

Black Lives Matter, Just Not to Hillary Clinton. African American Voters Support a “Fantasy Champion for Black Lives”

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Global Research, March 07, 2016

[Reader Supported News](#) 4 March 2016

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#),
[Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

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Over 50 years ago, in a 1963 Chicago protest against school segregation, [one of today's Democratic candidates for president was chained to a black woman](#) and then arrested for resisting arrest. Now that moment appears in [an unofficial campaign poster](#) emphasizing the candidate's [commitment to civil rights](#). That protestor for black rights in 1963 was not Chicago native Hillary Clinton, then a politically active Republican supporting Barry Goldwater for President, even though he opposed the Civil Rights Act. Now Clinton is politically strongest in the same southern states Goldwater won in 1964 - ponder that irony.

In 1962, Hillary Clinton's youth minister took her and her class to hear Dr. Martin Luther King preach a sermon titled "[Sleeping Through the Revolution](#)," referring to the civil rights activism of the time. She shook Dr. King's hand. [Recalling the event in 2014](#), Clinton said:

Probably my great privilege as a young woman was going to hear Dr. Martin Luther King speak.... I sat on the edge of my seat as this preacher challenged us to participate in the cause of justice, not to slumber while the world changed around us. And that made such an impression on me.

But it did not make such an impression that she couldn't support Goldwater (to be fair, he helped integrate the Arizona Air National Guard). And it didn't make such an impression on her that she actually participated in the Civil Rights Movement (making Clinton-supporter Rep. John Lewis's denigration of Sanders's civil rights record look like a pretty hypocritical cheap shot, but that's what happens when the establishment circles the wagons). It's not that Hillary Clinton is terrible on civil rights, she usually manages [to end up on the side of the angels](#), more or less, but she has [never shown the willingness or capacity to lead](#) them.

Hillary Clinton: “We have to bring them to heel.”

On February 24, in Charleston, South Carolina, Hillary Clinton held a private fundraiser at a posh private home before a predominantly white crowd of about 100 who paid \$500 each to attend. Clinton had just started to speak when a young black woman (who also paid \$500 to get it) quietly held up a pillow case with a handwritten message in capital letters - “[WE HAVE TO BRING THEM TO HEEL](#)” - followed by #WhichHillary. Making nice at first, Clinton started reading the message aloud and the following exchange took place.

ASHLEY WILLIAMS: I'm not a superpredator, Hillary Clinton.

HILLARY CLINTON: OK, fine. We'll talk about it.

ASHLEY WILLIAMS: Can you apologize to black people for mass incarceration?

HILLARY CLINTON: Well, can I talk? OK, and then maybe you can listen to what I say.

ASHLEY WILLIAMS: Yes, yes, absolutely.

HILLARY CLINTON: OK, fine. Thank you very much. There's a lot of issues, a lot of issues in this campaign. [...]

ASHLEY WILLIAMS: I know that you called black youth superpredators in 1994. Please explain your record. Explain it to us. You owe black people an apology.

HILLARY CLINTON: Well, I'll tell you what, if you will give me a chance to talk, I'll—I'll tell you something. You know what? Nobody's ever asked me before. You're the first person to ask me, and I'm happy to address it, but you are the first person to ask me, dear.

By this time the audience has become hostile, and security is leading Ashley Williams away (filmed by her confederate who appears to be ignored).

HILLARY CLINTON: Um, OK, back to the issues.

The issue Clinton ducks here is massive black incarceration

In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed a vicious crime bill (to go with his vicious welfare reform bill) that has had a devastating impact on black families and communities across America. In 2010, [Michelle Alexander](#) published *The New Jim Crow* (a New York Times bestseller) to address "mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness." In her preface, Alexander wrote that "something is eerily familiar about the way our criminal justice system operates, something that looks and feels a lot like an era we left behind,... America's latest caste system." (The scandal of over-imprisonment in America is or should be well known to any sentient reader, along with the scandal of disproportionately locking up people of color, along with the [scandal of making imprisoned black people a profit center](#) for largely white-owned private prisons.)

For the February 10, 2016, issue of *The Nation*, Michelle Alexander wrote a piece titled "[Why Hillary Clinton Doesn't Deserve the Black Vote](#)," in which she summarizes the Clinton record on racial justice:

What have the Clintons done to earn such devotion? Did they take extreme political risks to defend the rights of African Americans? Did they courageously stand up to right-wing demagoguery about black communities? Did they help usher in a new era of hope and prosperity for neighborhoods devastated by deindustrialization, globalization, and the disappearance of work? No. Quite the opposite.

Campaigning for President Clinton's re-election in 1996, Hillary Clinton chose to defend the

1994 crime bill and its increased mass incarceration with [hard-edged, unsympathetic rhetoric](#), based in part on the scare tactic of invoking imaginary “super predators.” (Clinton has since offered a non-apology apology for the rhetoric: “Looking back, I shouldn’t have used those words, and I wouldn’t use them today.”)

To date, Clinton has not addressed the substantive issue of mass incarceration, which seems a pretty clear systemic injustice of long standing. Clinton has taken [contributions from the private prison industry](#), and has given a small proportion of the money to a charity that helps women prisoners adjust to society on release. In October 2015, after months of pressure from civil rights and immigrant justice groups, the Clinton campaign had promised not to accept [clearly labeled prison industry contributions](#).

By July 2015, the injustice of the American justice system was plain enough that even [Bill Clinton sort of apologized](#) for the 1994 Violent Crime Act. Speaking before the annual meeting of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) on July 15, Clinton said: “I signed a bill that made the problem worse.... And I want to admit it.” He did not propose to do anything about it. Nor has Hillary Clinton proposed to do anything about the mass incarceration of black Americans or other minorities. She has offered at best kinder, gentler rhetoric.

And at the same time, she claimed in Charleston: “You know what? Nobody’s ever asked me before. You’re the first person to ask me, and I’m happy to address it, but you are the first person to ask me, dear.”

Clinton lies - what else is it? - and the media can’t tell it’s a lie?

The reality is that Hillary Clinton has been asked before about mass incarceration, she has been asked before about mass incarceration by Black Lives Matter people, she has been asked before about mass incarceration of black people only to turn pettish and say, “if that is your position, then *I will talk only to white people about how we are going to deal with a very real problem.*” On August 11, 2015, in the course of a 15-minute videotaped meeting, Daunasia Yancey pressed Clinton on her role in oppressing black people:

... you and your family have been personally and politically responsible for policies that have caused health and human services disasters in impoverished communities of color through the domestic and international war on drugs that you championed as First Lady, Senator and Secretary of State. And so I just want to know how you feel about your role in that violence and how you plan to reverse it?... those policies were actually extensions of white supremacist violence against communities of color. And so, I just think I want to hear a little bit about that, about the fact that actually while ... those policies were being enacted, they were ripping apart families ... and actually causing death.

In response, Clinton tried to change the subject. (On August 25, 2015, [Reader Supported News published](#) my long report on Clinton’s dismal and unresponsive meeting with Black Lives Matter people in Keene, New Hampshire. The event was reported by others as well, but not widely.) Perhaps that limited coverage contributed to Clinton’s willingness to claim, absolutely falsely, that nobody had ever asked her before. Perhaps she gambled that no one would remember, or even google, the truth.

And she would have won that bet with one of the best columnists at The New York Times,

Charles M. Blow, whose work is consistently probing and thoughtful. Just not this time - in his February 29 piece, "[I'm Not A Super Predator](#)," about Ashley Williams, he quotes Hillary Clinton saying, "You're the first person to ask me ..." about mass incarceration of minorities.

"How could this be true? How was this possible?" Blow wrote, with instinctive, accurate skepticism. But he accepted the Clinton claim's veracity at face value, apparently not bothering to do basic fact-checking of a claim that is not even close to being true. This Clinton dishonesty was not widely reported. And Blow, having accepted the truth of Clinton's falsehood, used it in a weird kind of victim-blaming:

In that moment, I knew that the people of my generation had failed the people of Williams's. Her whole life has borne the bruises of what was done, largely by Democrats, when I was the age she is now.

She said she has grown up knowing families and whole communities devastated by vanishing black people, swept away into a criminal justice system that pathologized their very personage. That night, Williams forced a reckoning.

But that's not true. There has been no reckoning, not so far as Clinton is concerned. There is no Clinton acceptance of responsibility or accountability for inhumane policies, the Democratic Party is still in bed with those who want to privatize government, and the establishment candidate and her party have yet to promise any serious change, much less any real improvement. The private prison scam will continue to be just one more way to loot the public treasury, while having the perverse effect of pressuring governments from local to federal to keep arresting people fast enough and jailing them long enough to keep the profits flowing to people who have no vested interest in justice, rehabilitation, or freedom. Black lives don't matter to the bottom line of the prison-industrial complex any more than they matter to Hillary Clinton.

What *does* matter to Hillary Clinton? Or Bernie Sanders?

Clinton gives the game away at the end of her brief encounter with Ashley Williams in Charleston. As the black college graduate student is led away by security for objecting to policies that destroy black lives, Clinton says calmly, revealing her actual priorities, "OK, back to the issues."

In other words, more than two decades of life-destroying criminal policy that she helped implement and support is not an issue for her. She might just as well have said, "I will talk only to white people," which is pretty much what she did for the rest of the evening.

Ashley Williams has also criticized Sanders for voting for the 1994 Violent Crime Act. At the time, April 13, 1994, he also spoke out strongly against the likely - now actual - [consequences of the crime bill](#), concluding:

Mr. Speaker, it is my firm belief that clearly, there are some people in our society who are horribly violent, who are deeply sick and sociopathic, and clearly these people must be put behind bars in order to protect society from them. But it is also my view that through the neglect of our Government and through a grossly irrational set of priorities, we are dooming tens of millions of young people to a future of bitterness, misery, hopelessness, drugs, crime, and violence. And Mr. Speaker, all the jails in the world, and we already imprison

more people per capita than any other country, and all of the executions in the world, will not make that situation right. We can either educate or electrocute. We can create meaningful jobs, rebuilding our society, or we can build more jails. Mr. Speaker, let us create a society of hope and compassion, not one of hate and vengeance.

This demonstrates that the consequences of the crime bill were knowable in 1994, and that some people knew them. This also illustrates the political pressure politicians were feeling about “crime” issues, leading some like Bernie Sanders to vote for a “solution” that he did not believe to be any solution at all. There is no such contemporary prescience expressed by either of the Clintons, leaving their supporters [to defend horrible policies](#) with weak excuses like, well, lots of people supported it. One of them in 1994 was Hillary Clinton, whose [hardline defense of more cops and more prisons](#) contains no compensating humane concern even close to what Sanders expressed.

More than fifty years of commitment to civil rights has earned Sanders only a tiny fraction of the black vote in primaries so far, despite articulate and heartfelt [support from black rapper Killer Mike](#) talking about Hillary Clinton’s cold dismissal of Ashley Williams and Black Lives Matter – “The only person that I have the conscience to vote for is Bernard Sanders, I know that the only person that my logical, beautiful black mind will allow me to vote for is Senator Bernie Sanders!” His argument has yet to gain significant traction with black voters. On February 29, before the black vote crushed him in South Carolina, [Sanders told a rally](#):

There is no rational reason why a black male baby born today has a one-in-four chance of ending up in jail. That’s a disgrace. And together, we are going to bring justice to a broken criminal justice system.

Hillary Clinton could have said something like that to Ashley Williams at that mostly-white fundraiser in Charleston. She didn’t say anything like that. She didn’t even make the effort. With the removal of the black nuisance, Hillary Clinton said only: “OK, back to the issues.” Three days later, at a Hillary Clinton rally in Atlanta, two Georgia State University students were [removed for holding “Black Lives Matter” signs](#). The Clinton campaign denied any responsibility.

William M. Boardman has over 40 years experience in theatre, radio, TV, print journalism, and non-fiction, including 20 years in the Vermont judiciary. He has received honors from Writers Guild of America, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Vermont Life magazine, and an Emmy Award nomination from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

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