



COVID-19 & MDOC: We Deserve to Live & Not Die

COVID-19 hit the Michigan Department of Corrections like a quiet storm feasting on women and men who have already been buried alive. Yes, we all are guilty of committing some type of crime, but I ask the question: Can we be considered for forgiveness like the American Government that has committed one of the greatest crimes against humanity? I am referring to *mass murder*. I WANT TO LIVE AND NOT DIE... WE ALL DESERVE TO LIVE AND NOT DIE! But because of this quiet storm called COVID-19, We all share a possible death sentence! Is our humanity not valuable enough for us to be removed from society *and* face this death sentence? We are *grandfathers, grandmothers, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters*, not mere “criminals” as you would characterize us. I take responsibility for what put me here; I also take responsibility for others that are here with me. We are not the same women and men that brought us here; we have done the work of transforming and redeeming ourselves in an environment where rehabilitation is a damn joke. To the prison administration, I am 178539 residing on the plantation called Saginaw Correctional Facility; I, like many others, deem prisons a plantation because that is what the 13th Amendment dictates:

"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."

Is this why society turns a blind eye because we are nothing more than “modern-day slaves”? It has been cited in the media that over 1,700 prisoners have been confirmed positive with the coronavirus in a prison population consisting of 38,000 prisoners. The state of New Jersey has calculated more deaths than any state per capita; the state of Michigan ranks second regarding this dismal statistic. Again, I say we DESERVE TO LIVE AND NOT DIE! Social distancing is laughable in a confined environment, where most prisons have double bunks or open sleeping areas (*such as Lakeland prison that has the most cases*). As with any disease it preys on the “vulnerable,” the prison population is one of the most vulnerable. Again, I say WE DESERVE TO LIVE AND NOT DIE!

I am Ahjamu Khalifah Baruti. I am 64 years of age, and I have been confined to prison going on my 36th year in the MDOC. I am also the father of Yusef “Bunchy” Shakur, who served 9 years in the MDOC; who has been home over 19 and half years. My son, like many others, has shattered many myths and stereotypes that have faced formerly incarcerated men and women upon being released to a society that was (and still is) unforgiving. I would hope their contribution will influence you the reason why many of us who are incarcerated deserves a second chance.... WE DESERVE TO LIVE AND NOT DIE AND – NOT BE WAREHOUSED LIKE SARDINES, WAITING TO BE THE NEXT VICTIM OF COVID-19! William Garrison, DESERVED TO LIVE! Yet because the MDOC refused to act with human compassion for him, HE DIED. Will you stand on the right side of history, or will you stand on the wrong side of history? I know, like many others, we prisoners face an uphill battle to receive your mercy. However, if I succumb to the coronavirus, I will do so as a Man, not as modern-day slave!

No Struggle, No Progress
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