

Canadian Hip Hop musician, Drake, has a song entitled, “Started from the Bottom, Now We’re Here” — and we are ---In Ferguson, Missouri. A city under siege; a city under the microscope. Where is ‘here,’ and how could we still be ‘here’?

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), which provides federal oversight of the criminal system for our children, we’ve been ‘here’ for a while, at a serious juncture with an ambiguous label, DMC—or in another millennium, ‘apartheid.’ For more than a decade, the OJJDP has been a leader in efforts to reduce the overrepresentation of minority youth in the Nation's juvenile justice system and has spearheaded the Disproportionate Minority Contact Act (DMC) which mandates programs for every state. *A Disproportionate Minority Contact Chronology: 1988 to Date* outlines a history of this effort. So, how does Missouri stack up? How does WV stack up? According to the Sentencing Project and Bureau of Justice Statistics Data, in Missouri, and West Virginia the ratio of incarceration of blacks to whites is 5.2 to 1 and 5.6 to 1, respectively. Missouri, and West Virginia hover around the national median in the Nation where 25 states have higher disproportions and many are at a level 12 times higher for blacks than whites.

So, where is ‘here’? If it were another country, what would we call ‘here’?

Hopefully, the DMC Coordinator for Missouri and every other state will be invited to participate in reforms which define ‘here’ as a place of opportunity and justice which includes community policing strategies, unconscious bias assessments and law enforcement decision point mapping and analysis. In Ferguson and those suffering outside of the national spotlight, efforts to educate and empower young minorities should be ramped up with Street Law workshops, teen governing initiatives, and career counseling out of the DMC Act and our tax dollars. Included in the resources that the OJJDP already offers on its website, www.ojjdp.gov/dmc, is a technical assistance manual, the *Disproportionate Minority Contact Technical Assistance Manual, 4th Edition* which provides detailed guidance on DMC identification, monitoring, assessment, intervention, and evaluation. Its intended audience is Juvenile Justice Specialists, members of State Planning Agencies and State Advisory Groups, DMC researchers and consultants, and policymakers and practitioners involved in the juvenile justice system at the state and local levels. That’s a great place for Chiefs of Police to reform. Its companion publication, *Reducing Disproportionate Minority Contact: Preparation at the Local Level* describes strategies that states and communities can use to reduce disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system and its first contact, ‘the po-po.’ It includes useful "how to" information drawn from the manual and presents important background on the context in which local preparation takes place—media coverage and public attitudes about crime, race, and youth. These tools can offer guidance for community and educational leaders who want to transform their ‘here.’ Our tax dollars are working to create tools and collect data like the following national chart depicting the obvious reality for many in Ferguson, or on the West Side of Charleston. It boils down to Decision Points where law enforcement and prosecutors can use wide discretion.

2011 Case Processing Summary
Counts for Delinquency Offenses

DECISION POINTS	All	White	Minority	Black	AIAN*	AHPI**
Population at risk (ages 10-17)	33,447,300	25,489,300	7,958,000	5,545,900	599,900	1,812,300
Juvenile arrests	1,393,100	918,000	475,000	437,200	18,700	19,100
Cases referred to juvenile court	1,236,200	790,000	446,200	410,900	18,600	16,800

Cases diverted	337,600	239,500	98,100	88,900	4,500	4,700
Cases detained	256,800	150,600	106,200	97,800	4,800	3,700
Cases petitioned	664,100	398,400	265,700	245,600	10,700	9,400
Cases adjudicated	391,700	241,700	150,000	137,400	7,400	5,200
Adjudicated cases resulting in probation	250,100	159,000	91,000	82,500	4,800	3,700
Adjudicated cases resulting in placement	95,900	54,500	41,400	38,600	1,700	1,100
Cases judicially waived	5,400	3,000	2,400	2,200	100	<50

* AIAN: American Indian or Alaskan Native.

** AHPI: Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander

<http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/dmcdm/asp/display.asp?year=2011&offense=1&displaytype=counts>

Sadly, it's obvious that the next category for data collection will be 'the use of lethal force.'

Overall incarceration rates of adult offenders compiled by the Prison Policy Initiatives, demonstrate that the contact in the juvenile system can set up segments of the population for lifetime reverberations.



<http://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/raceinc.html>

So, where is 'here'?

An overgeneralized scan of the last 50 years suggests that question has no easy answer. From the 60's on, historical context changed and civil liberties improved, but by the 80's much of our national awe was drawn to the plights of a flattened world through the rise of technology. We *globalized* with the www, and *capitalized* with Wall Street Ponzi schemes, and *anesthetized* with drugs and media, while the efforts of the 60's and 70's for Civil Rights in our backyards seemed to stagnate. By the 90's, as our attention moved to places like Cape Town, South Africa and skirmishes in the Gulf (of Saudi Arabia) instead of Hometown, America, many of us were heard to mutter that we never got the "We *HAVE* overcome," memo from Ms. Coretta which gave us the liberty to abandon our own struggles for those abroad. Yet, resting on our laurels, the nation waged war against external threats like drug cartels, immigrants, and the axis of evil which managed the economic dominance we would squander through the sub-prime mortgages of the 3%. We measured carbon footprints and regulated emissions in Brazil and China while our car companies built gas guzzling shrines and stoked coal fires with hot air. We are the world. Yet in terms of power, leadership and equity issues in places leading to Ferguson, we suffered the outrages of

the Rodney King's, Abner Diallo's, Trayvon Martin's, and now Michael Brown's at the hands of those entrusted as civil or community servants to protect them. . . We're still 'here.'

We are infuriated that the democratic process alone didn't take care of itself in Ferguson and other places and institutions like it. Like other fledgling democracies in Egypt or elsewhere, it takes vigilance. America's experiment in cultural inclusivity is flawed in many ways, but one reality is that dominant groups are as determined to preserve a sense of order in the experience created by their dominance, as those waiting for their turn. For those waiting, being shut out of the experience and insight that are passed through the 'in group,' is the 'Catch 22' — obviously many in positions of power are most comfortable with passing to those who share their experience. It would seem that passing the torch is easier if you don't have to bend too much. And although many, if not the majority, of those belonging to the dominant culture in America want a more perfect union, they may not want to abdicate the seats of power to achieve it. Theoretical egalitarians have families to feed, too. That may be one reason we are still 'here,' -- how unjust, nepotistic, systems are perpetuated--in law enforcement, in schools, at universities, in boardrooms, in politics in places like Ferguson or Dade County or Charleston.

Drake finishes his song with, "*Story stayed the same* through the money and the fame, but started from the bottom, Now we're here."

Let's *change* this story. The organization, mothers of color america, is open to those who take their role as "MOCA," seriously and as paramount to the success of their children. Our children are not part of the dominant culture of America based on historical race strata, or historical legacy inheritance, or historical religious affiliation. However, our inherent dominance within MOCA is based on the vigilance we share. A vigilance that's required to help develop this Nation into a more perfect union for our children. A vigilance that's required to prevent the bloods of our children to cry out on the streets. . . we're here! Ever again. We'll start, and hopefully finish, with words leading to enlightenment, and *Actual* Egalitarianism. Our perfect democracy is a work progressing and our Nation's President and his cabinet, attest to that. But the disenfranchisement and marginalization of the majority of people of color, and in poverty can't be abated by the success of a few. Nor should it be. But it's a place to start, if we are vigilant about breaking the cycles of dominance which stand in the way of progress and unity.

Gregg Suzanne Ferguson McAllister

Founder—mothersofcoloramerica