

# AN African-American Perspective

This newsletter is published by RCJamesDesign, P.O. Box 1181, Williamsport, PA 17703 • [www.rcjamesdesign.net/African-American](http://www.rcjamesdesign.net/African-American)

## Are You REGISTERED to VOTE?



***Pundits say that voters are angry and frustrated. Are you exhausted defending President Obama from vicious political attacks?***

On Monday (9/20/2010) while at the "Investing in America" town hall meeting to discuss the state of the American economy a self described middle-class African American woman, Velma Hart, who is the CFO of a veteran's service organization, told President Obama: "Quite frankly, I'm exhausted. I'm exhausted of defending you, defending your administration, defending the mantle of change that I voted for, and deeply disappointed with where we are right now. I have been told that I voted for a man who said he was going to change things in a meaningful way for the middle class. I'm one of those people. And I'm waiting, sir. I'm waiting. I -- I don't feel it yet...Is this my new reality?"



***Exhausted Velma Hart on CNBC***

Also, unfounded bias and bigoted attacks by conservatives such as former House speaker Newt Gingrich and Dinesh D'Souza, validate the perception that the Republican Party does not welcome independent minded people of color. According to Gingrich, "What if [Obama] is so outside our comprehension, that only if you understand Kenyan, anti-colonial behavior, can you begin to piece together [his actions] ...That is the most accurate, predictive model for his behavior."

Statement's such as these will not win many friends or positively influence people. Even with that being

true, it must be noted and understood by President Obama and his advisors that he will begin to lose significant support within the African-American community if he and the Democratic Party do not begin to target much needed relief to the community. They have it wrong when they say to help white America will help black America. "Trickle-Down Economics" failed during the Reagan administration and will fail today. A rising tide may lift all boats but will not lift them equally. Helping black America will help white America. Long-term success must come from the bottom up, not the top down.

Dr. Wilmer Leon

<http://www.thegrio.com/politics/are-african-americans-exhausted-with-defending-obama.php>

# The Modern Caste System for Blacks and Browns

*Jarvious Cotton cannot vote. Like his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather, he has been denied the right to participate in our electoral democracy. Cotton's family tree tells the story of several generations of black men who were born in the United States but who were denied the most basic freedom that democracy promises - the freedom to vote for those who will make the rules and laws that govern one's life. Cotton's great-great-grandfather could not vote as a slave. His great-grandfather was beaten to death by the Klu Klux Klan for attempting to vote. His grandfather was prevented from voting by Klan intimidation. His father was barred from voting by poll taxes and literacy tests. Today Jarvious Cotton cannot vote because he, like many black men in the United States, has been labeled a felon and is currently on parole.\**

<http://www.newjimcrow.com/>

That is the first paragraph of the new book, *The New Jim Crow, Mass Incarceration in the age of Color Blindness*, by Michelle Alexander, a law professor at Ohio State University. Promoting her book on TV, Ms. Alexander has carefully traced the systematic disenfranchisement of African-Americans. She has presented a disturbing and almost irrefutable conclusion – Black and Brown Americans have become the raw material of the Prison Industrial Complex. Putting “people of color” behind bars has become a very profitable big business. Ms. Alexander argues that the growing industry has spawned a caste system where Black men are permanently labeled as felons. In many states felons are denied the right to vote.

**Here are a few facts:** *The U. S. Bureau of Justice Statistics* says that in 2008, over 7.3 million people were on probation, in jail or prison, or on parole at yearend — 3.2% of all U.S. adult residents or 1 in every 31 adults. In 1997, about 9% of the black population in the U.S. was under some form of correctional supervision compared to 2% of the white population and over 1% of other races.

<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=11>

*The Sentencing Project's report, Uneven Justice: State Rates of Incarceration by Race and Ethnicity (July 2007)* states:

- African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six (5.6) times the rate of whites;

- Hispanics are incarcerated at nearly double (1.8) the rate of whites;
- States exhibit substantial variation in the ratio of black-to-white incarceration, ranging from a high of 13.6-to-1 in Iowa to a low of 1.9-to-1 in Hawaii;
- States with the highest black-to-white ratio are disproportionately located in the Northeast and Midwest, including the leading states of Iowa, Vermont, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Wisconsin. This geographic concentration is true as well for the Hispanic-to-white ratio, with the most disproportionate states being Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New York, New Hampshire, and New Jersey; and,
- States exhibiting high Black or Hispanic ratios of incarceration compared to whites fall into two categories: 1) those such as Wisconsin and Vermont which have high rates of black incarceration and average rates of white incarceration; and, 2) states such as New Jersey and Connecticut which have average rates of black incarceration and below-average rates of white incarceration. In both cases, the ratio of incarceration by race is higher than average.

[http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd\\_statisticsofinbyraceandethnicity.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/rd_statisticsofinbyraceandethnicity.pdf)

*The Charles Hamilton Houston Institute* identified the process of harvesting young Black men to feed the Prison Machine:

The School to Prison Pipeline describes the tragic journey that begins in segregated, impoverished schools and ends in juvenile halls and adults prisons for far too many children of color. Youths traveling through this pipeline are frequently taught by unqualified teachers in overcrowded, dilapidated facilities, forced to endure sub-standard curriculum, tested on material they were never taught, removed to separate and inadequate special education programs, repeatedly suspended, expelled and even arrested for relatively minor offenses, held back in grade, banished to alternative schools, before they finally drop or are pushed out of school, thus tripling the likelihood that they will spend time in prison.

<http://charleshamiltonhouston.org/Projects/Project.aspx?id=100005>

**Who has the right to vote?** *The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania* says that if you live in Pennsylvania consider yourself fortunate:

There are many myths about who has lost the right to vote. In many counties, election and prison officials are confused about the voting rights of felons and may even be giving out bad information. Too many felons think that they can never vote again, or that they must wait five years.

**Here are the facts:**

**Under Pennsylvania law, felons who have been released from prison, or who will be freed by the time of the election, are eligible to vote. This is true even if they are on parole or probation. Only those felons who are incarcerated are not allowed to vote. Voting rights are automatically restored upon release from prison.**

The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania is committed to making sure that everyone's right to vote is protected. If you know of an eligible voter who has been in prison and is having trouble registering to vote or being allowed to vote, please have him or her contact the ACLU of Pennsylvania at one of our three offices:

- Philadelphia Office toll-free: 1-877-PHL-ACLU
- Harrisburg Office toll-free 1-877-HBG-ACLU
- Pittsburgh Office toll-free 1-877-PGH-ACLU

For more information about voting, go to

<http://www.aclupa.org/issues/votingissues/votingrightsofexfelons.htm>

**Pennsylvania's Eligibility for Convicted Felons**

The Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania ruled on December 26, 2000 that the Pennsylvania law prohibiting convicted felons from registering to vote for five years after their release from prison is unconstitutional. Consequently, if completing an older version of the Voter Registration Mail Application (VRMA) form, a convicted felon who has been released from prison may make application to register to vote by striking through the felony conviction line at Section 9(2) on the VRMA and signing his or her name.

Convicted felons who are incarcerated on the date of a primary or general election are not eligible to vote, regardless of whether they are registered. However, pre-trial detainees and misdemeanants are eligible to register to vote and/or to vote by absentee ballot if they otherwise qualify to vote under law.

[http://www.votespa.com/portal/server.pt/community/register\\_to\\_vote/13518/voter\\_registration\\_requirements](http://www.votespa.com/portal/server.pt/community/register_to_vote/13518/voter_registration_requirements)

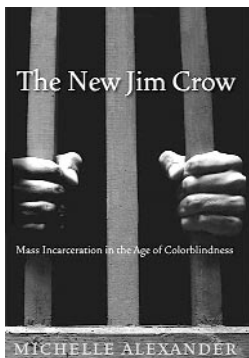
# In Pennsylvania Ex-Felons Can Still Vote



Professor Alexander joined the OSU faculty in 2005. She holds a joint appointment with the Moritz College of Law and the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. Prior to joining the OSU faculty, she was a member of the Stanford Law School faculty, where she served as Director of the Civil Rights Clinic.

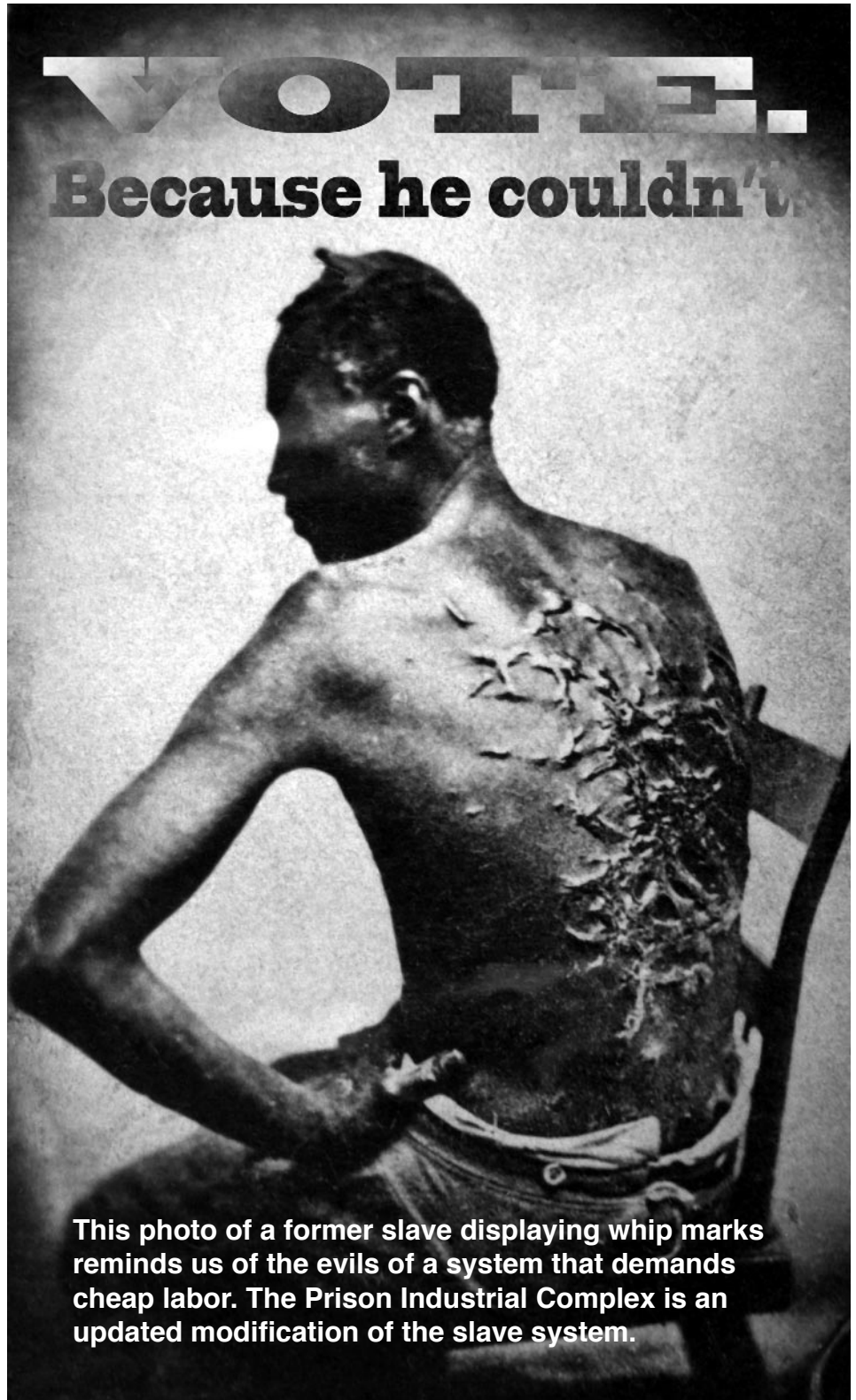
Professor Alexander has significant experience in the field of civil rights advocacy and litigation. She has litigated civil rights cases in private practice as well as engaged in innovative litigation and advocacy efforts in the non-profit sector. For several years, Professor Alexander served as the Director of the Racial Justice Project for the ACLU of Northern California, which spearheaded a national campaign against racial profiling by law enforcement. While an associate at Saperstein, Goldstein, Demchak & Baller, she specialized in plaintiff-side class action suits alleging race and gender discrimination.

Professor Alexander is a graduate of Stanford Law School and Vanderbilt University. Following law school, she clerked for Justice Harry A. Blackmun on the United States Supreme Court, and for Chief Judge Abner Mikva on the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit.



Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow* is available on Amazon.com.

\*excerpt from book used with author's permission.



**VOTE.**  
**Because he couldn't**

**This photo of a former slave displaying whip marks reminds us of the evils of a system that demands cheap labor. The Prison Industrial Complex is an updated modification of the slave system.**

*The American experience has not been kind to African-Americans. Our Right to vote is slowly being eroded away. October 4 -Last day to register before the General Election. November 2 is the general election. There are over 70,000 voters in Lycoming County. But, in the City of Williamsport, there are more registered Democrats than Republicans . You can make a difference.*



# Do the Right Thing. Vote, it's Your Right.

## Are You Eligible to Vote?

To register to vote in Pennsylvania, you must be:

- A citizen of the United States for at least one month before the next primary, special, municipal, or general election.
- A resident of Pennsylvania and the election district in which you want to register and vote for at least 30 days before the next primary, special, municipal, or general election.
- At least 18 years of age on or before the day of the next primary, special, municipal, or general election.

Once you have registered to vote, you are not required to register again unless you change your residence, name, or political party affiliation.

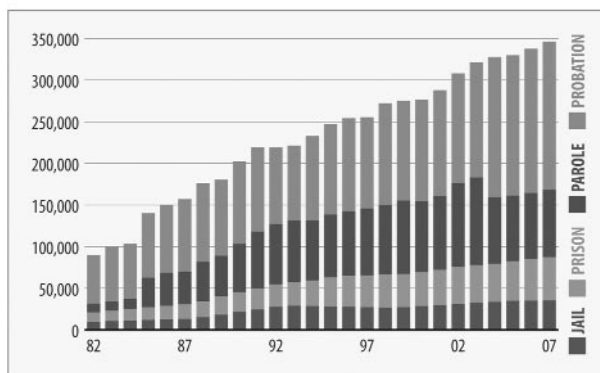
Please note that any intentional false statement made on an application for voter registration constitutes perjury and is punishable by law.

## Eligibility for Primary Elections (in the spring of the year. November's the General Election.)

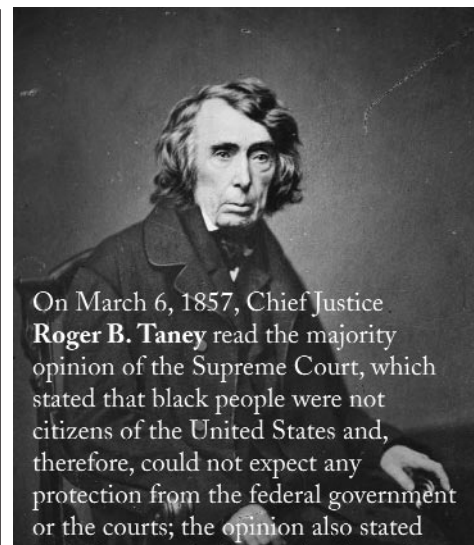
A primary election is an election in which a political party nominates its candidates for an upcoming general election. The rules for voting in primary elections vary from state to state. In Pennsylvania:

- You must be registered and enrolled in a political party to vote in that party's primary.
- All registered voters are entitled to vote on Constitutional amendments, ballot questions and in all special elections that might be held at the same time as a primary election.

**The chart at right shows the rising population of the total correctional system from 1982 to 2007. In 2008, 1.84 billion was spent on corrections in Pennsylvania. Incarceration is a growth industry.**



Source: [www.pewcenteronthestates.org/publicsafety](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/publicsafety)



On March 6, 1857, Chief Justice **Roger B. Taney** read the majority opinion of the Supreme Court, which stated that black people were not citizens of the United States and, therefore, could not expect any protection from the federal government or the courts; the opinion also stated that Congress had no authority to ban slavery from a federal territory. The decision of *Scott v. Sandford*, considered by legal scholars to be the worst ever rendered by the Supreme Court, was overturned by the 13th and 14th amendments to the Constitution, which abolished slavery and declared all persons born in the United States to be citizens of the United States.

**Williamsport's Taney Connection**  
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 An African-American Perspective

**REGISTER TO VOTE TODAY!** Last Day to Register is **October 4th!**