

## A Tête-à-tête with one of the best lawyers in America: Benjamin L. Crump J.D.

Written by Kam Williams J.D.

Saturday, 13 December 2014 20:45

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Through his legal prowess and advocacy in the Trayvon Martin case, the Martin Lee Anderson Boot Camp case, and the Robbie Tolan Supreme Court Case, attorney [Benjamin Crump](#) has already secured a significant legacy founded in Constitutional law.

His considerable acumen as both a litigator and an advocate has ensured that those most frequently marginalized are protected by the nation's contract with its constituency. His landmark civil rights legal battles will be taught in textbooks and referenced by both this and future generations interested in understanding the scope of our fundamental Constitutional protections.

Attorney Crump has been recognized as one of the *National Trial [Lawyers](#) ' Top 100 Lawyers*, *Ebony*

Magazine's Power 100 Most Influential African Americans, and bestowed the *NAACP Thurgood Marshall Award*

and the

*SCLC Martin Luther King Servant Leader Award*

. In spite of his immense professional responsibilities, he still finds time to serve his local community.

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Benjamin Crump readily shares his professional and personal talents with local, statewide and national causes and charities. He was appointed the inaugural Board Chairman of Florida's Big Bend Fair Housing Center, Inc., a Federal Grant organization dedicated to the eradication of housing discrimination. He also served as Chairman of the Legal Services of North Florida, and donated \$1,000,000 to the organization's Capital Campaign to ensure that poor people would continue to have quality legal representation as well as access to the courts.

[Attorney](#) Crump believes in fighting to preserve the advances in justice and equality that minorities achieved during the Civil Rights era. To that end, he has served as Vice President of the National Bar Association and General Counsel to the Tallahassee Chapter of the *NAACP*.

In addition, he's been elected as the Chairman of the Tallahassee Boys Choir, and he is a past President of the National Florida State University Black Alumni Association. And he's a Life Member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the *NAACP*.

Benjamin Crump and his law partner Daryl Parks share their firm's largesse with the community that has embraced them--most notably--they have endowed scholarships at Florida A&M University, Livingston College, Florida State University, and Bethune Cookman University for minority law students.

Here, he reacts to the “[Black Lives Matter](#) !” movement sweeping the nation in the wake of the failure of grand juries to indict police officers in the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner.

***[Mega Diversities is the first Canadian media and the first one outside the U.S. to post this interview ]***

**KAM WILLIAMS J.D. TALKS TO BENJAMIN CRUMP J.D.:**

**Kam Williams:** Hi Ben[jamin Crump], thanks for the interview. I'm honored to have this

**opportunity, brother.**

**Benjamin Crump:** Thank you, Kam [Williams]. I'm glad we've finally connected.

**KW:** I have a million questions for you from readers. Children's book author Irene Smalls says: You have agreed to represent the family of Tamir Rice, the 12 year-old shot by a cop in Cleveland, despite the failure of the grand juries even to indict in the Michael Brown and Eric Garner cases. What fuels your continuing passion and search for justice, in the face of a criminal justice system that seems broken to many of us?

**BC:** I was just talking to some folks who said, "Ben, you take these cases, and you make a big issue of holding police officers and the killers of our children accountable in the criminal courts, and of making them to go to jail, when you know the history is that police officers don't get put in jail when they kill little Black and Brown boys. You win these multimillion dollar victories in the civil courts, but because the officers don't go to jail, people think you lost the case. Why do you keep insisting on trying to have the police officers put behind bars?" The way I answered them was, "I just can't bring myself to sell out as if it's just about money. I know we're going to win the civil suit in all these cases. But that's not full justice. Why is everybody else entitled to full justice except our people and our children? Full justice means you discourage the police from ever doing this again because people will know that if you kill our children, you'll have to do the perp walk and go to jail. It shouldn't be that if you kill a Black person, there's a good chance you won't, but if you kill a White person, everybody knows you're going to prison. We say: our lives are just as valuable. So, the one thing I always know, Kam [Williams], is we can't sell our community out. I don't worry about whether everybody understands that. Sure, it would be easier to do like most lawyers and only talk about how much money I got for my clients in the civil courts, but to me, that's not victory.

**KW:** Irene [Smalls] also asks: Do we need to increase the activism in the Black community around voting, literacy, etcetera?

**BC:** Yes.

**KW:** Editor Lisa Loving says: Many people in Black communities across this country feel that the legal system simply doesn't work for them. In fact, we see that racial profiling

**takes place at every point—on the streets where officers patrol, in the jailhouse, in the courtroom, even in the parole system. On top of that, many people with an arrest record are legally barred from voting. Mr. Crump, what do you tell people when they say they feel like the system is weighted against them?**

**BC:** What I tell them is that it's still the best system in the world, and that we have to fight to make America be America for all of us. We have to fight to make the words in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence mean something. If they just apply the Constitution, that means we are getting due process under the law and in legal proceedings. It's not right that we have to fight to make it fair, but we the people have the power to do so. That's what I love about what's going on in Ferguson and after the Eric Garner case, and about what I'm sure will now happen with the Tamir Rice case.

**KW: Editor/Legist Patricia Turnier [of [www.megadiversities.com](http://www.megadiversities.com)] asks: Why isn't the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause applied uniformly? Is there a systemic flaw?**

**BC:** I think there is a flaw in the system. The flaw in the system is that we continue to exonerate the police for killing little Black and Brown people while holding them accountable in other communities. I once wrote a paper titled, "Police Don't Shoot White Men in the Back." You just never heard about police accidentally shooting a White man who's retreating. What that says is that a flaw in the system allows police officers to be immune for killing Colored people. If you think about the grand jury system, that's exactly what happens. You have local prosecutors who have a symbiotic relationship with the local police officers, and they have no relationship with and many times no regard for the Black person dead on the ground. If we keep doing things the same way and expect a different result, that's the definition of insanity. So, we need special prosecutors with no relationship to the police departments, if we really want to have independent investigations and trials.

**KW: David Roth asks: Do you think the race of the police officer is relevant in these types of cases?**

**BC:** Yes. You do see instances where Black officers kill Caucasians. They go to jail. And where Caucasian officers kill Caucasians and go to jail. Race matters and the statistics bear that out.

**KW: Attorney Bernadette Beekman asks: What do you think can bring peace to the nation in the wake of the failure of the Michael Brown and Eric Garner grand juries to indict?**

**BC:** Swift action by the Federal Department of Justice. Other than that, the people are really feeling that the system isn't fair and that folks in their community can't get equal justice.

**KW: Do you think the Department of Justice is really interested in pursuing civil rights cases in the Michael Brown and Eric Garner cases? Or do they just say that each time a cop gets off in order to calm people down and to give them a false sense of hope that justice will eventually be served?**

**BC:** I want to believe that Attorney General Holder and the Justice Department are going to do everything in their power to follow through on their words and give some sense of justice to these families.

**KW: Will the Department of Justice bring a civil rights case against George Zimmerman?**

**BC:** I honestly don't know.

**KW: Patricia [Turnier] asks: What advice do you have for young African-American attorneys fresh out of law school?**

**BC:** To be true to thyself, and to remember what Charles Hamilton Houston said: "Strive to be an engineer for social change and justice." Otherwise, you're just a parasite on society. Fame, notoriety and material things will come, but first, make it your job to represent your client in a zealous manner and to do good in the world.

**KW: How would you assess the state of race relations in America? Are things getting better or worse?**

**BC:** Well, with Ferguson decision and then the Eric Garner decision within seven days after that, I think things are tenuous, at best. This could be a defining point for the entire United States of America, because we all need to be better than we've been previously.

**KW: John Hartmann asks: Have you been surprised by the die-ins and other mass demonstrations we've seen lately in cities all over the country?**

**BC:** I think we have tough times because some of the frustration from Trayvon flowed over to Michael Brown. Now the Michael Brown frustration is flowing over to Eric Garner, and I think the Eric Garner frustration is going to flow over to Tamir Rice. People are still trying to come to grips with these decisions that don't seem rational and are certainly not reflective of equal justice.

**KW: Lisa [Loving] also asks: What happened to the old legal maxim that a prosecutor could indict a ham sandwich? Do you think people are outraged because the grand jury is shrouded in secrecy?**

**BC:** Ferguson was all about transparency, because there was such a sense of community mistrust of the court and the government leaders. The worst thing you could do there was have a grand jury proceeding that was going to be secret. And cut off from the rest of the world. It just made no sense. But that's what they did, and the result is that you come out not knowing what really happened in that room. Words on paper can't convey the tone and whether a persuasive case was presented to get an indictment. Consequently, when people saw the result, they believed what we were saying from the very beginning, namely, that the system isn't fair when you use a local prosecutor.

**KW: I admire that your spirit hasn't been broken by the legal system's color coded dispensation of criminal justice.**

**BC:** It is heartbreaking, but you just have to keep fighting the fight, and remember that the moral arc of the universe bends towards justice. Part of what keeps me going is when I see the enthusiasm of the young people. I was recently in Chicago working on the matter of Howard Morgan who was shot 28 times by four white police officers on his way home in one of the worst

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injustices I ever heard of. These students I met with at the University of Chicago Law School had so much passion, saying, “We’re going to make this world better than what it is today.” And they had so much faith that I could deliver, that it inspired me to go fight harder to reverse this miscarriage of justice that had occurred right before their eyes. After witnessing me making my argument in the courtroom, they said, “We want to do that one day. We want to get the law degree so that we have the power and authority to argue on behalf of the least of ye, and to make them see our humanity, and make them see us not as 3/5ths of a man, but as men with all the inalienable rights of any other American.”

**KW: Alan Dershowitz in his book, *The Best Defense*, said that one of the things they never teach you in law school is that a policeman’s word is gospel in the courtroom. How do we fight that unwritten law?**

**BC:** With the proposed Mike Brown legislation for video body cameras, because our lies aren’t lying to us.

**KW: Do you think all the attacks on people of color by police are symptomatic of a racist society or of a class society where people of color have no value or voice?**

**BC:** I think it’s a little of both. I think they devalue our lives. We have to turn the slogan “Black lives matter!” into a reality because our lives do matter.

**KW: Film director Rel Dowdell asks: How are you holding up? It must be hard flying from city to city to city. We need you, brother.**

**BC:** Thanks for asking that, Rel [Dowdell]. This is my first time home in nine days. I’m so happy to be home, I don’t know what to do.

**KW: How can I, as a [Attorney](#) journalist, help the cause?**

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**BC:** First of all, I'm glad you're a member of the bar, because we need our best and our brightest to be on the front lines fighting for us. You can help by staging clinics where you just teach people what the law is. Most of our people want to fight, but they don't know how to fight. We need to teach them how to fight constructively.

**KW:** Well, thanks again for the time, Ben[jamin Crump], I really appreciate it. Now go get some rest. Like Rel [Dowdell] says, we need you.

**BC:** Will do, brother, and I look forward to meeting you in person at the march in D.C. on Saturday. God bless.

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**About the author of this interview: Kam Williams** is a syndicated film and book critic who writes for 100+ publications around the U.S., Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean. He is a member of the *New York Film Critics Online*, the *NACP Image Awards Nominating Committee*, and *Rotten Tomatoes*. He is a contributor to *TheLoop21.com*, *eurweb.com* and so on. He is also a columnist for our webmag [www.megadiversities.com](http://www.megadiversities.com). One of his interviews made the cover of *Heart and Soul* magazine last fall. One of Kam Williams' interviews with Spike Lee is included in the 2002 book entitled *Spike Lee: Interviews (Conversations with filmmakers)*. This book collects the best interviews of Lee. Some of Kam Williams' articles are translated into Chinese and Spanish. In 2008, he was Voted Most Outstanding Journalist of the Decade by the *Disilgold Soul Literary Review*. In addition, he has been honored at the U.N. (for BMORENEWS GLOBAL FORUM ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT) on June 15th 2012 by the Foundation for the Support of the United Nations (FSUN). Williams is an erudite Attorney who holds a BA in Black Studies from Cornell University, an MA in English from Brown University, an M.B.A. from The Wharton



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