

**The
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**Benton Harbor Believes in Fighting Back!
Represent Our Resistance
By Dr. Lenore J. Daniels, PhD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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I have often been awakened at the dawn of the day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an old Aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist and whip upon her naked back until she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from this gory victim seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. Where the blood ran fastest there he whipped longest, he would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin.

-Frederick Douglass

I'm ready for action.

-Reverend Edward Pinkney

Jackie Robinson appeared on the baseball field. Joe Louis appeared in the boxing ring, and Lana Turner came to South Africa by way of Stormy Weather, shown at the only movie theatre in the Black township.

We "looked to this land with incredible admiration," the Former Archbishop of Capetown, Desmond Tutu, told the audience on March 11, 2009 at Riverside Church in New York. "Your Civil Rights movement inspired us to no end," particularly since we "were being roughed up" in South Africa.

It is painful, difficult to describe, said Tutu "that this land had this huge blot. That you

believe in the death penalty.”

“Why do you do this?”

“Whether you like it or not, you are part of a system that is turning you into violent people.” Iraq was destroyed, Tutu said, “on the bases of a lie because you have come to believe that force, that violence would be the answer.”

The death penalty is a “legal” means of extermination, a substitute for the vigilante mob. The lethal injection replaces the noose - and the spectacle of the lynching scene. Incarcerating a disproportional number of Black, Brown, and Red people is not an accident. Our leadership at the top, Archbishop Tutu said, has long turned to violence as a response to resistance. Violence is a policy. It controls the pace of Black, Brown, and Red advancement and sanctions the continuing state of fear for Black, Brown, and Red communities.

Robinson, Louis, Turner declared their humanity and defied the system. Our leadership and our celebrities, these days, declare their ambition and look to be the featured object at the other end of a camera lens!

We have lies and characterizations that imprison people. A plain clothes officer is waving a gun. He is following “criminals.” A police squad car drives by. The officers see this man. They see him. They fire. The plain clothes officer was Black. It was too late for the officers who fired to know he was a plain clothes police, one of them. But they knew he was Black - and he had a gun. He had a gun! He was running forward and shot in the chest. The autopsy report: He was shot several times in the back! Execution!

To speak of racism now is risky.

Just before September 11, 2001, students would grumble about “PC.” What is the problem with “politically correct” language? I look out at pre-dominantly white faces. Most looked away and a few, usually young men, looked directly at me. But they couldn’t tell me what bothered them about “PC.” A few years ago, whites Americans wanted to know why they couldn’t use the word, “nigger.” They used to - without our permission! Now, there was anger about being told NO disguised in “PC” politics. The word, “nigger” is vibrant once again just as nooses began to appear everywhere. Under Bush II, Americans can once again “smoke `em out” here and “smoke `em out” there. 9/11 removed the constraints against lashing out at Blacks, Brown, Muslims, Gay and Lesbian communities.

The American Empire wants to deal a death blow to those traditions and groups who do not adhere exclusively to U.S.-corporate think. By annihilating these traditions and other ways of being, the new “PC” encourages thought and behavior that promotes rather than challenges white privilege, sexism, homophobia, greed, bailouts for the wealthy, and vigilante actions of anti-abortion activists. Judge Sonia Sotomayor points out the obvious to anyone open to the humanity of others:

Justice O’Connor has often been cited as saying that a wise old man and wise old woman will reach the same conclusion in deciding cases... I am...not so sure that I agree with the statement. First, as Professor Martha Minnow has

noted, there can never be a universal definition of wise. Second, I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life.

Ah, Yes! How far on the dark side do you have to be not to understand this?

Now, Newt Gingrich, an alert teacher of the proper corporate-think mentality and fearful of giving any ground to humanity, asked a fearful white America, particularly those who believe they live in a perpetual state of Red Alert, to imagine an absurdity, frightening because it is so real to the majority of the world's population: "Imagine a judicial nominee said 'my experiences as a white man makes me better than a Latina woman.'" Where's the joke? Western white men's experiences are considered better than a Latina woman or anyone who isn't white and male!

"New racism is no better than old racism," Gingrich adds. Gingrich, when did you stop thinking and behaving as a white man who believes his experiences makes him better than a Latina woman?

Gingrich's experience as a white man allows him the *privilege* (white privilege) to declare Sotomayor racist. For all of Gingrich's "intelligence," his "education," for all his years on Earth, he has never experienced what it is like being a Latina woman!

It's not "new racism" versus "old racism," Gingrich. It is white supremacy. And, no, it is not the KKK's version. It is the version accepted as a norm that allows whites to receive a college degree without ever reading one book written by a Black, Brown, or Muslim. It is the version that represses the scholarly and creative traditions of the majority of the world. It is the version of white supremacy that demands all those other people, the majority of the world become "educated" and knowledgeable of Western white traditions of thought.

It is white supremacy repressing the voice of the traditionally powerless. It's the political, economical, social, cultural powerful, the dominant power attempting to control the narrative of reality. (Talk about violence, Archbishop Tutu? This is an example of violence from the powerful leadership here in the U.S.). Your experience, Gingrich, as a white man, always makes you better than a Latina woman or a white woman in this nation. You don't erase racism by silencing the victims of racism. Now that racism is over, our experiences can't be heard. Here, in United States, despite what your eyes tell you, we are all one race now, Archbishop Tutu! That is why it is painful and difficult for you to understand the death penalty at a prison site because there's another over heads of many of us Black, Brown, and Red in the U.S.

Racism implies power to act on your prejudices and the power to repress and deny opportunities to another person or another racial or religious group. Racism implies the power to invade (with or without lying but usually lying is profitable), to destroy, and to kill; power to incarcerate particular groups of people; power to omit the history of violence, and power to coerce all to collaborate in the myth of the self-declared powerful.

If racism is nothing else, it is the power to control thought and behavior. Identification with the oppressed is mocked; identification with the oppressor is demanded. Judge

Sotomayor's involvement with the Puerto Rican college organization and her talk at the University of Puerto Rico School of Law titled, "Puerto Ricans: Second-Class Citizens in 'Our' Democracy?" is suspect! At Gingrich's "talks" with the "American public" or at his social lunches and dinners, do you think he feels *uncomfortable, un-American* standing for an audience or at the table among friends and business associates? Blacks had better make sure their "talks" and social gatherings are multiracial - and they better not make reference to their race unless it is to condemn it for being a "pathological" or an "irresponsible" lot of people!

A lethal injection of fear now is *better* than the spectacle of the noose (but a spectacle every now and then won't hurt - and most important - the culprit won't be found guilty!).

Black, Brown, and Red Americans must pay for those days of Robinson and Louis, Malcolm and King, the Black Panthers, the Puerto Rican Movement for Freedom, and the American Indian Movement.

Why, you ask, Archbishop Tutu?

Our leadership has been nullified in this new era of American Empire. They spent more time apologizing to the ignorance of a Gingrich or a Rush Limbaugh. Busy shuffling to the right, our Black leadership is nearly indistinguishable from Darth Vader, still exerting the forces of the dark side.

In Benton Harbor, Michigan, lawlessness of the Berrien County government and the courts, to use John Mann's words, "is nothing less than breathtaking in its Jim Crow audacity." Mann writes, "the City Commission [is] an extension of the boardroom, the newspaper a corporate organ, the law enforcement agencies largely a vicious occupying army residents are compelled to finance." Berrien County's lawlessness is intended to purge Benton Harbor of its Black poor and working class citizens, through the pre-dominantly Black City Commission's give-away of land (lake-front property) in Benton Harbor to Whirlpool, Inc.

Whirlpool and the City Commissioners handed the Black residents of Benton Harbor the death penalty - a lethal injection of "law and order" in a nation where resistance, particularly Black resistance has historically been viewed as a threat to the political, economic, and social order.

In Benton Harbor, Judge Dennis Wiley, already the recipient along with Judge Alfred Butzbaugh of the "Jack-Ass of the Year Award," has received yet another honor. The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression awarded Judge Wiley the Muzzle of the Year Award. "Each spring members of the Center's Board of Trustees decide who should be distinguished for First Amendment infractions out of the hundreds of people and institutions nominated."

Judge Wiley stood out!

Last year, Reverend Edward Pinkney, leader and activist with the Black Autonomy Network Community Organization (BANCO), was sent back to prison for writing a newspaper editorial condemning the actions of Judge Butzbaugh of the Berrien County Criminal Court. In the editorial, Rev. Pinkney quoted a passage from the Book of

Deuteronomy. Judge Wiley ordered Rev. Pinkney to serve a 3-10 year sentence for "issuing a 'true threat'" - because, according to Judge Wiley, the Reverend's "status...has some particular - I guess, direct line to the Lord, and...a reasonable person would consider this to be a threat."

If you listen carefully, you can hear the angry crowd shouting, "Don't let her speak!" and you see Sojourner Truth in her "old bonnet" standing determined to testify "concerning the wickedness of this 'ere people'" (*Autobiography of Sojourner Truth*). Rev. Pinkney is the first minister in the history of humankind to be convicted and sentenced for quoting the Bible, but he is not the first to "read the Bible as a text of earthly justice." Rebecca Hill, in *Men, Mobs, and Law: Anti-Lynching and Labor Defense in U.S. Radical History*, sites David Walker's *Appeal*:

"My color will yet root some of you out of the very face of the earth!!! You may doubt it if you please...So did the ante-diluvians (sic) doubt Noah...so did Sodomites doubt until Lot got out of the city and God rained down fire and brimstone from heaven upon them, and burnt them up."

These "revolutionary readings of the Bible," writes Hill, "could be argued to be the first native American radicalism."

In other words, Rev. Pinkney's speaking and his activism draws from a rich tradition of revolutionary activist and human rights advocates, one perhaps foreign to many white Americans educated within the confines of a Western perspective. The shock white Americans experienced at the "discovery" of a Rev. Jeremiah Wright exposed the assumption that *hidden* in the depths of the Black community are individuals, activists and truth tellers like that of a man who in 1966-67-68 warned America that its lawless agenda was anti-human.

"God has a way of standing before nations with judgment, and it seems that I can hear God saying to America, 'You're too arrogant! And if you don't change your ways, I will rise up and break the backbone of your power, and I'll place it in the hands of a nation that doesn't even know my name.'"

The nation's response to Rev. Martin Luther King was death!

Judge Dennis Wiley ignored "the April 22 Supreme Court order to "articulate the reasons" for keeping Pinkney under 24/7 house arrest with electronic tether" (BANCO).

And what tradition informs Judge Dennis Wiley's silencing of truth?

The terms of Rev. Pinkney's 24-hour house arrest, as Abayomi Azikiwe, editor of *Pan-African News Wire* writes, are draconian. "Under his appeal bond he is denied the right to preach, grant interviews, write articles, address crowds or engage in politics."

The attempt to muzzle the work of BANCO began when Rev. Pinkney and Black residents of Benton Harbor stood up to challenge the give-away of land to Whirlpool Inc. As Dorothy Pinkney, wife of Rev. Pinkney, told editor, Azikiwe, the plans of Harbor Shores Development and Whirlpool, Inc., "along with astronomical foreclosure and unemployment rates," forced "many residents of Benton Harbor to leave the area" (Azikiwe, "Appeals Court to Hear Pinkney Defense").

Rev. Pinkney and the BANCO movement went to work. In 2005, after Rev. Pinkney won the election against City Commissioner Glenn Yarbough, "a notoriously racist and abusive" (Ted Glick, "Future Hope" Column, BANCO), the "white power structure" overturned the election results and began a campaign to kill the resistance in Benton Harbor. (Newt Gingrich wouldn't be able to detect anything askew in the structure of government and judicial power here in Berrien County. It is a structure that is so normal, so *universal*). Rev. Pinkney was the central target.

Rev. Pinkney had gone to the FBI after he heard from residents in Benton Harbor about suspicious voting procedures. He was sent away.

Why?

The power structure works together. "Detectives were paying people to come in and testify," Rev. Pinkney said. There's evidence of one agent informant asking if he was still going to be paid, even after he was unable to provide the proper services to the FBI. In another situation, a resident decided against receiving his pay. The agent threw 300-400 dollars in his car as the man was pulling away. When the man threw the money back, the agent told him he would be charged with littering! A woman said a detective offered her \$10 dollars to vote for Rev. Pinkney. "She went to my attorney to tell them what the authorities were trying to do." Rev. Pinkney went to the FBI with this information. But Berrien County's agenda was to "smoke him out."

Create a narrative of wrongdoing, position Alfred Butzbaugh, with "financial interest in the development of Harbor Shores," at the head of the courtroom, and seat an all-white jury, and as Dorothy Pinkney says, you have a denial of due process and an illegal conviction (Azikiwe, "Appeals Court to Hear Pinkney Defense").

Has the lawlessness of Berrien County extinguished the resistance movement in Benton Harbor? Nada!

"People around the nation are beginning to get what's going on in Benton Harbor. I believe that this situation is a stepping stone. People are going to find out that Whirlpool, Inc. is behind the prosecution of me and the take over of Benton Harbor. We need outside help in order to build from the inside," Rev. Pinkney said last week. Rev. Pinkney spoke about the need to organize young people. "They have to be trained first. We are doing it as a team. Then young people can take battle on and run with it."

News from Benton Harbor is that it is very much alive! Last night, June 5, 2009, Minister Louis Farrakhan, keynote speaker at the Rally for Justice, urged the Black mayor, Wilce Cooke, and City Commissioners to stand up for justice. "It was tremendous. Not just good but tremendous," said Rev. Pinkney. People kept coming and calling until 3 in the morning." Social-Justice advocate Iva Carruthers, Radio-One radio host Warren Ballentine, and Black Commentator Columnist and radio host, Conrad Worrill and the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War and Injustice (MECAWI) called for unity in the struggle against the lawless tactics of Berrien County officials and this leadership is committed to attending the June 9, 2009 Court of Appeals hearing.

This Rally for Justice didn't happen overnight. It came about because of the activism of Rev. Pinkney and Dorothy Pinkney and all those Benton Harbor residents who refused

to surrender to a Jack-ass's world! Benton Harbor is fighting back! The residents are rejecting the death penalty! They need everyone involved in this battle against injustice. Rev. Pinkney is asking that you file a complaint in support of his [Rev. Pinkney's] complaint to remove Judge Dennis Wiley. This judge defied a court order! Judge Wiley had 21 days to comply with the court order to explain his reasons for placing Rev. Pinkney under house arrest; he failed to respond.

Make sure to you refer to complaint #09-18209. Call, email or write the Judicial Tenure Commission and the Supreme Court and ask for Judge Wiley's removal.

You can also send a letter to the Judicial Tenure Commission at 3034 W. Grand Blvd., Suite 8-450, Detroit 48202 or call at 313-875-5110 or email judicialtenure@courts.mi.gov. Or send a letter to the Michigan Supreme Court, Michigan Hall of Justice, P.O. Box 30052, Lansing 48909 or call at 517-373-0130 or email msc-info@courts.mi.gov.

Email Rev. Edward Pinkney at <http://bhbanco.blogspot.com/> or call him at 269-925-0001.

Update:

Rev. Edward Pinkney case:

On June 9, 2009, three to four hundred Benton Harbor residents and Minister Louis Farrakhan joined with Rev. Pinkney at the Court of Appeals in Grand Rapids, Michigan to hear defense arguments in the case of activist Rev. Pinkney. "We blew them out the water," Rev. Pinkney said. Attorneys for Rev. Pinkney appeared before three judges to ask why the minister is still under 24-hour house arrest and why he was charged with threatening a judge. "They didn't have the answer."


"We have to wait 14 to 60 days for an answer to come. It could be any day or 60 days."

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and facilitator of student-teacher communities behind the walls of academia for the last twenty years. Dr. Daniels holds a PhD in Modern American Literatures, with a specialty in Cultural Theory (race, gender, class narratives) from Loyola University, Chicago. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Daniels.

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