WHAT IS REASONABLE? Corrine Mackenzie

In doing this research, my ultimate goal is to see the change that is so desperately needed in Michigan regarding self-defense. If I have the right to defend myself against a perpetrator who breaks into my home, then I certainly have more of a right to defend my life against a man who is battering me. I plan to obtain this goal by promoting education about domestic violence to judges, law makers, prosecutors, and law enforcement. I believe that if they have true knowledge of this issue, then we will see less women incarcerated for merely defending themselves.

As I embark on this journey, to change our laws on self-defense, I can’t help but feel a sense of anger at the system. Historically, abuse against women was a permitted act. Women were forbidden to defend themselves against their abusive husbands. This set the social standards we still abide by. A woman was to take the beating as handed to her, and not to engage in any violence: It was considered “unfeminine” (Schneider, 26). I have researched this topic of self-defense, particularly for battered women for two reasons: 1) I am a battered woman who survived, and 2) I am in prison surrounded by others who survived. This affects me and generations to come. Women should not be viewed as “appropriate victims” of violence. Women should have the right to defend their lives when an intimate partner is threatening to take their life.

Michigan has the most archaic views and interpretation of the self-defense laws. Self-defense is a right that a survivor of domestic violence should have access to. More often than not, women have been terrorized by their abuser for years. These women do not kill out of malice. These women kill out of necessity. Michigan stands on the reasonable element of self-defense and that is unrealistic in a domestic violence situation. What exactly is “reasonable” when the man you love and share your life with repeatedly abuses you, rapes you or threatens your life or the life of your child? If Michigan accepts that one can kill a perpetrator that breaks into your home in self-defense, then they cannot possibly criminalize a battered woman’s conduct.

I have interviewed three different women. There is a commonality among them. They all survived and they are all doing 20-plus years to life in prison. These women are mothers, sisters, daughters, friends, and mentors. They are kind, loving, and resilient. They all had to make the unthinkable choice to kill or be killed. They are going to have to live with that choice they made forever; that choice to survive. Can you think of any human being faces with death who is not going to defend themselves? I cannot, and I write this paper.

Meet Carol. She has been incarcerated for 21 years. She is serving life in prison without parole for killing her abusive husband. Carol was subjected to violence constantly at the hands of this man, whom she loved. She attempted to leave and as it normally goes, he threatened her, and threatened her children. The police had been contacted and never offered her any assistance. Carol was young and had prior trauma, so she responded out of fear.

Carol faced a jury and was convicted of 1st degree murder for the murder of her husband. The elements of Battered Woman Syndrome was never introduced by her trial defense attorney. I asked Carol if, in that moment of the killing, did she believe that death or great bodily harm was likely to occur. She said, “yes.” Carol honestly believed that her life and the lives of her children were in danger, which is the first requirement of the self-defense law in Michigan. This belief is according to a reasonable person and “reasonable” is not an accurate depiction of a woman being terrorized. What is reasonable about a man beating you, terrorizing you, or threatening you with a gun being held to your head?

Meet Julie. She was convicted by a jury of a second degree murder for killing her abuser. She was originally charged with 1st degree murder. However, the jury found her guilty of a lesser charge due to evidence of domestic violence. Although Battered Woman Syndrome was her defense, the judge nullified the lesser charge by sentencing her to 38-60 years. This man held a gun to her head, shot a gun in her daughter’s room and beat her “like she was a man.” Julia didn’t leave because she believed she could “change” him. She loved this man and we all believe in the ones we love, right? The irony is, our system only victimizes her further.

According to Rocco Cipparone, Jr., author of The Defense of Battered Women Who Kill, “A woman who has killed her batterer during an acute battering incident usually will be able to show that it was reasonable for her to believe that resort to deadly force was necessary to avoid the threatened harm” (p. 435). If this statement were true then Etta, the third woman I interviewed, would not be incarcerated for 20-30 years.

Etta’s abuser was one who inflicted repeated harm on her. She left her abuser and took him back more than once.
He would abuse her again. Eventually, Etta reached her breaking point. On one fatal evening, Etta's abuser once again attacked her. He began slamming her against the floor. When he released her, she grabbed a butcher knife and told him to leave. He lunged at her and she stabbed him one time. Etta called 911 and administered CPR until help arrived. Etta was convicted of second degree murder and her self-defense claim was hindered and not acknowledged. New social standards determine when self-defense is viable. Unfortunately, in a care of the battered woman, she is not permitted to claim self-defense as one is in a bar room brawl. The reasonable man standard disregards the problems, or reality a woman faces in a violent relationship. The equal force and imminent danger rules have been forbidden or limited in a trial for a woman accused of killing her abuser. These rules being excluded during her trial deny her the equal protection under the law because she cannot introduce all relevant facts to a jury (Schneider, 637).

Survivors of domestic violence often take matters into their own hands because “the system” is broken and offers no assistance. Some statistics show that as many as 70 percent of domestic violence calls do not end in prosecution (Bitchmedia). Seventy percent: How many women were left to protect themselves or ended up dead because their abuser was free instead of placed in jail? Michigan does not hesitate to prosecute the woman for protecting themselves when the system failed to.

According to the current elements of Michigan’s self-defense laws, a battered woman who kills her sleeping abuser will not be able to assert the self-defense claim. This is where Battered Woman Syndrome should be admissible in a court of law. The cycle of abuse that this woman has been subjected to for any amount of time has caused not only physical, but psychological harm. Killing her sleeping abuser, in her mind is completely reasonable to avoid further harm or possible death. The “reasonable person” standard undermines the reality of what a battered woman is subjected to, the physical violence, intimidation, and sexual abuse are not irrelevant and should be mitigating factors at trial. The imminence of further abuse not only exists but is inevitable.

There is much debate in our society over domestic violence and killing an abusive partner. The debate is simple, but complex. Why doesn’t she leave? This is the favorite question of those who do not know what it is like to be in “her shoes.” The structure of our system is flawed. Instead of more women being successful at receiving the help they need to leave, or being protected, they are offered little aid or none at all (Jacobsen, C. & D’Orio, L.). I can list a plethora or reasons as to why she stays in the abuse. That she likes it is not one of these reasons for staying.

Some women stay because they feel obligated. They are married to the monster and religious beliefs or morals and values keep them from leaving. I just want our society to stop being so judgmental and blame these women no longer. Every time there is a woman on the news for killing her abuser, she is ridiculed by society for not leaving. Communities need to embrace these women and support them, not condemn them.

We must begin with public prevention of domestic violence. If abusers did not exist, then there would not be victims. How do we effectively do that? We teach our youth that respecting others is the only acceptable treatment of another human being. We teach them that abuse is not the answer to conflict. If preventative measures were implemented, we may see less tragic endings. Society can no longer blame her because she stays. As a community, we must provide resources and support for leaving the abuse to even be possible. Providing assistance will enable her to leave so she doesn’t feel killing in self-defense is her only option.

As said in a case study of Michigan Women’s Justice and Clemency Project, “If they are forced to defend themselves alone, or to kill their abusers in self-defense, the response is very different . . . they must face the same gender-biased institutions, public officials and laws that sustain the ideologies of women’s subjugation and produce ongoing violence” (Frost). Our laws prohibit the seriousness of violence against women. Due process is denied to women because of the erroneous views of our legal system.

Michigan self-defense laws must be changed in order for battered women to receive equality in our legal system. California, within the last ten years, revised their laws and hundreds of women are released from prison because they chose to recognize the evidence of abuse. If Michi-
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gan followed suit, then women like Carol, Etta, Julia, and hundreds more would be released from prison. Removing the hurdles women face in the courts and allowing them to provide evidence of self-defense would be effective in less victims becoming incarcerated.

In conclusion, the current self-defense law in Michigan only fails rather than helps women who have survived domestic violence. There must be an understanding of what does on in the mind of someone who has been abused. Killing her abuser is probably the most reasonable option. Therefore, the “reasonable person” standard is met. This standard, as currently written under the law does not “correlate to women's experience of abuse” (Gillespie). Women should no longer be deprived in presenting self-defense claims and evidence of abuse to substantiate those claims in the court of law.

References


FUNDING OUR OWN INCARCERATION

Throughout the course of prison history things has changed drastically! And many tax-paying citizens are not aware of how their money is being utilized within the incarceration system. On top of that, the MDOC budgeting plan has been through the roof from fabricated claims of unnecessary and costly needs. The MDOC has deviated from the concept Michigan Department of Corrections, because in reality that term would represent an individual being corrected from their error by being rehabilitated through adequate programming, restorative justice, and prison reform.

Instead it should be Michigan Department of Corruption or Misusing Michiganders’ Deposits on Corruption because throughout the years post secondary education programs were a part of their fabricated claims to be cut from the budget along with closing down the majority of MSI factory jobs within the institutional setting. Which was the best thing a prisoner could utilize while on the inside due to the fact this was not only teaching us how to develop a real work ethic but educating the minds of men and women on a college level to prepare them for their return back to society. No matter if you were a short timer or had a long indeterminate sentence or life without the possibility of parole, these things were at your disposal.

As of today education is only provided for those 7 years within their earliest release date or those that are required to get their GED. The trades such as food tech and builders’ trade has fallen under the same stipulations stripping that opportunity completely away from the long timers

Giles, Carol. Personal Interview. 4 April 2019.
Dunmire, Etta. Personal Interview. 4 April 2019.
Catlett, Julia. Personal Interview. 4 April 2019.

Charles A. Jackson Bey

who will remain within these walls for a significant amount of time. The only thing that’s left standing on its last leg is the CMT class—custodial maintenance technology trade, which has now been finding its way out of the prison system throughout Michigan. The so-called Michigan Department of Corrections! Figure if one would be here for a while they’ll need to learn to keep the floors buffed and waxed, carpet clean, along with cleaning windows and restrooms.

So now this takes me to my next point which is how we are funding our own incarceration. As we know the cost of living in the outside world has been going up and the battle for minimum wage has reached nearly ten dollars per hour throughout Michigan. Now I made mention earlier that the factory jobs were removed from the institutional settings throughout Michigan prison system, as well as our work bonuses for the remaining jobs such as food service. Over the last 30 years prison wages have not gone up! Throughout Michigan, it is widely known that state prisoners such as myself can barely support ourselves with a prison job adding to pennies a day. We are considered blessed if we have the help of friends and family. It should be noted once again that prison wages have not increased in over 30 years. Yet the prison store prices have gone up! Along with prison job pay scales going down. On top of limiting us to only 200 hours as food service workers, with a starting rate at 17.5¢ unskilled, 23.5¢ semi-skilled, and 32.5¢ skilled per hour, consider how prisoners are being held responsible for the following living expenses toward funding our own incarceration:

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FUNDING OUR OWN INCARCERATION

A. Hygiene supplies including sales tax
B. Over-the-counter medications, including sales tax
C. Co-payments for medical, dental, and optical services, in the amount of $5.00 per visit individually
D. Legal photocopies along with notary services in the amount of $1.00 per notary.

Pursuant to MDOC policy directive PD03.04.101, which governs medical service providers to charge prisoners a $5.00 medical co-payment for all medical services as delineated above, placing extreme hardship on all prisoners! So this alone does save the state and prison system thousands of dollars. This is in addition to the fact that all the work we do would otherwise cost the state money to hire people from outside to do, which means prisoners are taking on the cost of many facility operations.

Also look how we add additional funding to our own incarceration, comparing store prices from 2008 to those of 2020:
- noodles then 20¢ now 35¢
- white rice then 65¢ now $1.39
- chili no beans then $1.45 now $3.33
- peanut butter then $1.70 now $3.29
- tuna fish then $1.30 now $4.42
- foot locker then $79.40 now $112
- protein powder then $10.90 now $15.51
- cough drops then 65¢ now 93¢
- Colgate toothpaste then $1.50 now $2.80
- Soap then 40¢ for Ivory, 60¢ for Dial, now 65¢ for off-brand

Keep in mind that in reality we are unable to actually afford any of these items on a 17, 23, or 32¢ income, so that means that those of us who are blessed to still have family, friends, and loved ones to help support us are the ones actually being fleeced. Which they are the actual tax paying citizens funding our own incarceration through the Securepak ordering system, phone system, J-Pay Music, and the fee for sending financial aid to our accounts just so we can keep funding our own incarceration through the system of highway robbery with no gun!

BOOK CLUB CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

In summer of 2019 we invited readers to request a free copy of James Baldwin’s modern classic The Fire Next Time. And we invited readers to submit response essays with reactions to the book. While we have been thrilled with the response for the book requests, we have not received many response essays and would still love to feature your work in a future newsletter issue. If you read the book, we want to hear your thoughts! What did you relate to? What resonated? Do you agree with Baldwin’s observations and experiences? What has changed in the last 57 years since the book was published? What has remained the same? Address these or any other questions in writing to us and we will consider featuring your work in a future newsletter issue.

Please note that we are not able to send more copies of the book.

My last critical point which I want to enlighten readers to is this: Safe & Just Michigan gave the two following statements in the spring of 2019:

1. People incarcerated in Michigan are serving some of the longest sentences in the nation, with an average minimum sentence that is 10.3 years and growing, and

2. Michigan’s prison population has fallen 23% between 2006, when it reached its largest size of 51,515 people, and 2017.

These two statements might sound like they cancel each other out, but both statements are true. The paradox is one of the most interesting facts brought to light in the Michigan Department of Corrections’ 2017 statistical report, which was released in January 2019. It's no coincidence that the average minimum prison sentence is rising at the same time the overall prison population is declining. In fact, the two are related. In recent years, efforts have been made to find ways to divert people from prison for offenses that bring shorter prison sentences. Problem-solving courts, such as substance use courts and mental health courts, offer treatment programs instead of prison time. This has reduced the state’s prison population. However, that has done nothing to reduce the number of people who are still serving long-term sentences. While people serving sentences of 20 years or more comprised 18.3% of the prison population in 1998, as of 2017 they represent 31.7% of the population. We have fewer people coming to prison, but those who are coming are coming for a longer time, adding to the system of funding our own incarceration along with the tax-paying citizens of Michigan being fleeced.

According to a report by the Senate Fiscal Agency, a reduction in 13,000 prison beds would result in a $494,000,000 savings. Even with this decrease Michigan still has an incredible amount of work to do in order to lower the prison population further. Even with that cut over the last 14 years, Michigan still spends over $2 billion on corrections alone. Like many states, Michigan has reached a critical point in the status of its corrections department and you citizens should be fed up! I know I am, what about you?
YOUR HEALTH MATTERS: HEALTH AND HYGIENE TIPS Center For Disease Control

Updated March 26, 2020

CDC is responding to a pandemic of respiratory disease spreading from person-to-person caused by a novel (new) coronavirus. The disease has been named “coronavirus disease 2019” (abbreviated “COVID-19”). This situation poses a serious public health risk. The federal government is working closely with state, local, tribal, and territorial partners, as well as public health partners, to respond to this situation. COVID-19 can cause mild to severe illness; most severe illness occurs in older adults.

SITUATION IN U.S.

Different parts of the country are seeing different levels of COVID-19 activity. The United States nationally is in the acceleration phase of the pandemic. The duration and severity of each pandemic phase can vary depending on the characteristics of the virus and the public health response.

CDC and state and local public health laboratories are testing for the virus that causes COVID-19. View CDC’s Public Health Laboratory Testing map.

All 50 states have reported cases of COVID-19 to CDC.

U.S. COVID-19 cases include:
- Imported cases in travelers
- Cases among close contacts of a known case
- Community-acquired cases where the source of the infection is unknown.
- Most U.S. states are reporting some community spread of COVID-19.

CDC RECOMMENDS
- Everyone can do their part to help us respond to this emerging public health threat:
  - On March 16, the White House announced a program called “15 Days to Slow the Spread,” which is a nationwide effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 through the implementation of social distancing at all levels of society.
  - Older people and people with severe chronic conditions should take special precautions because they are at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 illness.
  - If you are a healthcare provider, use your judgment to determine if a patient has signs and symptoms compatible with COVID-19 and whether the patient should be tested. Factors to consider in addition to clinical symptoms may include:
    - Does the patient have recent travel from an affected area?
    - Has the patient been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 or with patients with pneumonia of unknown cause?
    - Does the patient reside in an area where there has been community spread of COVID-19?
    - If you are a healthcare provider or a public health responder caring for a COVID-19 patient, please take care of yourself and follow recommended infection control procedures.
    - People who get a fever or cough should consider whether they might have COVID-19, depending on where they live, their travel history or other exposures. More than half of the U.S. is seeing some level of community spread of COVID-19. Testing for COVID-19 may be accessed through medical providers or public health departments, but there is no treatment for this virus. Most people have mild illness and are able to recover at home without medical care.
    - For people who are ill with COVID-19, but are not sick enough to be hospitalized, please follow CDC guidance on how to reduce the risk of spreading your illness to others. People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to isolate at home during their illness.
    - If you have been exposed to someone sick with COVID-19 in the last 14 days, you will face some limitations on your movement and activity. Please follow instructions during this time. Your cooperation is integral to the ongoing public health response to try to slow spread of this virus.

COVID-19 EMERGENCE

COVID-19 is caused by a coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in people and many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats, and bats. Rarely, animal coronaviruses can infect people and then spread between people such as with MERS-CoV, SARS-CoV, and now with this new virus (named SARS-CoV-2).

The SARS-CoV-2 virus is a betacoronavirus, like MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV. All three of these viruses have their origins in bats. The sequences from U.S. patients are similar to the one that China initially posted, suggesting a likely single, recent emergence of this virus from an animal reservoir.

Early on, many of the patients at the epicenter of the outbreak in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China had some link to a large seafood and live animal market, suggesting animal-to-person spread. Later, a growing number of patients reportedly did not have exposure to animal markets, indicating person-to-person spread. Person-to-person spread was subsequently reported outside Hubei and in countries outside China, including in the United States. Some international destinations now have ongoing community spread with the virus that causes COVID-19, as do some parts of the United States. Community spread means some people have been infected and it is not known how or where they became exposed.
SEVERITY

The complete clinical picture with regard to COVID-19 is not fully known. Reported illnesses have ranged from very mild (including some with no reported symptoms) to severe, including illness resulting in death. While information so far suggests that most COVID-19 illness is mild, a report out of China suggests serious illness occurs in 16% of cases. Older people and people of all ages with severe chronic medical conditions — like heart disease, lung disease and diabetes, for example — seem to be at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 illness. A CDC Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report that looked at severity of disease among COVID-19 cases in the United States by age group found that 80% of deaths were among adults 65 years and older with the highest percentage of severe outcomes occurring in people 85 years and older.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A pandemic is a global outbreak of disease. Pandemics happen when a new virus emerges to infect people and can spread between people sustainably. Because there is little to no pre-existing immunity against the new virus, it spreads worldwide.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is infecting people and spreading easily from person-to-person. On March 11, the COVID-19 outbreak was characterized as a pandemic by the WHO.

This is the first pandemic known to be caused by a new coronavirus. In the past century, there have been four pandemics caused by the emergence of new influenza viruses. As a result, most research and guidance around pandemics is specific to influenza, but the same premises can be applied to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemics of respiratory disease follow a certain progression outlined in a “Pandemic Intervals Framework.” Pandemics begin with an investigation phase, followed by recognition, initiation, and acceleration phases. The peak of illnesses occurs at the end of the acceleration phase, which is followed by a deceleration phase, during which there is a decrease in illnesses. Different countries can be in different phases of the pandemic at any point in time and different parts of the same country can also be in different phases of a pandemic.

WORLD OVERVIEW FROM NEW YORK TIMES
(4/6/20)

The coronavirus pandemic has sickened more than 1.2 million people, according to official counts. As of Monday afternoon (4/6/20), at least 70,000 people have died, and the virus has been detected in at least 176 countries, as these maps show.

The number of known coronavirus cases in the United States continues to grow quickly. As of Friday morning, at least 336,000 people across every state, plus Washington, D.C., and four U.S. territories, have tested positive for the virus, according to a New York Times database, and at least 9,600 patients with the virus have died.
YOUR HEALTH MATTERS: HEALTH AND HYGIENE TIPS CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL

The first coronavirus case in Michigan was reported on March 10. There have been a total of 17,221 cases reported and deaths, according to a New York Times database. Michigan has been consistently the fourth highest nationally behind New York, New Jersey, and California.

Detroit has become an epicenter of the disease outbreak. Wayne County (3247), Oakland County (3380), Macomb County (2159) and the city of Detroit (5023) have the most cases in the state. There have also been cases reported inside Detroit Reentry (11), Duane Waters Health Center (7), Kinross (1), Lakeland (30), Macomb (53), Newberry (1), Parnell (98), WHV (24), Woodland (2)

Gretchen Whitmer issued a “Stay at Home” order on March 24th, which extends until April 13th. Measures like this are being issued in states all over the country and currently half of the world is under similar “Stay at Home” restrictions. All “non-essential” businesses have been closed, public schools have closed for the rest of the school year, and over 6.6 million people have filed for unemployment across the country.

WATCH FOR SYMPTOMS

Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases.

These symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure (based on the incubation period of MERS-CoV viruses).

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness Of Breath

If you develop emergency warning signs for COVID-19 get medical attention immediately. Emergency warning signs include*:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or inability to arouse
- Bluish lips or face

*This list is not all inclusive. Please consult your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

HOW CORONAVIRUS SPREADS

PERSON-TO-PERSON SPREAD

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

CAN SOMEONE SPREAD THE VIRUS WITHOUT BEING SICK?

People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this occurring with this new coronavirus, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

SPREAD FROM CONTACT WITH CONTAMINATED SURFACES OR OBJECTS

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

HOW EASILY THE VIRUS SPREADS

How easily a virus spreads from person-to-person can vary. Some viruses are highly contagious (spread easily), like measles, while other viruses do not spread as easily. Another factor is whether the spread is sustained, spreading continually without stopping.

The virus that causes COVID-19 seems to be spreading easily and sustainably in the community (“community spread”) in some affected geographic areas.

Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected.

SITUATION IN U.S.

Different parts of the country are seeing different levels of COVID-19 activity. The United States nationally is in the initiation phase of the pandemic. States in which community spread is occurring are in the acceleration phase. Due to the inability to maintain appropriate social distancing, county jails across the country have been releasing inmates, Iran has already released over seventy thousand prisoners, and Gretchen Whitmer issued an executive order 29 calling for the early release of people in county jails and prisoners to be consider for parole. That said, there is no guarantee that any of these executive orders will be carried out by counties or the parole board and self advocacy efforts remain crucial.
U.S. COVID-19 cases include:
• Imported cases in travelers
• Cases among close contacts of a known case
• Community-acquired cases where the source of the infection is unknown.
• Twenty-seven U.S. states are reporting some community spread of COVID-19.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

KNOW HOW IT SPREADS
• There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).
• The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus.
• The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.
• Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).

Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Clean your hands often
• Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
• If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
• Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
• Avoid close contact
• Avoid close contact with people who are sick
• Put distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT OTHERS

Stay home if you’re sick
• Stay home if you are sick, except to get medical care. Learn what to do if you are sick.

Cover coughs and sneezes
• Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.
• Throw used tissues in the trash.
• Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Wear a facemask if you are sick
• If you are sick: You should wear a facemask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) and before you enter a healthcare provider’s office. If you are not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then you should do your best to cover your coughs and sneezes, and people who are caring for you should wear a facemask if they enter your room.
• If you are NOT sick: You do not need to wear a facemask unless you are caring for someone who is sick (and they are not able to wear a facemask). Facemasks may be in short supply and they should be saved for caregivers.

Clean and disinfect
• Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.
• If surfaces are dirty, clean them: Use detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING YOUR SPACE

HOW TO CLEAN AND DISINFECT

Wear disposable gloves to clean and disinfect.

Clean
• Clean surfaces using soap and water. Practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces.

High touch surfaces include:
• Tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.

Disinfect
• Clean the area or item with soap and water or another detergent if it is dirty. Then, use a household disinfectant.
• Follow the instructions on the label to ensure safe and effective use of the product.
• Many products recommend:
  • Keeping surface wet for a period of time (see product label)
  • Precautions such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.
• Diluted household bleach solutions may also be used if appropriate for the surface. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.
• Follow manufacturer’s instructions for application and proper ventilation. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.
• Leave solution on the surface for at least 1 minute
• To make a bleach solution, mix:
  • 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water
  • OR
  • 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water
• Alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol.

Soft surfaces
For soft surfaces such as carpeted floor, rugs, and drapes
• Clean the surface using soap and water or with cleaners
  appropriate for use on these surfaces.
• Launder items (if possible) according to the manufacturer’s
  instructions. Use the warmest appropriate water setting and
  dry items completely.
  OR
• Disinfect with an EPA-registered household disinfectant.
  These disinfectants meet EPA’s criteria for use against
  COVID-19.

Electronics
For electronics, such as tablets, touch screens, keyboards,
and remote controls.
• Consider putting a wipeable cover on electronics
• Follow manufacturer’s instructions for cleaning and disinfect-
  ing
• If no guidance, use alcohol-based wipes or sprays contain-
  ing at least 70% alcohol. Dry surface thoroughly.

Laundry
• For clothing, towels, linens and other items
• Wear disposable gloves.
• Wash hands with soap and water as soon as you remove the
  gloves.
• Do not shake dirty laundry.
• Launder items according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
  Use the warmest appropriate water setting and dry items
  completely.
• Dirty laundry from a sick person can be washed with other
  people’s items.
• Clean and disinfect clothes hampers according to guidance
  above for surfaces.

Clean hands often
• Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20
  seconds.
• Always wash immediately after removing gloves and after
  contact with a sick person.
• Hand sanitizer: If soap and water are not readily available
  and hands are not visibly dirty, use a hand sanitizer that
  contains at least 60% alcohol. However, if hands are visibly
  dirty, always wash hands with soap and water.
• Additional key times to clean hands include:
  • After blowing one’s nose, coughing, or sneezing
  • After using the restroom

• Before eating or preparing food
• After contact with animals or pets
• Before and after providing routine care for another person
  who needs assistance (e.g. a child)
• Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed
  hands.

WHEN SOMEONE IS SICK

Bedroom and Bathroom
Keep separate bedroom and bathroom for sick person
(if possible)
• The sick person should stay separated from other people in
  the home (as much as possible).
• If you have a separate bedroom and bathroom: Reduce
  cleaning to as-needed (e.g. soiled items and surfaces) to
  minimize the amount of contact with the sick person.
• Caregivers can provide personal cleaning supplies to the
  sick person (if appropriate). Supplies include tissues, paper
  towels, cleaners, and EPA-registered disinfectants.
• If shared bathroom: Clean and disinfect after each use by
  the sick person. If this is not possible, the caregiver should
  wait as long as possible before cleaning and disinfecting.

Food
• Stay separated: The sick person should eat (or be fed) in
  their room if possible.
• Wash dishes and utensils using gloves and hot water: Han-
  dle any non-disposable used food service items with gloves
  and wash with hot water or in a dishwasher.

Clean hands after handling used food service
items.

Trash
Dedicated, lined trash can: If possible, dedicate a lined
trash can for the sick person. Use gloves when removing
garbage bags, and handling and disposing of trash. Wash
hands afterwards.
PEOPLE WHO ARE AT HIGHER RISK FOR SEVERE ILLNESS

COVID-19 is a new disease and there is limited information regarding risk factors for severe disease. Based on currently available information and clinical expertise, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Based on what we know now, those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are:

- People aged 65 years and older
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility

People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including:

- People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
- People who have serious heart conditions
- People who are immunocompromised
  - Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications
- People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
- People with diabetes
- People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
- People with liver disease
DEAR MAMA James Washington III

May these words I write find your spirit to kiss. Diane’s warm embrace, my mother . . . love still bond, physical presence continuously missed.

Days never pass that I don’t think back, can see you smile, it makes me laugh. My source of Joy.

I remember you taught me how to cook. I was five years old. Showed me how to take care of things. Even iron my clothes.

Thank you, I appreciate you, raising me to be the man another woman’s son couldn’t be to you. Thank you for being the example of the kind of woman I needed to see. Just to think, you had four children. But you did that for me. I’m now beginning to understand the value of the sacrifices you made.

What I would give to see you again . . . But deep inside I feel your protection. When I speak, can sense that you’re listening. I miss you. My eyes still go waterfall occasionally, specifically November 14th.

I cried like an orphan the day I learned you would no longer be with me. Had to deal with that alone . . . in the hole. Led to conversations with God turning into life changing experience.

Twelve years since you passed, still in prison head high to the ceiling. Places like this didn’t seem to kill me, made me stronger. Neither make or break, brought forth what was in me. After twenty, they ask, what is in him? I say, the part of you the whole world think is seemingly missing.

Dear Mama

SOUL ENCOUNTERS THAT PAINT AWARENESS Sajad Al-Jibory/Double M

Let me start this off by saying that humanity has been its own worst enemy throughout history, whether through exploration, religion, power struggles, oppression, politics, and so on. These are only a few of the reasons that “scars” are passed down over time. We find safety in what we know and don’t go past our personal views, even if what we know is more corrupt, dangerous, and insecure. It’s what we understand and it’s always easier to condemn what we don’t know.

The media and propaganda are what constantly pick at the “scars,” exposing only what they want at this moment in time. The media is the mercenary of America and the world because all they care about is money. They don’t care how a half-truth can impact a city, state, or even whole cultures such as Muslims, Latinos, or African-Americans. Nothing blinds a man more than hate. It fogs the perception. When we hate, the truth cannot be revealed because hate compels us to deny the truth even if we see it. Why? The wound of humanity.

They understand that, these days, a platform is necessary to rise and be heard. They don’t show that it takes an ambulance 30 minutes to get to a person in the “hood” who’s been shot. They don’t show that police respond even later than that. They don’t show the backlog of cases just tossed to the side. They don’t tell you that a Latino or Black man (outside of an A-list actor) is always playing the role of thief, gangbanger, robber, murderer, or rapper. You must understand that the subconscious mind is responsible for making connections. What do I mean? Do you think of every word you write as you write it? Do you think that every word you know how to spell was rehearsed by you? No: Your subconscious mind has made that connection and does its job when it’s called to make a complete thought come to life through words. Communities that survive with and depend on each other for safety or financial needs gain understanding through suffering together. This what brought these so-called “gangs,” or “revolutionaries,” as I call them, together. Have you ever felt misunderstood? If you are outside these communities, this image given through generations to your subconscious mind will make that negative connection it has been picking up on with every show, movie, and book you have ever seen.

If you are inside of these communities, and that stigma is constantly vocalized and shown on television along with the violence seen in a “suffering community” that is forced to survive, you are likely to become what you have been programmed to “think” you are instead of what you have the power to be because you are part of a lineage of survivors and warriors. How can one succeed if he is already tossed aside when he walks through a door? It’s hard enough getting to know people. It’s even harder when that initial encounter comes with the weight of proving they are not what propaganda portrays.

They want you to hate Islam so you are unable and unwilling to understand. They want to hide the truth. Such as the oppression “America” brought upon the Muslim world during the Bush administration for precious resources like oil. The Muslim world consists of more than the Middle East, but that is the platform they chose to exploit because of a sick man named Saddam Hussein. Though I do not support anything ISIS does, they were initially formed to combat this oppression, as was the Taliban and Al-Qae-
SOUL ENCOUNTERS THAT PAINT AWARENESS Continued from Page 11

da. All of these groups lost their vision and would hurt more than help the religion they were ostensibly fighting for. Yes, it’s humanity’s job as to help the oppressed, but when your help becomes just as oppressive where does that leave us? A reaction, but they don’t show that part.

If I asked you to clear your thoughts and called you back in 30 minutes and simply stated “Islam or Muslim,” what would come to your mind? Terrorism—but why? You have been subconsciously programmed to make that connection and that’s not a word one will ever be comfortable with or around because of what that word is associated with: fear. They don’t show the rest of the Muslim world condemning these actions, fighting them without the means to actually do so because they are the true believers of Islam, fighting “Jihad” against those who are tarnishing this beautiful religion. They don’t show you the communities that are bi-racial and also of many religions alongside of Islam coexisting, prospering, helping to build a stronger community. Dearborn and Hamtramck are places like this. When you ask members of these communities what they think when they hear “Muslim or Islam,” they will most likely smile because they’re thinking of their friends. They have had sleepovers, grown up together, celebrated birthdays, exchanged presents, honored each other’s different holidays. Why? Because the media couldn’t create hate where there is understanding, couldn’t blind them from what they’ve seen their whole lives, which is the opposite of what has become so destructively attached to a religion, condemning those who pray to God the same as all faithful do in their own beautiful way.

Hypnosis is a mind control method. Correct? Where the body goes into a deep sleep and the subconscious takes over so that someone can sway what you do or think. If you work 2-3 jobs, have multiple kids, and barely have time to shower, sleep, or have a desk job, your brain is on overload and you are very susceptible to the propaganda of the screen. They know this, and by “they” I mean the ones who control the board dictating the pace of the game. The government is the friend you always felt kind of weird about but dismissed things because of your friendship, only to one day see what you felt was true and start watching more closely. Because you are finally making the choice to be conscious, you now “understand” that you were only being used to allow that “scar” handed down to never fully heal.

If we fail to seek truth and actual understanding of the rest of humanity, we will remain nothing but tools to those that gain from all our losses. Make the choice to exercise the free will God has given you in order to gain the knowledge necessary to make your decision from a humble standpoint. The truth lies in between both sides. It’s up to us to investigate or just accept.

WITHOUT FULL EMPLOYMENT THE SURVIVAL OF PROGRAMS FOR RETURNING CITIZENS ARE IN DANGER

Jamal Hammond

Editor’s note: It may seem strange to be publishing an article arguing for the importance of full employment at a moment in time when unemployment rates are skyrocketing quickly. We received this submission before the viral spread was on the public radar and feel it highlights some points that remain salient, specifically that the work economy sets the stage for re-entry. An implied point of this article takes center-stage in our current moment of health crisis, namely, that the ripple effects of unemployment will increase the difficulty of re-entry adjustment even as the crisis demands the emptying of prisons for the sake of public health. We need to think creatively and critically together and welcome further conversation from readers in response.

For decades reentry advocates have tried to ensure that returning citizens are not denied an opportunity to earn a living on the basis of having spent time in prison. Their advocacy upheld the underlying principle of equal opportunity, namely that anyone seeking employment should be charged solely on individual merit and therefore not to be discriminated against after supposedly paying their debt to society. They have directed their efforts at eliminating the “have you ever been convicted of a felony?” box on job applications; pressed for a national legislation to outlaw discrimination in employment; and try to appeal to the consciousness of Americans to uphold the idea of everyone having a fair shot. However, advocacy based solely on the principle of opportunity is inadequate to address complex employment problems.

I’ve been thinking more and more about this because I hope to be exonerated and released from prison soon. There is a minority of returning citizens for whom it is enough to remove the artificial barriers to employment. Mainly those who entered prison with careers already in progress. Then there are others, the majority, for him opportunity it’s just a word and removing such barriers hardly changes anything. They are predicament remains the same or worsens because they will be able to compete for only a limited number of jobs. As much as 80% of people entering prison do so without a high school diploma or GED, and leave with a little more than a few self-help certificates that carry no weight in the job market.

Family and friends tell me not to worry about finding a “good job.” They tell me that “more companies are hiring
Many people know this of course. And hardly anyone is saying it. And because they do not say it, the public at large winds up confused about how much progress is actually being made in terms of employment opportunities. Confused about how removing artificial barriers does not enable returning citizens to compete equally with others for valued employment. Confused about how removing barriers does not remove the accumulation of disadvantages flowing from time out of the lifecycle, stigma that’s even going to be difficult for me to shake when the court admits I never should have been incarcerated, and discrimination that keeps returning citizens on the periphery of building a quality life since quality of life is often wrapped up and how much money a person does or does not make.

The question should be raised that incarceration disrupts the lifecycle (e.g. education, career, wealth building), and it said disruption constrains life chances when people get out, which the majority of people behind bars at sometime will, what is the benefit of incarceration? “Disruption” just exasperates already existing problems. I mean we can predict with a high degree of accuracy where most people getting out of prison and returning to a post-industrial society will end up if the net effect of reentry does not confront how the economic and social situations into which so many people are paroled produce modes of adaptation and create subcultural patterns to take destructive forms. There is an increased likelihood of turning to either underground illegal activity or idleness or both. This isn’t a morality thing or a values thing. It is a national economy thing; a rising cost of food, clothes, shelter, transportation, high insurance costs, outrageous healthcare deduct-ible thing. Problems that most Americans experience, but more immediate and critical when a person is just getting out of prison.

I am convinced that after exoneration and released from prison I will connect to the tools and resources necessary to become a thriving member of the community. A very unique set of circumstances came together which permitted me over the years to self educate (I don’t have any degrees) and build up a resume of activism, critical thinking, and organizing skills. But for those that have not been as lucky, and I do not use that word loosely, I believe that the complex problems of finding wealth-building jobs after spending decades or even just years in prison can be alleviated only by policy that involves promoting full employment.

As I see it, there are important questions usually overlooked when strategies to promote employment opportunities for returning citizens are proposed. These questions include, but are not limited to, what are the type, variety, and volume of jobs to be generated; to what extent are the jobs located in the communities incarcerated men and women come from and return to; and what is the quality of these jobs in terms of stability and pay? I believe the answers will have to be pursued beyond just “finding a job,” beyond income and skills needed to function in the “free market.” I believe the economic rules need to be changed in favor of the poor and middle-classes, prison’s majority clientele.

Accordingly, those who argue they’re returning citizens economic and financial plight can be satisfactorily addressed simply by removing artificial barriers to employment fail to recognize how to re-integration into the community is inextricably connected with the structure and function of the modern American economy. They do not take into account fluctuations in demand for labor, how executive and shareholder payouts affect the rates of employment, or attacks on unions. The complex factors associated with this shift in emphasis cannot be reviewed in full detail here, but I should like to point out here that even educated, trained, and talented returning citizens cannot really benefit from the removal of artificial barriers if the economy rules stay in place.

A full employment approach would not eliminate the principle of equal opportunity, but would rather be considered an offshoot of it, and indeed is secondary to it. I say this because returning citizens are disadvantaged not simply by disruption in the lifecycle, you know being caged for part of their life, but by profound economic structural changes: The shift from goods-producing to service-pro-ducing industries has polarized the labor market into high-wage and low-wage sectors; automation and artificial intelligence have affected the number and types of jobs available; and manufactures continue to relocate to foreign markets where labor, resources, and the environment are least protected. While these changes have adversely affected the poor and working classes in general, they have been especially devastating for returning citizens because they live in the areas that have been hardest hit by these changes.

To embrace the idea of full employment does not mean a shift in focus away from the employment needs of returning citizens. It keeps me up most nights thinking about
how putting the pieces of my life back together after getting out of prison cannot wait for the launching of long-term programs. Short-term prison and community programs such as coding, STEM, and a high-paying trades are needed now. Moreover, policies or programs targeted at people getting out of prison are much less likely to be introduced or to receive continuing support in a stagnant economy. Full employment would create a climate to help preserve such programs.

In closing, to speak to the need for long-term economic structural changes is not to disregard the need for short-term targeted programs for returning citizens. Rather, it is to recognize that full employment makes targeted programs less required. It recognizes the need for reentry advocates to shift or expand their definition of the problems they work to illuminate, and they need to broaden the dialogue and scope of suggested policy changes, a need to broaden the dialogue to central economic concerns—an economy based on meeting people's needs rather than profit.

WHAT WE DO SAYS WHO WE ARE AS A PEOPLE Dwight Henley, MBA, and Jamie Meade

Editor's Note: The numbers were updated on the day of printing as requested by the author.

We say Iran is a totalitarian country run by brute force of dictatorship. We label Iran's government as state-sponsored terrorists and condemn them for anti-humanitarian actions against their own people and neighboring countries in the region. However, this totalitarian government recently released nearly 50,000 prisoners in response to the deadly COVID-19 virus while states across our country refuse to do so.

With over 17,221 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 727 deaths in Michigan so far, Governor Gretchen Whitmer has failed to publicly address any concern for the 37,000-plus prison population in the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC). The MDOC has over 5,000 prisoners already at or past their release date and approximately 2,500 prisoners who are 50 years old or older with 20-plus years served. Not only have these elderly prisoners spent decades in prison while having the lowest recidivism rates, they are now the most vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus.

So why do we refuse to release prisoners while a totalitarian government found the compassion to do so? Perhaps many Americans fail to view prisoners as citizens and, therefore, don't see them as people. Some may not even be thinking about those in prison during a crisis such as this. Or maybe our political leaders are more concerned about their political careers than human lives. Whichever the case, governmental officials help citizens avoid inner conflict about this calamity with false claims about how the law prohibits early release. If the concern for those imprisoned continues to be ignored, governmental officials in Michigan and around the country will find themselves faced with a high fatality rate in prisons due to the COVID-19 virus.
Alejo: My name is Alejo, here with Jasmine, and you’re listening to Rustbelt Abolition Radio: an abolitionist media and movement building project. Today we have the wonderful opportunity to speak with two members of the Asian Prisoner Support Committee, APSC, Nate Tan and Ny Nourn. Welcome to the show.

Jasmine: Thanks so much for having me Alejo, and thank you to Nate and Ny for also guesting.

Nate: Yeah, thanks for having us.

Alejo: So both of you, right, along with you, Jasmine as well, have long been involved in this extraordinary organization, the Asian Prisoner Support Committee based out of the Bay Area in California. So can you both tell us a little bit about how you got involved with the APSC?

Nate: Ny, do you want to go first? You going to take this question on for us?

Ny: So how did I get involved with APSC? I think definitely because APSC, when I was in ICE detention and facing deportation to Cambodia, I knew that they were coming out to my court hearings, supporting me, you know, for my freedom, for my release. So they were just amazing in that. And I knew that once I got released into the Bay Area that I wanted to connect with APSC. Not only thanking them but doing the movement work with them and, and supporting others, like how they’ve supported me.

Nate: Yeah. My story’s a little bit different than Ny’s. I got involved with Asian Prisoner Support Committee largely because I think my community has been, I think growing up has felt really underrepresented in a lot of Asian American media I consumed, like I don’t think my experience growing up as a child of Cambodian refugees was reflected in popular culture or I could relate to people. There wasn’t a lot of people outside of the Cambodian American community that can talk to you about incarceration, deportation, and donut shops and all these things. And I met Asian Prisoner Support Committee at a school, when I was in college over five years ago. And they gave a presentation on the incarceration of Asian Americans and deportation. And I stuck with them ever since.

Jasmine: Thank you so much for sharing that. So we’re just going to dive right into sort of the bigger questions about APSC and, and where APSC sees itself fitting into larger movements. So it seems that one of the key targets of APSC’s work is what some would call crimmigration, right? And so a portmanteau of what—this sort of prefix, crim- and immigration, right? And so one of the pieces of legislation that continues to structure immigration struggles is the 1996 IIRIRA or Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, while, sort of, the 1994 crime bill is what generally structures most people’s understandings of prison expansion in the US. So with this in mind, can y’all explain what crimmigration is and what does crimmigration as a term mean for APSC?

Ny: The word crimmigration, if you separate it is criminal reform and immigration, right? We have a closed system and the immigration system, and of course immigrants, they end up just like any other person, when they end up charged or convicted of a crime, they end up in the legal system and they end up being sentenced to prison or jail. And after serving their time, they are criminalized, being punished further because of their immigration status.

Nate: Yeah. So how I think—to add to Ny’s point—how I came to understand crimmigration is this really interesting cross section where this really unique population falls, and that’s people who are highly carcerable, and highly subject to the forces of immigration police, which I don’t think is unique to Asian Americans or Southeast Asians but nonetheless, it affects Asian Americans who do fall into the incarceration system and immigration system. And I think society often separates criminal justice system and the immigration system as these two separate systems that don’t talk to each other, that have no relationship to each other, but in reality, these things inform each other and work together to build this really robust machine that really harms our communities.

Alejo: We’d like to get a sense for how you all think about crimmigration as both of you are saying, right? That’s sort of, we tend to separate out these terms and in particular we’d like to think about how you all are thinking also about abolition and how abolition intervenes in this sort of crimmigration complex as it were. So you all probably saw that during the 2018 movement, there were explicit connections, right? Explicit expressions of solidarity between, for example, the unrest in the ICE detention centers in Washington, as well as Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, right? This prisoner-led organization from the inside who stood in solidarity with those in the ICE detention facilities in Washington. So how does APSC sort of see itself as part of the abolitionist movement more generally?

Nate: Yeah, I can speak a little bit to that and then I can tag Ny in. But I think for Asian Prisoner Support Committee, our work has to be rooted in abolition in that reform hasn’t gotten us out of this mess to date, right? Like, I think, as we come to understand reform is changing a system, you know, changing the system as a race structure, it’s hurt our communities and impacted our communities. And abolition is kind of the longterm term vision, right? And when I think of abolition and APSC work, I don’t necessarily think of it like this kind of immediate thing that happens, but what do we need to do to decarcerate the prison system to the point of its extinction? And what do we need to do in the immigration system where, uh, we can rid the United States of, you know, ICE? And I think about how that abolition is also structural and like the abolishing of a structure but also abolishing of some social and cultural beliefs that we have, right? So like, could prisons exist if racism didn’t exist? If slavery didn’t exist in the United States. If colonialism didn’t exist, could ICE exist without racism as well, or sexism, patriarchy, xenophobia — and that an end to the prison system and immigration system also means an end to these systems that are so deeply embedded into US society.

Ny: Adding to Nate’s point, it all starts with the shifting of the stories being, uh, reflected and uplifting everybody’s humanity. That’s part of, you know, abolition, abolitionist practices and we’re created in a way — you know, because society, they want
to play into fear. And is it fair for those that, say, intern immigrants because of the serials, you know, they’re rapists and murderers, whatnot. But yet for us, we counteract that we, we share the history and the underlying needs. Like how to, you know, instead of trying to explain like, how did the person end up — Like, what is behind these decisions that they made or how they involved in these types of behaviors. I mean, without talking about, you know, people’s stories, we can’t talk about mass incarceration, how to end it. And we’re, you know, in a society that’s built on punitive justice or even reformatory justice, like Nate said, doesn’t work because, you know, we still have a mass incarceration crisis. We’re still battling it and the only way we know is to, how can we slowly dismantle it.

Jasmine: That was great. And then Nate, I’m wondering, can you talk a little bit about what are some of the concrete strategies that APSC takes to organize against the crimmigration system? I think Ny mentioned some of the campaigns that are about sort of restoring someone’s humanity after they’ve been sort of cast aside and disposed because of a crime that they committed. So I’m wondering what is it that APSC does to sort of organize against this?

Nate: Yeah, I think half jokingly APSC does everything that it can and our partners do everything they can in their power to stop a lot of deportations mostly, but do everything we can to get people out of prison, not deported. And most recently do what we can to bring people back. And some of the strategies — well I want to say that all of the strategies center impacted families as the key organizers to getting this work done because, uh, aside from the impacted people or the people who are directly affected, I think families are also affected by incarceration and deportation. So we had our #PardonRefugees campaign in 2019 that where we gathered all of the families in Northern California who were impacted by an ICE raid that targeted the Cambodian community. We got them together, in all one space. And it was like almost this really sad, mournful moment that like smoldered into this raging fire for freedom. And the, and then we got to organizing, I mean they talked to everyone they could in the highest places, our partners at the city and state level, they went on news stations and radio stations and they went everywhere to share their story. And while they were doing that, our partner center for empowering refugees and immigrants held space for the families to talk about their, talk about the struggles that they were going through. And then while all that was happening, on the legal end we had attorneys trying to fight the cases in court. So there’s almost this three-pillar strategy that all the families are involved in that takes almost this huge mass mobilization effort that I don’t think any of us could have anticipated but became the model in which we prevented deportations here moving forward.

Jasmine: Yeah, I think that’s something that, as a volunteer with APSC, I always found really inspiring was that there was this sort of attempt to organize people, not just sort of already-radicalized people who already know that prisons and in jails and detention centers are all like part of the same fucked up system. But that there was a real attempt and I would say, and I would say it’s successful, of including the families of the people who are being affected by these structures. And that I think that one of the places where all of these communities are coming together in a unified fight against prisons and cages and deportation is in the sort of court support that APSC has organized for campaigns. Like I know I was present at a lot of Ny’s hearings. I think that that’s like a really key strategy is using court support as a way to, or as the space to bring families and organizers and prison abolitionists and lawyers together.

Nate: Thank you Jasmine for, for bringing that up. We had this incredible strategy. So my earlier days when we started this work was with the #KeepPJHome campaign, and PJ was a former lifer in San Quentin, and he was facing deportation. He was incarcerated at the age of 14, did 19 years behind bars. And I think more than anything, PJ is my friend. And then being that he was my friend and I like really cared for him and I was really willing to do anything to not see him go. And the only thing I can think about doing was packing the courts every single time. And we packed those courts. I mean they had sitting room for, like, 35, 40 people and we always brought out 60 to 100 people depending on the day. But I think once more people started hearing PJ’s story and once PJ’s story started garnering sympathy, and his case isn’t like a easy case, to swallow right. It was a murder case. And very rarely in this, in this work you hear people trying to fight for people who are actually convicted of serious crimes. But I think from PJ’s case and from other cases that we’ve supported, we knew that if we can convince people and show people that even people who are convicted with serious crimes deserve freedom, then everyone else can deserve freedom. Right. And I think now we go from packing the courts to packing the whole capitol of Sacramento in California to packing court rooms eight hours away in Southern California. I mean, it’s been such a phenomenal journey. Yeah. Wow.

Alejo: How do y’all think you managed to do that? I mean, part of it, as you’re saying, is the narrative in a way, but it’s, it’s so hard, it seems at times to kind of be, go beyond these kind of very punitive, moralizing, narratives, right? That we’re always pushing back against. And I think sometimes that’s the challenge, between this crimmigration nexus, right? Because in the one hand, at least in my experience, the immigration reform movement has always tended to create the idea of the “good immigrant,” right, of this perfect, law-abiding subject that goes to work, goes to church, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And so that it’s always this friction, right, between those who are deemed worthy. So, and yet you all also, as you mentioned, Nate, you also brought people back. You managed to bring people back, right, as well, from after deportation, right? That’s part of the work that APSC does. So I’m just curious if you could sort of tell us a little bit about that. That part of the work.

Ny: I think with the good versus bad, we know that there’s no good or bad immigrant, no good or bad person. Like we all make mistakes, you know, because of xenophobia, they wanted to say, Oh, let’s see, you know, the bad immigrants keep the good ones, you know, those that don’t come into trouble with the law and you know, those, um, you know, those are, they considered no DACA’s. You know, children never brought over to the US by parents, you know, they’re focused on their school, in their education. They stay out of trouble, and they want us. Then those that are, you know, have went into the prison system, the jail syst-
tem to say, you know what, you have an opportunity to remain in the US, but then you do this X, Y, and Z. Therefore, you know, you're willing that you should be deported. Because, you know, you don't make America safe. You know, you should've never be, you know, in this country. And also the fact that they want to say, well, if you came here illegally, you know, that means, you know, you shouldn't be here the first place. So leave! Because we know there is not an illegal immigrant, you know, but they want to use that kinds of lingo. But we want to say instead, they came here as undocumented, and they want to say, you know, deport all the bad ones. That's what we're trying to do, dismantle that type of language and that narrative.

Alejo: Can you tell me a little bit more how you all were able to do that for PJ? Because PJ was undocumented if I understand that correctly.

Nate: Yeah. So PJ isn't undocumented per se because of what Jasmine spoke about earlier, the IIRIRA bill, Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. Even if you came here legally as an asylum seeker, as a green card holder, a permanent resident, once you commit a crime, you get that revoked and you, after you serve your time, you become deportable. So what we find is I think there's this common belief that immigration police or ICE only goes after people who are undocumented, but they go after— their primary focus and people who are most likely to be deported are immigrants who came here legally with who committed a crime or who were convicted of a crime. And that's what PJ is. That's what, actually, a lot of Southeast Asian prisoners face— a lot of Pacific Islanders face—that they come here with legal documentation and get caught up in the systems of poverty and then incarceration and then find themselves subject to deportation.

Jasmine: Yeah, I think that's one of the things that I've always appreciated about APSC's outward education is saying, look, there are these people who, because of these varying structures of white supremacy and capitalism and patriarchy are getting caught up in say, I mean like the big one for Southeast Asians as we've talked about in APC and also in roots, which is the education program in San Quentin and Solano is that, you know, people who are living, who, who may have legal documentation but are living precarious lives because of white supremacist cis-heteropatriarchal capitalism, um, get caught up in gang life and in other sorts of things that are deemed criminal when really they're just trying to survive, right? And then they get put into prison and then they find themselves suitable for parole. But as soon as they're let out on parole, instead of being freed, they're handed over directly to ICE because you know, even though parole says, well now you're a good citizen and you won't harm the community, ICE says, well, we still don't want you because you're an immigrant. Right? And so that particular narrative is so overwhelming and applies to so many people. And I think that work of sort of saying, well, you know, actually this question of documented or undocumented is really kind of missing the point and doesn't think about the ways that, you know, the US legal system and the US immigration system are working to always create criminals and also get rid of them.

Alejo: Yeah. Though I think also, I mean, as you were mention-
it to be better at it. And you know, we think freedom as freedom fills our senses, right? It has a touch, it has a smell, it has an emotion and it’s like this thing that can physically exist. And for us it’s when we keep families together and we get to reunite families together. And when we launched #PardonRefugees at the end, when we protected 11 Cambodians from deportation, I think that a group of us were like, what would it have looked like if this work was being done like five or 10 years ago? Could we have stopped more deportations? And then the later question became, what if we do this work now for people who were deported? And then we looked across the globe to folks who’ve been deported. And a group of us went out there [to Cambodia] and we did a presentation on #PardonRefugees strategies. We did, how we stop deportations. And then when we flew back after meeting like a hundred or so deportees, we were like, we’re going to bring someone back. And then eight weeks later we brought someone back. And I think, you know, it’s a start of our new campaign though, the #RighttoReunite campaign where we’re looking internationally to see how we can really end these physical boundaries that separate families. Right. Yeah. Wow. That’s really amazing. I mean, I wish we could talk more about this. I wish we could maybe talk about abolition as a martial art later, as a practice.

Jasmine: So, yeah. I’m just gonna ask one more question and that’s: are there any last things that either of you want to share?

Ny: I’m thinking like in longterm, how does this work sustain us? It’s definitely a sustained community, you know, power movements and empowering not just individuals, but collectively, you know, families and communities. And we celebrate and honor it and that’s what sustains us. And we know the work is really hard, right? It’s never easy to fight for someone’s freedom, especially against what we’re facing. So I think we definitely want to encourage other communities to do the same, to, you know, to try it out, to seek help, to ask for help. That’s why we’re doing outreach. You know, we’re going to do outreach in Southern California, if the next round of raids should happen in SoCal that, we should have, you know, another organization or community members down there that’s able to help support. We definitely want to build power all across the nation, you know, to trend it. Because I think that’s the only way to dismantle ICE, you know, to keep families together.

Nate: Yeah. And I think the last thing I want to add is, as much as abolition is a martial art as well, abolition is also, or to get to abolition is, very much a feeling. And I think a lot of the work that APSC does, we go in a little half-blinded. But I think in the end, our hearts and the hearts of the family members that are impacted and the hearts of people behind bars and the hearts of people in Cambodia, they beat for freedom. And I think that’s what keeps us moving towards that direction. And, you know, we, as much as we’ve had wins, we’ve also had losses, but that doesn’t stop this work because we know how necessary this work is, for our communities.

Jasmine: Well thank you so much for joining us on Rustbelt Abolition Radio. This was such a lovely and illuminating conversation and an important one to have as we continue to fight for a world without prisons and a world without cages.

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