

Is there anything redeeming in the life (or death) of Milton Jones ?

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As a youngster, **Milton "Butch" Jones** helped fill Detroit's streets with the sounds and smells of death.

If his 1996 autobiography tells the truth, the teen-aged **Jones** stole everything from Michelin tires to artificial grass. He also took assignments to torch buildings and kill people, shooting one victim 15 times in the back. And after serving three years in prison for manslaughter, he co-founded Young Boys Inc. (YBI), the notorious Detroit drug gang.

Now, ironically enough, federal prosecutors have requested the death penalty for **Jones** and two other men.

The three were among 14 people indicted in Detroit in June 2001 on charges of selling heroin, cocaine and marijuana during the 1990s. **Jones** allegedly ordered the killings of two rivals, one of whom was tortured and shot twice in the head. Only if convicted of killings could **Jones** and the others be executed.

In its controversial death penalty request for **Jones**, the government said he had demonstrated "a low potential for rehabilitation."

That's rather soft-boiled language for the man largely responsible for Detroit's shift from Motor City to Murder City during the heroin-saturated 1970s and early 1980s.

Jones and fellow Young Boys' leaders promoted a brilliantly evil idea. It rippled across the country, spreading corruption and death.

YBI's leaders began the practice of using kids as young as 9 or 10 -- kids immune from serious prosecution or prison -- to package and peddle dope. Their drug-peddling network once moved hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of heroin a week in Detroit.

Eventually it all came apart as more and more YBI lieutenants marched off to federal prisons or landed in coffins.

In 1983, **Jones** pleaded guilty to drug conspiracy charges. In 1989, officials brought him to Michigan from a federal Arizona prison to face trial on two murder charges. The charges were dismissed, re-instated and then dismissed again, freeing **Jones** in 1992.

At the time of his release, he announced that he had experienced "spiritual growth" behind bars. He also said he wanted to enlist Detroit students in something he called Drug War Awareness Inc. He claimed his group would push youngsters to finish their schooling and steer clear of drugs and crime.

Fortunately, no one decided to put **Jones** -- an old fox if ever there was one -- in charge of classrooms filled with potential recruits for his schemes.

Just as fortunately, plans to make a movie glorifying **Jones** ' life and times have fizzled out or at least stalled.

In the summer of 2000, producer Marc Cayce claimed the Detroit-made movie would contain "redeeming parts" and show **Jones** leading a crime-free life. Supposedly, **Jones** then had a landscaping business.

"Without a knowledge of the past, the future will surely repeat itself," Cayce said.

So true. If these latest charges stick, **Jones** will once again become a prison inmate -- or worse.

For the record, I don't support the death penalty and don't really expect **Jones** to get it.

If it should happen, though, I won't weep.

Caption: Betty DeRamus Betty DeRamus

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