter of the Association of Black Sociologists, September, 2010*). It was also submitted to the National Council for Black Studies for possible approval but only the African Criminology and Justice Association has approved it so far. This draft resolution was also posted as a Press Release on *AfricaResource.com* where it has received more than 1000 hits. I present a slightly updated version of the resolution and call for action to bring about the implementation of the relevant policies around the world to avoid the increasingly oppressive repression of people of African descent, the poor generally and minority ethnic populations around the world.*

Towards scholar activism to actualize the resolution, I suggest that every meeting of professional associations with a focus on people of African descent should include a March For Social Justice calling for an end to the war on drugs because it is an undisguised war on people of African descent and the poor generally even though they do not use drugs more than other categories of people. I suggest that such Marches for Social Justice should proceed to a local prison and picket it with placards denouncing the racist war on African people, then march to a local court to organize a sit-in to enlighten the general public about the pyrrhic lose-lose effects of the war on drugs.

Finally, I call on scholar activists and members of the community to work together to get the issue of drugs decriminalization on the ballot in every jurisdiction and campaign for the voters to pass the proposition and end this unjust war which has been wasting tax resources, damaging the lives of individuals and destroying communities while more dangerous substances remain legal and are marketed to the people with government subsidies:

Contrary to the claim by Times magazine that the war on drugs, the longest war that has cost American taxpayers \$2.5 trillion over 40 years, has 'no clear enemy',¹ the NAACP in 2010 rightly condemned the war on drugs as a racist war against African Americans and against the poor generally.² Californian voters have also proposed the legalization of marijuana to avoid the unnecessary criminalization of otherwise law-

¹ Brief History The War on Drugs By [Claire Suddath](http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1887488,00.html) Wednesday, Mar. 25, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1887488,00.html> See also 1994 U. Chi. Legal F. 25 (1994) Race and the War on Drugs; by Tonry, Michael

² <http://naacpoc.org/2008/03/why-are-1-in-9-young-black-men-in-prison/#more-39> See also J. Gender Race & Just. 381 (2002) Race, Crime and the Pool of Surplus Criminality: Or Why the War on Drugs Was a War on Blacks; by Nunn, Kenneth B.;

abiding responsible adults, aid the sick who need the drug and create fair employment opportunities and wealth for the people and tax revenues for the state.³

The intensifying violence among poor urban youth across America, the Caribbean, South America, South East Asia and Africa have all been linked to struggles over the control of the lucrative illicit drugs trade that governments could tax for revenue to support education, health and social services while saving on unnecessary repressive enforcement. The attempt to arrest a single drug lord in Jamaica for extradition to the US resulted in the death of nearly 80 innocent Jamaicans in 2010 and the war on drugs in Mexico has claimed more than 30,000 lives in three years while a similar attempt to make Thailand 'drug-free' in 2003 resulted in the extra judicial killing of 2800 people. Not surprisingly, three former South American presidents, including the eminent sociologist, Dr. Cardozo of Brazil, issued a policy statement in 2009 denouncing the war on drugs as a costly failure that should be abandoned.

The Drug Czar of the Obama administration, Gil Kerlikowske, in 2009 announced that the war on drugs was inconsistent with the goals of a democratically elected government that should be serving the people and not waging war against its own citizens but insisted that there is no need for a change in policy except the stopping of the raids on medical marijuana dispensers in states that approve of the legal prescription of the drug for patients and promised only a change in language.⁴

Research by Human Rights Watch in 2010 reported that "blacks comprise 62.7 percent and whites 36.7 percent of all drug offenders admitted to state prison ... federal surveys and other data detailed in this report show clearly that this racial disparity bears scant relation to racial differences in drug offending. There are, for example, five times more white drug users than black. Relative to population, black men are admitted to state prison on drug charges at a rate that is 13.4 times greater than that of white men. In large part because of the extraordinary racial disparities in incarceration for drug offenses, blacks are incarcerated for all offenses at 8.2 times the rate of whites. One in every 20 black men over the age of 18 in the United States is in state or federal prison, compared to one in 180 white men."⁵

Based on the available overwhelming evidence, there is no doubt that the war on drugs is a war against African American men and women primarily and we call on the Obama administration to immediately end this injustice and free the drugs war prisoners who are in prison for no violent offences.

We declare that the war on drugs is part of the systematic processes to strip African Americans, Hispanics and the poor generally of the constitutionally guaranteed right to equal protection and return them to prison slave plantations where their labor is exploited cheaply by the industrial complex and we call on President Obama to abolish this racist affront to democracy without further delay the same way that President Lincoln proclaimed the abolition of slavery with a stroke of the pen.

As educators, we are confident that we could teach our communities to use their civil liberties to choose not to consume dangerous substances the same way we have been able to teach large sections of the community to say no to tobacco and alcohol which kill many more people around the world than all the illicit drugs put together. We know from research that one illicit drug, marihuana, has never killed anyone but is used as the major pretext (with 800,000 arrests annually in the US alone) for the criminalization of

³ Miron, Jeffrey A. (2007-09-17). "[Costs of Marijuana Prohibition: Economic Analysis](http://www.prohibitioncosts.org)". Marijuana Policy Project. <http://www.prohibitioncosts.org>/ See also Gender Race & Just. 225 (2002) Recovering from Drugs and the Drug War: An Achievable Public Health Alternative; Blumenson, Eric.

⁴ ^ "White House Czar Calls for End to 'War on Drugs'". [The Wall Street Journal](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124225891527617397.html). May 14, 2009. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124225891527617397.html>

⁵ See, e.g., Craig Reinerman and Harry G. Levine, "The Crack Attack, Politics and Media in the Crack Scare," in Craig Reinerman and Harry G. Levine, *Crack in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Michael Tonry, *Malign Neglect: Race, Crime, and Punishment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); David Cole, *No Equal Justice* (New York: The New Press, 1999); David Musto, *The American Disease: Origins of Narcotic Control* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973); See also <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/04/10/drug-policy-and-human-rights>

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otherwise law-abiding youth from the African American, Latino, South Asian, Caribbean, African and poor white communities worldwide at huge costs to tax payers.

We suggest that illicit drug dealers are the major beneficiaries from the war on drugs and therefore they oppose decriminalization because the war makes drugs relatively expensive and directly increases their profit margins the way bootleg liquor enriched organized criminals before the ending of prohibition. We are confident that the same way the Mafia violence associated with prohibition was ended with the ending of prohibition, the violence associated with the turf wars for the drug trade would be significantly reduced once this racist war primarily against African American, Hispanic and poor communities worldwide is brought to an end with rehabilitation programs for the prisoners of the war on drugs.

In line with the emphasis on prevention in the health reform act, we call for harm reduction through the hospitalization of those who fall sick from drug dependency just like tobacco and alcohol patients who are more numerous and more likely to die despite the fact that tobacco and alcohol remain legal.

We call on President Obama to extend his policies of hope and reduce the politics of fear and greed by borrowing from the experiments in countries like The Netherlands and more recently Portugal which have been implementing different forms of decriminalization with the result that their prisons are decongested, their streets are safer and their citizens face reduced harm compared to the US, France, UK, Mexico, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa and Russia, to name a few examples of the battlefields of the so-called war on drugs.

Many law enforcement officers favor decriminalization to remove the temptation of corruption, increase respect for officers in the community, and free them from a racist war so that they could concentrate on the real bad guys. The Vienna Declaration on illicit drugs has also called for policy change to help reduce the epidemic spread of HIV/AIDS.⁶

Thanks to Dr. Cornel West of Princeton University, the only eminent public intellectual with the courage to endorse the draft of this resolution within 24 hours after it was sent to him. I invite others with moral and intellectual courage to sign on to this resolution and help to bring about a change in policy for the benefit of all. The endorsements of Prop 19 below show that more black public intellectuals and organizations need to join this campaign given that the war on drugs is a war on the black people who do not use more drugs, especially in the case of black women who are close to suspected black men.⁷

It is understandable that African American and Hispanic American scholars are reluctant to support drugs decriminalization given the destructive impacts of the drugs trade on poor and minority communities. This was part of the reason why the 100:1 ratio in penal severity between crack and powder cocaine was passed without much protest from the African American community because crack was seen as a demon drug that caused havoc in the black community. However, I suggest that it is the war on drugs that is causing the greater harm because more dangerous substances like tobacco and alcohol are allowed to be sold on every block of the black community despite the fact that tobacco alone kills six million people worldwide and half a million Americans annually. Yet, we rely on education to get young people to say no to tobacco and to drink responsibly; when they fall sick from these substances, we do not send them to prison but rightly to hospitals where the harm is reduced for the individual and the community. I recommend that we treat drugs as the public health problems they are and remove them from the reach of the control-freak criminal justice system that is rendering our world ever more dangerous by seeking to tell responsible adults what they could or could not consume in the safety of their own homes.

⁶ <http://www.viennadeclaration.com/the-declaration.html>

⁷ Lawrence D. Bobo and Victor Thompson, 'Unfair by Design: The War on Drugs, Race, and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Justice System' in *Social Research: An International Quarterly* Issue: Volume 73, Number 2 / Summer 2006 Pages: 445 - 472. See also SR Bush-Baskette 'The war on drugs as a war against Black women' in *Girls, Women, and Crime: Selected readings*, edited by Meda Chesney-Lind, Lisa Pasko, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 2004; Doris Marie Provine, *Unequal under law: race in the war on drugs*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press; Agozino, Biko 'Editorial: Foreign Women in Prison' in *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 2, 2008, <http://www.umes.edu/ajcs/index.cfm?id=18504>

As Michelle Alexander aptly observed in *The New Jim Crow*, this is a civil rights issue of immense proportions which the first black president of the US, Barack Obama, could have prioritized if black leaders would champion the cause and make him to support the call for decriminalization with legislative proposals or presidential orders especially because he himself admitted that he did not only smoke, he also inhaled as a youth and if he had been arrested and criminalized back then, there would have been little chance that he would be the president that he is today. This is a task not only for black leaders but for all who have a moral conscience in the world today to support because the war on drugs does not only affect black people adversely, it is a global epidemic that is ruining the lives of poor people while depleting public revenues.

ENDORSEMENTS OF THE PROPOSITION 19 IN CALIFORNIA:

The following people and organizations have endorsed Proposition 19 to legalize marijuana. To submit your endorsement of the initiative, [click here](#).

Law Enforcement

- National Black Police Association
- National Latino Officers Association
- San Jose Police Chief Joseph McNamara (Ret.)
- Seattle Police Chief and San Diego Deputy Police Chief Norm Stamper (Ret.)
- Former Los Angeles Deputy Police Chief Stephen Downing
- Former Los Angeles Police Department Sergeant and Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney William John Cox
- Former Contra Costa County Deputy Sheriff David Sinclair
- Former Los Angeles Deputy Sheriff MacKenzie Allen
- Former Los Angeles Deputy Sheriff Jeff Studdard
- Former Sutter County Deputy Sheriff Nate Bradley
- Former Yolo County Resident Deputy Sheriff Danny Maynard
- Humboldt County Sheriff's Captain Stephen Cobine (Ret.)
- Orange County Superior Court Judge James P. Gray (Ret.)
- San Francisco District Attorney Terence Hallinan (Ret.)
- Former Senior Humboldt County Deputy District Attorney and Prosecutor Jeffrey Schwartz
- Former Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney and California Administrative Law Judge Mike Schmier
- Riverside County Deputy District Attorney Walter Clark (Ret.)
- Former Orange County Senior Reserve Park Ranger L. Lawrence Baird
- Oakland City Attorney John Russo
- Former Community Prosecutor James Anthony, Oakland City Attorney's Office
- Los Angeles Police Department Narcotics Detective David Doddridge (Ret.)
- Former San Jose Police Department Narcotics Detective Russ Jones
- Former Los Angeles Senior Police Specialist Walter McKay
- United States Air Force Security Forces Officer John Darker, Anderson, CA
- Former United States Military Police Officer Dr. Nina Graves, Santa Barbara, CA
- United States Navy Officer and Intelligence Specialist Larry Talley (Ret.)
- California Correctional Peace Officer William Baldwin (Ret.)
- California Correctional Peace Officer Madeline Martinez (Ret.)
- Mohave County Deputy Probation Officer Joe Miller (Ret.)
- Former Lakeport Police Officer Rick Erickson
- Former San Francisco Police Officer Bill Dake
- Former Torrance Police Officer Kyle Kazan
- Former Massachusetts Assistant Attorney General John Amabile, Tisbury, MA
- Atlanta, Georgia State's Attorney Jay Fisher
- Former American Samoa Attorney General's Office Chief Prosecutor and Municipal Prosecutor for Washington Cities Jim Doherty
- New Jersey State Police Detective Lieutenant Jack Cole (Ret.)
- New Hampshire State Police Officer Paul MacLean (Ret.)
- Retired Bristol, Vermont Police Chief and Saint Albans, Vermont Police Chief Tim Datig

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- Former Deputy Sheriff Leo E. Laurence, J.D., Central Missouri
- Former Reserve Deputy Sheriff and Corrections Officer Dwayne Sessom, Lawton, Oklahoma
- Former Davis County, Utah Deputy Constable Bret Black
- Retired Washington Superior Court Judge David Nichols
- Retired Police Captain Peter Christ, Syracuse, New York.
- Former Spokane, Washington Police Department Narcotics Investigator Jay Fleming
- Former Corrections Official Michael Gilbert, San Antonio, Texas
- Former Department of Corrections Sniper and K-9 Narcotics Dog Trainer Rusty White, Bridgeport, Texas
- National Black Police Association Executive Director and former Washington, DC Metropolitan Police Officer Ronald Hampton
- Former Baltimore Police Officer Peter Moskos
- Burlington, Ontario, Canada Law Enforcement Officer Alison Myrden (Ret.)
- Law Enforcement Officer Tony Ryan (Ret.), Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Physicians and Doctors

- United States Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders, MD (Ret.)
- Dr. Larry Bedard, Former President of the American College of Emergency Physicians*, Sausalito, CA
- Dr. Newton Harband, Retired Oncologist, Past President, Stanford Medical School Alumni Association*, San Rafael, CA
- Dr. Daniel Susott, MD, MPH, Medical Director, World Family Foundation*, San Francisco, CA
- Dr. Floyd Huen, MD, Board of Trustees, Alameda County Medical Center, Oakland, CA
- Mitch Earleywine, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, State University of New York at Albany
- Dr. Lester Grinspoon, MD, Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, Norfolk, MA
- Dr. Julie Holland, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, NYU School of Medicine, New York
- Dr. Leonard Krivitsky, MD, DD, Addiction Medicine Specialist, Philadelphia, PA
- Dr. Frank H. Lucido, MD, Family Practitioner, Berkeley, CA
- Arthur M. Strosberg, Ph. D., Pharmaceutical Industry Consultant, Foster City, CA
- Dr. Sunil Aggarwal, MD, PhD, Seattle, WA
- Dr. Christopher Fichtner, MD, Hemet, CA
- Stephen Frye, M.D., Psychiatrist, Las Vegas, Nevada

Economists and Business Leaders

- Peter Lewis, Chairman of the Board, Progressive Insurance
- Jeffrey Miron, Harvard Economist
- Dustin Moskowitz, Co-Founder, Facebook
- Sean Parker, Co-Founder, Facebook
- Michael D. Whitty, Ph.D., Adjunct Professor, University of San Francisco School of Business and Management

Elected Officials

- Congressman Pete Stark (CA-13)
- Congressman Dan Hamburg (CA-1) (Ret.)
- Congressman Pete McCloskey (CA-11) (Ret.)
- California State Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata (Ret.)
- California State Senator Mark Leno
- California State Senator Tom Hayden (Ret.)
- California State Assemblymember Tom Ammiano
- California State Assemblymember Hector De La Torre
- California State Assemblymember Mary Hayashi
- California State Assemblymember Jared Huffman
- California State Assemblymember Nancy Skinner
- California State Assemblymember Kerry Mazzoni (Ret.)
- Humboldt County Board of Supervisors
- Alameda County Supervisor Nate Miley
- Marin County Supervisor Steve Kinsey
- Mendocino County Supervisor John Pinches
- San Francisco Supervisor David Campos
- San Francisco Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi

- Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates
- Fairfax Vice Mayor Larry Bragman
- The Berkeley City Council
- The Oakland City Council
- The West Hollywood City Council
- Arcata City Councilmember Shane Brinton
- Berkeley City Councilmember Kriss Worthington
- Berkeley City Councilmember Darryl Moore
- Hayward City Councilmember Bill Quirk
- Oakland City Councilmember Rebecca Kaplan
- Oakland City Councilmember Jean Quan
- Oakland City Councilmember Pat Kernighan
- Oakland City Councilmember Larry Reid
- Oakland City Councilmember Nancy Nadel
- West Hollywood City Councilmember John Duran
- Windsor Town Councilmember Debora Fudge
- Palm Springs Unified School District Board Member Justin Blake
- AC Transit Board President Rocky Fernandez
- East Bay Municipal Utility District Board President Doug Linney
- Water Replenishment District of Southern California Director Rob Katherman
- Modoc County Democratic Central Committee Chair Thomas Romero
- Alameda County Democratic Central Committee Member Edie Irons
- California Republican Party Delegate David LaTour

Organizations

- California NAACP
- California Libertarian Party
- California Green Party
- Peace and Freedom Party of California
- California Young Democrats
- Progressive Democrats of America
- Republican Liberty Caucus
- ACLU of Northern California
- ACLU of Southern California
- ACLU of San Diego
- California 16th Assembly District Democrats
- Alameda County Democratic Party
- Butte County Democratic Party
- Los Angeles County Democratic Party
- Madera County Democratic Party
- Modoc County Democratic Party
- Orange County Democratic Party
- Placer County Democratic Party
- San Francisco Democratic Party
- Siskiyou County Democratic Party
- Sonoma County Democratic Party
- Democratic Party of the San Fernando Valley
- Sonoma Progressive Democrats of America
- Latino Democrats of Stanislaus County
- Progressive Democrats of Stanislaus County
- Desert Stonewall Democrats of Palm Springs
- Castro Valley Democratic Club
- Culver City Democratic Club

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- West Hollywood/Beverly Hills Democratic Club
 - West Los Angeles Democratic Club
 - Irish American Democratic Club of San Francisco
 - Democratic Women's Forum of San Francisco
 - San Francisco Young Democrats
 - District 3 Democratic Club
 - Richmond District Democratic Club
 - Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club
 - Harvey Milk LGBT Democratic Club
 - Potrero Hill Democratic Club
 - Robert F. Kennedy Democratic Club
 - Wellstone Democratic Renewal Club
 - Valley Progressives
 - Libertarian Party of Orange County
 - Libertarian Party of Riverside County
 - Courage Campaign
 - CREDO Action
 - Calitics
 - The Greenlining Institute
 - Humboldt Center for Constitutional Rights
 - San Francisco for Democracy Political Action Committee
 - San Francisco Women's Political Committee
 - The LA Gay & Lesbian Center
 - NAACP Congress Against Racism & Corruption in Law Enforcement (CARCLE)
 - Color of Change
 - William C. Velasquez Institute
 - Latino Voters League
 - A New PATH (Parents for Addiction Treatment and Healing)
 - Bay Area Chapter of Education Not Incarceration
 - Idriss Stelley Action & Resource Center
- Labor**
- Service Employees International Union (SEIU) of California
 - United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Western States Council
 - International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU), Northern California District Council
 - Central Labor Council of Butte-Glenn Counties (AFL-CIO)
 - Communications Workers of America (CWA), Local 9415
 - Instituto Laboral De La Raza
 - Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), San Francisco Chapter
 - Sign Displays, Local 510
 - Michael Hardeman, Business Representative, Sign Displays, Local 510
 - John Roe, UFCW, Local 5*
 - Dan Rush, UFCW, Local 5*
 - Brian Webster, Staff Assistant, Instituto Laboral De La Raza
- Faith Leaders**
- California Council of Churches IMPACT
 - Progressive Jewish Alliance
 - Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry Action Network
 - Interfaith Drug Policy Initiative
 - Karen Gilman, Women of Temple Israel of Hollywood*
 - Rev. Bryan Griem, Pastor of Montrose Community Church*, Montrose, CA
 - Rabbi Jeffrey Kahn, Clergy Against Prohibition*
 - Jane Marcus, Ph.D., Board Member, Women of Reform Judaism*, Palo Alto, CA

- The Rev. Canon Mary Moreno Richardson, Episcopal Diocese of San Diego*
- Curtis D. Robinson, Sr., President, Girls Inc, WCCC*, Richmond, CA
- Rev. Dr. Rick Schlosser, Executive Director, California Council of Churches IMPACT, Sacramento, CA
- Dennis Shields, Minister, The Religion of Jesus Church*, Captain Cook, HI

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- Eric Wright, Santa Clara Law, Santa Clara, CA
- Richard W. Wright, Illinois Institute of Technology, Kent College of Law, Chicago, IL

*Organizations listed for identification purposes only.

Graph shows the impact of the war on drugs on the prison industrial complex in the US
Source of Graph: Wikipedia.

