

## Mass Incarceration Has Become America's Answer to Social Problems, Says Speaker Donna Murch

Stockton Hosts Fannie Lou Hamer Human and Civil Rights Symposium

For Immediate Release ; with photos on [flickr](#)

Tuesday, October 11, 2016

Contact: Maryjane Briant  
News and Media Relations Director  
Galloway , N.J. 08205  
Maryjane.Briant @stockton.edu  
(609) 652-4593  
[stockton.edu/media](http://stockton.edu/media)

Galloway , N.J. - "America has become a prison nation" as civil rights rebellions in the 1960s led to "the elevation of punishment as the solution to all social problems," said Donna Murch, an author and associate professor of History at Rutgers University, in her keynote speech today at Stockton University's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Fannie Lou Hamer Human and Civil Rights Symposium.

Fannie Lou Hamer "was always the great hero of the civil rights movement for my mother," Murch said. "She was a child laborer and a sharecropper who was beaten so badly by police" while fighting for voter registration that she suffered permanent injuries.

For the generation who came up during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, seeing Emmett Till's 14-year-old body in a coffin was a catalyst, Murch said, much as the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. and other such killings led to the Black Lives Matter movement and renewed civil rights struggles.

"Police left Michael Brown's body in the street for five hours, immersed in his blood," and that was shown on social media, forcing the mainstream media to pay attention and galvanizing protesters "who will not stop until they have attained justice for Michael Brown and others," she said.

"A new national collective memory was forged" by Ferguson, she said.

The events in Missouri "represent the culmination of longstanding repression and resistance," she said. The roots of the United States imprisoning more of its population than any other country grew out of the "law-and-order" political backlash to "urban rebellions" in Watts, Calif. and elsewhere, Murch said.

-more-

-continued from page 1 -

In response to urban unrest “and its political expression, Black Power,” two things happened, said Murch, whose teaching and research focuses on historical studies of mass incarceration/the war on drugs, black power and civil rights, California, social movements and postwar U.S. cities. Itca2.6( )11y(f)-6.p)2.6(og(i)2.6(ni)2.6(a 0 Td 002 Tw -26.2)2.6(d [(and))11.2(d 11.3(t)-d-

-continued from page 2 -

In response to a question from Mahalia Bazile, vice president of the UBSS, about how to respond to “covert racism,” such as when a white student said she might be interested in attending a UBSS meeting, but that her husband is “kind of racist” and might object.

“Use your voice,” Williams told Bazile. “Explain how you’re feeling and don’t be afraid.”

Murch added, “Race is not just about blackness, race is about whiteness.....Ask her to explain herself and her husband as white supremacists.”

The program also featured a video about Hamer’s life and performances by the Stockton Vocal Jazz Ensemble led by Beverly Vaughn, professor of Music, and Afro-One Dance, Drama and Drum Theatre, Inc., founded by Reid-Merritt.

# # #