

think (we're talking about Americans, and Betita will excuse me for one second--US people), why we think we know what prisons are like and what they're doing to people. What are the sources of our knowledge about that and how do we rely on those sources of knowledge in making decisions about what should happen to people?

One of the things that's difficult in talking about the prison system, and I think anyone who's ever tried to talk about this has confronted this, is that: when we talk about racial slavery, US racial slavery, as a past event--and I think Tim Wise was talking about the ways we see the past this morning--we think of it as utterly natural to see slavery ended in the 19th Century, because we can see that kind of racial segregation is produced. But we don't have that same kind of vision when we're talking about contemporary situations.

So, I want us to think about what is natural to us about incarceration, and about prisons. Why do they feel like they're a permanent part of the landscape? What are the ways that that's reinforced for us?

One of the things I started to do was to study TV. I would go to the TV Guide page on the web and type in "prison" and see how many different times it came up. And you could actually watch from 8 am to actually 4/5 in the morning, something about prisons, including cartoons, ads, reality programming, TV movies, whatever...and the news...it goes on and on and on at every hour of every day. Now, if that's possible, it also creates the idea that there's the permanence of this institution.

So I want us to think about two things really I guess. On the one hand, what's happening as a racializing process when we incarcerate people to challenge us to think about humanity as a category. If dehumanization is what we talk about when we talk about US racial slavery, the historical slavery, then what is the process of dehumanization in the prison context. How do we describe it; how is it different from US racial slavery historically? How might it also be the same? A lot of folks focus on how it's the same, e.g. patterns of incarceration are racial--they look very much like racial slavery. But a lot of times we don't factor in that very difficult part, which is that people have been convicted of a crime. That's the exception to the 13th Amendment: that you cannot have slavery, except as punishment for a crime. That legal part, that legal apparatus of convicting someone, allows many people ideologically to feel off the hook. It moves the activity away from us onto the prisoner.

Whatever is happening, and there's an incredible quote from Clarence Thomas, but I won't read it--you don't need it--which really shows that the presumption is that it doesn't matter at all what the state does to prisoners because, at bottom, they are not like us, or they have done something to become not like us any more. And I really want us to think about that.

I also want us to think about the way we think that the prison itself is a permanent part of our natural landscape. And the way in which we reinforce this to each other in the forms of culture that we participate in.

I heard some derogatory remarks about hip hop. I'm an in-between generation, so I don't necessarily talk about the hip hop community as one thing or put it down. But I think that it is definitely true that there are these forms of representation that we all consume that have, whatever side of the debate they fall on or around whether or not the incarceration patterns are cor-

rect, that further consolidate our feeling that these are places that will always be here.

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The Meaning of Durban - Where Do We Go From Here?

Fran Beal

I was excited when I was asked to do this. My experience in Durban last August, just one year ago, was one of the highlights of my life: to gather together in one place in the world, where there are people from all over the world with one thing on their mind, "How are we going to deal with this question of racial justice?"

But in preparing for this presentation it was very difficult for me because even though I had written 15 columns--some building up to the conference, about the conference, and after the conference--this was the one the least amount of people knew anything about. There were very few articles in the paper; there was little coverage except about the United States walking out, and people weren't interested in the summation because once the United States left, insofar as the US press was concerned, nothing happened.

Therefore, it's hard for me to try to figure out how I can give people information about what happened, some of the excitement there, and do some analysis at the same time. I'm going to try.

In many ways it's very hard to believe that only ten months have passed since the UN Conference on Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and other forms of Intolerance actually took place in Durban, South Africa. Since that very important gathering, in which over 8000 people gathered in the NGO conference (the non-governmental part), and then people from the governmental part of it, essentially the world has really shifted on its axis because of what happened on 9/11. I think since that moment and the repercussions that we're all facing in trying to confront today about that horrific terrorist assault on the World Trade Center, on the Pentagon, and the plane that went down in Pennsylvania, the repercussions have exploded on the world scene in a way that initially brushed all other considerations to the side.

But for those of us who participated in Durban, and in the Durban dialogue, I think a critical part of trying to understand the new political terrain that confronts us, is to extract what lessons we actually can, what we learned, and to apply them to the current struggle against war, racism and repression that is going on in the United States today and around the world. I'm

going to try to pick out a few things.

First a little background. What were some of the goals of this conference? The United Nations pulled together and there were several goals that were set: to review the progress that had been made in the fight against racism and racial discrimination, to consider ways and means to better insure the application of the standards for confronting racial discrimination; to increase the level of awareness about the scourges of racism; to formulate concrete recommendations on ways to come up with effective activities to eliminate racism; and to review the political, historical, economic and social, cultural and other factors that lead to the way racism is articulated in the world today. And then it was to have some concrete recommendations and some action-oriented national, regional and international measures to combat all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances. And finally, it was to draw up concrete recommendations for ensuring that the UN has the financial and other necessary resources for its action to combat all the above. So that was that ambitious goal that was actually set for the conference.

The official US delegation walked out. First they threatened to walk out, even prior to the conference, if the questions of reparations and if the question of the formulation that Zionism is racism was not removed. At the conference, they sent a third--maybe fourth--rate delegation in the first place. So, actually those who walked out were nobody anyway as far as I was concerned.

What's very key in understanding this walkout-is that there were two conferences, going on. First, the national, the non-governmental conference was going on. Then there's a little overlap, and then the state, the various governments are meeting. What's significant to me is that it was a very broad statement that covered all kinds of things from immigrant rights to the Dalits and Palestinians, all kinds of criminal justice. It wasn't like the Blacks in this country who just see racism in a very myopic way. This was a very inclusive conference, which saw the intersection, particularly of race/class/gender, as a centerpiece of how people perceived how you have to take up the question of racism today.

In some ways, for many of the activists from the United States, I think there was a wake-up call for the level of international isolation of the US government in international politics, particularly as it relates to race. The activists from the United States were exposed to these burning questions in a way that they hadn't been before: those are the Dalit, who we erroneously used to call the "untouchables" in India, the Roma peoples, the "gypsies," people who we hadn't been seen as a part of the international anti-racist movement, brought their issues, and imposed it on the....I don't say that in a negative sense, but made sure that their issue became a part of the international human rights community.

I think we have to view the world conference on racism as a success, because in many ways, not only were there over 8000 delegates from around the world that came and presented various workshops and positions and, like Lillian mentioned, people had done work building up to this, it wasn't just like people went and attended. A lot of studies had gone on in terms of how racism interacted with their particular arena of work. So, for example, there were days of discussions going on in labor and how race plays a part in the international labor force. I went into the tent--they had a huge tent just devoted to that question--and

people from Africa getting up, people from Italy, a lot of people who had immigrated to the European countries, talking about really deep stuff in terms of not only the racism they face in the labor force, but the racism of the organized labor movement in the countries in which they had moved to. And people came with documents and studies, like I said. The Women of Color Resource Center, for example, presented a whole book in which its main focus was the whole question of race, class and gender, as a conception of how to approach the question of seeing...They also had participated in the Women's Conference in which they had seen their role of raising the question of race in the Women's Conference, so here it was interjecting the gender questions, along with the class and the racial questions. So there was a lot of work that went on prior to the conference, to bring it together.

Also, a lot of people don't know this. But all of the UN agencies also had been mandated to try to look at how all of their activities were impacted, or not impacted, by questions of race. So we saw the World Health Organization, International Labor Organization, every single one of them had documents and work that they had done. So there was a two-year process of this building up. So, to suggest that the United States walking out of this conference somehow would eliminate all of that work was absolutely insane. It didn't happen, and it was very successful in a number of ways.

One of the specific things that I think came out of the conference also was the adoption of the NGO statement that represented a real landmark achievement in the global and anti-racist struggle. The position that the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery represented a "crime against humanity" was a real breakthrough for those who had consistently been campaigning for racial justice and against colonialism around the world. And this became a part of the comprehensive document laying out a program and a ten-year plan of work, which was adopted.

I'd like to actually move a little bit to this question of Zionism and reparations because I think it's important for us to understand certain things that happened there. Many people were organizing around the question of trying to get Zionism declared as racism, and there were a lot of battles that went on around that question. My own particular view is that was an erroneous tactic, because just at the time that it was happening when the Israelis were systematically assassinating Palestinian leaders, were illegally occupying--and of course they still illegally occupy the land--yet the debate that went on in Durban didn't concentrate on those actual political things that were happening. What it became was an ideological debate about whether Zionism was racism or not. I think that was a particular error, and I've had this discussion and debate with many of my Palestinian friends, but this was what actually happened.

But believe me the Zionist lobby was vociferous there and everywhere. And they were able to push back the debate and the discussion and to paint everybody with an anti-Semitic brush who challenged in any way Israeli policies as they relate to the Middle East.

However, the United States was presented with a bigger problem when it came to reparations. It proved more difficult to isolate the NGO's that had been carrying the banner for Black reparations and it was a real knotty problem for the US. If you recall, even though we believe the United States walked out on

the basis of reparations, that is not what they said. They said it was because of the Israeli questions.

Actually the work that went on around the question of reparations was some of the most important work that actually happened in terms of organizing for the conference. One way that the conference was organized was that they had working groups that came together two or three times in the course of two years around preparations for the conference. One of those was called an "African and African Descendants Conference" caucus, and this was the caucus that carried the banner for reparations in terms of the conference as a whole. They issued a ten-point call to action that they wanted the conference to adopt. The first three are the most important: one was that the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slavery and colonialism be designated as "a crime against humanity"; number two that the victims of the slave trade, slavery and colonialism, i.e. they were talking specifically about Africans and African-descendants, be entitled to reparations; and three, a recognition--and this was very important, this was a fight between some of the more conservative in the Black caucus and some of the more progressive, but they got this through--that recognition of the economic basis of racism, that is the linkage between the exploitation of Black labor and racism. That was an important fight that was carried out and won in that caucus.

To many these may seem a little difficult to grasp, why the US was so opposed to some of these formulations. Maybe not, if you're sophisticated enough. But an important point I'd like to underscore is that the debate wasn't just about colonialism and what happened in the 14th, 15th, 16th or 17th Centuries. I think that it was...and it wasn't a demand for belated recognition of the United States misbegotten racist past, and Europe. I think at stake for the United States and its allies was a political and ideological struggle that is actually taking place in the context of 21st Century globalization. That's really what was at stake, as far as I'm concerned, in terms of that fight going on there around reparations.

Irrespective of what criticisms people might have around reparations, politically, to me, that was really the essence of what was happening there, because, at an international level, the US and its allies want to deny responsibility for the current misery that their former colonies in Africa, Latin America or Asia are confronting today. In particular, I think they want to sever the link between the contemporary poverty and five centuries of slave trading and colonialism. It in many ways, particularly for the African countries, what this boiled down to, was to offer substantive debt relief as their form of reparations that they were demanding in relationship to this.

The debt relief is a very important question and, at some point, we should probably have a whole conference on it. The level of debt was brought about mostly by the former colonial situation, by the imposition of Black stooges in Africa, and the overthrow of people like Lumumba. Progressive Blacks get overthrown and get replaced by Black stooges that turn around and rob the country and put their money in Swiss banks. And now the people are left supposedly having to pay this debt back that was imposed on them by the colonialists in the first place. It's an outrageous type of situation. And the Africans, most of the Africans, recognize that it is, and so the demand for debt relief is a revolutionary demand in this particular period, and it is totally tied up with the questions of reparations. That's the ideological, historical and political basis for the demand in the colonial past.

So you can't just see it in the way it's been articulated up to now.

On the domestic front it also has some implications here, because I think the reparations theme poses an adamant rejection of the "new racism" that guides the Bush administration. This neo-racist discards, discredits biological racism in favor of attacking the demands to redress grievance, which they call "reverse racism." Its proponents deny the ongoing existence of racism and therefore the need for compensatory programs. What's worse, the neo-racists cloak their support for maintaining white supremacy in a bogus call for "reconciliation", based upon abandoning the concrete struggle for racial justice. In other words, in all these calls for the "race blind" society that we hear, and even the term "diversity" I get a little nervous because I really agree with what Tim was saying this morning: call it what it is. It's a system of white supremacy, white superiority. And you then don't get kind of confused about what we're actually talking about here.

Their adoption of the language of the civil rights movement becomes impossible if we call it white supremacy, as opposed to just racism.

Very cynically, in its place, what are we offered in exchange? We are offered attacks on affirmative action, which as far as I'm concerned is an extremely modest compensatory program. Then we are offered the thinly disguised, racialized privatization schemes of public services and schools, which constituted neo-liberalism's face in the United States.

"There's no such thing as 'institutional racism' ", Bush claims, and racial disparities are dismissed by blaming the victims of racial bias for their own impoverished status, for the high Black incarceration rate, for low educational achievement, and Black political marginalization in the United States. Therefore, for African Americans the demand that the world body recognize slavery as a crime against humanity that merits compensation would call this entire logic of the neo-racist agency into question. That's why that struggle around reparations was so important. It had not to do with 100, 200, 300 years ago; it has to do with the constant struggle against racism today. And it operates on the ideological front; and it operates on the political front.

Therefore the concept of the right of reparations so far has played a very progressive role insofar as posing a contradiction to their program. In any case, the one thing I would like to say on the reparations: the movement that's growing, it's moved from the fringe of African American discourse to the center of African American discourse, and it's actually achieved a number of successes, even within the framework of traditional politics. But I'm not going to go into that, because I want to get more to the analysis of it. But this is important to understand why the United States, and the EU, had been dragging their feet about appointing a delegation, why the foundation community didn't come up with the money in the way they did for the women, and why the media colluded in keeping people ignorant of even knowing that the conference was taking place in the first place.

So, what happened in this place? I think despite the questions around reparations, Zionism, all the other things that take place, more was taking place than even that. Many of the delegates, particularly from North America that attended the forum were in for a very big surprise, because most had known about the reparations fight, most had known about the Zionism-equals-racism debate that had been raging. What they

didn't expect, however, was an NGO forum that would unfold as a continuation of an ever more articulate and ever more vocal anti-globalization movement. Durban, South Africa, in my view has to be now added to Seattle, Prague, Genoa, and the rest, when masses gathered to challenge the trans-national financial and political institutions that have snared the world's peoples in its globalization net.

But I think Durban had two important differences that are important. First, young whites and Europeans dominated the Seattle, Washington, Genoa protests, and the NGO forum, on the other hand, attracted a global, cross-generational activist core, that was composed predominantly of people of color from the Americas, from Africa, and from Asia. And while the US and European protests concentrated on the economic institutions, Durban's unique contribution was to place the fight against racism, xenophobia and other related intolerances at the center of its anti-globalization critique. And this is an important difference and an important strength and something that I think added to peoples understanding of the anti-globalization struggle.

Of course, the NGO forum was not a gathering that was called in reaction to the imperial elite and its financial and political institutions. However, I think I can make the argument that seeing it in that context is correct. It was articulated in the opening statements of people from the South African host organization that greeted us there, in which the spokeswoman said things like, "We will talk about the Palestinians. We will talk about the blockade of Cuba." And, to a wildly cheering crowd, she concluded that the NGO's had to insist that we, 'Not accept any strategy or program or policy that does not touch on the profound causes of all the inequalities--economic and social injustices.' "

These points were even reinforced by President Mbeki, who said, "I would like to believe that a common outcome we all seek is a measurable commitment within countries and among all nations that practical steps will be taken and resources allocated actually to eradicate the legacy of slavery, colonialism, and racism that condemns billions across the globe to poverty and despair." He also made some specific references to the process of globalization, "in which we award some mightily and leave others

with unbearable suffering in the midst of plenty."

Most importantly I thought from that speech, though, there was an implied thing that he said-that could threaten the social peace-that globalization itself could be the cause of social unrest throughout the world.

The problem was that it was nice that Mbeki said this, but there were a lot of NGO's from South Africa who were very upset with Mbeki and thought he was a little disingenuous. Among them were organizations like COSATU (the Congress of South African Trade Unions), who had demonstrations going on almost every day that involved tens of thousands of people. One day it was for the homeless in South Africa, another day it was for the Palestinians; another time it was for the whole question of privatization.

Let me just say that not all the Black people that attended thought so. There were some that still had this myopic view, and there were others that began to see a more integrated approach for this.

My last concept here is that the government gathering that took place a week later fell far short of what happened in the NGO forum. The US and the other colonial powers chose not to pick up the racial justice gauntlet and engage in the debate. But it's not one that can be put off forever. Many of the NGO's saw this gathering as only the opening salvo in a face-off between those who provoke exploitative globalization streams which perpetual racial and xenophobic discrimination and those with a vision of a democratic world of economic and social justice with racial equity at its core.

And as much as they'd like to ignore these realities, it's extremely doubtful that the US policy makers that conceived the current war on terrorism can bury this new understanding and this new consciousness among the global racial justice community under the rubble of Afghanistan or any place else in the world.

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"The price the white American paid for his ticket was to become white--: and, in the main, nothing more than that, or, as he was to insist, nothing less. This incredibly limited not to say dimwitted ambition has choked many a human being to death here: and this, I contend, is because the white American has never accepted the real reasons for his journey. I know very well that my ancestors had no desire to come to this place: but neither did the ancestors of the people who became white and who require of my captivity a song. They require of me a song less to celebrate my captivity than to justify their own."

James Baldwin -- *The Price of the Ticket*