

Denial of Civil Rights Protects Republicans

As a Black man with a felony record residing in Tampa, I cannot continue to just sit idle and quiet on the sidelines while our Madame Attorney General, Pam Bondi, leads the crusade to defend and enforce racist and segregationist Jim Crow laws of 1876. Enforcement of Jim Crow laws serves only one special interest group, the Republican Party of Florida. These laws only protect the political dominance of the Republicans in our state for generations.

Pam Bondi should be required to register as a lobbyist for the Republican Party of Florida.



Pam Bondi, the now Attorney General and Al Mccray

Recently the Clemency Board of Florida voted 4-0 to derail the automatic Civil Rights Restoration Train. Former Governors Charlie Crist and Jeb Bush were once engineers on this train. The Board voted to make the Civil Rights Restoration process almost impossible. Yeap, there won't be any automatic voting rights.

The Clemency Board imposed lengthy waiting periods and you almost must beg to have your civil rights restored after a felony conviction. The current backlog is well over 100,000. With all the new applying conditions, hoops, and the constant new releases from supervision, if you applied today, you could have your rights restored by the year 2037? But be sure and be on both of your knees when you apply.

While many Jim Crow Era laws across the country have since been abolished, Florida seems to have a dedicated mindset at denying voting rights to Blacks and other minorities with felony records. This is probably the last of the Jim Crow Era that's causes the greatest harm to Minorities. Even though the criminal justice system is de facto programmed to work against minorities, the Clemency Board has made it harder to resume a productive life.

The facts are plain and simple, Jim Crow laws, passed 1876-1960, had only one specific evil purpose.

They were designed, passed and executed to deny Black people in America the benefits of freedom.

Yeah, yeah, there are by far more White folks than Blacks with Felony convictions that will also fall victim to these changes in Civil Rights restorations. But these White folks are really sacrificial lambs. The numbers of White folks that can't vote does not have any significant dilution of the vote that will adversely hinder Republican Party voting strength. That is always the convenient and easy cop out rationale that the clemency vote is not specially aim at Blacks and minorities because it affects more White more. You have to compare the percentage of each race of those with felonies against their total population base.

The percentage of Blacks that can't vote is a significant number compared to its percentage of the population.

As long as an estimated 13-15% of Black adults are legally prohibited from voting, this creates a one sided political field.

It is assumed that most minorities will register as a Democrat once they get their rights restored. Pam Bondi and The Republican Party of Florida are well aware of this. How else should Blacks register and vote after being at the foul hands of Republicans on this

issue? Can you really blame Blacks for running to the Democratic Party "if and when" their Civil Rights are restored?

If these groups of people were able to vote, Florida could truly be a multi political party state.

There is a notion, being tossed around in Tallahassee, that voting is a privilege and not a right. That to me represents an ideology of arrogance, racism and very neo-conservatism.

In the days of Jim Crow, the racists in power had to make provisions that snared the greatest about of Blacks away from voting. It was very simple, those with a felony conviction would lose Civil Rights, especially the right to vote. In doing so many thousands of poor White folks became unintended and peripheral victims of racist Jim Crow laws. With these White Folks out the voting poor, it basically had a minimum or no effect at on the political landscape. This small number never could change the outcome or elections. I would say that this group had to real agendas for getting more political power. Their percentage of the overall White population, as today, is so insignificant compared to the population of White folks.

In today's terminology, those White folks would be called "poor White trash". They were at the bottom of

the social- economic scale and where more prone to commit crimes.

I would venture to say these same White folks were instrumental in the formation and terrorism of the Klu Klux Klan. You see when freed slaves started competing for jobs and societal benefits with these White folks something had to be done. The Jim Crow laws aided in a way, it gave legitimacy to these groups, such as the Klu Klux Klan.

The facts remain the same today, and as yesterday. Jim Crow laws are definitely aimed at Blacks because of the higher disproportion percentages and inequality of numbers of Blacks with criminal records. Even thou Blacks are arrested over all at a much lesser rate in terms of numbers. Blacks are arrested and convicted in higher percentages to its population base. Blacks are convicted and sent to prison at a much higher rate than Whites.

To understand the need for a fairer rights restoration process, you must take a closer look at the criminal justice system and its inequities*.

Let me clear the air, anyone who breaks the law should face the consequences for their actions, as prescribed by law. I just think that equality should permeate through the entire criminal process. It seems

like when Minorities encounters the criminal justice system, racism always seems to find a way of creeping into the process. However before the criminal activity, some underlining factors are; social- economic and apathy in the community.

In Florida, Black Males make up roughly 7-8 % of the population, but make up 49.8 % of the prison population. Blacks account of 35% of arrests in Florida. The Black Population is roughly 16%. The Florida arrests for 2009 are as follows: 581,067 Whites, 291,443 Blacks. Nationally Blacks make 46% of the prison population even thou Blacks make up 13 % of the population.

How can anyone in a civilized society not question the moral legitimacy of these racist statistics?

One confusing statement from Pam Bondi was that she thinks that people once their civil rights were restored would immediately run out celebrate by committing fresh crimes. What an absurdity that is? Stevie Wonder can easily see through that. First of all, these persons are already out of lock up or community control for years and living crime free. If they have been crime free for 3-5 years or more, it is illogical that they would automatically return to crime.

However if a small percentage of instances were to commit new crimes, like the three strikes laws in some states, they could forever lose your right to vote and serve on juries. But they could retain other Civil Rights.

Most new crimes are committed by persons without a previous criminal record.

Sure there will always be that tiny exception to any rule. People who have made mistakes would like to move with life in the legitimate mainstream.

These people without Civil Rights raise families, work, pay taxes, attend schools, and contribute to the health, wealth and prosperity of their communities. All they ask for is forgiveness and a second chance.

Let's give Madame Bondi some respect here. She says she is only enforcing the law, the Florida Constitution. Denying the automatic restoration of civil right is still the law. She also says she is protecting the public. No one can argue the facts about the 33-35% recidivism within 3-5 years.

I hear that the Attorney General will support a move that would allow felons, without their Rights, to have profession careers. This to me is a sick April fool's Joke. It's even better than trick o treat. The prospect of a professional career is useless without

your civil rights. As long as that question, "the arrest/felony", remains on employment applications, felons will have problems getting professional jobs.

The Attorney General should enforce all the laws on the books. There are other laws that not being enforced. Either she is not aware of these laws, or she understands that enforcement of certain laws cause harm to the Republican Party of Florida. She should enforce all the laws. It could be that enforcing Jim Crows and denying Blacks and Minorities civil rights are more politically beneficial?

Here are some of the laws that are not being enforced.

1. Pregnant pigs are not to be confined in cages.
2. It is illegal to go downtown without \$10.
3. The death penalty applied to horse stealing.
4. Women may be fined for falling asleep under a hair dryer, as can the salon owner.
5. A special law prohibits unmarried women from parachuting on Sunday or she shall risk arrest, fine, and/or jailing.
6. It is illegal to sing in a public place while attired in a swimsuit.
7. Men may not be seen publicly in any kind of strapless gown.
8. It is illegal to skateboard without a license.

9. When having sex, only the missionary position is legal.
10. You may not fart in a public place after 6 P.M. on Thursdays.
11. It is considered an offense to shower naked.
12. You are not allowed to break more than three dishes per day, or chip the edges of more than four cups and/or saucers.
13. You may not kiss your wife's breasts.
14. The Penalty for horse theft is death by hanging.

Madame Attorney could rightfully and truthfully say that these laws are out dated and are stupid laws. Perhaps, in her defense, I will agree. The current victims of racist Jim Crow laws could also say the same, that Jim Crow laws are outdated and stupid.

Does Madame Attorney General not know the real facts of the inequity in the criminal justice system? Or maybe she just simply does not care to know?

Madame Pam Bondi often mentions that she was a successful tough prosecutor for almost twenty in Hillsborough County Florida. In 2009 of all the persons going to the State in Prison from Hillsborough County, 55% were Black. The Black population of Hillsborough County is around 16%.

Hillsborough County, on a per capital basis, has sent the more people to state prison. Hillsborough County has the most people on death row.

Across the State and country, you would find similar disparities. Many lower and many higher. It is not just Hillsborough County. But it's arresting people with criminal behavior.

The current State Attorney, Mark Ober, is very active with fair and equal criminal prosecutions without regards to race or gender. His office is aggressive with criminal prosecutions, but is also very big on diversion and attempts to keep folks out of jail (when the facts merits), out of system resolutions is a plus, community involvement and educating the public is a priority.

I have always supported his reelection efforts and his office's human prosecution policies.

But the criminal justice system, everywhere, require a workable and continued partnership with the State Attorney's Office, Community and the schools to truly have an impact on decreasing the disparities in the criminal justice system.

Sure there are more complicated factors besides one's race that puts people in the eyes and clutches of

the criminal justice system. But race has to be high on that list. Other reasons on that list are:

1. Non early corrective intervention with juvenile offenders. Hillsborough County Commissioner is on the right track. But there are some of his provisions I have personal issues with.
2. Lack of parental disciplining at home. Social scientists and lobbyists for the prison industry have blurred the line between parental discipline and criminal assault charges. Parents are afraid of going to jail for the simplest act of disciplining of their out of control kids. These kids know the rule well and how to dial #911.
3. Limited resources to hire an attorney. Five hundred dollars won't win a criminal conviction case.
4. Over loaded cases and limited budgets at the public defender's office. Often these brilliant defense attorneys out of necessity have become professional plea bargainers.
5. Lack of community investments in troubled youths and corrective criminal behaviors.

It seems like community support never goes further than the pulpits and the 10% of God's money which stays in the churches coffers.

6. Lack of education to youths in the early school years about the lifetime severe consequences of a criminal record.
7. Single parent families.
8. Blacks are more likely to get jail time while white get probation or diversion. They know and understand the system. Most times when it comes to Blacks and Minorities, it's not their first appearance in front of a judge. It's more like there third or fourth time. While Whites people are given time and time again opportunities to enter diversion programs where repeated offenses don't show up on records if they appear in front of a judge.
9. Lack of knowledge about diversion programs.
10. The silent but effective "no snitch" rule that prevents repeated criminals from being quickly apprehended. You would think that community would want to help so they would not become a victim of crime from that same criminal? I since that it is not total the fear of retribution from the criminal elements. The community just does not want to help the Poo-lice.
11. The image that cops are an occupying force verses being a protection/ community service provider.

The Rights Restoration process should be automatic after specific waiting periods. The wait for the harshest crime should not exceed 5 years after all sentences completion, fines and restitution has been paid. People should not have to serve two sentences; one given by the courts and another one given by the clemency board.

During my entire adult life, I was once very proud to be associated with the Republican Party. But it seems like since the last national election there has been hatred, racist comments and plain dirty language coming from the party. The Republican Party's alignment with the Tea Party was my last straw. I seriously question the agenda, benefactors and people in the Tea Party. Are they a racist and front organization for neo-cons? The jury, in my mind, is still deadlocked on that question.

But I do attribute all this negative rhetoric to an election of a Black man to the White House.

Months after that election, I became an independent voter. When I made my change known to the public, I received considerable hatred laced comments and email from some my former Republican colleagues.

I have not gone as far to become a Democrat. Not quite ready for that. But I will lend my resources to

the Democratic Party efforts in correcting this Civil Rights Restoration travesty.

The Clemency Board, for the good and future prosperity of the state, should reverse their decision. The Board should move beyond perpetual retribution and hatred. The Board should be about the spirit of redemption and providing a second chance for people to return to being a productive part of our society.

Give felons who have paid their dues to society a reasonable avenue of hope for the future. There should be an automatic Civil Rights restoration after 3-5 years (crime free) of waiting without applying without begging.

Luckily for me, my past encounter with the criminal justice system was in the State of Georgia. Georgia has an automatic process of getting your right to vote immediately after your total sentence is complete. Your complete restoration of Civil Rights occurs after a 6 to 12 months back ground check (for recent criminal activity).

Pam Bondi, you are the chief law enforcement official of the State of Florida. Take the lead and correct this great injustice. You should represent all the people of Florida not just the Republican Party or Jim Crow laws. We all know the rationale and basis for

these racist laws. They were to make sure that Blacks would never stray too far from the plantations and the masters' dominion. These laws of 1876 have no valid place in our society in 2011.

Over the years, I had a cordial and a very productive working relationship with Ms. Bondi.

Al Mccray

A Tampa Resident

Or

Managing Editor / Tampa News and Talk

mccray@tampanewsandtalk.com

813 244 0664

PO Box 280486

Tampa, FL 33682

http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/getdoc/2c4b035b-369b-406f-a729-dc898ae08996/arr_age_race.aspx