

Young Black Males Entering The Criminal Justice System is at a State Of Emergency!

By Dr. Rosie Milligan

Clara Hunter King, ESQ, an Atlanta based attorney, has joined forces with two female criminal defense attorneys who says, “ The number of African-American youth entering the Criminal Justice System has reached a state of ‘Emergency.’” These attorneys are tired of seeing young lives—and they tend to be young Black males lives—wasted through ignorance. It has been said that what you don’t know can’t hurt you, but in fact, what you don’t know can get you locked up in prison for a lifetime. The legal system is not about what you don’t know but whether your behavior constitutes a crime and “what you should have known

Clara is founder of the organization “Watchdogs For Justice.” Clara, and fellow attorneys Yvonne Hawks and Lawanda Jean O’Bannon, have written a series of short stories that brings the reader face –to-face with bad decisions and common and most frequent mistakes made by young people. These attorneys have written a series of short stories that tell, clearly and directly, how one wrong decision can have lifetime tragic consequences. “This Is Not Cool” brings the reader into the lives of Shontez, David, Dana, and Bill, and demonstrates how urgent the need is to educate our young people about the consequences of their actions.

These are excerpts of mistakes demonstrated in their new book, “ This is Not Cool”: Legal Lessons For Youth & Their Parents.

Shontez was out riding with his friends when one of them suggested they rob an old man they saw in a phone booth. Dana was a hard-working young lady who was nice enough to cash a check for a colleague she didn’t know very well. David let his friend talk him into robbing people so they could buy pizzas and play video games. Bill was in the car with his friend Johnny when a cop car pulled up behind them, and Johnny decided to try to outrun it.

None of these young people realized the very serious consequences of their actions until it was too late. Even decisions that seem very innocent—like cashing a check for a friend—can impact a young person’s life forever. Every young person should read "This Is Not Cool" over the age of ten. Parents, foster-parents, all children caretakers and any organization that works with youth. Religious organizations should provide this book to their youth.

Why Blacks contribute about half of all the prison inmates when they are only 13 percent of the U.S. population is subject to much speculation. Some believe that it is due to poverty, lack of job opportunities, inferior education and single parent households. Some believe the residents in urban areas demand more police visibility for protection because of the high rate of street crimes such as: drug dealing, armed robbery and gang related

problems. We believe that education in “prison prevention” will curtail the rate of incarceration of our youth.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics Criminal Offenders Statistics: Based on current rates of first incarceration, an estimated 32% of Black males will enter State or Federal prison during their life time, compared to 17% of Hispanics males and 5.9% of White males. The report further stated that an estimated 57% of inmates were under the age of 35—this being males who are in their most productive and prime years of life. What this means is that we are looking at incarcerating almost an entire generation of people.

According to Dr. Claud Anderson, the hidden national unemployment rate of Blacks is 35%. In cities like Baltimore, Detroit and Pittsburg, Black unemployment is well over 45%. In New York, unemployment for Black men tops 51%. The national Black youth unemployment figure is nearly 80%.

On March 29, 2006, Clara King spoke with students at King/Drew Magnet High School in Watts California. Their teacher, Ms Pamela Woodlief, had her students read the short stories from "This Is Not Cool" prior to attorney King's visit. The students wrote letters expressing their appreciation for King's visit and for the legal lessons they had learned. The following are excerpts from their letters to attorney King:

"I want to say thank you for coming to my school. In your book "This Is Not Cool," the story with Shontez, my brother is in a similar situation. I wish he could have read that story before he got locked up. I just want to thank you for that."

"My brother was one of those who had problems. As of now, he is in jail for the rest of his life. I believe that this is because he didn't have that one person that told him that his life could be better."

"I learned so much from the things that you shared with our class. Before you shared those things with our class, I never knew that you could get in trouble with the law when you didn't even know that your behavior was a crime but you should have known. So I have to be careful and watch out for certain things."

"Thank you for visiting our 6th period class. I really was able to relate to the stories in your book. I understood the stories and how someone can easily fall into the life of tragedy just by meeting the wrong friend. Thank you very much for your time. I hope that you can come back again."

"Many of the things that you talked about I was relating to them because have been through a situation like one of the scenarios in your book. It really made me think. And today, I made a list of all of the people that I know and I realize how little I know about those people. Thank you so much for making us think about the people we call our friends"

"Thank you for coming to share your knowledge with us. I found your stories and facts very interesting. I learned much about my rights. I liked it a lot when you gave us scenarios and asked us questions because it made us think and we learned a lot from you."

Watchdogs For Justice holds interactive seminars at schools, churches, group homes and any place where there are young people in attendance. .I believe that every young person and their parents or caretaker should read "This Is Not Cool" together and should have a discussion about the stories. Our youth are getting erroneous information from peers on the streets. And many of their parents are not discussing issues that are causing our youth to become locked behind bars, because they do not anticipate their children being caught up in these legal situations that can cause them to go to jail or prison. These are unsuspecting parents. Therefore, jail and prison prevention is not a topic that seems necessary as a topic for family discussion.

Most parent have no clue about some of the things that young people are involving themselves in today which can cost them years and even life in prison. On many occasions the youth who initiate the trouble that your child finds himself involved in, is not really known by your --- they don't even know their legal name, just his/her nick name. In most cases your child doesn't even know their hangout friend's parents name or their addresses. So when trouble comes your child is left along paying the consequences for something he had not even thought about doing, he only went along, because he had not been taught to stand alone when things do not feel right.

For information regarding interactive seminars for youth, how to obtain the book "This Is Not Cool" Call Dr. Rosie Milligan 323-750-3592 or visit www.milliganbooks.com or visit Express Yourself Bookstore, 1425 W. Manchester Ave. Ste.C, L.A. Calif.