

# BLACK MUSLIM COVID COALITION

## BUT UNBOWED: BLACK MUSLIMS SPEAK ON MASS INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COVID

5/2/2020

*Minutes: Sidikat Ishola, DREL 2019 Fellow*

### I. Call to Order: 4:10 PM EST

### II. Objectives:

1. Black Muslims speak on Mass Incarceration in the COVID age.
2. Moderator Aya Saed, Dr. Yusef Salaam, Atra Flemons, and Jimmie C. Gardner discuss the ways in which our brothers and sisters behind bars are coping, persevering, and organizing in this moment of crisis and what we as a community can do to advocate and uplift their stories.

### III. Opening:

1. Aya Saed opens webinar with prayer and lifts up the life of brother Akbar Shabazz the first Muslim Chaplain with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and his recent passing from COVID-19
2. Discusses the importance of communing as a collective, understanding the reality of our incarcerated brothers and sisters, and how we can support them
3. Introductions of moderator and panelists: Dr. Yusef Salaam, Atra Flemons, Jimmie C. Gardner, and Aya Saed

### IV. Conversation/Questions:

**Q1:** While you all possess a rich cross-section of experiences, I also want to acknowledge that there are missing stories and narratives in the room. Who do you want to bring with you into this conversation? Are there brothers and sisters whose experiences and stories you want to bring? I want to invite you to name anyone or any community that surfaces in your heart.

#### Responses:

#### 1. Jimmie C. Gardner:

- i. Discusses what is going on in institutions in Georgia and poses the question: What are their Protocols?
- ii. Discusses the importance of having family members inquire about their loved ones.

- ii. Discusses how Institutions in Georgia are having outbreaks and stresses the importance of Individuals taking extra precautions.
  - iv. Speaks on Rudolph Sutton-the the first prisoner to die from COVID-19 in Pennsylvania and John moss III of (Ohio)
  - v. Institutions are short on supplies, i.e ( Bleach, sanitizing supplies, etc.)
2. **Atra Flemons:**
    - i. Mentions her cousin Betty who is an organizing fellow with Essie Justice and who is in contact with incarcerated women.
    - ii. Discusses the invisibility of women and how they are not talked about. People are not being tested and individuals are being released from county jail in LA, but no exit strategies are set in place.
  3. **Dr. Yusef Salaam:**
    - i. Reflects on those who never came home from prison. ie. (Sheikh Noah) and reflects on meeting Muslim members of the Black Panther Party while in prison.
    - ii. There are Individuals whose stories have never been told and others who have been released, but stories have not been held in the light.
    - iii. Huge numbers of women are imprisoned for crimes they never committed.
  4. **Aya Saed:**
    - i. Mentions those who have made mistakes and that they are worthy of redemption.

**Q2:** Before we jump into a larger conversation about structural issue pervading our world, I want to start by acknowledging the significance of this Holy Month and thanking you all for joining us during this time. What was your source of solace during the month of Ramadan while incarcerated?

**Responses:**

1. **Dr. Yusef Salaam:**
  - i. Reflects on finding purpose in the pain and constantly knowing that there was a light at the end of the tunnel
  - ii. Discusses how being Muslim helped him and his trial: of being incarcerated
2. **Jimmie C. Gardner:**
  - i. Found solace in discipline and being structured in Islam
  - ii. Staying focused and maintaining a structured foundation
3. **Atra Flemons:**
  - i. Discusses how mothers of incarcerated children carry a lot of what their children go through
  - ii. Families are also impacted

**Q3:** We have all heard the alarming infection and death rates of COVID-19 in prisons, jails and detention centers. What explains this? How does the prison industrial complex exacerbate the impact of COVID-19?

**Responses:**

1. **Dr. Yusef Salaam:**
  - i. Discusses how there are no ways to social distance within the present conditions in jails
  - ii. Inmates who are being released may not know if they are infected and what that means when they re-enter communities.
  - iii. Inmates are scared to seek medical attention
2. **Jimmie C. Gardner:**
  - i. Individuals are in cells that have 8 men in them and poor conditions that prevent social distancing
  - ii. Lack of resources: i.e (Cleaning supplies)

**Q4:** There will come a day when COVID-19 passes, but mass incarceration will continue to plague our society. Is there a correlation between the disproportionate impact of mass incarceration in our communities (Black & Muslim) and the disproportionate impact of COVID in our communities?

**Responses:**

1. **Dr. Yusef Salaam:**
  - i. Reflects on the projects and their reality. Food quality and its effect on health.
  - ii. Black people having less access
2. **Jimmie C. Gardner:**
  - i. Albany, Georgia is a hot spot and is a predominantly black community.
  - ii. Discusses the lack of proper eating habits
  - iii. Stresses the importance of maintaining health and reflects on prayer in prison and the journey/resilience
3. **Aya Saed:**
  - i. Uplifts the work and diligence of Black Muslims in prison and their continued commitment to freedom. Also how they are paving the way for all kinds of prisoners.
4. **Atra Flemons:**
  - i. Communities are not receiving real food and do not have access to health care.
  - ii. Discusses the importance of the census and its connection with creating/having access to resources. We need to be active participants.

**Q5:** A few days ago, a Native woman by the name of Andrea Clay Bear died while delivering her child behind bars while she was on a ventilator. This health crisis brings to focus the lack of health access and health care --

especially as it pertains to women. I would love to hear from sister Atra Flemons what she can share about the state of health care in the prison industrial complex, and for women in particular.

**Responses:**

1. **Atra Flemons:**
  - i. Many cases are happening in Women's prisons. Discusses what happened with Andrea Clay Bear. Women are not getting the medical attention needed. Their issues are not being talked about.
  - ii. The media is looking at men in prison but not women.
  - iii. We need to support organizations that are working with women
  - iv. Discusses Immigrant communities and Immigrant detention
2. **Aya Saed:** Uplifts a Nigerian immigrant woman's story and brings awareness to immigrant women in frontline healthcare

**Q6:** Because of COVID, there have been a few cases of folks who are being released. How can we, as a community, better engage people who are exiting the system. What lessons can we reap from your experiences?

**Responses:**

1. **Atra Flemons:**
  - i. Discusses isolation and asks what are the exit strategies?
2. **Jimmie C. Gardner:**
  - i. Ask for compassionate release. Individuals self isolate for 2 weeks to prevent risk and keep people safe.
  - ii. They are not testing in minority communities and people are passing it on. There is a lack of testing across the U.S.
3. **Dr. Yusef Salaam:**
  - i. Reflects on those who are released may not know that they have the virus.
  - ii. Awareness as a people
  - iii. As we come out of COVID-19 how are we going to come out? How is our health going to fare?

**Q7:** We are convened here today by the wonderful and remarkable work of the BMCC team. I want to know if there are organizers or organizations who are doing the work of liberation that you want all of us to be aware of and support?

**Responses:**

1. **Jimmie C. Gardner:**
  - i. The Gardner House Inc., Georgia Innocence Project, Leadership Georgia, Leadership Albany, community gardens, and other organizations that give back to Albany Georgia and surrounding counties, etc., Albany Masjid (Al-Islam) -Iman Salahuddin

ii. Jimmie C. Gardner’s Social Media/website:

**Twitter:** [@jcgardnerspeaks](#)

**IG:** [jcgardnerspeaks](#)

**FB:** Jimmie C Gardner

[www.jcgardnerspeaks.com](http://www.jcgardnerspeaks.com)

**2. Atra Flemons:**

i. Los Angeles is offering free testing in their community

ii. Importance of the census, registering to vote, and the

importance of knowing initiatives on your ballots

iii. CAIR California, MuslimARC

**3. Dr. Yusef Salaam:**

i. The Innocence Project, The Marshall Project, Justice 4 the Wrongfully Incarcerated

ii. Dr. Yusef Salaam’s Social Media/website:

**Twitter:** [@dr\\_yusefsalaam](#)

**IG:** [dr.yusefsalaam](#)

**FB:** YusefAbdusSalaam

[yusefspeaks.com](http://yusefspeaks.com)

**4. Aya Saed:**

i. Muslim Wellness Foundation, National Black Muslim COVID Coalition

ii. Social Media: [@bmcoalition](#) [@muslimarc](#) [@mwfnational](#)

iii. Aya Saed’s Social Media:

**Twitter:** [@SaedaAya](#)

**IG:** [deenjournal](#)

**V. Additional Links:**

1. <https://www.georgiainnocenceproject.org/>

2. <https://essiejusticegroup.org/>

3. <https://www.innocenceproject.org/>

4. <https://www.facebook.com/Justice-4-the-Wrongfully-Incarcerated-1453297798302531/>

**VI. Closing**

1. Recitation of Surah Al-Asr and dua by Dr. Yusef Salaam

**VII. End of Order- 5:40 pm EST**