

April 15, 2020

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Silent Cry Inc.

NEWSLETTER



NIGHTMARE
IN COVID-19
PENITENTIARY

This has been a year of many things. Unrest, health disparities, joy, pain, coming into my greatest peace and losing a few people to gain serenity. I want to say thank you to Joyce Ann Vaughn for giving birth April 15, 1978 in Corona State Prison for Women. She had choices and in her predicament I don't know if I would be here. Thank the ancestors for holding me through the storms. The creator for allowing all of it inspire of. Everything that didn't kill me transformed me into an ever evolving human being. I learned forgiveness as well this year. 42 is good. A lot of people I know are not here. So, I'm grateful. For the people who made my year you know your names. And, I appreciate you.

My family and friends.
My laborers in the movement.
Warriors of humanity. I love you all. My aunt Kathy Campbell Happy birthday April 9.2020. You are a blessing and we love you all the way to California. Paul Toliver my nephew. Happy 18th birthday all the way to California and graduation your amazing and I love you. This is my open letter to share with you.

Happy birthday to me and may the creator and ancestors keep pouring into me.
All my love.

Shawanna Erena Vaughn, Founder, Silent Cry Inc.

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SILENT CRIES BEHIND BARS

“My name is Mario Cavin and I tested positive for Covid19. I'm currently residing at Macomb Correctional Facility. I've never thought a solution for medical treatment was Solitary Confinement. But, there I was without anything that was personal to keep my sanity and spirits from being diminished. MDOC has to be better. The world has to do better with healthcare for all or none with discrimination to location. All I need is a second chance.”





WHAT DOES THE SPREADING OF CORONAVIRUS MEANS TO US?

BY QUENTIN JONES & RICARDO FERRELL

Never in my wildest dreams, did I ever think that I would be living in the midst of a crisis like the current pandemic plaguing the world. At times, it feels like I'm in a movie but this is not fiction, it's real. In a short period of time, the spreading of the coronavirus and the increasing death rate has abruptly changed my reality. As I lie here on a thin piece of hard plastic staring at the walls of a concrete cage stained with the hopelessness of men who have been tortured by incarceration, I'm forced to think about what the current pandemic means for those of us incarcerated. The reality is, it's inevitable that it will make it's way inside of most, if not all correctional facilities and when it does, a lot of men and women are going to die. The health care services provided to us is inadequate as it is, so it wouldn't be logical for me to think that it's going to get better in the time of a global crisis. As a person who has served twenty one years in twelve different Michigan prisons, I know that our life doesn't matter to the health care staff or the individuals who oversee the MDOC.

Realistically, these numbers will likely be higher as more testing is conducted. In my 40 years of incarceration, nothing of this magnitude has ever hit the prison system. As mentioned above, the health care system is not only inadequately poor, but the so-called qualified health care professionals who receive substantial salaries to provide us health care services don't really give a damn if we die, so how can we expect them to provide an adequate health care system? In the eyes of many employees, both health care and correctional staff, we're just another inmate with a six-digit identification number. If we had the capability to video-tape the daily mistreatment and deplorable conditions in these prisons, it would surely shock the conscious of any decent citizen on the outside. Recently, prisoners at a Mississippi prison were able to share with CNN and the world, the horrible conditions of their facility.

Although on the surface most of the facilities here in Michigan do a good job to project the image like everything is all good with the structure and those housed there, but the true reality is, we're being psychologically tortured by the abusive, tormented, and racist mistreatment by staff and being subjected to this sort of pressure only adds to the anxiety, and worrying brought on by COVID-19.

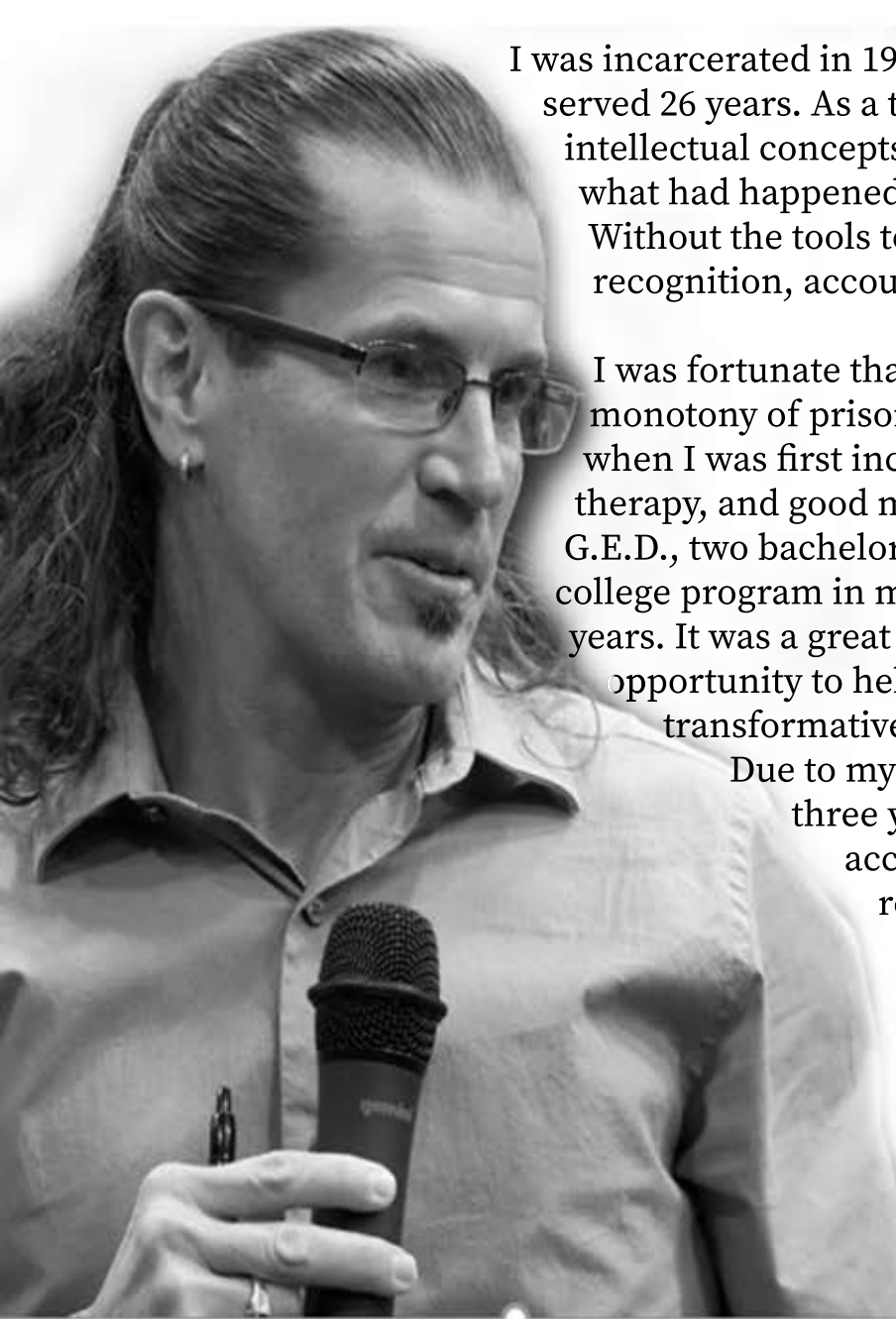
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It's really troubling how staff are inconsiderate towards the most vulnerable. We can't bring the Coronavirus into any of the prisons. Now experts are saying COVID-19 can be spread through talking, breathing. We have to be concerned and do everything humanly possible to help curb the spread of this virus because if we leave it up to those in charge of our care then there is no telling what will happen to us who are the most vulnerable.

Every prisoner's worse fear is dying in prison but those of us sentenced to death by incarceration know that it's a great possibility that our worse fears will come true. A lot of us are barely clinging on to the hope of not dying in prison and now that hope is being taken away by COVID-19. The MDOC has implemented new protocols to try to stop the spreading of the disease, however, most of those protocols only add mental stress to prisoners. There is no such thing as social distancing in prison, where we are all packed into a small space. We are housed in units with community bathrooms and showers. Then there is community day rooms with microwaves and JPAY kiosks that 240 men use. The MDOC has approved the use of bleach and provided more cleaning supplies but it's so diluted that I question its effectiveness. Honestly, my biggest concern is not the men who I live with it's the staff who work here. Part 3 Recently, there have been staff members who were visibly sick but still allowed to come into work. That's scary because people are dying from the coronavirus and I'm at a facility where there is a lot of racism. My life is literally in the hands of men and women whose daily practice has been to dehumanize me. Now, in a time of crisis I'm to believe that they have my best interest at heart. Incarceration by itself has an effect on one's mental but when you add the stress and strain of the current pandemic, it becomes even more stressful. The sad part is, no one seems to care about us in here. Recently, all visits were suspended within the MDOC which is understandable given the severity of the circumstances. However, people are dying at a rapid pace and some of our family members will die. Some of us will never get to see our family members again.

That is a heavy burden that we must carry day in and day out but no one thinks about that when they think about those of us incarcerated. No one considers how this pandemic affects the mental of those incarcerated. Let's just be honest, there aren't a lot of people who care. What does the spreading of the coronavirus mean for those of us incarcerated? It means living in fear every day. It means worrying about your family. It means fighting to keep your sanity. Most of all, for every last one of us in prison, it means facing our worse fear because the way that we are treated in here, if we were to contract the disease it will greatly increase the chance that our worse fear will then become a reality. Part 5

We are certainly one in this pandemic, we may have been separated before now by our belief systems, cultures, demographics, social status, and the like but if we were to pause just for a moment and take a real open-minded look at what's actually going on around the globe and right here in our communities, I'm sure you would come to realize no one is any different than anyone else because this damn pandemic is slowly wiping away the inhabitants of this world. As of this writing, globally, there's nearly one million total cases at 981,221 with 50,230 deaths; with the U.S. having 226,374 cases with 5,316 deaths. In Michigan, there's 9,334 cases with 337 deaths. Within the MDOC reportedly there is 122 prisoners who tested positive with 1 death from the Coronavirus-19.



I was incarcerated in 1989 at the age of 17 in Indiana, and I served 26 years. As a troubled teen, I didn't yet have the intellectual concepts to understand my life up to that point, what had happened to me, and what I was experiencing. Without the tools to understand and look into myself, recognition, accountability, and healing were far reaches.

I was fortunate that despite the violence, deprivation, and monotony of prison, many programs were still available when I was first incarcerated. Consequently, education, therapy, and good mentors changed my life. I earned a G.E.D., two bachelor's and masters, and then ran the onsite college program in maximum security prison for over 15 years. It was a great opportunity to give back, an opportunity to help others also experience the transformative influence of postsecondary education.

Due to my 30-year old violent felony, it took me three years and numerous denials to get accepted by a Ph.D. program after my release. During this time, I advocated in D.C. for the return of the Pell Grant for prisoners, presented equity for postsecondary prison programs, and spoke in several venues about the barriers to employment and admission to universities for the formerly incarcerated. Now, I am a Ph.D. student at Tulane University in New Orleans, and

I am participating in a peer support group for formerly incarcerated individuals. Our focus is on what we call Post Incarcerated Syndrome (PICS). PICS is the combination of PTSD symptoms and more—the effects of living in a total institution, with all its limited opportunities, coercion, deprivations, and degradations for years on end. PICS is my area of research. I am on a team that is further conceptualizing PICS and attempting to gather data to help substantiate its existence, so we can together advocate for the necessary services for all re-entering individuals.

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~Jarrod M. Wall~



Leroy Washington

In the 51 one years of my life, I have never seen the likes of a pandemic of this magnitude. Covid-19, or C-19 as we call it, has the entire world under siege. Positive test results and the death toll is racking up numbers like a slot machine. Yet people, in our country, are still acting as if its nothing.

Four weeks ago on 3.9.20, I went on a medical run for an MRI. The officers attitudes were, "It's just another influenza." -One even said, "These stupid people are over reacting. The common flu killed 80k people last year in the U.S. alone." I said to myself, "These ignorant and arrogant fools... can't they see C-19 is shutting the entire world down, killing people, and crushing economies!" We went back and forth with a little verbal sparring, when they noticed I wasn't the average dumb black man they were use to dealing with the conversation became more hostile, racial and insulting.

As a kid my mother taught me, "You gotta learn when to dumb down. A smart man can play dumb, but a dumb N%#@! can't play smart!" So I shut my mouth. But I couldn't help but think to myself, the only way we can catch anything is from the staff and visitors. Damn its going to be fools like these two that brings this killer virus in to the facility.

As I looked down at my chains, a harsh reality set in. As a prisoner, I know if I get sick, I aint got nothing coming. They don't even have enough ventilators or respirators for the people in society. I'd be a fool to think they would give one to me.

So I decided to write a letter to everyone I loved and care about. A letter of Encouragement, Hope, and Actualization. Encouragement -if you take this serious and the proper precautions, you have a better chance to survive; Hope -that even in your ignorance, some of us will make it and live on; Actualization -we cannot minimize the situation. We must accept the harsh reality that some of us are going to die.

A few excerpts from that letter: "... How are you guys holding up in this coronavirus state of emergency? Make sure you have provisions for at least two weeks in case you have to self quarantine. e.g., dry goods like: potatos, beens, rice; then some water and juices. Make sure you have enough medicine if you need it and cold medicine and cleaning supplies. You may have to order it online. ...Soon everything will be restricted, even movement. ...I know when hit here, some ppl are going to die. We already got the worse health care system in the world. I can't see them treating us like civilians. We are to low on the priority list. I pray my immune system is strong enough to combat whatever this thing is. If I don't make it... and I fall... comfort my baby for me. I don't want to be mourned. Tell her to celebrate my life and do great things in my name and honor. I love my family (all of yall) more than I love life itself. Don't worry about me. I'm good, for real! I've faced way worse than Covid-19. I'm already doing a death sentence...Lol. So life/death has different meaning to/for me.

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The reason I'm laughing is because I survived them unforgiving mean streets and then all these years of prison to possibly let a virus kill me... how ironic. ...You know the scariest part about it is that everyone is not taking it serious. They think it will all blow over like everything else has in the past. WE DON'T KNOW FOR SURE."

To be honest, it was my way of saying, "I love you in case either of us don't make it. While I do want to live, I need you to prepare yourself in case I don't!" Many didn't even catch it because they've always known me to be this stump down soljah and because I've survived 25 years of this HELL, they expect me to come through with flying colors.

Since that day, Michigan has been labled an Epic Center Hot Spot. We are racking up 1000 new cases daily with the death toll in the hundreds. To exasperate the problem, today marks the eve of our first reported prisoner death from C-19. The MDOC went from 7 cases to 14 in one day, to 95 by the end of the week, now there's 122 known cases and one death all in week's span.

In addition, I just learned today that one of my brothers, in Ohio, and his 5 year old son has C-19. Amazingly, his wife and 10 year old daughter did not test positive. I also lost three friends last week to C-19. Including Michigan State Rep. Issac Robinson. He passed away Sunday March 29th. I've known him and his mother Rosemary Robinson (Ret. State Rep) for over 20 years. My most sincere and deepest condolences goes out to her and the family. May God be with you and all of us during these troubling times. The anxiety level is at an all time high on both sides. I seen the two officers that took me on that medical run, neither could look me square in the face like a real man. I seen fear in their eyes that I didn't see a few weeks ago.

I over heard another officer tell an inmate, "If I catch the virus I'm definitely bringing it in here to kill off all you bastards. If I'm going to die none of you deserve to live." It took everything in me not bud into their conversation. In prison you just don't get in other people's business. I know he's a miserable piece of crap. Now, that death is rampant and he's highly susceptible because of his obesity he's afraid of the uncertainty of his own future like the rest of us. However, he should be prosecuted if he does what he say and some dies. He said it with malice and premeditation. He's not above the law and in the least he should be fired.

Things have gotten really real, real fast in the past couple of weeks. As you may know our visits have been suspended indefinitely (which is understandable). So I spoke with the Deputy Warden, asked him to contact the Director (she's a pretty reasonable woman), to see if we can receive Video Visits. Our Jpay system is equip to handle such and other states already provide this service to their prisoners. His response, "It's not possible because its to complicated." Once again, It took everything in me to not curse him out because it can be done. Knowing that I may die in the next few weeks or more of my loved ones is complicated, what hell is he talking about? But instead, I took the high road. I said, "Sir, you see your family everyday and the one's you can't see you FaceTime or talk to them over the phone. You got me contending with 720 other inmates for 24 phones. 3x a day I gotta race to the phones in the rain, sleek, or snow and I still might not get a chance to make a call." His response, "Well, me and my family didn't commit any crimes."



Shanequa Charles

With 40 years in her community, the motivation to serve on this level comes from working on issues that impact our communities daily. From tenants rights, criminal justice, youth development, food justice, small business growth, immigration, voting rights and civic engagement, there is a wide range of understanding that Shanequa has developed over the last two and a half decades.

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Educate Don't Incarcerate is a grassroots organization founded by **Terrance Coffie**, Mr. Coffie is a 2017 M.S.W, and 2016 B.S.W. graduate of New York University where currently teaches as an adjunct lecturer. EDI is committed to providing higher educational opportunities to those impacted by the criminal justice system by creating political and legislative change. As a formerly incarcerated citizen Mr.Coffie knows first hand the challenges those impacted face in accessing educational opportunities, as well as the benefits in changing the trajectory and outcomes of those with justice involvement.

As an justice advocate and proponent for educational and criminal justice reform, Terrance has committed himself to empowering those with justice involvement. His motto that he adopted from Mr. Glenn Martin, is one he stands on and believes "those who are closest to the problem, are those who are closest to solution"! Mr. Coffie believes that the potential of some of our countries brightest minds are locked away in cages, and that it is reponsibilty of those with a shared experience and like mindedness to free that potential.

