



## **Desley Brooks** **Councilmember District 6**

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### **COMMENTARY** *from the* **Offices of Oakland City Councilmember Desley Brooks**

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#### **No Apologies for My Actions**

*By Oakland City Councilmember Desley Brooks*

According to Jasmyne Cannick's, African-Americans who rallied for clemency for Stanley "Tookie" Williams must do the same for Clarence Ray Allen, a non-black, 76-year-old blind man just weeks away from execution. My response to this statement is why?

Why must the African American community publicly explain or justify its actions or inactions around Clarence Ray Allen's impending execution? Why doesn't Ms. Cannick ask why are the international community, press, and any number of other racial, ethnic, and religious groups who also supported Stanley's clemency appeal noticeably absent on Mr. Allen's case? How is it that African Americans must now shoulder the burden of publicly and vehemently opposing every execution that ever occurs, and if they fail to do so, this is somehow dispositive proof of racism?

Even if blacks supported Stan because he was black, is that wrong? According to a recent Santa Clara Law Review published study, blacks are 3 times more likely to receive a death sentence if convicted of killing a white person. The study also indicated that African Americans comprise only 6 percent of California's population, but represent over 36 percent of California's death row inhabitants. Clearly race has something to do with the death penalty so the killing of another black man with such haste and an unwillingness to pursue the truth galvanized many African Americans to support Stanley's clemency appeal.

Ms. Cannick's position is overly simplistic and fails to comprehend the complexity of issues associated with support of Stanley's clemency appeal. His was no ordinary case. It was reported that never had an execution received such widespread media coverage. The reality is that the vast majority of executions do not generate any significant amount of media or public attention. Moreover, two distinct yet connected issues converged into the groundswell of support for Stanley Tookie Williams - his compelling clemency foundation and growing public opposition to the death penalty.

Stanley Tookie Williams was a phenomenal man. He connected with people in a very profound way. Without exception, every person, white or black, who met with Stan, spoke of his ability to inspire, his unconditional and unwavering faith, his demonstrated redemption and rehabilitation, and his uncompromising commitment to work for peace and non-violence. In addition, yes, Stan wrote children's books, created gang truce protocols, created anti-gang and anti-violence programs for youth, and was nominated six times for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Essentially, Ms. Cannick missed the fundamental point. The public call for Stanley's clemency was based on demonstrated redemption and greater public benefit, not denial of guilt, although real questions on this have also surfaced. No corresponding case has been made for Mr. Allen. Even with this wealth of attributes and support, Stanley was denied clemency. Other than our general death penalty opposition, what is the redemption argument for Mr. Allen, a 76-year-old blind man who is primarily known for arranging successful contract murders from prison? Instead of trying to guilt African Americans into blindly arguing for clemency for Mr. Allen, Ms. Cannick's time could have been better spent educating people about his case and providing them with advocacy tools.

Finally, I resent Ms. Cannick's presumption that she is all knowing of every African American and/or every African American Leader's actions relative to the death penalty. Since first meeting Stan in late November, visiting with him during his last hours on this earth, standing outside the prison awaiting his State administered murder, and attending his funeral, I made a personal vow to publicly raise my voice in opposition to the death penalty. To that end, I have spoken to individuals and groups. I sponsored a resolution in support of Assembly Bill 1121 to impose a moratorium on the death penalty in California, and asked other elected officials to do the same. The resolution was unanimously passed by the Oakland City Council on January 3, 2006.

Ms. Cannick should ask herself what kind of message is sent when she becomes an apologist for hate-mongers and asks the African American community to blindly act without sufficient information.