



By John Harris Jr.
VILLAGER Columnist

The Urban Redemption Song

we're not necessarily given room for consideration. If I was a young boy from the suburbs or a young man from the sticks, and I'm out there shooting cans with an illegal pistol, the likelihood of me getting a firearm possession is slim to none. But if I'm in the city and I get caught with a pistol that's illegal, the chances of me receiving a large amount of (prison) time is exorbitantly higher because I'm viewed as a threat.

(VILLAGER) - Robert Lilly spent 21 of his 52 years in various Texas prisons.

"Most of my life, I've been on the inside of a prison," said Lilly, who served 41/2 years of a 30-year prison sentence for evading arrest prior to his recent release - one of three different prison terms Lilly served in Texas.

He remains on parole until 2049.

"If I live that long, I'll be 81," he said.

Lilly represents the 126,000 people currently in Texas prisons, according to the Texas Center for Justice & Equality website. Of that total, 32 percent of people in Texas prisons are Black.

Blacks make up only 13 percent of Texas' general population.

"When you live in a community that has a high concentration of law enforcement, there's greater opportunity for contact with law enforcement. When there's greater opportunity for contact, there's greater opportunity for arrests. If there's greater opportunity for arrests, there's greater opportunity for prosecution," Lilly said.

"In our case, being a young Black male,

"Most people believe that if you go to prison, it's because you've done something wrong. That's simplistic," Lilly continued. "The truth of the matter is many in our community would love to have a different outcome in our lives. But when you start off with a disadvantage, the chances become less and less likely, especially if you have contact with law enforcement at the earlier stages of your life."

Lilly's story is a familiar one.

Growing up in the South Bronx, Lilly moved to Inglewood, California, to live with his father following the death of his mother.

"It was a time of gang proliferation in our communities," Lilly said. "As a young man coming from another city, I did what I had to do to survive."

Addicted to crack cocaine as a teenager, Lilly served three years at a juvenile facility for strong arm robbery to



Robert Lilly standing in front of the Arthur B. Dewitty Center. Photo credit: John Harris Jr.

support his drug habit.

"I was already addicted to crack. It turned my life upside down," Lilly said. "I went back to my old high school and took a guy's gold chain that I traded for crack," Lilly said. "Since 1984 until today, I've been wrestling with this phenomenon called addiction trying to establish this reality called recovery."

Following his release, Lilly moved with his family to Abilene, Texas.

"I moved to Texas trying to get away from gangs," Lilly said. "My oldest stepbrother was a

drug dealer. He welcomed us right back into that environment. Sadly, at 18, 19, 20 years old, I didn't believe there was anything else. I was never exposed to anything else. Virtually all my life, I had been surrounded by the streets. Growing up in New York in the 70s, it was heroin. Coming to California, it was marijuana and cocaine.

"When people say, 'It was your choice. You shouldn't have done this or that,' we have to take time to listen to people's stories. And if we listen to their stories, then we

might have some clues to understand how to get solutions that could offer hope. If it hadn't been for people doing that in my life, I wouldn't be where I'm at today."

Today, Lilly is a proud graduate of Abilene Christian University with a degree in applied studies/social work.

"I never gave up hope because I had so many people caring for me," Lilly said. "This is why I'm back in Austin because I have a support system here. That's the difference."

"Most of us have

been impacted by mass incarceration in some way. We have a cousin, aunt or uncle, somebody that we know, somebody that we love, that's incarcerated. We've got to start talking about it. If we don't, we allow the stigma to continue to stain those that want to change.

"This is about survival," Lilly said. "This is about life. This is about hope. This is about giving voice to a population that is seemingly invisible in our society."

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CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL SORORITY OF PHI DELTA KAPPA, INC.

(Article by Christella Cain, Parliamentarian, Delta Beta Chapter)



Above: The National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Inc. Delta Beta Chapter celebrate at their Centennial Founders Day Luncheon.

Right: Charter Members Myrna Roos (left) and Dolores Hillmyer (middle), and Saged Member Christella Cain (right) being honored at the Founders Day Luncheon.

Left: Nancy Thompson (right) presents Chastity Colbert-Davis (left) with the 2023 Achievement Award.



Above: The Delta Beta Chapter members worshipping at David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church.

Below: Members Elaine McKinney (left), Beverly Piper (middle), and Carolyn Golden (right) enjoy painting at the Chapter Social.

Right: Austin City Council Woman Natasha Harper-Madison presents a proclamation to Delta Beta Chapter members. (L-R) Esther Phillips, Ramona Jones, Nancy Thompson, Natasha Harper-Madison, Dr. Brenda Burrell, Christella Cain, & Crystal Jones.



Delta Beta Chapter - Founders' Day 2023

(VILLAGER) - The Delta Beta chapter of the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Inc. kicked off the sorority's annual Founders' Day celebration weekend on Friday, May 19, 2023 with a Sisters' Fellowship Night. Members enjoyed karaoke, painting, cards, dancing, and lots of food. On Saturday, Delta Beta chapter held its traditional solemn and moving ritualistic ceremony honoring its founders. Sunday's activities culminated with members attending worship services at David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, followed by a luncheon with members and their families. During the luncheon, a brief program was presented, commemorating the eight founders of the Sorority, as well as the fourteen Charter Members of Delta Beta chapter. Of the three remaining Charter Members, two were in attendance. Delta Beta Chapter's youth group gave a performance and the chapter's Sage Members (age 80+) were given tributes.

Resolutions from both the Austin Independent School District and the City of Austin were presented to Delta Beta members in celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the NSPDK, Inc.

The National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Inc. will convene in July, 2023 in Orlando, Florida at its biennial conclave to celebrate one hundred years of excellence through the sorority's established program, Y.E.S.-Youth, Education, and Service. The resolutions will be read during this conclave.

The National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Inc. is a non-profit educational sorority founded in 1923, in Jersey City, New Jersey. During that period of time, there were no educational organizations open to African American teachers. The eight founders started the organization to establish a sisterhood among African American teachers and promote the highest ideals of the teaching profession.

Recognizing the need to support, encourage and inspire both their fellow teachers and their youth, more educators were invited to join from other geographical areas within the United States. Beginning with one chapter and eight members in 1923, the NSPDK, Inc. has grown to five regions, over 120 chapters, and over 4,000 members throughout the United States.

The Delta Beta chapter of the NSPDK, Inc.

started with fourteen Charter Members in 1977. Fifty-seven members are now active in furthering the goals of the sorority. Delta Beta chapter has been recognized for its achievements and major contributions to the teaching profession and the local community.

Delta Beta Chapter extends a heartfelt thanks for a stellar weekend of events to the 100th Anniversary Founders' Day Committee members: Dr. Stella Bell, Tiffany Berry, Christella Cain, Chastity Colbert-Davis, *Chair*, Dr. Pamela Gray, Altamese Greer, Nancy Thompson, Carla Grace Roberson, Robin Turner, Ruth Washington, and Diane Williams. Special thanks to our youth—Xinos Melodi Tyson, Xinos Maya Crawford, and Kudos Aamari Brown—for their outstanding performances during the Sunday luncheon; and to our Anthropos (the men in our lives) for their ongoing prayers and support to Delta Beta Chapter and NSPDK, Inc.

For information about membership into NSPDK, Inc. and its affiliate groups, please contact Delta Beta Chapter President Dr. Brenda Burrell at email: deltabeta1977@gmail.com.