

Know the Conditions of Your Oppression

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Pelican Bay State Prison Most people in the United States define knowledge as 'The acquisition of information through experience or study.' If "being knowledgeable" is the state of being consciously aware of some specific information, then the importance of that information is only relative to what it is applied to. Its use is only manifested through the intentions of he who acquires the information. Michel Foucault, a theorist and author of "Discipline and Punish" (3rd chp. entitled Panopticism), argues that "...knowledge is not pure and abstract but is implicated in networks of power relations, or people govern themselves 'through the production of truth.' This includes the truths that determine how we imagine and manage the boundaries between normal and the transgressive, the lawful and the delinquent" \* (Bartholomae, Petrosky, 208). On the other hand Keeanga Taylor, a social activist, argues in her book Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation that prison is the product of the court and criminal justice system, and that truth and knowledge empower those who would otherwise be victims of the system. When we look at the reality of incarceration and how it was created for, and \*is used as a tool to disenfranchise African and Mexican peoples and their communities, we see the social construction of "crime" being represented as an abstract truth, and reality. The continued enslavement of lower class African and Mexican peoples via the United States prison industrial complex is mainly due to our ignorance of the system (capitalism) that allows such a tool of oppression to operate. In this context, knowledge has the potential to act as both an impediment and/or a liberating factor.

'Criminality,' and subsequently crime was not created by the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution; it was redefined by its ratification, "crime" in a "free" society occurs when individual citizens decide to transgress beyond the boundaries in which the law has set. In this context law is color blind. It is administered for the benefit of society as a whole irrespective of class, race or religion. When the 13th Amendment was ratified, "law" became the tool to criminalize specific behavior, and "crime" became whatever behavior was criminalized by the law. "Law" and subsequently "crime" was and continues to be used as a tool. To subjugate African peoples. Taylor states "when the police enforce the law inconsistently and become the agents of lawlessness and disorder..." She also states "Blacks could be arrested for vagrancy and sentenced to hard labor in slavery like conditions as punishment" (10.108.09).

Imprisonment is slavery legalized by the U.S. Constitution. The goal of incarceration is the sane (to an extent) of chattel slavery; maximum capital gain while economically and politically subjugating African Peoples. The predominantly white, male political apparatus of the U.S. has no interest in relieving African peoples from these shackles of oppression. Any motivation to change our deplorable conditions within the confines of this system starts with the abolition of the 13th Amendment. I do not see real change occurring within a system whose survival is predicated on the suppression of real change.

Foucault points out in Panopticism "...for example that is not the case that prisons serve the courts and a system of justice, but that the courts are the products, the servants of the

prison, the prison as an idea, as a central figure in a way of thinking..." (10.208, "Prison," in the system of capitalism, represent the need of capitalism to continually subjugate its perceived enemies/opponents for its survival. In order to effectively administer capitalism, society must be stratified with its upper and middle classes sharing an interest with the ruling elite to subjugate its lower class. Law, crime and the courts work hand in hand to accomplish this goal. All four of these realities work simultaneously to keep the system of capitalism operational. Not understanding the connection between capitalism and our historic and current subjugation as Africans within the U.S. makes our responses to the conditions that capitalism creates unorganized, irrational and predictable.

Capitalism as a system of not only economics, but social relations, historically has been applied in the United States unequally. It is a system that allows private individuals to "own" the means of production and subsequently access to the natural resources of the country. Ownership (as it has been applied in America) gives private individuals the right to deny "individuals" access to the resources in which they own (openly & covertly). The United States government and its private sector has used and continues to use racism to define "who" is allowed access and denied access to these resources. These oppressive realities of capitalism are the root causes for the horrible conditions that we find in the prison class, African and Mexican communities which leads to mass incarceration. Keeanga Taylor states capitalism is an economic system based on the exploitation of the many by the few because of the gross inequality it produces. Capitalism requires various political, social, and ideological tools to divide the majority. Racism is one amongst many oppressions intended to serve this purpose... Capitalism used "racism" to justify plunder, conquest and slavery..." (205.06). If we truly desire to change our oppressive conditions we must recognize that the ruling elite have a direct interest in preventing the change, and they use capitalism to facilitate this impediment to change. Inclusion into this system is not our answer and no matter how beautiful black may be, we must not fall victim to believing the deceptive words of one who represents this system simply because he or she is black. When we do this then we can truly begin our struggle.

We are all connected through Ansar, Ram, Run; We are all manifestations of Allah, Neter, Yaweh, we are all brothers/sisters

In solidarity:  
Edwin AKA Tariq

P.S. I enclosed a pic of me receiving a certificate for completing my Criminal Gangs Anonymous Program – Thought I'd share with the people.

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