

Messages from the Mound



In 2007, I began my prison ministry where I facilitated my Relationship First Aid spiritual based personal development classes at Mound Correctional Facility in Detroit. After Mound closed in 2012, I continued to communicate with the inmates through newsletters, birthday cards and attending/speaking at events at various facilities. It is suspected that the facility got its name because of the many ancient mounds that were found all over Detroit, and I believe the most concentrated and largest ones were along what is now known as Mound Rd.

"Messages from the Mound" is named after the newsletters that I send out to the inmates since that is where we all initially met. Because the classes that I was teaching them focused on spiritual elevation allowing the negativity within them to die, thus ultimately elevating their consciousness, I thought it an appropriate name because a "mound" is defined as: an "elevation" formed of earth overlying ruins, a grave etc., a heap or raised mass. The following articles are from men that are currently incarcerated or released and this serves as an opportunity for the voiceless to have a voice. If you have a loved one that is currently incarcerated and would like for me to send them newsletters, please forward their contact information with a MDOC number to:

Relationshipfirstaid@yahoo.com or contact me at:
Relationship First Aid, Attn: Ma'at Seba, P.O.
Box 1934, Belleville, MI. 48112 cashapp
Donations to: #moundministry

Black August 2020

By Dion Dawson
SPECIAL TO THE SUN



As we commemorate the anniversary of a slain Dragon, George Jackson, let us revisit and contemplate his words from an August 9, 1971 prison-letter following, what The Servant, Huey P. Newton called the Revolutionary Suicide of the man-child, Johnathan Jackson:

"I want people to wonder at what force created him, terrible, vindictive, cold, calm man-child, courage in one hand, the machine gun in the other, scourge of the unrighteous: "an ox for the people to ride"!!!"

Under the weight and subtlety of severe colonialty, it has become customary for the community of black victims of America to blame themselves (their sons, brothers and fathers) for the violent conditionality visited upon the neighborhoods New Afrikans call home. They lament so-called

black-on-black crime and call for the incarceration of their people in perpetuity who has never truly been freed from the bondage of a slavery that manufactured the Nigga, and its agency in the ultimate service and interest of its master. We have become quick to hand over our black boys trying to figure out how to be men in the absence of black men's inability to escape the socialization within an environment that has brutalized and neutralized the ability to function as men. Thus, Comrade George asks us to consider "what forces created" this type of black male?

Political analyst Michael Parenti offered great insight when proposing that oppressed groups are forced to resort to various survival mechanisms, culminating in crime and violence; and even as the oppressor, as white supremacy bemoans the existence of these traits, they are sure to reinforce the patterns of these behaviors as a means to create the conditions for the justification of its systems, namely, police and prisons. How inhumane must they be to set traps for a people to ensnare themselves, then penalize them if they don't blossom into roses out of the concrete jungle constructed for them to live and die. Instead, in the words of Ho Chi Minh, calamity has hardened us and turned our minds into steel.

So what are the forces, the Dragon asks us to wonder, that creates the revolutionary? In her 1973 message "To My People", Assata told us that "Black Revolutionaries do not drop from the moon." Instead, she said they are "created by our conditions. Shaped by oppression." Similarly, the niggas running the streets, the thugs and gangsters, drug dealers, robbers and murderers, like the revolutionaries, are manufactured in droves within black ghettos as a direct result of violent governmental policies born out of racial capitalistic hegemonic agendas.

An example of such policies would be NAFTA, which liberalized capital encouraging the exporting of industries to foreign countries in the name of cheap labor which meant the accumulation of surplus profits for corporations willing to exploit the labor of abject poor people, particularly in the Third World. This policy scheme served to redistribute income and wealth from the bottom to the top. It advocated the forcing down of wages, eliminated manufacturing jobs from inner-city neighborhoods, thrusting hundreds of thousands of middle-class people in this country into poverty or tettering on its line. Hence, these disastrous policies has both a racial and class basis. In this way, local poverty and crime is interconnected with world-wide political economics, and the unsafe conditions we see cropping up in Detroit, Chicago, Baltimore, and other cities with enclaves that's predominantly black, is the consequence of U.S. imperialist operations on a global scale. And until we reckon with this reality, no fundamental change will show its face to the denizens of the junkyards and graveyards in which we live that disappears our loved ones into prison-yards.

So what's the solution, the so-called brainwashed African-American will retort, as if a remedy should exist that could be applied and effectuated in one fell swoop, lest they abandon and indeed betray the necessity of a Black liberation struggle that's upon us. To the contrary, our resolution consist of a process of protracted processes that must, in the process, cease to coalesce around status quo social justice frameworks that recapitulates dominate social change theories that have proven to be ineffective, accommodating, and legitimizing of the white imperialist settler-colonial state structure and its tentacle systems.

If liberation is what Black people truly desire, then our struggle model must function from a revolutionary perspective, as opposed to reformist-integrationist vehicles, regardless of its progressive and/or radical labelling. Comrade George, in his prison-letters, stated on more than one occasion that "Control over the circumstances that surround my existence is of the first importance to me. Without this control, or with control in someone else's hands, I am forever insecure, subject at all times to the whim and caprice of the man in control." This expression is an assertion of the necessity to capture power over our lives, to be able to determine our own social, political and economic realities, instead of having it dictated to us by white domineering agents. In the words of, Malcolm X, our struggle is neither a social or moral struggle, but a struggle for power. With this in mind, there is no alternative available to any oppressed, neocolonial people but revolution.

The difficulties of traditional African spiritual practices in the MDOC

By Kwesi Damani Kojo Osundara (Gerald Byrd)
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

The Ifa spiritual tradition has been recognized by the Michigan Department of Corrections since 2005, and this recognition has fallen short of the demands of practitioners' federal constitutional and statutory rights. The MDOC continues to place Ifa/Orisa traditions into a Western Religious framework, an impossibility given the fact that Ifa/Orisa traditions are oral traditions, earth-centered, involve practices that Christian Chaplains would regard as heretic and much of Ifa/Orisa practice requires an Initiated Priest/Priestess to perform rituals and divination for, and present consecrated sacred items to devotees. The MDOC, whether through the compulsion of federal injunctions or societal pressures, must broaden their understanding of religious practices to accommodate smaller, uncommon religious groups like Ifa/Orisa traditions.

The MDOC, until January of this year as a result of my pending civil rights lawsuit regarding Ifa/Orisa worship (Gerald Byrd v. Randall Haas, et al., 2:17-cv-11427, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Michigan), did not allow Ifa/Orisa practitioners to conduct Group Religious Services, and still do not allow us to purchase and possess many of the necessary religious articles for practice.

From the perspective of MDOC officials, it is enough to simply allow practitioners to purchase these religious items from an approved vendor of their choosing (one that often does not understand or respect Ifa/Orisa traditions). These unconsecrated items sold by people who are neither Awo (gender neutral term for initiated Ifa priests/priestesses) nor O'lorisa (gender neutral term for initiated Orisa priests/priestesses), are useless to Ifa/Orisa devotees. While a prayer rug from whomever may suffice for Muslims or a Cross Pendant for a Christian; Ileke Beads or Esu stones, not consecrated specifically for the devotee, will not suffice. This personalized consecration is necessary.

There are still several religious items that are not yet approved for us to either purchase/possess due to nonsensical and exaggerated security concerns. For example, we are not allowed to have white garb for prayer, ceremony and divination because of an inmate who escaped a few years ago wearing a white Food Service uniform but incarcerated people in Food Service still wear white uniforms and we are even allowed to purchase all-white sweatpants and sweatshirts. We also are not allowed to have "Ide" wrist beads because they can supposedly be used to signify gang membership. All of these belated security

concerns arose five years into the religious lawsuit, reasons the Federal Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit calls "post hoc rationalizations" that aren't regarded as truthful given the fact that are not the actual reasons for denial since they were not mentioned until litigation began.

Many Ifa/Orisa devotees, including myself, have opted to make makeshift items that are consecrated by an elder in the tradition or one of the few Awo that are incarcerated. These items are considered contraband and subject to being taken or destroyed at any officer's discretion. While few officers will overlook makeshift altars, Ogun pots, Esu stones, and Ileke beads; many will destroy them and even write practitioners a Misconduct Report for possessing Contraband. I've recently received two of them in the last two weeks of July 2022, leading up to my August 1st Settlement conference in the lawsuit. Needless to say, the case wasn't settled. Ifa/Orisa devotees are forced to choose between following rules or worshipping and receiving misconducts that cause them to lose privileges and, in some cases, even trips to segregation.

Reconstructing altars and sacred items after destruction by staff has become a regular part of Ifa/Orisa worship in the MDOC. The desecration of sacred items is reminiscent of what all indigenous peoples of the planet endured during the many conquests of their lands by Caucasians. The MDOC's actions certainly raise suspicion of racial motivation for the disparate treatment of Ifa/Orisa devotees.

However, there are challenges that arise for the Ifa/Orisa community in here, independent of the MDOC. Principal among them is the inability to contact and receive support from Ifa/Orisa priests/priestesses. This presents problems because Ifa requires the guidance from the priestly and elders in the tradition. They are needed for consecration and presentation of sacred items to devotees. They perform divination for devotees to help them determine things about themselves that are important to their spiritual journey. Most importantly, they teach us about Ifa/Orisa philosophy and practice.

Whatever the motivation of the MDOC for burdening Ifa/Orisa practice, I remain steadfast in my spiritual practice and proudly accept all adversity that may come while preserving and teaching the traditions of my beloved Egun (ancestors). It is my hope that the Ifa/Orisa community out there reach out and offer some assistance to us. May the Egun and Orisa support me in this battle for the religious rights of Awo, O'lorisa, and Aborisa throughout the MDOC. Ase (May it be so).

Food for Thought

By Joseph Green
SPECIAL TO THE SUN



"When mental energy is allowed to follow the line of least resistance and to fall into easy channels it is called weakness; when it

is gathered, focused and forced into upward and difficult directions it becomes power and this concentration of energy and acquisition of power is brought about by means of self-control," James Allen wrote.

Too many times we search for the easy route. Everybody wants the success without putting in the work to obtain it. We want to go home but don't want to take on the work that is required of us. We want peace and happiness, but you don't want to put in the work to obtain it. We want to be better people but don't want to put in the work.

In the nation of Islam minister Farrakhan says, "that anything of value has a difficulty factor attached to it." What is more valuable than you? It's very difficult for many people to truly look within. Many people in prison don't see value in themselves. Instead of seeing value

within themselves they would rather create a good impression upon others concerning their toughness and street smarts. This line and channel have the least resistance and it doesn't gain you anything of value. The people we strive to create a good impression upon recognizes that you don't see value in yourself so why should they value you.

In order for us to gain true power we must begin to focus our energy on knowing ourselves. Which means learning self-control. The person who controls themselves, controls their life, their circumstances, their destiny. To shut the door on old habits and thoughts is to open it to new and better ones. The person who is learning how to subdue and control his thoughts is becoming wiser every day.

I know that you're on a journey but self-examination is the key to our success. Take the time to see how far you have come and the strength you have acquired. You haven't taken the easy road of giving up and seeing your life without value. Allow your voice to be a constructive expression of your growth and the value you now possess.

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