

Opioid crisis now hitting Blacks: will humane treatment follow?

BY ASWAD WALKER | DEFENDER NEWS



The limited series “Dopesick,” starring Michael Keaton, takes on the prescription drug addiction epidemic. (Hulu)

forcement members and others who sought to lock cell doors and throw away the keys on those hooked on crack.

Currently on Hulu, the mini-series *Dopesick* chronicles how Purdue Pharma leadership were the biggest drug dealers on the planet, purposefully getting folk addicted to their opioid, OxyContin, to the tune of billions in profits for the owning Sackler family.

The show is compelling, especially if you possess any level of humanity. Because, *Dopesick* goes all the way in on showing the horrid impact of drug addiction, especially when it becomes a tsunami of abuse.

Dopesick also shows what so many of us already knew: that the larger society treated these overwhelmingly white addicts with humane compassion.

What *Dopesick* doesn't show is what news outlets like theGrio are reporting: one of the ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is the massive rise in opioid abuse and addiction by Blackfolk.

Uh-oh.

According to health officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in a span of one-year overdose deaths started trending upward, jumping a whopping 30% in the latest year alone. These health officials estimate that upwards of 100,000 folk in this country died of drug overdoses. And many are linking these overdose deaths to increased opioid use.

Again, according to theGrio article “Opioid Crisis Hitting Black Communities at Alarming Rates Amid Pandemic,” the drug crisis is hitting Black communities especially hard.

The article reported, “The problem is still getting worse and the deaths are going up at an even faster rate and this is a public health emergency,” says Dr. Andrew Kolodny, Medical Director of Opioid Policy Research at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management. It also quoted Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, who said, “At the beginning of the opioid crisis it was primarily white Americans who were impacted by this, but a growing number of Black Americans are dying at alarming rates.”

Without sharing all the gory details and statistics that you can find via theGrio article (<https://thegrio.com/2021/11/23/opioid-covid-black-communities/>), I'd rather focus on the future, and wonder aloud, “Will this same compassion for those addicted to opioids continue to exist as more Blacks find themselves in the addiction ranks?”

I hear President Joe Biden called the data on these rising opioid addiction numbers “a tragic milestone.” He's even calling on Congress to address the issue. But will a Congress that is made up of nearly 50% white nationalists or white nationalist-leaning folk who are trying to suppress Black votes, silence Black voices and ignore Black, Brown and white calls for criminal justice reform, be willing to treat Black people diseased by addiction with the same humanity and compassion and patience and support and love that they displayed to white addicts?

History suggests not. According to Dr. Carol Anderson, author of *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*, and Joel Edward Goza, author of *America's Unholy Ghosts: The Racist Roots of Our Faith and Politics*, one of the most consistent things in the history of the United States of America is for Blacks to be attacked by white violence—physical, political or both—every time Black people are perceived to receive some service or “win” a law or policy that protects their rights.

In short, both Anderson, Goza and many others, point out that just the mere perception that Blacks are receiving something, anything that could benefit Black people, white society—meaning politicians, businessfolk, the wealthy and the dirt poor—loses its day-yum mind and goes about the insidious business of making Black people pay with more mistreatment or less access to what are supposed to be our rights as citizens.

Treating Black people caught in the grips of opioid addiction like whitefolk in those same shackles will be viewed by many as Blacks receiving something that could be of benefit—humane treatment and care.

We just might want to invest some time, resources and brainpower into how we are going to care for our own. Because, if historic patterns serve as a predictor of things to come, we may not want to hold our breathe waiting to receive that humane treatment so freely given to whites.

After Guilty Verdicts, Civil Rights Leaders Exhort Black America to ‘Never Stop Running for Ahmaud’

By Stacy M. Brown | NNPA

(NNPA) - After nearly two years of pain, suffering, and wondering if the men who killed Ahmaud Arbery would pay for their heinous crime, the 25-year-old's family finally received justice.

A Glynn County, Georgia, convicted Travis McMichael, Gregory McMichael, and William Bryan of felony murder.

“Guilty. Guilty. Guilty,” civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump exclaimed.

“Nothing will bring back Ahmaud, but his family will have some peace knowing the men who killed him will remain behind bars and can never inflict their brand of evil on another innocent soul,” Crump continued.

NAACP President and CEO Derrick Johnson called the verdicts long overdue.

“Ahmaud Arbery's death was unnecessary and fueled by racist ideologies deeply engrained into the fabric of this nation,” Johnson insisted.

“Generations of Black people have seen this time and time again, with the murder of Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, and many others,” he continued.

“The actions and events perpetrated by the McMichaels and William Bryan leading up to Ahmaud's death reflect a growing and deepening rift in America that will be its undoing if not addressed on a systemic level.

“We must fix what is genuinely harming our nation: white supremacy.”

The jury found Travis McMichael, who shot Arbery in February 2020, guilty of all nine charges, including malice murder and four counts of felony murder.

The panel found his father, Gregory, not guilty of malice murder but convicted him on felony mur-



Tears streak down the cheek of Ahmaud Arbery's mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, after the jury convicted Travis McMichael on Wednesday, Nov. 24, 2021, in the Glynn County Courthouse, in Brunswick, Ga. Greg McMichael and his son, Travis McMichael, and a neighbor, William “Roddie” Bryan, were convicted of murder Wednesday in the fatal shooting of Arbery. Stephen B. Morton / AP



der, unlawful imprisonment, and other charges.

Bryan escaped a guilty verdict on malice murder, but the jury found him guilty of three felony murder counts, aggravated assault, false imprisonment, and criminal intent to commit a felony.

The men, who also face federal charges, could spend life in prison when sentenced.

Judge Timothy Walmsley bound the men over and will soon set a sentencing date.

Immediately following the announcement of the first guilty verdict against Travis McMichael, Arbery's father, Marcus Arbery, shouted, “long time coming.”

Judge Walmsley asked court officials to remove the senior Arbery.

“Ahmaud Arbery should be alive today. This tragedy should have never happened,” said Florida Congresswoman Val Demings, who is a Democrat.

“I am keeping his family in my prayers. But we must move forward together to dispel the shadows of our past and to ensure the safety and civil rights of every American,” Demings asserted.

Crump insisted that Black America must keep fighting for civil rights and justice.

“This case, by all accounts, should have been opened and closed,” Crump demanded.

“The violent stalking and lynching of Ahmaud Arbery was documented on video for the world to witness. Yet, because of the deep cracks, flaws, and biases in our systems, we were left to wonder if we would ever see justice,” Crump remarked.

“[The verdict] indicates progress, but we are nowhere close to the finish line. America, you raised your voices for Ahmaud. Now is not the time to let them quiet. Keep marching. Keep fighting for what is right. And never stop running for Ahmaud.”