Brothers and Sisters!

In this special issue of the Right2Vote Report, in the spirit of this month, we examine alternatives to living in American imperialism. Anyone who has written about Black August or Bloody September love to see your articles. While some may be satisfied with second-class citizenship, we have a ways to go towards actual freedom. Freedom to develop our own economy, manage our own resources and care for our own people. To date we’ve perceived integration as a victory (that’s what we’re taught in schools), but with the ongoing cases of police murders of Black citizens, massive loss of employment among communities of color, increases in gentrified areas, and now the weaponizing of the coronavirus against people held in jails, prisons and detention facilities across the country, it’s clear to see that integration has not been successful (and never will).

How can we be strategic in the face of a white supremacist controlled government? We must participate to the fullest extent of our capacity. Meaning, if you currently have the right to vote, you must exercise it. Get your registration updated and your absentee ballot now. If you know who your representatives are, you must communicate your policy concerns (whether for or against a piece of legislation within their authority) regularly. As an influencer within your support network, you are responsible to keeping your friends and family informed about the policies that they are unaware of and the best ways for them to take action. Through being engaged we can expose were the gaps are, propose solutions, commit stakeholders to those solutions and hold them accountable (or expose them as unaccountable and replace them).

Yesterday was Michigan’s primary election. I cast my ballot with each of you in mind, and I’ll continue to do the same until you are able to cast one in your own name.

In Solidarity,
Amani Sawari
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Resources from the National Lawyer’s Guild (NLG)

Prisoner Legal Action Network (PLAN) PLAN is a national support network, initiate your legal relationship with PLAN by submitting the form: LEGAL OBSERVER AFFIDAVITS AFFORD PRISONERS A WAY TO DOCUMENT RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND SEEK PROFESIONAL SUPPORT to National Lawyers Guild 132 Nassau St. Room 922, New York, NY 10038

Network Federal Defense Hotline The NLG National Office is launching a hotline for activists and lawyers to report incidents of federal repression, such as FBI “door-knocks” at activists’ homes, grand jury investigations and subpoenas, and any other federal law enforcement efforts to undermine civil rights, such as federal grab squads and the use of unidentified federal agents to police protests. The numbers is 212-679-2811

Interview request for 70 Million Podcast Atlanta based journalist, Pamala Kirkland is interested in speaking with impacted people about their experiences with voting or trying to vote while incarcerated, interested participants can Call 678-763-9446
The Only Crowded Places Left... are the Prisons

by Amani Sawari | July 22, 2020 | sawarimi.org

I want to begin this piece with my empathy for my brothers and sisters behind the wall, we have not forgotten about you. I empathize, rather than sympathize. Sympathy is recognition through a lens of pity, saying, “I see what’s happening to you” while empathy is recognition through the lens of shared understanding, saying, “I see what’s happening to us”. My empathy with incarcerated people in the United States throughout the current coronavirus-pandemic begs me to hold their experiences as a lens with which I use to examine American officials’ responses to the pandemic outside of the prison walls. My observations enrage me, however they also incite me to collaborate on efforts that force the state to respond more appropriately to these crises concerning the two million plus people incarcerated across the country.

The Storefronts are Empty

Now that the country is taking care not to have too many people in one space businesses have been making sure to provide patrons with outdoor dining/shopping alternatives in heavily circulated areas. As a result not many people are shopping, eating or congregating indoors. Restaurants have cut their seating capacities in half. Salons providing hair, facial and nail grooming services are open by appointment only and even shops and boutiques have cut back their hours to serve customers by appointment basis. All of the public spaces I’ve visited over the past month have reduced their hours. Along with this, the state recently mandated that walk-in businesses require their patrons to wear masks while indoors.

And Prisons are Still Crowded

I wish that state officials would respond to the overcrowding problem in the penitentiary with the same vigor that they depopulated our offices, shops, restaurants and schools.

State governors cleared out every congregated area with swiftly passed executive orders that were strictly enforced at every level. Regardless, Corrections Dept. continue to ignoring the recommendations of the CDC as there are thousands of incarcerated people who spend as many as 23 hours a day in an unventilated room with covered or no windows. The average person in prison has outdoor access for less than 12 hours each day. Specifically in Michigan’s Dept. of Corrections the outdoor recreation “yard” area opens at 7:30a and closes at 10:50a. The yard reopens at 12:00 noon before closing again at 4:05p (for a head count where every inmate is counted by prison staff).

Following counttime, the yard reopens at 5:00p until finally closing at 9:20p For moments where prisoners are unable to access outdoor ventilation, they are able to order a handheld fan for $20.

Recently staff have been required to wear facemasks. In some facilities masks have been distributed to the inmate population, in others there are consequences for prisoners being found without a face covering that range from being given a ticket to being sent to quarantine (revised solitary). Community mutual aids like in California, South Carolina and Michigan have provided people in prison with funds to purchase masks, medications, fans, sanitizers, vitamins and other items related to their health and care.

Provoke the Power of the Pen

While some people in prison have access to masks and other critical supplies, little to no actual policy changes have been made in order to significantly reduce prison populations. Governors have the powers and tools to dramatically decarcerate now, but have refused to use their executive authority over their state prison system. As a result, people in prison are critically suffering. Prisoners have reported instances where staff fail to wear masks and show symptoms or sickness. Practices that allow cross contamination, like unnecessary shakedowns and strip searches persist (the decreased number of staff working make the threat of spread even more likely as the same guards are stretched to manage more inmates throughout multiple shifts).

The prison class has not been given the same, or even equitable protections during the pandemic as their friends and families on the outside (or even as the staff who stand with them behind the wall). Its obvious that the minimum requirements set by the CDC for best managing the coronavirus in public spaces have not been met in jails, prisons and detention centers. This lack of care by government and prison officials toward the prison population is appalling. With all of the changes we’ve seen across society, prisons are the only places that remain the same...overcrowded and lacking any serious considerations of the lives impacted people held within them and loved ones of those. Every other area of our society has been forced into making drastic change for the safety and security of us all. Why hasn’t this attitude stretched over the prison system? Prisons are the epitome of an institution built to maintain the safety and security of our society, so why didn’t officials start there? Prisoners should have been the first to get masks, people in prison should have been among the first to incorporate higher sanitation precautions, social distancing practices should have been utilized earliest in prison by implementing dramatically reduced sentencing requirements. So long as the pandemic persists behind the wall, it is imminently awaiting us all. The second spike is being brewed up by prison and political officials who refuse to take dramatic action to fix the overcrowded prison problem now.
House Judiciary Committee

Each of the bills on the next page have been referred to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. We encourage you and your networks to reach out to committee members, in addition to your own Member of Congress. Democrats outlined in blue, Republicans outlined in red.

Committee Hearing Room
2141 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
202-225-3951

Office Locations
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
202-225-3951

Democrats outlined in blue, Republicans outlined in red.

Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
**IssueVoter**

*IssueVoter* is a nonpartisan organization with a mission to give everyone a voice in our democracy. *IssueVoter* is working with *Right2Vote* to highlight the following pieces of legislation in Congress and we encourage you to send your opinion on any or all of these to your representative. You may write to your representative at the address on the following page, and let them know which issues you care about and how you would like them to vote on these bills. Every constituent contact is counted by each representative’s staff, no matter whether it is received by mail or phone. Please make your voice heard!

**Should we require law enforcement officers to employ de-escalation techniques?**

- **Introduced**
- **Passed House**
- **Passed Senate**
- **Resolving Differences**
- To President
- Became Law

### Preventing Tragedies Between Police and Communities Act (H.R. 2927)

**Referred to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security**

This bill requires that states and localities receiving certain grants require law enforcement officers to undergo training on and employ de-escalation techniques. This bill aims to help reduce the need for use of force by law enforcement officers. All law enforcement officers of state or local government would be required to fulfill a training session each fiscal year.

**Sponsor:** Rep. Gwen Moore (Democrat, Wisconsin, District 4)

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**Should inmates be allowed a shortened or reconsidered sentence?**

- **Introduced**
- **Passed House**
- **Passed Senate**
- **Resolving Differences**
- To President
- Became Law

### Second Look Act of 2019 (H.R. 3795)

**Referred to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security**

This bill allows for a reconsideration of an inmate’s sentence based on certain qualifications. Those include a sentence longer than 10 years, length served no less than 10 years, if the inmate is no longer a threat to any person, and if the inmate demonstrates the ability to reenter the greater community successfully. Additional factors to be considered include the nature of the offense, the age at the time of the offense, details of juvenile cases, victim statements, and mental/physical examinations. Finally, there is a requirement of the US Sentencing Commission to submit an annual report to the Judiciary Committees of the House and the Senate detailing the amount of reductions and information about each case.

**Sponsor:** Rep. Karen Bass (Democrat, California, District 37)

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**Should Congress allow for sentences below the mandatory minimum?**

- **Introduced**
- **Passed House**
- **Passed Senate**
- **Resolving Differences**
- To President
- Became Law

### Second Look Act of 2019 (H.R. 3795)

**Referred to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security**

This bill allows for the courts to impose a sentence below the minimum mandatory sentence. This would only be done if the court found sufficient evidence that the mandatory minimum is longer than necessary.

**Sponsor:** Rep. Robert Scott (Democrat, Virginia, District 3)

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**Opponents say**

“It is a core principle that prosecutors should charge and pursue the most serious, readily provable offense. This policy affirms our responsibility to enforce the law, is moral and just, and produces consistency. This policy fully utilizes the tools Congress has given us. By definition, the most serious offenses are those that carry the most substantial guidelines sentence.”

- Former Attorney General Jeff Sessions

**Proponents say**

“Attorney General Sessions’ directive to all federal prosecutors to charge the most serious offenses, including mandatory minimums, ignores the fact that mandatory minimum sentences... distort rational sentencing systems, discriminate against minorities, waste money, and often require a judge to impose sentences that violate common sense.”

- Rep. Robert Scott (Democrat, Virginia)
Should legal standards for police prosecution and training be increased and standardized?

**Justice in Policing Act of 2020 (H.R. 7120)**

Moving to Senate for consideration and/or vote

This bill seeks to increase accountability and transparency in investigations regarding police misconduct. The bill lowers the criminal intent standard in prosecuting misconduct of a law enforcement officer from willful to knowing or reckless. It also limits qualified immunity as a legal defense for law enforcement officers in civil suits and authorizes the Department of Justice to issue subpoenas in investigations of local law enforcement for patterns of discriminatory policing. Additionally, the bill will create the National Police Misconduct Registry. These steps will be combined with various requirements surrounding policing practices such as requiring implicit bias training and body camera usage and limiting the transfer of military-grade weapons to police forces. It will also making lynching a federal hate crime.

**Sponsor:** Rep. Karen Bass (Democrat, California, District 37)
The Great Afrikan Return?!

by Jalil A. Muntaqim | December 5, 2019 | Sullivan CF NYDOC

As an avowed new African I have been considering the development of pan-africanism in the last couple of decades. I have found this socio-economic and political ideal has been mostly abandoned by the majority of black activist. With the advent of Black Lives Matter and various other social-consciousness Black activist groups, there has been little discussion regarding an identity of being black to a determination of an African identity in its historical significance and ramifications. This is especially important given the height and polarization of ethnic divisions in the US with a white supremacist in the White House. While this is not the first time a White House occupant was/is a white supremacist, the vociferous espousing of ethnic cleansing of America has become an open debate and policy. Yet, Black activist, as far as I know, are giving little attention to the prospects of being expelled from the US in light of US government’s vicious expulsion of Latin American/Hispanics and others. The white supremacist has forwarded an argument that the rich cannot become citizens, illegal immigrants to justify ice round-ups and deportations. Also, in support of their position, they posited the 14th amendment of the US Constitution needs to be amended to deny automatic citizenship to anyone who has migrated from this country and gave birth to a child. The white supremacist do not want these live births to be counted as US citizens.

Hence, I urge all to consider since the 14th amendment was imposed on freed new African slaves in 1867, absent the plebiscite votes or referendum of any form of consent to be classified US citizens, can send citizenship similarly be revoked by the act of Congress absent New African consent? The question for me is who will be next, if white supremacist were to take complete control of the US supreme Court and government as they are seeking to achieve? What contingency plans are Black activist considering or even debating in the event of an actual civil war as being advocated by Trump supporters?

Would it be presumptuous of me to propose it is time for black people to give serious consideration to resurrecting the ideals and principles of pan-africanism. That it is time to internationalize our political perspective of our being part of the larger African diaspora and strengthen how this may play in our continued efforts to persevere our existence in the US? Would anyone disagree there is a need to contemplate the building of an allied political forces for (near) future engagements opposing white supremacist avowed determination to make America Great Again! (meaning White!

We are collectively in the last 4 years of the international decade for peoples of African descent that was promoted back in 2015 by the United Nations general Assembly. I have found little information of what has been achieved in the last six years to mark the decade as a successful epoch in New African growth and development, and the establishing of a new African and a PanAfrican polity. In fact, the opposite can be identified by the continued epidemics, violent strife, ethnic divisions and confrontations, from South Africa to Uganda, and the divisions among black African activist across the country. The US imperialist, via AFRICOM, continues to forge ahead establishing bases on the continent, sowing dissension and divisions in the areas occupied by AFRICOM, to the overall detriment of the African populace.

While in the US, police murder of black people is at an all-time high, gentrification of black neighborhoods has exacerbated black displacement and homelessness, HBCUs are under threat of extinction, and mass incarcerations, despite efforts to halt it, continues to grow. Several corporations have established themselves as the new controllers of the prison system.

This applies not only to privatization, but developing economic incentives for the maintenance of prison slave labor and exploitation: JPay, Securus Aramak etc, to name a few. Black life in America continues to be challenged by the system of racist capitalism. In essence, the system functions in every dimension and capacity to exploit and control black economic existence and survival. There has not been a single organization or leader that has forge of formidable strategy to challenge and combat was obviously a systematic and seemingly strategic plan to diminish and eliminate black existence in America. This genocidal onslaught on Black lives has to be recognized and made part of the national debate absent any niceties of bourgeois apologetic reasoning for such human rights violations. In essence, Black life in America is under siege, and it is time Black people collectively come to this understanding and decide how on a national level they are going to persevere their existence and prosper. W.E.B. Dubois warned that, “Capitalism cannot reform itself; a system that enslaves you cannot for you”.

If I may, I propose a national and united determination to demand and fight for dual citizenship with Ghana and Liberia, not unlike the Jewish community has with Israel. That Black people collectively begin the process of forging socio-economic and political ties, including cultural exchanges manifesting the original idea of what the great W.E.B. Dubois and Kwame Nkrumah. To essentially initiate a pan-africanist determination whose origin began with the three Trinidadian activist, H Sylvester Williams, CLR James, and George Padmore, of whom the Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey developed in to an international calling, and W.E.B. Dubois organized the first Pan-African Congress in 1919, an international form of black liberation that included Kwame Nkrumah George Padmore and many others.

It is time for Black people in America to emerge from under the racist canopy of America’s illusion of being an accepted American, identifying themselves as African-Americans. AL-Haj Malik El Shabazz/Malcolm X succinctly addressed this mental dilemma by stating, “they identify with their Master more than their Master identifies with himself”. I dare deem this behavior as symptomatic of a form of schizophrenic delusion from having suffered 400-plus years of racist trauma; a severe case of Stockholm syndrome by identifying with Black people’s historically established Nemesis of their very existence. This psychological conditioning, what W.E.B. Bubois calls double consciousness has severely weakened black people’s resolve to become totally and completely free of racist exploitation and repression. This reality has resulted in class divisions and disunity, color and caste animosities detrimental to Black survival in racist America.

Therefore, what I propose is a national campaign for building and establishing dual citizenship with Ghana and Liberia. Recognizing Ghana has publicly called for Black people’s return and Liberia was originally established for the restoring of African identity and Nation statehood reality for freed African slaves. It seems to me this is a pragmatic and strategic objective in pursuit of resurrecting a pan-africanist ideological and political determination in light of the growing and evolving anti-black quality in the United States.

This action would serve as a catalyst to raise national consciousness of African identity; create an international and strategic alliance with African governments and human rights organizations; and close the chasm between Africans on the continent and those in the diaspora. The exchange will ultimately benefit all participants, and further strengthen international cooperation against a common exploiter of African lives. Nationally, it would heighten the political consciousness and determination of Black people’s collective struggle opposing white supremacy in all of its virulent and violent manifestations of genocidal consequences.
Therefore, the greatest expression of black lives matter is to resurrect and restore a pan-african strategic determination inclusive of a new African identity. Our pan-africanist cytopathological determination would manifest as the internationalist conceptualization of our collective humanity. It raises our political objectives beyond the confines of US domestic politics and inserts our struggle within the body politics and opposing US, imperialism and neo-colonial exploitation of Black lives anywhere on the planet. We will begin the process of asserting not only our inalienable right to live, but are human rights as members as the African family void of defining our relationship by our common enemy of white supremacy. In this praxis, we must take every necessary step to divorce our humanity from the clutches of white supremacist defining and regulating our existence on any level. From Queen Nzinga to Harriet Tubman, from Saffiya Bukhari to Assata Shakur, we have a rich history of African/ New African resistance, it is incumbent of us during this pivotal time to born into existence a new Pan-Africanist Movement, an unified international mass determination to oppose and defeat white supremacy and US imperialism in all of it's deadly anti-Black manifestations. Remember: We Are Our Own Liberators! Please note: this piece has been revised in order to meet length limitations

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Covid-19 and Prison Overcrowding: It's All in the Framing
by Dortell Williams | CDCr

I am tremendously grateful to, and for, all of the advocacy organizations that strive to liberate our imprisoned voices, voices that have been so vehemently smothered by tons of aggregate concrete and shackled by miles of cumulative razorwire.

In two recent interviews, one organization described the adverse conditions we endure daily during normal circumstances, circumstances that are now magnified by the Covid-19 threat. However, the issue was framed as one of prisons being understaffed, for which I respectfully counter, they are overcrowded – and deliberately so. Still, for me, the bestviciarous description of our experience was the following account:

"Incarceration, for many people is prolonged, slow-motion disruption of normal life, punctuated by periods of unpredictable violence. Certain aspects of incarceration can be analogized to be trapped in a natural disaster: you are cutoff from loved ones, physical harm is a constant threat, and the future is full of unknowns. (Raher, 2020)"

After 30 years of continuous confinement, I couldn't have described it better myself. My sole caveat to this otherwise extraordinary vicarious representation is simply how the issue of current prison conditions is framed. Again, I must dearticularate that prisons are by no means understaffed. In both televised interviews, the well-meaning advocate framed their description of our plight as one in which the prison employees are understaffed. And that may be so, if we are trying to build up the prison industrial complex; however, with 2.3 million souls behind physical bars, and another 7 million tethered by parole or probation, for sure, the highest incarceration rate in the world, the truth is, the prisons are overcrowded; really, really overcrowded.


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Let My People Go
by Randal LeFevre | MDOC

"Let my people go," is the battlecry reverberating across Michigan as Amani Sawari champions prison reform with the Repeal T.I.S. (Truth-In-Sentencing) Ballot Initiative. However, it was God himself who first made the slogan famous when he instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh, "Thus said the Lord... let my people go." And it was also God who instructed Amani to tell Gov. Whitmer, "Let my people go." In biblical days, the Israelites were enslaved to the Egyptians for 400 years before a deadly plague forced Pharaoh to let God's people go. In 1619, blacks were brought to America as slaves, and are now disproportionately warehoused in prison slavery camps. It isn't a coincidence that a deadly plague, Covid-19, exploded in 2019, exactly 400 years after 1619. God is warning Gov. Whitmer to let his people go.

Prisoners are properly of Michigan and under Gov. Whitmer's control. After her legislation wouldn't pass any 'good time' bills rewarding good behavior, Amani launched the ballot initiative and collected 215,000 signatures toward the required 340,047. But Gov. Whitmer issued a 'stay-at-home' order, and the state refused to restore the lost 69 days. Amani filed a law-suit which Gov. Whitmer has fought tooth and nail. However, Amani has had 5 favorable rulings so far, and God is saying, "Let my people go."

Gov. Whitmer can't protect her prisoners from Covid-19, but she refuses to let them go. Social distancing cannot be met in Michigan prisons. MDOC had approximately 36,000 prisoners who contracted 3,997 covid cases with 68 deaths which is the same amount of deaths of all 172,000 federal prisoners combined. California commuted 8,000 prisoners after 2,300 tested positive and 31 died. These disproportionate numbers show that Michigan can't protect prisoners from Covid-19, but Gov. Whitmer refuses to let God's people go. Gov. Whitmer can't afford to warehouse prisoners but she refuses to let them go. Due to Covid-19, tax revenue collection is at its lowest since the great depression. When we consider the finances needed to fix, maintain, and replace Michigan's failing infrastructure in conjunction with upcoming Flint water lawsuits, it doesn't seem possible to fund a $2.2B corrections' budget. To do so, takes money from our children's education. Gov. Whitmer could tighten the load if only she let God's people go.

Gov. Whitmer knows that race-based discriminatory policies and practices led to mass incarceration but she refuses to let her prisoners go. Covid-19 exposed America to racial disparities with health care, employment, and housing, but it was the sadistic murder of George Floyd by law enforcement that disrobed racism within the criminal justice system. Gov. Whitmer is aware that racial disparities contribute to why blacks make-up only 18.4% of U.S. population but 34% of U.S. prison population. Yet, she refuses to let God's people go. Gov. Whitmer removed a slave-owners name from a state-owned building but she won't release her prisoners. The Lewis Cass Building in Lansing, Michigan was renamed because Cass was a slave owner who created policy to forcibly remove Native communities from tribal lands in order to make Michigan a state. While it is honorable to stop glorifying creators of racist policies, it is better to release prisoners who are enslaved due to racist policies such as the Truth-In-Sentencing law. Gov. Whitmer understands this but won't let God's people go.

To not release prisoners only angers God and delays the inevitable. There is a parallel between the Israelites 400 years of enslavement and blacks 400 years of enslavement. Notice that the U.S. makes up only 5% of the world's population but has approximately 25% of the world's prison population. Yet, she refuses to let God's people go. Gov. Whitmer removed a slave-owners name from a state-owned building but she won't release her prisoners. The Lewis Cass Building in Lansing, Michigan was renamed because Cass was a slave owner who created policy to forcibly remove Native communities from tribal lands in order to make Michigan a state. While it is honorable to stop glorifying creators of racist policies, it is better to release prisoners who are enslaved due to racist policies such as the Truth-In-Sentencing law. Gov. Whitmer understands this but won't let God's people go.

RandalLeFevre is the HELPING THOSE LEFT BEHIND curriculum co-creator, and he is currently pursuing a social worker degree with MOTT Community College. Despite having been incarcerated for over 30 years in 2 states, RANDAL LEFEVRE is dedicated to making a difference in this world.

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