

# OBAMA AND { THE BLACK } AGENDA

5 ISSUES THE NEW PRESIDENT MUST TACKLE

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## 5. CRIME & PUNISHMENT

**President Obama's Plan**  
**Equal sentences, equal justice.** During the campaign, Obama said that he would reform a criminal justice system that locks up Black males at such a high rate that a Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of ending up in prison. That change will, in large part, be the responsibility of Eric Holder, the nominee for attorney general. Obama's plan would seek to end the discrepancy between the minimum sentences for powder cocaine and crack, "when the real difference between the two is the skin color of the people using them," Obama has said.

### What Black America Needs

**Prevent, don't suppress, crime.** More than 900,000 of the nation's 2.3 million inmates held in state and federal prisons and local jails in 2007 were African-American, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Frederick Douglass once said, "It is so much easier to build healthy children than to repair broken men."

The Obama administration should consider a proposal by the Children's Defense Fund, which suggests treating juvenile delinquency as a public health crisis, aiming to stem youth violence, rather than employing more failed programs aimed at suppressing crime. Obama should support the Youth Promise Act, introduced in Congress recently by Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA). Under the legislation, some \$3 billion per year would be allocated to assist communities across the country to establish local councils with leaders from law enforcement to social work supporting neighborhood action to discourage youth violence.

### What You Can Do

**Get involved.** Be a mentor, volunteer at the local Boys & Girls Club. Help start after-school and summer activities for kids in your neighborhood. Pressure state and local officials to abandon the lock-'em-up mentality as a law enforcement strategy. Demand more intervention and prevention programs that get at the root cause of crime. Scott puts it this way: "It makes more sense to put a fence at the edge of the cliff than an ambulance down in the valley."