



Beyond the “War on Drugs”

Envisioning Just, Safe and Wholesome Black Communities

IBW Drug Policy Reform Orientation and Education Retreat

April 30 – May 2, 2015

The Real News Network Building, Baltimore Maryland

The Third Annual IBW Drug Policy Reform Orientation and Education Retreat was convened in Baltimore against the backdrop of a major uprising which **lied** bare the crises of police brutality, the impact of the War on Drugs and decades of blatant neglect. Therefore, nothing could have been more appropriate than deliberations on “Envisioning Just, Safe and Wholesome Black Communities.” The crises in Baltimore and the ongoing crisis in Black communities across the country added to the importance of this year’s Retreat. Accordingly, the gathering of representatives from IBW’s Drug and Criminal Justice Policy Reform Collaboratives from Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, representatives of the Black Family Summit (African-centered national Black professional organizations) and policy experts and resource persons engaged in a rich and inspirational process of information-sharing, networking, cross-fertilization of ideas, collective learning and the development of an action agenda. Equally important, the “bonding” which occurred during the Retreat contributed to the continued “movement-building process” between the Justice Collaboratives and Black Family Summit organizations that IBW believes is crucial to overcoming the “State of Emergency” in America’s “dark ghettos” that is devastating Black families and communities.

Synopsis of the Proceedings

April 30

Event: Press Conference and Informational Forum

Defining “Harm”

Protecting Black Children and Preserving Black Families

Prior to the Opening Session of the Retreat, IBW and the Drug Policy Alliance held a Press Conference and Informational Forum to release a major Statement on the “Definition of Harm.” The Definition is designed to end the practice of arbitrary and disproportionate removal of Black children from their families by foster care and other child welfare agencies on the basis of “protecting” them from “harm” by parents who may suffer from substance abuse or **addition** issues. The Statement was a direct outgrowth of the 2014 Retreat where Black Family Summit organizations were charged with developing a Definition

of Harm because of the damages being done to Black families and communities by the use of culturally inappropriate policies and practices in the name of safeguarding the interest of Black children. The Statement and Definition was well received. The Statement of Definition of Harm and video of the Press Conference and Informational Forum can be found on the IBW website www.ibw21.org

Participants:

- **Baba Leonard Dunston**, Convener, IBW Black Family Summit
- **Yolande Cadore**, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Drug Policy Alliance

- **Nana Dr. Patricia Newton**, Immediate Past President/Executive Director, Black Psychiatrists of America.
- **Dr. Taiwan Lovelace**, Co-Convener, Washington, D.C. Justice Collaborative
- **Dr. Daryl Taasogle Rowe**, President, National Association of Black Psychologists
- **Toni Oliver**, President, National Association of Black Social Workers Inc., representing **Nana Joe Benton**, Immediate Past President, National Association of Black Social Workers
- **Art Way**, State Director, Drug Policy Alliance, Denver, CO
- **Dr. Ron Daniels**, President, IBW, Moderator

Opening Session

Topic: Status of the “War on Drugs”

After **Rev. Shirely Gravely-Currie**, IBW Board Member, welcomed the Participants, **Dr. Ron Daniels**, President, IBW, took the occasion to reiterate and reemphasize IBW’s basic approach to promoting change in Black communities as a good faith facilitator. In a presentation entitled *Cultivating a Culture of Collaboration to Heal Black Families and Communities*, he stressed the critical importance of formations like the Black Family Summit and the Justice Collaboratives modeling a cooperative/collective way of striving/working to combat and overcome the crises afflicting Black communities. Organizations and agencies can utilize their collective resources to heal Black families and communities without surrendering their organizational independence or integrity. He argued that it is more difficult to overcome intentional or unintentional schemes, policies and practices that harm Black communities when organizations and agencies committed to working for the betterment of Black people are disconnected or function in a competitive manner. We must “cultivate **and** culture of collaboration” to tap the collective strengths of Black people in the quest to heal Black families and communities. [A video of Dr. Daniels presentation can be viewed at www.ibw21.org]

Jesselyn McCurdy, Esq., Senior Legislative Counsel, American Civil Liberties Union, presented powerful data on the disastrous effects of the War on Drugs and racially-biased criminal justice policies on Black communities. Examples:

■ The Department of Justice Report of Ferguson cited clear patterns and practices of discriminatory policies that specifically created a “debtor prison culture” via disproportionately targeting and fining African Americans for parking and traffic violations. In a city of 21,000 there were 9,000 outstanding arrest warrants for traffic violations. In effect, the targeting and ticketing of Black people was a designated source of revenue for the city’s coffers.

■ In the state of Maryland in a year 109 mostly unarmed Black men were killed by police. Only two officers were charged, neither of whom were convicted. Many of the deadly encounters are associated with infractions associated with the War on Drugs. Such patterns breed hostility and distrust toward the police.

Dr. Malik Burnett, Policy Manager, Office of National Affairs, Drug Policy Alliance, standing in for **Jasmine Tyler** of the Open Society Foundations provided an assessment of the prospects of reform legislation at the federal, state and municipal levels. There are some promising pieces of legislation in Congress that have bi-partisan sponsorship:

■ **The Redeem Act** by Senators **Cory Booker** and **Rand Paul**; **sentencing reform** that would give greater discretion to Judges; and proposals to **eliminate the disparity in sentencing for powdered and crack cocaine** (from 8-1 to 0). **Senator Hank Johnson** has a bill to **curtail the militarization of the police**.

The prospect for passage of significant federal legislation is dim because of severe partisan divisions and gridlock. The outlook is brighter at the state and municipal levels:

■ **California has moved to reduce some felony offenses to misdemeanors**. This will result in the release of thousands of incarcerated persons.

■ **New Jersey has passed significant Bail Reform legislation** that gives Judges more discretion in setting bail. Large numbers of individuals often remain in jail awaiting trial because they cannot afford bond. The New Jersey legislation will result in a reduction in the number of people languishing in jails for lack of ability to pay bond.

■ **Philadelphia City Council passed an Ordinance decriminalizing possession of small amounts of Marijuana**. A fine of \$25.00 is levied instead of arrest and possible incarceration.

■ **In Washington, D.C. City Council via Initiative 71 residents voted to legalize the possession of small amounts of Marijuana** and the recreational use of same in private.

Dr. Divine Pryor, Executive Director of the Center for Nu Leadership on Urban Solutions, a think tank founded and administered by formerly incarcerated persons, admonished policy reform experts, advocates and organizers to always be aware that the criminal justice system has historically functioned as a mechanism of control in Black communities.

We must always be familiar with the thought process/thinking of law enforcement in terms of devising and maintaining systems of control for Black communities. We need to “beat the police at their own game” as we struggle for reform. Toward that end, in his capacity as Chairman of the New York City Clergy Task Force on Police Accountability, **Dr. Pryor** has enrolled in the New York Police Academy for a close-up examination of the curricula used and the mindset of the Instructors who are training Cadets to interact/interface with Black communities. Thus far he has found the experience to be shockingly revealing!

Dr. Pryor also reminded the group of the massive disenfranchisement of Black people through felony convictions and suggested that restoring voting rights to formerly incarcerated persons could potentially change the ideological direction of many states across the country. In the states where formerly incarcerated persons are allowed to vote, large numbers are not aware of it. Educating, mobilizing/organizing formerly incarcerated persons to be a power block in the U.S. should be a major goal of drug and criminal justice reform advocates as well as civil rights/human rights organizations.

May 1

Morning Session

Topic: Utilizing a Racial Justice/Social Justice Framework to Advance Drug Policy Reform

Atty. Seema Sadanandan, Director, Policy and Advocacy, American Civil Liberty Union, gave an extensive rationale for the use of a racial justice/social justice framework to educate communities about the damages resulting from the disproportionate arrest and mass incarceration of young Black men because of racially **bias** criminal justice/policing policies. She discussed the campaign to pass Initiative 71 to legalize possession of small quantities of Marijuana to illustrate the effectiveness of this approach. Some among the group of faith leaders assembled by Rev. Shirley Gravely-Currie on IBW's behalf were initially lukewarm or opposed to supporting the Initiative. However, attitudes shifted once they understood the issue from the perspective of racially biased enforcement which was producing disproportionately high arrests and incarceration of Black people, mostly young men. Therefore, they could be for the Initiative as a racial justice proposition without necessarily endorsing legalizing of Marijuana. Faith leaders could support Initiative 71 as a matter of racial justice and reparations to repair the damages of a discriminatory policy.

Topic: Regulation versus Criminalization: The Case of Portugal

Art Way, State Director, Drug Policy Alliance, Denver, CO, provided background on the decriminalization of Marijuana in Portugal; a country that drug policy reform advocates often reference as a model for change in the U.S. He noted that drugs have not been "legalized" in Portugal. Instead, the policy is decriminalization for possession of small amounts of all drugs in favor of counseling and treatment within the context of a public health framework. In fact drug abuse has been shifted from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Health in Portugal. Art indicated that studies show no increase in the use of drugs as a result of decriminalization – which is one of the fears generally expressed by opponents of decriminalization or legalization.

Art's presentation precipitated a lively discussion about the stigma and fears associated with drug use and abuse in this country. The idea of Marijuana as a "gateway" drug that will lead to use of more dangerous and addictive drugs is one of the fears commonly held by people who oppose decriminalization or legalization. The damaging effects of drugs on so many African American families has also left a stigma on drug use and the decriminalization or legalization of same which is hard to overcome. Art spent time

debunking some of the fears associated with drug use and addiction and challenged the group to find ways of overcoming the stigma barrier in order to open the door to more humane ways of addressing drug use and abuse in Black communities.

Topic: Alternatives to Arrest and Incarceration: Can LEAD Work in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.?

Ronald Hampton, Washington D.C. Representative, Blacks in Law Enforcement of America, Co-Convener, D. C. Justice Collaborative and IBW Board Member, was slated to present on this topic but was delayed getting to the retreat. To fill the void, Dr. Ron Daniels briefly offered a basic overview of the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Program (LEAD) as initiated in Seattle. He then invited representatives from the Pittsburgh, D.C. and Philadelphia Regional Justice Collaboratives who had visited Seattle to review the Program to offer observations. There was general agreement that LEAD would be adapted differently to each city based on local conditions and priorities. There was a question whether local government officials would enthusiastically support a LEAD program in predominantly Black neighborhoods as opposed to communities that are experiencing gentrification like the Belltown section of Seattle where the Pilot Project for LEAD began. Upon his arrival, Ron Hampton expressed his strong support for LEAD as a transformative model of policing. He also stressed the need for Black communities to lessen their reliance on the police.

Afternoon Session

Topic: Viewing Drug Abuse/Addiction as a Public Health Issue

Kima Joy Taylor, National Drug Addiction Treatment and Harm Reduction, Director, Open Society Foundations, began her presentation using the analogy of how patients with Diabetes are viewed in society and within the healthcare system as opposed to those with drug abuse and addiction issues. Both are diseases, but one is treated dramatically different than the other based on misconceptions, fears and stigma. Her point was/is that both should be treated alike – as public health issues. Other pertinent points:

- The Affordable Care Act (ACA) offers a major opening to provide wrap around services to people addicted to alcohol and drugs. It is a way to cover major costs for LEAD and other diversion programs which focus on repeat drug offenders.
- It will take hard work to master the avenues for utilizing ACA and the skills to navigate the maze of regulations and procedures to secure the necessary services. It will also require a willingness to partner with unlikely forces.
- There is a critical need to overcome the stigma of drugs in Black communities in order to advance a policy reform agenda, including adopting a public health framework for dealing with drug use, abuse and addiction issues in Black communities.
- We need to develop culturally appropriate intervention and treatment models. Also need to challenge “evidence based” models that are not applicable to the experiences of Black people.
- Kima requested assistance is devising strategies to encourage service providers to learn how to utilize ACA to underwrite costs of services for diversion programs like LEAD. Similarly, there is a need to

develop messaging and approaches designed to overcome the stigma of drugs as a barrier to reform and the adoption of a public health framework.

Dr. Malik Burnett, Moderator, also contributed to this session. There was a very engaged and informative discussion around the presentations.

Evening Session

Topic: Combating Violence and Murders in Black Communities

After **Baba Leonard Dunston**, Moderator for the evening session, called on Black Family Summit leaders present to briefly describe their organizational priorities, **Andrea James**, Executive Director, Families for Justice as Healing and **Kenneth Braswell**, President, Fathers Inc. were afforded additional time to follow-up on their presentations from the 2014 Retreat. **Andrea James**, who was the principal organizer of the **Free Her Rally** held in Washington, D.C. last June, reported on the organization's continued efforts to have women serving unjust, long mandatory sentences released. Though the process is difficult, the relentless pressure has resulted in some victories. **Kenneth Braswell** reported that his film *Spittin Anger*, which deals with the impact of **absence** fathers on Black boys, continues to draw huge audiences across the country. He is currently working on another film which will deal with issues affecting Black girls.

Dorothy Johnson-Speight, Executive Director, Mothers-in-Charge, was the principal presenter tasked with addressing the topic of *Combating Violence and Murders in Black Communities*. **Dorothy** is advocating that violence and murders in Black communities across the country be declared a public health crisis. Accordingly, her organization is mobilizing/organizing a **National Standing for Justice and Peace Rally June 6th in Washington, D.C.** The Rally will be preceded by a **National Forum** on the issue hosted by **Congressman Danny Davis**. **Dorothy** appealed for the organizations at the Retreat to endorse the Rally and mobilize their networks to attend/participate.

Topic: Strategies and Models for Healing Black Families and Communities

Dr. Cheryl Tawede Grills, Association of Black Psychologists, Immediate Past President and **Atty. Enola Aird**, President, Community Healing Network were slated to present a synopsis of the **Emancipation Healing Circle** concept and illustrate how this approach can be used to heal Black families and communities across the country. They were able to provide an impressive overview before the Session was interrupted by the sudden arrival of a large police contingent near City Hall – which is in the same block where the Retreat was held. Many of the young organizers and legal observers in the building were concerned that the police presence might provoke a response from demonstrators in the area. As a consequence, the Session was adjourned and the Participants sought to support the young leaders prior to departing back to the hotel before the curfew.

Baba Leonard Dunston and **Dr. Ron Daniels** expressed regrets that the session was interrupted but assured **Dr. Grills** and **Atty. Aird** that IBW is committed to collaborating with the Association of Black Psychologists and the Community Healing Network to implement the Emancipation Healing Circles around the country.

May 2nd

Concluding Session

Topic: Roundtable Exchange with Pittsburgh, D.C., Philadelphia and Baltimore Justice Collaboratives

Richard Adams, IBW Board Chairman and Co-Convener, Pittsburgh Justice Collaborative and **Dr. Taiwan Lovelace**, Co-Convener, D.C. Justice Collaborative called on Participants from the Justice Collaboratives to share information about the programmatic and policy reform work in their cities.

After extensive information-sharing, **Charles Thornton**, Executive Director of D.C.'s Office of Returning Citizens offered a recommendation. He warned that the flood of Returning Citizens will be managed by institutions and agencies outside of the Black community unless there is a concerted effort for Black led institutions and agencies to become an integral part of the re-entry process. He urged the Justice Collaboratives to consider pushing for the adoption of Offices of Returning Citizens in their cities.

Topic: Summation - What have we learned and how does it inform our work?

After reiterating the critical importance of "Cultivating a Culture of Collaboration to Heal Black Families and Communities," **Dr. Ron Daniels** outlined an **Action Agenda** flowing from the deliberations:

■ The widespread circulation of the "**Definition of Harm**" **Statement** and the video of the Press Conference and Informational Forum to agencies and institutions across the country. The objective is to decisively influence the decision-making process of child welfare and protective agencies as it relates to keeping children with their families.

■ Request that OSF, in collaboration with IBW, facilitate the **convening of a select group of Black Family Summit leaders, opinion-makers and faith leaders to:**

1. Assess how best to employ a public health framework in addressing drug use, abuse and addiction in Black communities and effective messaging around this approach.
2. How to develop strategies and messaging to overcome the "stigma" of drugs in Black communities that is a barrier to policy reform and the adoption of a public health framework.
3. Receive orientation/education on effective strategies to utilize the Affordable Care Act to underwrite major costs for treatment counseling, treatment and wrap around services for persons addicted to drugs as well as strategies to incorporate ACA into pre-booking diversion models like LEAD.

■ The development of a Task Force to **define "Appropriate Evidenced Based Methodologies"** that are culturally appropriate to people of African descent. A similar effort by a group of Latino researchers might be used as precedent and model. **Dr. Cheryl Grills** and **Dr. Divine Pryor** agreed to Co-Chair the Task Force. **Charles Thornton**, xxxxxxx, xxxxxx, agreed to serve on the Task Force.

■ IBW is committed to supporting the **utilization of Emotional Emancipation Circles** as a component of a strategy to organize **Family Healing Circles** in targeted cities in conjunction with Fatherhood, Inc. The goal is to use this approach to heal Black families and communities by encouraging, motivating,

inspiring increased civic engagement, institution and movement-building for social justice and social change.

- IBW via the Black Family Summit will **support the International Global Summit** at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc.'s Annual Legislative Conference, hosted by **Congresswoman Karen Bass**.

- Justice Collaboratives are encouraged to explore encouraging their respective city governments to create Offices of Returning Citizens similar to the one in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Daniels concluded by outlining **forthcoming IBW Initiatives**

- Under the leadership of **Ron Hampton**, the **IBW Police Reform and Accountability Task Force** would like to convene **Community Based Hearings** in selected cities on the **“Broken Windows” theory of policing**. Possible Theme – ***Broken Windows or Broken System: The Need for Police Restructuring***. IBW will explore conducting the first Hearing in New York City where Police Commissioners have championed this theory. **Dr. Divine Pryor**, Chairman of the New York Clergy Task Force on Police Accountability pledged his support for a Hearing in New York.

- Against the backdrop of the uprising in Baltimore, IBW proposes to convene a **National Forum – *The Kerner Commission Revisited: Implications for the Crises in America’s “Dark Ghettos.”*** The goal is to show the persistence of police brutality, the reactions to it, and the underlying crises in urban inner-city neighborhoods that have gone unaddressed for decades. This Forum will also serve as the basis for intensifying the demand for a **“Domestic Marshall Plan”** to foster the development of just, safe and wholesome Black communities.

- IBW would like to convene **State of the Black World Conference IV**, post-election 2016, with the collective support of organizations affiliated with the Black Family Summit as a demonstration of a **new force in Black America and the Pan African World**; a new force with the collective experience, skill and will to heal Black families and communities in the U.S. and globally.