



What if Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now* had Covered the Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March?

by Donald "C-Note" Hooker

On January 21, 2017, in Washington, D.C., the Women's March was held. Two-hundred and ten-days later, on August 19, 2017, in Washington, D.C., the Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March was held. Two-hundred and fourteen-days after that, on March 24, 2018, in Washington, D.C., the March for Our Lives was held. I became aware of Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now* and the work they do four-years-ago. Their on the ground reporting at the Women's March was excellent.

Sometime thereafter, I became aware of the Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March. Seeing the crowd turnout for the Women's March, this was an opportunity to have similiar crowds showcasing public support in the cause of the prisoner. I told anybody I could about the Prisoner March. I created a graphic design about the event that included the contact information

to the event organizers. I then had the design printed on paper as stationary and distributed it to the prison population. When asked by various prisoners, "Why are you doing this?" I told them, "It is our responsibility to assist those in society who are helping us behind the wall." While this was my message, many didn't seem to get it. One day we had visitors to give us entrepreneurial advice. I shared this stationary and it went over extremely well. One group was a Silicon Beach start-up that specializes in Social Justice Promotion. Two-weeks later, I reached out to this group to help promote the Prisoner March, and was temporarily suspended from my entrepreneurial group for doing so.

For the past two-years, every Saturday, I have been working with the Nation of Islam and their Fruit of Islam (FOI), regarding Minister Farrakhan's "10,000 Fearless," the call for men and women to be involved in neighborhood conflict resolution. On Saturday, the day of the Prisoner March, I skipped this weekly meeting to watch Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now* cover the Prisoner March. This didn't happen. It happened nowhere on Broadcast T.V.; eventho this was a nationwide March.

On Saturday, August 12, 2017, in Charlottesville, Virginia, Heather Heyer was fatally killed in a hit and run during a protest rally of White Nationalist. A week later on the 19th, rallies were held across the country protesting Heyer's death. These rallies were covered in the national press and *Democracy Now*.

While our Prisoner rallies were nationwide, and multitude of people did participate, we did not reach critical mass to

capture the public imagination. And "Why was that?" I list poor planning by the national event organizers, poor funding, and a lethargic laissez faire attitude by the prisoner population in getting family members involved.

Long time Penal Reformers and Abolitionist have seen the failures of individuals with big ideas but poor managerial skills, or lack of staffing to support those ideas. Oprah Winfrey and George Clooney gave March for Our Lives \$500,000 each. It is not as tho Penal Reform movements don't have their arts and entertainment supporters and other philanthropist. 2.3-million times the number of family members affected by their imprisonment and America can mobilize a formidable March for Prisoners.

We are living in an age where social movements are becoming aware that support must be intersectional, meaning across social movements. To those who rally and use the "Prisoner's Voice," to raise awareness and fundraise off of, must understand that they must help to create stars-behind-bars. To the uninitiated, American prison-culture, influences American street-culture. American street-culture, influences American pop-culture. And American pop-culture, influences Global culture. Cultural capital can be made into real capital. The currency capital of a reality TV star is their fame. That means making stars-behind-bars out of our writers and artist becomes a form of leverage or cultural currency in the planning and promoting of events. It also means giving back to those artisans financially. This acts as an incentive for the prisoner-artist to go deeper into the mastery of their art. It also spurs broader prisoner

participation in learning about the creative process, and how to become involved in the movement. And studies show, that participation in the arts is a known quantum in producing a more actualized returning citizen. Social media advance posting, scheduling tools, such as Hootsuite and Facebook Page Manager allows for the reposting of a prisoner's work, or links to their work, several times in any given month, week, or day. The same programming technique Record labels use with radio or streaming to capture the public's imagination with their artist. While much progress has been made, the mere fact that one March came 210-days before our March, with mass media coverage, and the other 214-days after our March with mass media coverage, shows we have a long way in capturing the public's imagination here in the United States.

[C-Note has written for *Prison Action News*, *California Prison Focus*, and *Mprisoned Thotz*. He's been written about in *People*, *Darealprisonart* and *KCET-Los Angeles's Departures*. In 2017, Google Search listed him as both America's and the world's most prolific prisoner artist.]