

Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March



Letter from the Editor

Brothers and Sisters,
Allow me to introduce myself. Recently I was connected to Krystal, the chairperson of the Millions for Prisoners March, through a mutual friend on twitter. After speaking with her I learned about the opportunity to contribute to the No Shackles Newsletter, I can confidently say now that I've found a place within this movement. I recently graduated from the University of Washington this past June with a double major in Media & Communications and Law, Economics & Public Policy. I focused on research writing, my final research project documented the effects that local newspaper articles had on dehumanizing black students during the spat of racial incidents that occurred on college campuses across the U.S. in 2015. In many cases I found that the reputation of universities and university leaders were valued over protecting the lives and education of Black students. Similarly the reputations of companies and corporations also trample the value of Black life in America's capital democracy. So much so, that the 13th amendment we operate under today explicitly saves the reservation of slavery, an institution that's destroyed black families for centuries, for the benefit of corporations as punishment for a crime: *"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."* This amendment is why I am writing for you, it is why millions of Americans, including myself, are planning a march for you. In addition to being the Editor of the No Shackles Newsletter I am also a Local Representative for Seattle's Local Organizing Committee.

In solidarity,
Amani Sawari (@SawariMi)



Inside this Issue:

Letter from the Editor (p.1)

JLS Political Insight Column- Sundiata Jawanza

(p.2)

The Criminalization of Poverty in Capitalist America- Jalil Muntaqim

(p.3)

Millions for Prisoners March (p.8)

Getting Involved Inside and Outside

(p.8)

Reader Submissions (p.9)

I N Aawari Ara Mi- Amani Sawari

(p.10)



he 13th Amendment to the Constitution declared that "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."



JLS Political Insight Column

ABOLISH THE 13th: What does this mean?

It means to do away with by formal resolution. In this case to end LEGALIZED slavery/involuntary servitude in this Nation. Why not say amend or abolish the exception clause? Neither of these positions are incorrect in the legal jargon realms. This is why we say to ABOLISH, IN PART OR IN WHOLE. To those enslaved, it doesn't matter the language, they just want to have LEGALIZED enslavement abolished. We hold this belief as well. We are not trying to be politically correct. To say ABOLISH THE 13th are the words/language EVERYONE can understand. With the fall of LEGALIZED slavery in this country, will enter HUMANITY in the way we deal with those that have fallen short.

We are at a point in this Nation's history where the moral compass is being tested again by those enslaved. Their supporters are demanding an end to LEGALIZED slavery. These numbers grow daily as people awaken more and more to the suffering of those under the 13th. Some have argued that prisoners got what they deserved. Only a segment of people that have not been dehumanized can be regarded in such passing thoughts or conversations. This is the precise reason the 13th must be abolished. It's the continuation of a slave code that gave the same conclusive arguments 150 plus years ago, against a people it had dehumanized.

Today if you look in the Nations prisons, you will find that they have nothing to do with actually correcting or assisting in bettering people. Instead we find a system that warehouses and benefits economically from those imprisoned within. Criminalization has become a cash scheme from the biggest companies to the smallest. Most prisoners don't even know that their "time" has absolutely nothing to do with their so call crimes. Private investors spend millions to push unreasonable sentencing guidelines in every state and in Congress. This is the reason for Bill Clinton's signature on a so call crime bill that solidified the position of the Nation as the number one imprisonment land in the world.

All of what we see before us today, are the direct results of politicians maximizing on the 13th. This is our reasons for the slogan, ABOLISH the 13th.

To ABOLISH the 13th, is to change the entire National prison structural model. No longer will there be a Constitutional protection for companies to exploit the poor who have fallen short. Without such incentives, there will be no need to house people without actually helping. The Government and State will be more focused on creating policies and programs to get people out and keep people OUT of prisons. Support the Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March on Washington. Tell everyone you know to be there, and DEMAND an end to LEGALIZED slavery!!! Abolish the 13th! In

Solidarity,
Sundiata Jawanza



The Criminalization of Poverty in Capitalist America

Jalil Muntaqim: <http://www.freejalil.com/>



The Poor, Welfare and Prisons

An anonymous poet in the 1700's wrote about crime: "The law will punish a man or woman who steals the goose from the hillside, but lets the greater robber loose who steals the hillside from the goose." [1]

When talking about "the greater robber" it seemed particularly appropriate in the midst of the biggest financial rip-off in history of this country to think about the billions of dollars the Savings & Loan criminals stole, and about how most of them have gotten away with it. I thought about the complete insanity of how this country defines crimes in society. If you steal \$5 you're a thief, but if you

steal \$5 million --you're a financier.

Thirty percent of the wealth of this country is controlled by one-half of one percent of the people. Eighty percent of the wealth is controlled by ten percent of the people. I think that is a crime. In the dictionary, the word "crime" means "an act which is against the law." Crime applies particularly to an act that breaks a law that has been made for public good. Crime in one country, the dictionary continued, "may be entirely overlooked by the law in another country or may not apply at all in a different historical period."

That was interesting. What that really said was that concepts of "crime" are not eternal. The very nature of crime is socio-psychological and defined by time and place and those who have the power to make definitions; by those who write dictionaries, so to speak.

The more I thought about that and about those who write the laws, or at least define what law is, the more profound it became. I believe we all will agree that the United States is a nation of criminals. From its inception as a settler nation, exiled British criminals stole the land and lives from Native Americans and Africans.

They justified their actions with making and defining the law of the land, for example defining Africans as 3/5 of a man during slavery. Hence the power to define is an awesome power. It is the power of propaganda. It is the ability to manipulate our ideas, to limit our agenda, to mold how we see, and to shape what we look at. It is the power to interpret the picture we see when we look at the world for the American people in general, and New Afrikans, in particular. It is the power to place the picture we see when we look at the world. It is the power to place a frame around the picture, to define where it begins and ends. It is, in fact, the power to define where our vision begins and ends, the power to create our collective consciousness.

That kind of social propaganda is not only tremendously powerful, but it is also mostly invisible. We can't fight what we don't see. Most people accept the images and definitions that we have been taught as true, neutral, self-evident, and for always; so that the power to paint the future, to define what is right and wrong, what is lawful and what is criminal, is really the power to win the battle for our minds. And to win it without ever having to fight it. Simply said, it is hard to fight an enemy who



has an outpost in our minds. This indicates the need for revolutionary nationalists to develop a national agitation/propaganda mechanism. Specifically, nationalists need a single national publication and organ that represents the unified development of NAIM (The New African Independence Movement) to which each formation and organization contributes and supports its distribution.

The Social Dynamics of Crime Though some may question, as did Marx, the system's fairness in applying its rules, today most people don't question the basis of the system itself. That is, people don't question the relationship between those who own and those who don't. Though many people vote every four years on who governs, they never vote on and rarely question what governs. People don't challenge the legitimacy of the system, they accept it. The exception of course is when the oppressed rebel in insurrections. But usually we don't step outside of the frame around the picture. We don't disconnect the dots.

Emile Durkheim argued that crime is "normal" and necessary social behavior. According to Durkheim, "the inevitability of crime is linked to the differences (heterogeneity) within a society. Since people are so different from one another and employ such a variety of methods and forms of behavior to meet their needs, it is not surprising that some will resort to criminality. Thus as long as human differences exist, crime is inevitable and one of the fundamental conditions of social life."

[2]

In this regard, the conservative view echoes this sentiment inasmuch as they seek to establish a genetic trait that explains criminal behavior. They argue, "If liberals have trouble with the idea that people's genes influence their chances of committing crimes, conservatives have trouble with the idea that poverty causes crime. Conservatives do not deny that the poor commit more crimes than the rich. But instead of assuming that poverty causes crime, conservatives usually assume that poverty and crime have a common cause, namely the deficient character or misguided values of the poor." (Jencks, p. 11)

Concomitantly, the neo-liberals are essentially giving credence to the conservative position as it pertains to the "underclass." For instance sociologist William J. Wilson purports, "The liberal perspective on the ghetto underclass has become less persuasive and convincing in public discourse principally because many of those who represent traditional liberal views on social issues have been reluctant to discuss openly or, in some instances, even to acknowledge the sharp increase in social pathologies in ghetto communities." (Wilson, p. 6)

Needless to say, such ideas as genetic traits are the cause of crime set a dangerous precedent.

Trying to discern the social pathologies of the underclass harbors views that purport the wholesale contamination of entire communities. However, if one were to advocate that criminal behavior, especially of the poor, is either caused by genetic traits and/or born of social pathologies, then indisputably, it must be espoused that much of America suffers from these same causes.

In the March 12, 1993, issue of the Wall Street Journal an article entitled "Common Criminals --Just About Everyone Violates Some Laws, Even Model Citizens," byline by Stephen J. Adler and Wade Lambert stated:

We are a nation of lawbreakers. We exaggerate tax-deductible expenses, lie to customs officials, bet on card games and sports events, disregard jury notices, drive while intoxicated --and hire illegal childcare workers.



The last of these was recently the crime of the moment, and Janet Reno wouldn't have been in the position to be confirmed unanimously as attorney general yesterday if Zoe Baird had obeyed the much-flouted immigration and tax laws. But the crime of the moment could have been something else, and next time probably will be.

This is because nearly all people violate some laws, and many people run afoul of dozens without ever being considered, or considering themselves, criminals.

When we look at downtown urban centers, when we look at the lines of humanity waiting for food or a bed at the missions; if we look at the faces of people living in cardboard boxes on the streets of the cities, we must know that a crime has been committed. When we look at the faces of the dispossessed people, we see faces that look like people who lived in California when it was part of Mexico. In Miami we see faces of people whose great-great-grandparents were abducted and brought here from Africa.

In America, in the 1990s, as was the case in England in the 1800s, it is a crime to be poor. The poorer you are, the more criminal you are. If you are so poor that you have no place to live, and you live on the pavement or sleep in a car or in a park, you have committed a crime. It's against the law to sleep on the streets or in a park. If we have no home, it's against the law to sleep anywhere.

Walter I. Trattner in *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* makes the following observation in opposition to government policies that sought "to dismantle all benefit programs for working-age people except perhaps for unemployment insurance." (p. 335)

Indeed, others argued that structural changes in the economy and the erosion in anti-poverty programs were the causes of the problem, and that a strengthening, not dismantling, of the welfare state was essential in order to solve it. Such was the theme of Michael Harrington's *The New American Poverty* (1984), a depressing sequel pronouncement, "The poor are still there." They are poor, however, said Harrington, not because of any personal shortcomings or decisions on their part, but because of changes in the international economy, especially the "de-industrialization" of America, and the way in which they have been treated, or mistreated, here at home. They are the uprooted and the homeless, products of de-institutionalization, cuts in welfare programs, shortages in low-rent housing, and other social and economic forces over which they have no control; undocumented aliens who have become the new sweatshop laborers; unemployed blue-collar workers victimized by the disappearance of steady and relatively well-paying manufacturing jobs in the "smokestack industries" as a result of technological advances and global competition; white-collar workers who lost their jobs due to reorganization schemes in the name of efficiency, plant closings, or moves to new locations in the so-called Sunbelt; hopeless, uneducated, and untrained young blacks unable to get and hold jobs; families headed by poor, unmarried women; uprooted farmers and farm laborers hurt by the elimination of the subsistence farm and the agricultural depression; and millions of others in unskilled unsteady (and often parttime), low-wage, dead-end benefitless jobs in the service sector of the economy -- cooks in fast food restaurants, dishwashers and chambermaids in hotels and motels, janitors and cleaning women in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and the like. Harrington and others demand that the government spend billions of dollars on social programs to meet the needs of these "rejects" of society. (p. 336)

When the government fails to be responsible to its citizens and ignores the social dynamics of poverty, people are generally forced to seek illegitimate means to eke out an existence. In this case, it is a question of national oppression, whereby the imperialist government maintains exploitative relationships with New Afrikans, Native Americans, Chicanos, and Asians. Too many of these



“rejects” of society are caught in the vicious web of the criminal justice system. But the real criminals are those who create the socioeconomic conditions that perpetuate impoverishment. The real criminal is the colonial government itself. It then becomes necessary to assess the pathology of the capitalist and social policy makers that make crime big business, and deflect culpability of their criminal behavior.

Crime is Big Business The political decisions of the bankers are decisions about who will be poor. Corporate decisions made in the late '50s to remove industry from communities of color were about who would be unemployed. Decisions by developers and bankers about redevelopment (redlining and gentrification) are decisions about who will be homeless. Such decisions affect everyone, but people have no say in the matter. Generally people, especially the poor, have no say in most social and economic decisions that affect their lives. Somehow that is not part of the democratic method of government, and because people have no say in the process, creating homelessness is not criminal, but being homeless is. Runaway plants and plant closures are legal, but vagrancy is a crime. Trattner says:

Meanwhile the plight of the nation's hungry and homeless worsened. In November, 1984, in a pastoral letter on “Catholic Social Thinking and the U.S. Economy,” American Roman Catholic bishops had called poverty in America a “social and moral scandal that must not be ignored,” and stated that “works of charity cannot and should not have to substitute for humane public policy. ... A little more than a year later, the Physicians Task Force on Hunger in America reported on a two-year nationwide study it had conducted and concluded that, despite fifty-eight continuous months of economic expansion, hunger was more widespread and serious than at any time in the fifteen years (affecting some twenty million Americans), largely, in its words, because of “governmental failure” ... (Trattner, p. 337-8)

Hunger and homelessness are deliberately imposed socioeconomic conditions of the disenfranchised large numbers of the American population. This is especially significant when consideration is given to the method and means by which the malfeasance of the powers that be operate to ensure that such conditions stay the same. Thus such pathology ensures the rich get richer, while the poor get prison and early death.

Max Weber has argued that society is structured to function in a specific way to ensure its existence, that the social structure is subject to the mechanics of government, and that governing is all important above and beyond the immediate needs of the people. Weber held that social stratification depends on the distribution of three resources: wealth (economic resources), power (political resources), and prestige (social resources). Thus, in our society, wealthy business owners often gain power by contributing to political campaigns and earn prestige by making large donations to charity or to the arts. In other cases, however, the three are not linked. For example, in our society an individual acquires less prestige (in most circles) than someone who acquires comparable wealth by legitimate means. Artists, the clergy, and others may enjoy prestige but not wealth. On occasion people with few economic resources and little social prestige -- bureaucrats, for instance -- exercise considerable power. ... Weber held that because stratification is multidimensional, the formation of groups depends on which interests or identities people choose to emphasize. In capitalist societies, for example, ethnic and national identifications have proved more important than economic or class identification.[3]



We are able to determine the social and racial implications of certain classes, then, having a vested interest in crime. It can be argued that because an elite class of criminals is in charge, they commit capital crimes, crimes against society and humanity. The jails are overflowing, but that doesn't seem to help -- because the real criminals aren't in jail. They're in the board rooms and in the White House. They are the social policy makers that run this country. And today, they are increasing social repression by building more prisons, creating harsher legal sanctions (i.e. 52 death penalty laws, three strikes you're out), and becoming ever more heedless to the social implications of poverty as an impetus to committing crime.

Under their misleadership, over five million people are homeless, 37 million have no health insurance, 30 million are illiterate, 30 million more are functionally illiterate, one million are incarcerated, and 60 million live in poverty and are struggling day to day. By contrast, a tiny fraction of the population controls enormous wealth. The median net worth of the top 1% of households is 22 times greater than the median net worth of the remaining 99% of outstanding stocks and shares. The wealth of the richest 5% of the population increased by 37% from 1977 to 1988. The wealth of the richest 1% increased by 74.2%. At the same time, the number of people in poverty increased by one-third.

In this case crime does pay. The U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics announced on July 15, 1990 that federal, state and local governments spent \$61 billion for civil and criminal justice in 1988, a 34 percent increase since 1985. Other findings in the report were that federal, state, local governments spent \$248 per capita: \$114 for police, \$78 for corrections, \$54 for judicial and legal services, and \$2 for other items.

Almost half of the nation's justice spending was for police protection. Corrections accounted for almost one third of justice costs. Spending for corrections grew the most during that period, by 65 percent. Since 1979, state spending for prison construction increased 593 percent in actual (constant) dollars. That's some 2.6 times the rate of spending to operate prison facilities. In October of 1988 the nation's civil and criminal justice system employed 1.6 million persons, and the total October payroll for them was almost \$3.7 billion. [4]

Crime is big business in America. Annually the laws are changed to ensure profitability in the industry of crime. Social conditions that serve to maintain levels of poverty, feed the industry of crime, also put stress on the social stratifications of society. Given the fact that America is a nation of criminals as elucidated in the Wall Street Journal article, social conflict is inevitable. It then becomes a matter of identifying the real culprits of crime, and seeking the means to have them become accountable for their criminal behavior. This may very well include the redistribution of their wealth, and the reorganization of the social contract between the government and the governed.

In response to the stratification outlined above, it requires revolutionary nationalist and socialist efforts to formulate a national political agenda and policy that will challenge the prevailing social contract between the oppressed and the oppressor nation. This means revolutionary nationalists and socialists must have a clear and concise mass-line and political program that identifies and explains the nature of poor peoples' oppression, and how they are to be organized to confront their oppression.



Notes

1. Taken from an edited version of a speech by Sabina Virgo, given in L.A. on International Human Rights Day, December 8, 1990.
2. Quoted from the text, *Criminology*, by Larry Siegel., pg. 40.
3. Quoted from *An Introduction to Sociology*, by Michael S. Bassis, Richard J. Gelles and Ann Levine, pages 238-239.
4. *Justice Expenditure and Employment, 1988 (NCJ-124132)*.

Bibliography

Hacker, Andrew. *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*, New York : Ballantine Books, 1992.

Jencks, Christopher. *Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty and the Underclass*, New York : HarperCollins, 1992.

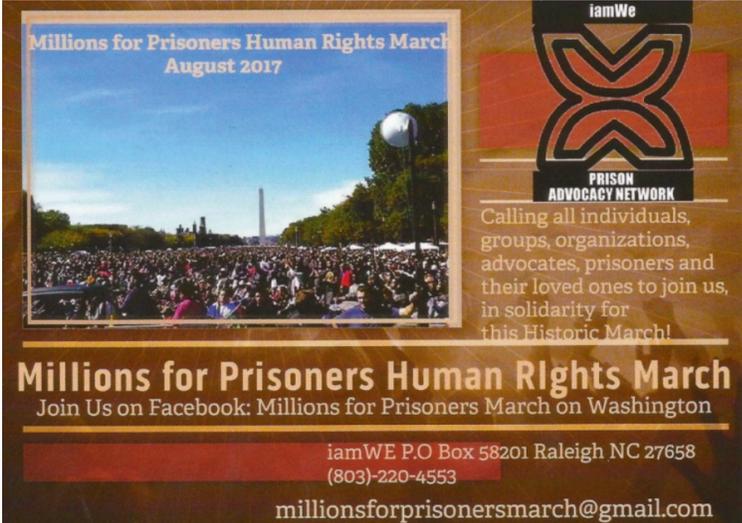
Time Magazine. "Lock'em Up: Outrage over crime has America talking tough," Feb. 7, 1994.

Trattner, Walter I. *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, New York : Free Press, 1989.

Millions for Prisoners March

Mission Statement

WE SEEK TO UNITE ACTIVISTS, ADVOCATES, PRISONERS, EX-PRISONERS, THEIR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, AS WELL AS ALL OTHERS COMMITTED TO THE FIGHT TO DRASTICALLY REDUCE OR ELIMINATE PRISONS AND THE PRISON SYSTEM, AND REPLACE THEM WITH MORE HUMANE AND EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS. OUR AIM IS TO EXPOSE THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION THAT IT TRULY IS. WE WANT TO CHALLENGE THE IDEA THAT CAGING AND CONTROLLING PEOPLE KEEPS COMMUNITIES SAFE. WE BELIEVE THAT FOR TOO LONG OUR NATION HAS RELIED UPON INCARCERATION AS A WAY TO SOLVE BROADER SOCIAL PROBLEMS, TO ITS DETRIMENT. IN AUGUST OF 2017, WE WILL MARCH ON WASHINGTON TO BRING WORLD ATTENTION TO THE CONTINUED SLAVERY AND INVOLUNTARY SERVITUDE IN AMERICA, ENABLED BY THE 13TH AMENDMENT AND TO HIGHLIGHT THE EVER INCREASING MOVEMENT AGAINST THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX.



The poster features a photograph of a large crowd gathered for a march. Text on the poster includes: "Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March August 2017", "iamWe PRISON ADVOCACY NETWORK", "Calling all individuals, groups, organizations, advocates, prisoners and their loved ones to join us, in solidarity for this Historic March!", "Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March", "Join Us on Facebook: Millions for Prisoners March on Washington", "iamWE P.O. Box 58201 Raleigh NC 27658 (803)-220-4553", and "millionsforprisonersmarch@gmail.com".



Getting Involved Inside and Outside

Local Organizing Committee (LOC)

The Local organizing committees shall be comprised of various individuals and organizations situated in local communities throughout the country. The LOCs will provide direct interaction with members of its local community as it relates to the promotion, organization and mobilization for the Millions for Prisoners Human Rights March. The LOC will engage members of the local community, and provide education on the impacts of the 13th amendment of the U.S constitutions and other laws that contribute to mass incarceration in their communities.

Requirements:

1. Minimum of 3 participants to form a LOC- 1 member being the Local Representative
2. All participants must be in agreement to raise awareness and push the Millions for Prisoner Human Rights March agenda. Participants are responsible for connecting with organizations and recruiting new members



Prison Organization Committee (POC)

POCs are operated for the sole purpose to keep the prison population informed on accurate information related to the March. This will be done by direct contacts established by the National POC manager. Any prisoner can form a POC. The process is simple. You must write for an application from the National POC Project Manager. After filing the application, if approved, you will receive a certification letter.

Requirements:

1. It takes 3 prisoners to form a POC- 1 member being the POC manager
2. All prisoners must be in agreement to raise awareness and push the Millions for Prisoner Human Rights March agenda. Participants are also responsible for recruiting new members.



Reader Submissions

Timeless

Let me first introduce myself, my name is Natanya Moton. I am a prison wife. My husband has been in jail since 1991, he was 15yrs old and I was 16yrs old at the time. My husband was convicted and sentenced to 27 to life at age 15yrs old. I was there from Day 1 until today and I will continue to be there until he is released.

My first visit was to Rikers Island in New York City was the worse. From the time I got off the bus until I enter Rikers Island I was treated as if I was an inmate. The searching alone made me feel disrespected and if I was an inmate. The way the C. O's made me feel was disgusting, but one thing it didn't stop me from visiting the man I love. It got worse when he went to Upstate NY prison. First I was thinking it can't be as bad as Rikers Island, boy I was wrong. First the ride was very long and dreadful then I had to actually wash up in a bathroom sink. But then it got even worse when it was time for the visit I didn't clear the metal detector. I was told by these racist C.O's if I didn't clear it I couldn't go on the visit. I was in the middle of nowhere but there was an older woman who pulled me to the side and gave me a sweatsuit to wear on the visit. When I finally gotten through the metal detector and went on with the visit, I just felt like again I was an inmate.

The way C.O's was talking to some of the female visitors was disgusting and downright degrading. But after a few visit, I sat back and realized something about these C.O's. They don't want our loved ones to have visits. They want them to be alone in jail, so the can kill them and no one will ever know or even care. But I made a vow from day one that my husband wouldn't just be a number and I would never allow them C.O's to have a reason to hurt or harm him, or stop me from visiting. I have been doing this going on 25 years come this December [2016]. It has been rough nothing hurts me more then to have to leave your soul mate after every visit and not bring him home with me. I need to tell every female out there do not allow these C.O's to stop you from visiting your love one in the inside. No one will stop me from visiting my husband and I plan to bring him home to me one day to live a normal life.

Revolutionary Love, NaTanya Moton



Freedom Still Lives

Socially I'm moving towards progress.

White clouds block my vision.

But still...I move on. Risen about the limited expectation Of mental midgets.

Militant because I pursue my objective With vigorous energy.

Label me but what that says about you?

I know your will is to compromise.

My will is to strive to conform society to it. You think about dying for your cause, maybe I can Help you with that.

But me, I formulate plans to live mines.

From ideology that was handed off by word of mouth.

By who?

Those who comprehended the truth through liberated ideas.

Mallah-Divine Mallah

I N Sawari Ara Mi

At age 5 is when I first noticed that the United States of America was *not* my home.

At that time my single mother and I moved just outside of Detroit MI, to be in a 'better' area and go to a 'good' school. A better area that had an elderly white woman living in the garden encircled home across the street and a mixed race couple that had an olive colored daughter for me to play with next door. A 'good' school that had more than the occasional white kid in each class. Even if it was just by a little percentage, I noticed at a young age that the more whites I saw around me, the safer I would be and the better I would be treated. I had enough experiences to prove that by the time I was 5 years old.

At age 8 I remember thinking to myself after bubbling in [African American] on a form at the doctor's office that I wasn't *really* American and I wasn't *actually* African so I must not be anything. I knew that I wasn't American because American holidays did not relate to me: Thanksgiving is about white man's harmony with Indians (problematic), Christmas celebrates a the birth of a Jesus that never looked like me (problematic) and I wasn't allowed to celebrate Halloween because it was the 'Devil's Holiday' (in my mother's words). I also was sure that I wasn't African because I didn't celebrate any African holidays, couldn't speak any African languages, I had no knowledge of any country in Africa that my family was connected to and I'd never even been to Africa or known a person that had. I was born in Pontiac, MI; an hour bus ride from Detroit and by 8 years old had never traveled more than 20 miles outside of it.

My government name is Amani Carithers. My first name is a name that my mother heard while watching TV, combined with a last name that effectively erases all that I ever was before a white man entered my bloodstream. My dad is the only man I know with this last name because the man who passed it down did not contribute at all to raising my father. He left my dark chocolate grandmother (never married and the oldest to wait to have a child) almost as soon as he entered her life. His only purpose served was to filter ancient blood and erase what was before. I've never been to a Carithers family reunion. My mother's last name, having never married my father, was



always Wilson (a surname like those of many emancipated blacks who adopted the names of important figures such as presidents).

I have no living brothers.

Therefore the Carithers surname will never carry on. I explain this to illustrate how my last name represents America's failure to black children on a national scale. We've proven this since Kenneth and Mamie Clark's doll test in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, that black children as young as 3 years old recognize their displacement and inferiority in relation to whiteness as a result of normalized racism embedded in American culture. My last name symbolizes this disconnect yet connection to whiteness that a lifetime of blackness is forced to combat with. With an aim to relinquish America's attempt to whitewash me...

...as a writer I rename myself Amani **Sawari**.

In the same way that my last name was assigned to me by the same government that enslaved my ancestors, slaves were assigned their names by their owners with complete disregard of their actual name. Some surnames reflected the work one did, like Cotton. After emancipation a few blacks who chose to abandon their former owner's surname took the last name 'Freeman' but most did not make that decision. As a result, 3 generations post slavery my father and I are still slaves. In *The Genesis Years* Elijah Muhammad writes, "You are still called by your slave-masters' names. By rights, by international rights, you belong to the white man of America. He knows that. You have never gotten out of the shackles of slavery. You are still in them." Carithers is more than a name, it's a title and a label that I now knowing this choose to free myself from, especially in my writing and thinking...

... I n sawari ara mi. I am discovering myself.

In an attempt to free myself from the identity that the state forces on me, a slave, I searched for my own surname in the same way that hundreds of newly emancipated slaves did as early as 1863. I have always desperately wanted to connect to my roots that were stripped from their soil but without stories from elders or any knowledge of family historical traditions beyond those created in America I will never know what a DNA test or historical document can't tell me. During the slavery period blacks didn't appear on the census until around 1870 (rarely recorded even as property or inventory), while whites' American records are intact as far back as 1700. As a result of US failure to recognize human life in the past *and today*, I must search for a surname of my own. In searching I found that many Africans brought to America were from West Africa and in that area there were over 75 more common languages spoken in conjunction with over 50 additional less common languages. Out of all of those languages there was no guarantee that slaves transported would even be able to speak to each other, let alone master English. Even so, today American English is the only language my family speaks.

English on my tongue represents the relentless destruction of my culture yet I use it every day.

Yoruba is one of the four official languages of Nigeria, a country that many slaves were transported from. I found the word 'sawari' while looking through Yoruba vocabulary. Sawari is Yoruba for discovery. In addition to being phonetically appealing it also describes the complex and enlightening lifelong process that I've been involved with as a young black person living in the United States. I am on a journey of discovery, on a road to discover who I am after being failed by an *American* school system that taught me to respect the 'Presidents' who advocated for the torture and enslavement of my ancestors for their own 'conveniences'. Thomas Jefferson wrote about these conveniences on his deathbed when he finally admitted to the evils of slavery, "I have long since given up the



expectation of any early provision for the extinguishment of slavery among us...until we shall be forced, after dreadful scenes and sufferings to release them in their own way, which, without such sufferings we might now model after our own convenience.” He like many of the most highly regarded people in this country, the United States of America, perpetuated the worst evils on my people. How could African-American possibly represent a group? It is highly confusing, offensive and contradictory by representing the oppressed-oppressor or whiteness-blackness. Like my last name, Carithers, the term ‘African-American’ is nothing more than a label that reinforces the mental slavery that continues to exist in America. My writings are a combination of my research and reflection that I share in order to add to a forever widening conversation about race relations in America, search for a solution for my desperate community and show my pride in being a member of the black diaspora.

In Solidarity,
Amani Sawari sawarimi.org

Submission Info: In addition to publishing content raising awareness about the march and providing updates on demonstration progress, the No Shackles Newsletter also accepts work from prisoners in the form of articles, art and poetry. This March is about you and some of our most meaningful contributions come from the inside. We also accept submissions from friends and family members of prisoners. For readers interested in submitting their work: typed and printed can be sent to the return address or emailed to <millionsforprisonersmarch@gmail.com>; carbon copy: <amanisawari@gmail.com> Submissions should be marked Attn: No Shackles Newsletter
Facebook: Millions for Prisoners March on Washington



Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners

1. All prisoners shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings.
 2. There shall be no discrimination on the grounds of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
 3. It is, however, desirable to respect the religious beliefs and cultural precepts of the group to which prisoners belong, whenever local conditions so require.
 4. The responsibility of prisons for the custody of prisoners and for the protection of society against crime shall be discharged in keeping with a State's other social objectives and its fundamental responsibilities for promoting the well-being and development of all members of society.
 5. Except for those limitations that are demonstrably necessitated by the fact of incarceration, all prisoners shall retain the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and, where the State concerned is a party, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocol thereto, as well as such other rights as are set out in other United Nations covenants.
 6. All prisoners shall have the right to take part in cultural activities and education aimed at the full development of the human personality.
 7. Efforts addressed to the abolition of solitary confinement as a punishment, or to the restriction of its use, should be undertaken and encouraged.
 8. Conditions shall be created enabling prisoners to undertake meaningful remunerated employment which will facilitate their reintegration into the country's labor market and permit them to contribute to their own financial support and to that of their families.
 9. Prisoners shall have access to the health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation.
 10. With the participation and help of the community and social institutions, and with due regard to the interests of victims, favorable conditions shall be created for the reintegration of the ex-prisoner into society under the best possible conditions.
 11. The above Principles shall be applied impartially.
-

iamWE Prison Advocacy Network
P.O. Box 58201
Raleigh NC 27625

