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Don't Forget the Sharpsville Massacre and Reparations

Worrill's World

By Dr. Conrad W. Worrill, PhD

BlackCommentator.com Columnist

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As we build the Reparations Movement throughout the African World community, we should not forget the atrocities that have been perpetrated against African people. We should not forget that the demand for reparations is worldwide. One such major atrocity in our history is the Sharpsville Massacre.

One of the tragedies of post-apartheid South Africa is that too much is being forgotten of the numerous atrocities that occurred during the vicious era of the white supremacist regime. ***African people should never forget history!*** It is in this connection that the National Black United Front always commemorates the March 21, 1960 Sharpsville Massacre. African Liberation Movement forces, around the world, commemorate the Sharpsville Massacre. This will be the 49th anniversary of this tragic event in South African history.

Just as the African in American Community in this country demonstrated and subjected themselves to arrest in the south during the 1950s and 1960s to protest racist segregation laws, African people in the Sharpsville area of South Africa, in 1960, began organizing to demonstrate against the white supremacist *Pass Laws System*. The Pass Laws System in South Africa was a method the South African Government employed to "officially" check on the whereabouts of Black People at all times. Black people had to carry a document much like a passport that had to be stamped, before they were allowed any movement in the country.

On December 19, 1959, the Pan African Congress / PAC (a black conference held in Orlando, Johannesburg), "resolved to embark upon a campaign directed against the Pass Laws which subject the African people to humiliation of constant arrest." The African American Community is familiar with police harassment and brutality. The Pass Law System in South Africa gives the police unlimited authority in arresting people at

will.

During the week of March 20, 1960, the Pan African Congress requested permission to hold a public meeting on Sunday. The request to meet was refused by South African Government officials. The Pan African Congress decided to launch the Pass Book Campaign on March 21, by holding a rally and demonstrated to protest these vicious laws. Unable to hold public meeting, members of the PAC called their members to meet at the Sharpsville Tennis Court grounds. (Sharpsville is the African location known as Vereeniging.)

According to eyewitness accounts, at about 1:00 a.m. on March 21st, "a great number of people had assembled at the tennis court where they were addressed on the objects of the campaign and had explained to them the decision to surrender peacefully to the police for arrest that day." Further eyewitness accounts explain that, "at 1:30 a.m., a Riot Squad with two security staff cars arrived at the scene of the meeting. Without endeavoring to ask anybody what the gathering was about, the police started shooting from their vehicles into the air to frighten and disperse the crowd."

Later that morning, "a great number of armed white people invaded the location and while they were ostensible patrolling the streets, intimidating people with the obvious intentions of causing retaliation so that they might be afforded an excuse to carry out their objective of smashing by brutal force the opposition to the Pass Laws." Leaders of the Pan African Congress continued their planned march to the police station in accordance with their decision that they were going to surrender themselves for arrest. Hundreds of people followed the leaders, singing the South African Black National Anthem.

After Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe, the first National President of PAC, and his aides had been arrested, thousands of unarmed Africans gathered at the police station in Sharpsville. The white police fired on the defenseless men, women, and children. Sixty Africans were killed on the spot and 178 were wounded. More than 80 percent of those shot were shot in the back as they fled. It is because of this incessant act of violence that we commemorate the Sharpsville Massacre.

It is important that we continue to analyze and discuss historical events that help us understand the role of history in the liberation of African people. ***African people must never forget history! Remember the Sharpsville Massacre! Get involved! Help build the Reparations Movement!***

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BlackCommentator.com Columnist, Conrad W. Worrill, PhD, is the National Chairman of the National Black United Front ([NBUF](#)). Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Worrill.

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