

FROM FERGUSON TO BENTON HARBOR: **#FreePinkney** SHIFT THE FIGHT TO ECONOMIC RIGHTS!



On November 6, 2014, without a shred of evidence or a single eyewitness, an all-white judge and jury in Berrien County, MI convicted **Reverend Edward Pinkney**, an internationally-renowned civil rights leader, of five felony counts of election law violation, for which Pinkney now faces **life in prison**.

The significance of Pinkney's case goes beyond the systemic racism, police and judicial corruption crushing Black communities around America.

Rather, the Reverend has become (and remains) a critical impediment to **a conspiracy of Wall Street and corporate billionaires** to de-industrialize, loot and ethnically-cleanse America's formerly-industrial centers.

St. Joseph and Benton Harbor, Michigan, both with roughly 10,000 residents, are separated only by the narrow Paw Paw River, but are worlds apart in every other way. St. Joseph is a playground of the rich and powerful; Benton Harbor has a 70% unemployment rate and a \$10,000 median per-capita income. St. Joseph is very white, Benton Harbor very black (over 96%). And despite housing the international headquarters of Whirlpool and a new luxury golf course, Benton Harbor has long been gripped by financial misery.

Whirlpool, **the world's largest home appliance manufacturer**, eagerly led the free trade agenda that saw most of America's manufacturing jobs sent away from places like Benton Harbor to low-wage sweatshops in Mexico, China and elsewhere. Unlike WalMart and other corporate welfare queens, Whirlpool literally has its own U.S. Congressman. Republican **Fred Upton**, the powerful chair of the House Energy & Commerce Committee (which oversees all trade legislation), is also the billionaire heir to Whirlpool's family fortune.

"[Without economic demands], all we're going to get is what we got out of Ferguson: a bunch of politicians and celebrities expressing sympathy and outrage. If we don't have a specific agenda—a list of exactly what we want to change and how—we will be gathering over and over again beside the dead bodies of our murdered children, parents, and neighbors."

- Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, *The Coming Race War Won't Be About Race*, TIME

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Rev. Pinkney's struggle has centered not just on fighting the monopoly power and racism of Whirlpool and its allies, but on exposing **the agenda to loot and ethnically-cleanse all formerly-industrial American cities**.

1) The Emergency Manager Law.

Benton Harbor was the first city in America with an "emergency manager" like the one now ruling Detroit. This controversial law, with tentacles connecting directly to Whirlpool and Rep. Fred Upton, allows a dictator appointed by Michigan's governor to fire public employees, cut pensions, sell off public property (like Benton Harbor's parks and beaches), etc. Pinkney has twice been **framed** for election law violations: both times he had just concluded a successful petition drive to recall public officials involved in theft of city property and denial of residents' right to democratic representation.

2) The Cornerstone Alliance

This stolen property is fed right back into Whirlpool and its allies. The "Cornerstone Alliance" is a public-private partnership where federal grant money is used to privatize Benton Harbor for the enrichment of Whirlpool executives and southwest Michigan's business and political elites. The marquee project is "Harbor Shores," a private golf course and resort built on the site of Benton Harbor's beautiful, stolen lakefront park and beach. Cornerstone is a front for the Whirlpool Corporation, used to drive Black families out of their homes (often

with illegal water shut-offs and other dirty tricks like those used in Detroit) and build tax free "enterprise zones".

Oligarchs in America

This pilot projects in Benton Harbor and Detroit are nearly identical to the IMF's notorious "shock therapy" program, which was famously forced upon Russia in the 1990s, resulting in mass poverty, homelessness, and the rise of the "oligarchs," a class of billionaire financiers who stole public property like land, telecommunications, oil, gas, raw materials, etc.

Fight for a New Deal

The threat to America is not just the despicable, racist justice systems that killed Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown – it's **class war!** A conspiracy of oligarchs has seized our government, cut our trade protections, sent our jobs overseas, and now they want to wipe us all off the map. This conspiracy starts with Black communities, but it won't stop there. **We must fight back** with hard-hitting economic demands – based on Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Bill of Economic Rights" – that will ensure good jobs and economic security for all.

Rev. Pinkney's fight is our fight

Pinkney is not just a victim but a **working class leader**. His case is the window we need into a fight that will unite all Americans, and he needs your help. **#FreePinkney** – let's make this an issue CNN can't ignore, and move the fight from collective despair to collective empowerment!

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