

Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty

On Wings of Hope

Project Hope



Volume 24 Issue I

Jan - Mar 2020

**Execute
Justice
Not
People**

STILL THE OTHER VOICE

We are still stunned by the event of 3.5.20 when the powers that be in Alabama murdered an innocent man, Nathaniel Woods. Not that we had not seen this before, we had but each time the hurt, the loss, the grief is new and the question is always how do we turn emotions into action to honor the man who was so ruthlessly and cruelly murdered by Alabama?

There is some consolation that it appears as though this time there will be a reckoning for the very mentally sick and ignorant leaders of this state. Their criminal act when they murdered Nathaniel Woods, an innocent man in the death house at Holman did not remain secret but resonated, shocked and horrified this country. Article after article in and out of this state, even articles in French and German expressed shock about what they did. Their refusal to listen to individuals with more powerful voices than ours here on death row, men like Martin Luther King III and Senator Doug Jones did not go unnoticed.

It prompted native son Cody Lyon journalist of the Daily News to write in his *article Alabama's blind vengeance. The execution of Nathaniel Woods* : "Since 1976, Alabama has executed 67 individuals, putting it in the top ten among states that kill individuals in the people's name. Nonetheless, Alabama also consistently has one of the nation's highest homicide and violent crime rates. Advocates for the death penalty like to say capital punishment serves as a deterrent to violent crime. But year after year, my sweet home Alabama seems to have been proving that lame argument is flat out wrong." We hope that Governor Ivey, Attorney General Steve Marshall and Senator Cam Ward are listening!

And the final quote is from COMMONDREAMS.ORG: "After the state of Alabama on Thursday night executed 44-year-old Nathaniel Woods despite serious concerns about injustices in his case, Rep. Ayanna Pressley and other lawmakers and civil rights advocates implored Congress to abolish the death penalty nationwide."

We return to the question which is what will we do, what will I do, what will you do to honor the memory of Nathaniel Woods and of all who were murdered by Alabama after the outrage has faded and there are no longer any headlines? Not to oversimplify but In the end action is the only thing that counts and so we will continue to get the word out, work with other organizations and activists who also believe that all life is sacred in order to fulfill our mandate to BE THE OTHER VOICE!

Esther

DRUGS, A RECURRENT THEME

If one were to take a poll on death row or in maximum security prisons in this too often called "great county" of ours one would find drugs to be a recurrent theme. So what is the answer by our so called justice system? Kill ' em or throw away the key! Have we solved anything, have we gone to the root of the problem? Of course not because there will be others to take the place of those murdered by the state whether by execution or by life without. Are we as a nation really that dumb in the 21st century that we don't understand cause and effect?

How did we get here, you may ask? There is a saying which places the responsibility squarely on us: "When the drugs came to the neighborhood, nobody cared and when they came to the suburbs it was too late." There is much truth to that but it should not be taken as an excuse to continue on our punitive, ignorant path.

So let's start at the beginning with the astounding revelation that no child was born a drug dealer or an addict. Yes, I know some babies born to addicted mothers will have to be weaned off the drugs but for all intents and purposes the baby was not born an addict. So the next question to be asked is what happened so that in his/her teens, sometimes even earlier they became addicted and or drug dealers?

If that was the only well paying job available, why was that in a nation that can afford to build walls to keep people out but not care for the ones already here? Yes, the nation is responsible but we are part of this nation and so what are we doing as individuals, as politicians? Of course the answer is complex because this is a complicated issue and so I do not want to over simplify but here is a thought. Man is an insecure being. We see that demonstrated in that he has the need to be "the chosen one". Religions are permeated by that need and meet it in different ways, providing feelings of safety.

Have you ever considered that a child needs that as well, that it needs to be a twinkle in someone's eye, that it needs role models who love it not beat it? We are not the government and cannot initiate the reforms needed, although we can speak out and vote. More importantly we can faithfully mentor a child, a teen so that he does not end up being devoured by our so called criminal justice system! Please do that!

Esther

Messages from the March 5th execution of Nathaniel Woods.

Chisholm's sister wishes to release the following statement about the execution of Nathaniel Woods:

I am writing to express my sincere wishes for Governor Ivey to stop the execution of Nathaniel Woods. I am the sister of Harley Chisholm III. I do not think that Nathaniel is guilty of murder. I urge Governor Ivey to reconsider her decision not to intervene. There is no harm in allowing more time for the courts to investigate. I want the new evidence to be brought forward and evaluated by new attorneys. Please do not move forward with the hasty decision to execute Nathaniel. My conscience will not let me live with this if he dies. I beg you to have mercy on him.



Esther,
we made the trip to Montgomery yesterday. In spite of the downpours & hazardous driving conditions. Though the plan was to meet Molly before the 2 PM hand off to the Governor's secretary, our coordination efforts were a few minutes off. But we rallied and the Woods family was able to give their letters with Randal & Gary accompanying them. We pray that all our efforts will have a far reaching affect on the powers that be. Thank you, Molly, for all you did. I'm sorry I didn't get to spend more time with you but Gary's friend needed me more at the time. Esther, we love you, we appreciate you, and we are so pleased that Witness to Innocence reached out to Alabama and made the trip possible for Randal & Gary. We are sending prayers for the Woods family, as well as for Gov Ivey & Steve Marshall, Attorney General of Alabama. May the eyes of their understanding become enlightened to see that "according to Gov Ivey's own words", Alabamians believe in the sanctity of LIFE. May God continue to strengthen all of us to continue the fight for life, and justice..Brenda L Padgett



We thank all of you who wrote, faxed, tweeted and called the Governor to let her know that Alabama does not kill in our name and that we will not condone state assisted homicide. We thank everyone who organized and attended vigils around the state and who joined with us from abroad. We thank the Alabama State Conference of the NAACP, Alabama New South Coalition, SOS, Alabama Arise, Alabama Peace Groups, the Quakers, Oppose, Lifespark, Witness to Innocence as well as ACAT-France for their support. As always, we especially thank our sister organization JAM in Birmingham.

True Justice

What would the U.S. Supreme Court be like if it was not a part of the American Political System? yeahhh, I know - I know, it's "not," but at the same time, IT REALLY IS. To think otherwise would be to give rise to naivete. Presidents select and nominate judges (candidates) for the U.S. Supreme Court who are more favorable to their political party, and their political party's agenda. All judges nominated by the president for the U.S. Supreme Court should be independents. If not all nine of the justices, at least five out of the nine should be independent. When I say independent, I mean independent in the sense that they would be independent of both Republican and Democratic parties.

When you nominate judges from a two party system, over time one party can and will eventually highjack the highest tribunal in the United States. Turning justice into no more than a farce, as it targets political agendas of its fellow party members to feed into the constitutional erosion machine. Take a very good look at the politically stacked Supreme Court as it sits right now, and you'll see the erosion of what used to be a democracy!

A Supreme Court where most of the judges are from one political party will never represent the whole of society that it sits in judgment of. There can be no will of the people when the highest court is not guided by the constitution, TRUE JUSTICE, but rather by political agendas and personal feelings! Can you even respect an opinion from said court? Well you could if you were willing to just allow your naivete to run rampant, or if you're on the winning side of the numbers on the court.

We the people... should expect more, and demand more than to be disrespected in our faces with a blatant disregard to the actual constitutional protections supposedly afforded to every man, woman, and child, no matter race, creed, or political affiliation.

No one's life should hang in the balance based on votes from human beings appointed by other human beings who only want to further their political agenda. In a dictatorship maybe, but in a democracy, that's just ludicrous!

A system that will take life must first give justice.

John J. Curtin, Jr.

Be the Other Voice

Phillips and Boyd



Alabama NewsFirst Quarter 2020

* It is with a heavy heart that we report that the state of Alabama took the life of Nathaniel Woods on March 5, 2020. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, friends, and his attorneys. We hope that they can find solace in the fact that they did everything they could to save Nate. We thank the many individuals and organizations who joined together to call attention to this injustice.

* Vernon Madison who suffered from severe physical and intellectual disabilities passed away in Feb. R.I.P. Vernon! We believe that death came as a friend to spare him ongoing physical and mental suffering.

* Alabama legislature is considering a bill that would eliminate the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals from the death penalty appeals process. It is discouraging to see legislators pandering to the uninformed with these emotional misrepresentations, and we encourage you to contact your representatives in the state house and senate to voice opposition to this bill.

* Alabama Arise Legislative Lobby Day is March 25th. We are proud to have them advocating on our behalf, and we encourage any of you who can go to go.

* We continue to work closely with Dr. Katie Owens-Murphy at UNA in Florence and her Graduate Assistant Ashley Massey on establishing a permanent archive for Project Hope. This will serve as a permanent memorial for the group and our members, as a learning tool for the public, and a record of the history of the death penalty in Alabama. We are grateful for this opportunity, and for UNA Librarian Jennifer Lee Pate for making it possible.

* We encourage all of our supporters to join our e-mail list by sending a blank e-mail to the address provided on our home page www.phadp.org.



Slippin

I've been slippin for about 5 years now, I crawl up, I slip down. Up, down, up, down, always slippin back to the bottom where all is ash. Seems I'm a bit too comfortable down where your only company is yourself and your shame. It's so much easier to ignore your shame when there is no one to point it out.

How unfortunate this I'm a pain freak it seems. Or, I guess you could say it's a most fortunate thing, since it seems to keep me from falling too far to ever get back up. So I keep trying, and most days I do pretty good. Others are not so great and these are the days that scare me most. Those are the days a slip becomes a slide and all that work, all that struggle and pain, go straight to the bottom with me. What to do now? It's all lost again!

Oh wait! Again? Again? Yep! All lost again. But that means I must have gotten it back at some point, right? And that means I can get it back again, right? Damn right it does! And damn right I will! As many times as it takes to get it right and keep what I have earned! as many times as it takes to scrape that teflon off my feet and plant them in stone.

My whole life has been one long war. One I have never bowed to and never will. This is just another battle for who Carey is and will be. I can win this. I know I can, I just hope it doesn't take too long.

The song goes "I'm slippin, I'm fallin, I can't get up." I don't think Imma let that be my chorus. No, I like this one better "I slipped, I fell, I get my ass up!" And one day, when I'm strong enough, I'll never slip again.

To those positive influences in my life. Thank you for not leaving me in the mud. You're more help than you will every know. To those who aren't so positive, when I get up, I will reach down for you. We'll leave the mud behind together!

I slipped, I fell, I will get back up.

Carey Grayson
Z-598 - H-2



DRUGS, A RECURRENT THEME

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Esther

Project Hope

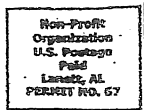


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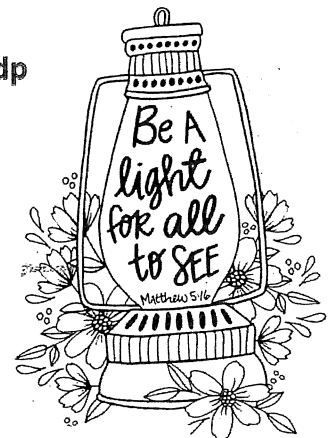
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**EXECUTE JUSTICE,
NOT PEOPLE!**



We know that justice is not done when a human being is murdered, whether it is by an individual or by the State. Thank you for continuing to stand with us so that one day we may overcome at last! R.I.P. Nate!

Esther and the Board of phadp



Uncertainty

There are many common themes in the human condition. We often look at them in a way that divides, or separates us. Looking at a struggle that everyone experiences as something that is mine alone, and that no one else can relate to is a mistake. An easy mistake to make when you're on death row. To think that people can't relate to what you're going through couldn't be farther from the truth.

We all go through the same things. Sure, there may be subtle differences, but we are more alike than we are different. After all, weren't we all made in God's image? Facing the same trials, and temptations in some way, shape, or form?

The same flesh that you struggle with, everyone else does too. Much the same way, every life will have some uncertainty in it.

Mine is not yours, and yours is not mine, but we will all have some.

Accepting that may not rid you of it, but trying to control everything to eliminate it will certainly make it worse.

The same way that sweating the small stuff will open up a chink in your armor, fretting over every uncertainty opens us up to stress and worry. (thieves of joy)

So, the next time you find yourself facing uncertainty, feeling like it's taking your joy, just remember that you're not alone. Don't focus on the fact that your uncertainty is different, but keep in mind that we've all been there, and most importantly, God knows all about it.

"His understanding has no limit" (Psalm 147:5)

Bart Johnson
Z-778 F-18



We appreciate everyone who has supported us over the years, and as time passes our mailing list needs to be updated. If we haven't heard from you in a while, and you still want to receive a paper copy of our newsletter, please let us know. You can simply mail this notice back to us in the envelope included with this newsletter.

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Life's Life

Political ponds
Traded like
Stocks and bonds
Treated like
Coupons
And this flow
Can't be soaked up
Using tampons
Now which truth
Should I expound on
Practice what you preach
or practice what you teach
They're not one and the same
It depends on
The audience you're trying to reach
With understanding
Being the leech
And save your opinions
Just speak what you know
Your life is the water
Seeds need to grow
Live to let
Others live!

Tony Barksdale
Z-611 - F-21



HOW TO HAVE A SAY

While Facebook groups and online petitions can generate buzz about an issue, nothing works better than contacting lawmakers personally. Email is often easy to ignore (just look at the junk in your own inbox), and some activists say a phone call works better.

Lawmakers often hold public hearings on bills, in which anyone can come to speak if they're willing to drive to Montgomery and sign up as a speaker. To find committee meetings with public hearings, go to <http://www.legislature.state.al.us> and click on "meetings and announcements."

A Christian Perspective

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Greetings family and friends,

As we roll on into 2020, I don't have to tell you how difficult it is, or what we're up against advocating to abolish the death penalty in a state like Alabama, but I do want to tell you how uplifting it is to see the support growing and spreading in the state. I am encouraged and very grateful for those who have joined our cause in a sustained and meaningful way.

We have always held the belief that if we could educate our communities about the injustice and unfairness that is inherent with capital punishment, it would convince them to join the fight against it. More and more, we are seeing our efforts bear fruit.

For those of you who join us, I want to remind you that the message of Jesus is one of forgiveness, salvation, and redemption. That "Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever." (Heb 13:8) And because God's grace is always there for us, we can live our lives just as consistently. As we continue in our purpose, He continues to sustain us.

Our mission to end the death penalty is not for the faint of heart, but when things get rough, it is important to remember that God is bigger than our struggles.

Grace be with you all

Bart Johnson
Vice-Chairman, PHADP



Fixate
JUSTICE
Not
People



20/20 Vision

Greetings to all the supporters and readers of this newsletter, PHADP's "On Wings of Hope"

As we begin this new year in 2020, with all its own difficulties and challenges, we are going to need 20/20 vision spiritually as well to help us along the way.

And with the eyes of faith, we will see a God who is almighty, who is sovereign and supreme, who loves us regardless.

He is all wise and powerful, "I am that I am" is His name, though everything else is changeable, He remains the same.

With this new sight, I refuse to be defeated, my eyes are on my God, He has promised that those who wait on Him will renew their strength, they will mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. He has promised to be with me as I tread through this life.

Therefore I'm able to look past my circumstances to heaven's throne above, knowing that my prayers have reached the heart of God, and now I'm resting in His love.

I give thanks to Him in everything, and with 20/20 vision my spiritual eyes are on His face, knowing that the battle is His, the victory is mine, and He will help me win the race.

May the blessing of the Lord be upon you all, and remember to look up, for your redemption draws near!

Earl "Pete" McGahee
Z-466 / H-18

American Justice

Sometimes I can be a slow learner. I just came to a realization that has me feeling like that now...

The justice system, especially here in Alabama, does not care at all if you are guilty or innocent of a crime. If you were properly arrested, tried, and convicted, that's all that matters. And once you reach that point, the only thing that can save your life is if the state (D.A., Judge, etc.) made a serious error during that process, or if a law is changed or created that works in your favor.

After being sentenced to death, in the eyes of the state, you are guilty, even if you are actually innocent. It then becomes a slippery slope because the state looks for every opportunity to shorten your appeals and kill you...Even if they have to bend or break the laws to do it.

The deck is stacked, the odds are grossly in the state's favor, as we sit here wishing, hoping, and playing that the injustices will be corrected, and that we'll eventually be treated fairly. This is the American Justice system! This is how it operates! I was foolish to believe that the truth mattered in my trial. When you live in a "tough on crime" state, you can get ready because there will be people who are innocent, or not guilty of a charge quite as serious as a capital offense being locked up, over sentenced, and killed at the hands of the state. I can't believe it took me 30 years to have my eyes opened.

Nicholas Smith

Resources to Kill

In the court of law you have two types of evidence. Circumstantial evidence- evidence based on inference and not on personal knowledge or observation. Then there's direct evidence- evidence that is based on personal knowledge or observation, and that, if true, proves a fact without inference or presumption. In the case against the death penalty in Alabama, there is no evidence more direct than Walter McMillian, Ray Hinton, and Toforest Johnson. All innocent men convicted and sentenced to death for crimes they didn't commit. Walter spent six years, Ray 30 years, before the state of Alabama was forced to deal with the injustice done to those men. But Toforest Johnson still waits to be set free from death row for a crime he didn't commit. These men, and many more, are the direct evidence that needs no inference or presumption! These are lives that the state of Alabama, through its blood thirst has trampled under foot with no remorse. In McMillian's case, the state of Alabama coerced a man to lie in order to get a conviction, then used its resources to reward that lie that was intended to kill an innocent man. Toforest Johnson is another case where the state of Alabama used its resources to convict the innocent. The state gave reward money to a woman who changed her story countless times and never said Toforest was the killer. Another lie intended to kill an innocent man. These cases, AND MANY MORE, are the direct evidence of why the state of Alabama shouldn't be able to kill.

When a state uses every resource at its disposal to convict, AND KILL, the innocent, the poor, and the mentally ill, that state is the real monster!!!

Jamal Jackson





Dear Reader,

I pray this finds you in great health and spirits (smile)
So much has been said, and is being said, yet we still find ourselves staring at the same reflection, seeing the same images... Which means nothing is being done, well actually, there are things being done, the same things as before.

Sooo (smile) with this letter, I'd like to propose a different approach to facing our Goliaths, and thinking on one thing, the story of David.

Sometimes we have to go backwards to go forward! Go back by reflecting, and don't re-trace your steps, reflect to learn from the life lessons, then proceed forward applying the life lesson learned, this is how the past becomes history.

Now remember, there isn't a seed on this planet that doesn't need time to grow, which means go back to your mental and emotional trashcan, I know, I know, eww, what a mess, but you let it get that bad so stop complaining and start digging. (smile)

All these thoughts and ideas you trashed based on timing or public opinion, revisit them in the midst of that mess. I'm more than sure that one or more of those seeds have sprouted, and hear me, we need it. Yes, you are we in this case and we need it. (smile)

We as one are David and only as one can we be David..

May our guiding light be: 1 Samuel 16:7

Thank you,
With Love,

Tony Barksdale
Z-611 - F-21



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