

Hip-Hop Needs to Back Abolition of the Death Penalty

Written by Robert ID2543

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The execution of Stanley Tookie Williams III, who was executed December 13th, 2005 by the state of California, brought the death penalty to the attention of the hip-hop community more than any other state ordered execution. Stanley Tookie Williams III was one of 60 people put to death last year by the government of the US.

Many rallies and protests were held by and or attended by hip-hop grass roots activist, many influential hip-hop and rap artists, religious leaders, politicians, Hollywood notables, death penalty opponents and many from every walk of life, but the peoples pleas for clemency fell on deaf ears.

All that was done in Tookie's case was a good start, but after reading the following information it is important that hip-hop artists start rapping about meaningful topics for a change. Rappers need to use their power to change things not just "good time" rap.

Amnesty International's new 'Worldwide Death Penalty Report' finds that the United States is still among the top executing countries in the world; and we look at other nations and blame them for genocide.

During 2005, at least 2,148 people were executed in 22 countries and at least 5,186 people were sentenced to death in 53 countries, Amnesty International disclosed today in its annual report on the death penalty worldwide. Across the world 20,000 people are scheduled to be killed by their own governments.

With 60 executions carried out in 2005, the United States remains one of the top executing countries, along with China, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Together the four nations accounted for 94 percent of all executions worldwide.

Despite these shocking figures, the global trend toward abolition of the death penalty continues to grow: the number of countries carrying out executions halved in the last 20 years and has dropped for the fourth consecutive year in a row. In 2005, Mexico and Liberia became the two most recent examples of countries that have abolished the death penalty.

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"Around the world, public officials are realizing that government-sponsored punitive killing is unjust and ineffective at its very core: it is a cruel and unusual form of retribution that has no deterrent effect," said Dr. William F. Schulz, executive director of Amnesty International USA (AIUSA). "Meanwhile, as one of the four most active death penalty countries, the United States remains a glaring exception to this growing global consensus. AIUSA members are doing all they can to help put the United States back on the right side of history."

The Amnesty International report uncovers chilling facts about the other three top executing countries. In China, a person can be put to death for as many as 68 crimes, including non-violent infringements like tax fraud, embezzlement, and drug offenses. Lucrative deals are made in selling organs extracted from those who have been executed. China also accounts for almost 80 percent of all executions, with data available to Amnesty International indicating some 1,770 individuals put to death last year. Undoubtedly the real figure is much higher, with one Chinese legal expert recently estimating the true figure at around 8,000.

Iran executed at least 94 people last year and was the only country known to have executed juvenile offenders during that period. It put to death at least eight individuals for crimes committed while they were children, including two who were still under age 18 at the time of their execution.

In Saudi Arabia, people have been taken from their prison cells and executed without knowing that a death sentence had been passed against them. Others have been tried and sentenced to death in a language they neither spoke nor read. Saudi Arabia executed at least 86 people in 2005.

In the United States, two men were released from death row in 2005 after evidence of their innocence emerged. In February, an Ohio judge fully acquitted Derrick Jamison in the murder for which he had received a death sentence two decades earlier. In November, a Pennsylvania jury dismissed all charges against Harold Wilson, who had been convicted in a triple murder in 1989. Jamison and Wilson became respectively the 120th and 121st death row inmates to be found innocent since 1973.

In March of last year, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the execution of juvenile offenders was unconstitutional, outlawing the practice. The United States had previously been a

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world leader in juvenile executions.

"Though it remains a national shame that the United States was the last country to formally reject executing juvenile offenders, we applaud the Supreme Court's ruling and hope it proves to be a harbinger of things to come in this country," said Sue Gunawardena-Vaughn, AIUSA's director of the Program to Abolish the Death Penalty. "And while AIUSA celebrated last year's acquittals of Derrick Jamison and Harold Wilson, their cases serve as grim reminders of the fundamentally arbitrary and capricious nature of capital punishment."

The 60 prisoners executed in the United States in 2005 brought to 1,004 the total number executed since the use of the death penalty resumed in 1977; 12 more executions have been carried out thus far in 2006. The State of North Carolina plans to execute Willie Brown in the early hours of April 21. Approximately 3,400 prisoners were on death rows across the United States as of Jan. 1, 2006. The death penalty is on the books in 38 states and is retained under military and federal law.

For a copy of Amnesty International's Death Penalty Statistics 2005, please see:

-- World Developments: <http://amnestyusa.org/abolish/developments>

-- Facts and Figures: <http://amnestyusa.org/abolish/figures>

-- Death Sentences and Executions: <http://amnestyusa.org/abolish/sentences>

For more on AIUSA's Program to Abolish the Death Penalty, please see: <http://amnestyusa.org/abolish>

Some information on Stanley Tookie Williams III

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Stanley Tookie Williams III, was 51 years old when he was executed December 13th, 2005 by the state of California,

Stanley was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, but grew up in an impoverished South Central Los Angeles.

Stanley Tookie Williams III was the co-founder, along with Raymond Washington, of the widely-known Crips street gangs in Los Angeles, California. The east side Crips were formed by Raymond "Truck" Washington in 1969. Stanley Tookie Williams joined Washington in 1971, forming the west side Crips.

Many people sometimes mistakenly believe that "Tookie" is a gang nickname, but in fact it was his middle name, shared by Stanley Williams and his father, Stanley T. Williams Jr.

Stanley Tookie Williams had turned his life around while in prison and wrote many books, some directed toward children trying to inform them of the dangers of 'gang life'.

In 2001 Stanley Tookie Williams was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. His life in prison had become exactly what the prison system is supposed to want to see; a reformed inmate who became a contributor to society.

In 1981, Stanley Tookie Williams was convicted and sentenced to death for the 1979 murders of four people in two separate incidents. Stanley Tookie Williams had always claimed his innocence in these crimes.