

Kwame Beans Shakur Call To Action For National Unification; Prison Lives Matter: Liberate Our Elders Webinar and Panel Discussion

By: Prison Lives Matter/Kwame Shakur Freedom Campaign

Introduction by Kwame Shakur

In December 2022, Kwame “Beans” Shakur reached out from behind enemy lines to speak with international leaders/freedom fighters Jalil Muntaqim, Bilal Sunni-Ali, Jihad Abdulmumit, Brother Shep, as well as Sekou Odinga, who transitioned to an ancestor on January 12, 2023, to propose organizing a national webinar and panel discussion aimed toward introducing the October 2021 Spirit of Mandela International Tribunal to the overall masses and the unfamiliar.

The five guilty counts of genocide against the u.s. stemming from the Tribunal, and how to establish a National Strategy/agenda to move that guilty verdict toward something tangible. One of the many ideas that have already come to fruition from the Tribunal is the development of the People’s Senate. It was agreed that something needed to be established to advance the present state of movement building going on in the u.s. around the continuing international human rights violations against Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. The most concrete vehicle to combat national oppression, colonial violence, and intra-community sectarianism while standing on international law and the Declaration of International Human Rights is through the implementation of the People’s Senate and the collective organizations, fronts, nations, tribes, and campaigns of senators/ambassadors who make up the governing body, which has been broken down into 11 districts/regions throughout the u.s.

Kwame reached out to Prison Lives Matter National Coordinating Committee members Minister King X, Nube Brown, and Andy Williams to help spearhead the organizing and onboarding process of what would become the Prison Lives Matter: Liberate Our Elders Webinar and Panel Discussion. Originally planned to take place at the J. Prince Compound in Houston, Texas, Kwame made a fundamental decision based on the development and strengthening of national, regional, and statewide organizing committees to aid in the infrastructure building. The decision was to break the organizing into a tri-state panel event in Oakland, California, Chicago, Illinois, and New York City during the weekend of August 4th-6th, 2023.

The organizational determination laid out for the weekend was to bring together principled thinkers from each of three regions hosting webinars as well as others from around the u.s. by establishing panels of doctors, lawyers, clinical psychologists, freedom fighters, organizers, clergy, and educators who are serious about taking the necessary steps toward taking our cries and charges of genocide to the international community. This is in addition to developing the fundamental programs for decolonization that are mandatory for any organizations or individuals acting in resistance to (neo-)colonized national oppression/imperialism and economic exploitation/capitalism. The key objective is to create the proper unification and infrastructure needed to rebuild and, most importantly, sustain a movement and governing body which will guarantee the human rights of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people to be in control of Our own destiny.

Three-City Webinars and Panel Discussions By Prison Lives Matter and Kwame Shakur Freedom Campaign

PRESS CONFERENCE

The PLM: Liberate Our Elders opened with a press conference with the location chosen for its historical significance – the site of protests held outside the New York City courtroom where the New York Panther 21 sham trial was held. At the time, the trial was the longest and most expensive in New York history, all of which came about from lies and infiltration by the New York City slave catchers, otherwise known as pigs. Afeni Shakur, who brilliantly defended herself and all 21 members, including Sekou Odinga and Sundiata Acoli (recently released after spending 49 years in slave camps), were acquitted on May 12, 1971.

Veteran Black Panther, Brother Shep, an instrumental leader in Prison Lives Matter and in numerous organizations supporting political prisoners, opened the press conference with these words: “Welcome to the press conference for the National Liberate Our Elders weekend. This event is being sponsored by Prison Lives Matter; and just a little history: We're standing right here on the original spot of the New York Panther 21 trial. On this, and the other side of the street, thousands of Panthers and the community were protesting the unjust conspiracy trial against the Black Panther leadership here in New York.

“Today we're kicking off New York's contribution to a three-city forum also taking place in Chicago and Oakland to Liberate Our Elders from prison. What we found is that the freedom fighters of the 60s, 70s and 80s are now all Elders and many of them are still in prison though this country says there are no Political Prisoners. We're kicking off this weekend from more than four months of organizing to begin a national campaign launching to bring about liberation for our Elders spearheaded by Prison Lives Matter's Brother Kwame 'Beans' Shakur, who is currently incarcerated in Indiana, and veteran Black Panther and Black Liberation Army comrade, Jalil Muntaqim, another former Political Prisoner who is now free and out on the streets.

“In 2021, we held a tribunal right here in New York City where international jurists found the United States government guilty of genocide on five counts. That will be the focus of this conference; looking at those areas of genocide that took place and we will be addressing all of them as they relate to the Prison Industrial Complex.”

OPENING PLENARY

The event's opening plenary was held in New York and virtually with leaders and organizers from around the nation coming together to call for the release of our incarcerated Elders and to bring revolutionaries together for the freedom and self-determination of all colonized Peoples.

“We know that since 1492 people have been fighting on this land. Indigenous ancestors called it Turtle Island. There were millions of indigenous nations, indigenous people, and by the time these oppressors were finished, the First Nation people were taken off their land. Genocide was committed against them, languages lost, cultures lost. The same thing that happened to African people, the same thing happened to Palestinians and has happened to Indigenous people here.

So, we have a responsibility to learn about the connectedness of these histories and herstories,” remarked Dequi Kioni-Sadiki, a longtime freedom fighter and wife of Sekou Odinga.

“Albert ‘Nuh’ Washington was a veteran Black Panther and soldier in the Black Liberation Army who was murdered behind the wall. He said, ‘Who I am depends on who you are. For Political Prisoners to come home, it is incumbent upon the People to make it so this settler colonial government cannot ignore work on their behalf. We bring them up in the mosque, in the church, in the community center, in our homes, and wherever we go, so they become known. The People understand that their freedom and our freedom is inextricably tied and linked together. They’re not an aside. They are a part of us, and we are a part of them.’”

As he was able to do throughout the weekend, Kwame Shakur would call in from his slave camp: “Before me being the national director of Prison Lives Matter, I’m a citizen of the Republic of New Afrika, a freedom fighter for the liberation of the New Afrikan Nation, and a cadre member of FROLINAN (Front for the Liberation of the New Afrikan Nation). Anything that I do or anything that I’m a part of, or anything that I’m building towards or with, is in the name of freeing the land, freeing the People in all capacities, which means our national liberation.”

The idea of PLM came about nearly a decade ago with an immediate shift from its original intent to differentiate it from any other prison movement, namely building toward national and international liberation. Shakur put PLM’s mission into historical context: “When I was approached by comrades in Virginia in 2015 and 2016 who wanted me to build this Prison Lives Matter movement by creating a platform and the political ideology and the network for that, I started writing out the mission statement and just paused and realized that all this would be was just another countless prison formation within the overall prison movement that was talking about prison conditions and how bad prisons are.

“I immediately changed course in the aims and objectives that we would move forward with in terms of PLM; building it on the infrastructure, concept, and the blueprint of FROLINAN that was laid out so brilliantly by our comrade, Jalil Muntaqim. A lot of people in the outside movement or in the prison movement have been doing this work for a long time. And when we talk about liberating our Elders, what does that look like, realistically, when it comes to the New Afrikan Nation? And if we just talk about liberating our Elders and all we’re doing is organizing protests and rallies and demonstrations, that means that we’re solely relying on the moral compass of the colonial empire and of our class enemies,”

One of the key calls for liberating our Elders is that we do not want to wait until they are near death before they are granted parole and release. “They didn’t let Russell Maroon Shoatz out. He was out on a conditional compassionate release. That meant that if he got healthy, they were going to take him back inside. And he passed on a couple of months after he was released. The work for our Political Prisoners is so very important because these are people who served, defended, and protected the community and the People. And so that’s what we’re doing. We are serving, protecting and defending the people inside for what they did for us when they were on the outside,” Kioni-Sadiki explained.

“We don’t want our Elders and the citizens of our Nation to be released when it’s time for them to die. Like Sister Dequi just pointed out regarding Russell Maroon Shoatz, we don’t want them released through the parole board after they’ve been denied for decades past their projected release date. We don’t want the liberation of our Elders to come on their deathbed through a so-

called compassionate release. What we're calling for, and what the aims and objectives of these panels are about this weekend, and what PLM as a whole is about, is tying in the outside movement to the politicization and the criminalization of our incarceration, using PLM as a vehicle for decolonization and connecting the dots between our national oppression, our neo-colonization as a nation and how that relates directly to the socioeconomic morality of the prison system in general," Shakur commented.

The People's Senate

Shakur tied in the weekend's missions of liberating our Elders and building the People's Senate. "When I started working with Brother Minister King X, I saw what his formation was doing with liberating our Elders out there in California. With me having such a deep connection and relationship to our Elders and veterans in Chicago and in New York, I knew we needed to develop this United Front and bring liberation within the PLM United Front, and to connect these liberation campaigns and freedom campaigns and defense committees all across the nation.

"For that to happen, when we're talking about a lot of these POWs and Political Prisoners – a lot of people use the terms loosely; just as somebody who's doing the work inside, somebody who's been Politicized or thinking that just because we're New Afrikans in America, the social, political, and economic reality and existence of us in general makes us Political Prisoners. If we're locked up when we're talking about these brothers and sisters that are POWs and Political Prisoners, we're talking about international law. We're talking about these individuals who are protected with their international human rights during the struggle to become free from this colonial government. It says that we have the right to wage a national liberation struggle, to be free, to form our own government, to proclaim our nationality. And it also states in that same international law and under the Geneva convention, that in the course of that national liberation struggle, if these individuals are confronted with colonial violence, as we were through COINTELPRO, the FBI, and the United States government, that we also have the right to protect ourselves, literally by any means, including armed struggle.

That's what happened with the Black Liberation Army. But instead of honoring this international law, the U.S. criminalized, hunted down, terrorized, and then captured our people, trying them in criminal court versus being treated as Political Prisoners.

"We have to start acting like a Nation instead of just a movement and an organization. We need to free these Political Prisoners. We're steadily using these terms," Shakur explained. "The United States government and the United Nations, which we know is run by the United States and other colonial nations around the world, though, who would come to our aid or who do acknowledge and support us, they're looking at us and knowing that we're not moving in our proper persona. Until we properly move as a Nation and establish something like the People's Senate, then all we're being looked at is radical Americans and Black militants versus New Afrikan Revolutionary Nationalists or actual freedom fighters who are protected under international law.

"What we're wanting out of this weekend, out of these panels and webinars, is to develop infrastructure to find out who's serious about doing this work, needing people to join, supporting the PLM National Coordinating Committee in your region, in your area, and to join these subcommittees so that we can figure out where do we start Political Education classes in your city and in your region. Where do we start this cadre development and training so that we can implement this and start developing the People's Senate and the appointed Senate."

“Change yourself to change the world. Don’t change yourself, you don’t change the world. That is the legacy of many revolutions. After the success of a revolution, we never really changed ourselves. That’s why we reverted to the same ‘Animal Farm Syndrome’ and became a worse oppressor and dictator over the people. There is a continuity in explaining our conditions,” described longtime revolutionary Jihad Abdulmumit, a major voice for the Spirit of Mandela’s International Tribunal and the People’s Senate, as well as a former Political Prisoner.

Abdulmumit continued: “There is a continuity as we explain colonialism, as we explain genocide, as we explain social degradation, as we explain economic exploitation. We can do that, and we have done that very well. In every platform that we are on, there’s a continuity in our powerful local and regional efforts, in our community, from our organizations that have been in existence for so long. There’s a continuity of strength there, but it’s not a continuity into developing new strategies. There is such a thing as dialectical materialism, dialectical processes. When you have contradictions, the quantitative build up and contradictions eventually lead to a qualitative change. When you deal with populations, if we stay in the silos and cycles that we’re in, we’ll never reach that qualitative change where our numbers will mean something. That’s why there’ll be 40 people at a rally, and we think we’re being successful.”

Of course, revolutionaries from around the world already know that the u.s. is complicit in, and guilty of, genocide throughout modern history, but Abdulmumit (who was calling in from South Africa where the local time was 3 a.m.) broke down its purpose as it relates to the People’s Senate: “Why did we have an International Tribunal to prove what we already know? We had a tribunal as an organizing tools so that, number one, we can present it in case somebody’s not politically astute enough to really capture really what’s going on; two, recognize the fact that they are victims of genocide, as Harriet Tubman said, ‘I freed 300 some odd slaves, but I could have freed a thousand more if they only knew they were slaves.’ And that’s what we have to say. That’s the condition of Black people in the united states. If you only knew you were colonized, you might get off your butt and do something.

“This is an oppressive country, but also a very wealthy, oppressive country, and we are chasing the carrot. Some of us have benefited from a piece of the carrot and the hope thereof, and the fact that we have not created any visible alternative way of life. You can bet your bottom dollar that when we talk about abolition or destruction, anything, that when somebody goes home and thinks about their house, their car, their kid going to college, and all these other things, you’re not going to get the result that you’re thinking that you’re going to get.

“On the ground, we must really create, just as the Black Panther Party attempted to do, a visualization of what an alternative lifestyle would look like. I always say that those of us, and it’s probably all of us, who speak toward self-determination and self-reliance, if you don’t have a potato or a tomato or a piece of cabbage growing out of your back patio, you’re not talking about self-determination. This thing is real. People all around us are not political or developing communities all around us. And the left movement is still stuck with analyzing the situation.

“Black August should be an organizing tool, just as the Tribunal is an organizing tool. The People’s Senate is designed to go out and, number one, recognize community organizations, such as representatives we’re looking at right here in front of us; and two, acknowledge what you’re doing. Not to focus on what I’m doing, but to acknowledge what you’re doing and to get

you to become part of this network so that we can acknowledge this organization and that organization, and bring you in touch with each other. That may not even be your focus, but let this process do that.”

Abdulmumit acknowledged the challenges in a country the size of colonized Turtle Island. “In a population of 335,000,000, this is not a small thing. This is a very complex situation. This is not a small African country. This is not a small Latin American country. We're going to have to figure out scientifically, in our strategy, how to break through to greater numbers so that when we say, 'Free all Political Prisoners', that's a demand.

“But what do you think that the oppressor hears when we say that? When you say that when there's 40 people at a demonstration or a rally? When there's been 40 people at a demonstration or rally for decades? For decades? So that means that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. So, hopefully, just one strategy.

“We're not ego tripping, and it's not taking anything away from anybody's organization. Matter of fact, this People's Senate initiative just gives us space to grow our organizations. It's given us the opportunity to be in touch with each other across the country. It's going to give us the opportunity to nominate and elect our own senators across the country, regionally and across the country, so that those senators can look at what's happening in each area, prioritize these issues, and we can send messages that will have a much more profound effect.

“And trust me, sisters, and brothers, this is a new strategy. This is not a Black United Front as we knew it to be in the past. That has not worked in the past. If you think it's working in the past now, then good for you. Take your head out the sand and recognize that we're going to have to do something revolutionary and radically different from what we've been doing. Otherwise, I'll see you next year, 2024, Black August and we'll be talking about the same thing, guaranteed. And we'll have some racist Donald Trump in office again or some Uncle Tom. That's what we'll be dealing with.

“So, in closing, I want to say that, dialectically speaking, this quantitative change is going to have to either take us down and our qualitative change will be disastrous, or this quantitative change is going to reach a point. Another point that's going to take us into a new level of thinking, and that new level of thinking when you're talking about sociology, when you're talking about groupings of people, is going to have to involve people, not the small numbers in our organization.”

Legal and Spiritual Freedom

Andy Williams, Jr., a member of the Lawful Committee and Illinois chapter of Prison Lives Matter, discussed freedom in its legal context. “First and foremost, I want to thank all the elders, the liberated ones, and the ones that we are looking to liberate. Prison Lives Matter's main movement is to abolish legalized slavery. We know that once they passed the 13th Amendment, they started passing Black codes, Jim Crow slave law. We just want to let the people know that freedom is our birthright. It's something that we're born with. It's an inalienable right that nobody can infringe upon. We have liberated Elders speak about the positive work, the work that they're doing to go back into these slave plantations and free the mind, the spirit, and the physical body

of our People. Too often we've been forced to try to succumb to this colonial system that has only indoctrinated our people, kept us oppressed in a condition of servitude. We look to keep the movement going and have our Elders begin to teach solutions to the crimes against humanity. My generation and the younger generation could learn so much from that generation on what to do, how to do it, how to implement what worked and learn from what didn't work, so we finally can have a nation of people that are free, mentally, physically, and spiritually."

Adding to the theme of spirituality in terms of freedom from slavery, Pastor Keith Collins of the Church of the Overcomer in Philadelphia and member of several campaigns focusing on the release of Political Prisoners spoke about how it is incumbent upon those of all practices of faith to join in the fight. "My task is to try to mobilize and organize and to re-energize the faith community of all practices of faith, all practitioners of faith traditions. And I want to begin by quoting Father Paul Washington, who was an episcopal priest here in Philadelphia. His church, Church of the Advocate, was known to be a revolutionary church, which worked closely with the Black Panthers. He gave haven to the Panthers at his church. It was a sanctuary church. It was a revolutionary church. And this is what Father Washington said about the clergy. *'Those who are cowards will ask, is it safe? Those who are political will ask, is it expedient? Those who are vain will ask, is it popular? But those who are conscious will ask, is it right?'*" he stated.

"So our task is to reach out to all practitioners, whether they be Muslims, Sunni, Shia, Christian, all the various denominations of Europe, all the practitioners of faith, to let them know that our true essence of faith is a liberating faith, not the faith of the colonizer, but the faith of the liberator, the faith that the Haitians used to liberate themselves from the colonial oppression of the British and the French and the Spanish empire.

"There's a text in Luke 4:18, it says: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.' Now, just stop right there. Why do we have Political Prisoners? Why do we have such opposition? Why are we forced to have this type of organization and revolutionary thought? Because we live in a colonial empire where capitalism and greed, extortion and genocide have created the conditions that lead to poverty. All our troubles, all the troubles of the masses, the proletariat, are from the fact that there are people with too many resources and people with no resources. The first thing on the agenda is the poor, those that have been deprived of their God-given resources and their inalienable rights. And this is the job of the clergy," he pointed out.

Consistent with the platform of PLM and its concepts of self-determination, Rev. Collins said that those most affected are those who should lead. "The historical model of the path to freedom and productivity must be self-directed by those affected by the policies of confinement and oppression in accordance with the self-directed liberation, such as the Underground Railroad, which was conducted by Harry Tubman and many others. Non-affected persons can lend economic support and become allies of this liberation movement, but historically, liberation leaders and ministers were the catalyst for self-determination.

"Queen Nanny of the Jamaican Maroons, Minister Samuel Sharpe (who led a revolt of the enslaved in Jamaica), Minister Denmark Vesey, (who planned the most extensive revolt by those enslaved in the U.S.), Gabriel Prosser (who plotted a revolt of the enslaved in Virginia), and the great Nat Turner (who led the most sustained revolt by those enslaved in U.S. history) paved the way for our abolition. Contemporarily, we see examples of Malcolm X, Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. and Bishop Albert Cleage (who led a powerful Black Nationalist church in Detroit), who were all committed to eradicating the conditions that produce poverty and crime.

“These faith leaders rejected the model of constraint and gradualism and embraced liberation theology and Black self-determination. Faith leaders must restore the collective consciousness of the church, the mosque, the temple; and like the children of Israel in the Old Testament, many today are attracted to experiences more enticing, emotional and mentally stimulating without the core values of the scriptures. Civil Rights leader Kwame Ture consistently sought to elevate the consciousness of America with specific dedication to elevating the conscious state of many in Black America to a higher level of consciousness and engagement,” he elucidated.

Indigenous and Chicano Liberation

Any movement for the liberation of New Afrikans that does not also include the liberation of Indigenous and Chicano peoples ignores the commonality faced by all those who are oppressed by white supremacy and its tentacles. Mia Feroletto, an activist (activist and artist) who publishes *New Observations Magazine* and works on behalf of the houseless and Indigenous communities among others, spoke about recovering Indigenous artifacts and the ongoing political enslavement of Leonard Peltier.

“Last year, I negotiated, as the authorized representative of the Oglala-Sioux tribe, the return of 131 artifacts stolen from the dead at the Wounded Knee massacre site. And this year, with Chief Henry Red Cloud and Wendell Yellow Bull, we are going to the Museum of Natural History to discuss the repatriation of all Lakota Sioux artifacts in their collection,” she communicated. “While that will happen, we’re planning a big event at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. I lived in Manhattan for 18 years, and my first big fundraising event was for the homeless at the cathedral in 1987, which is exactly when the Reverend Dean Parks Morton, the dean of the cathedral, was having the portrait of Leonard Peltier carved into the facade of the cathedral as part of his Stonemasons program. What we are uncovering is genocide and war crimes against humanity, and I had been asked by the Oglala-Sioux tribe to work with them on these issues because this is the moment between now and November 2024.”

On April 18, 1977, Peltier was falsely convicted of a crime he did not commit and has been incarcerated for nearly 47 years. Feroletto talked about her work with Peltier’s ad hoc committee. “I am in charge of his art, getting his art out into the public. I hope to have a museum show lined up for when he gets out. We are launching a new petition, since to this day, the voter registration card has the box ‘other’ for indigenous people, it does not list them as their own category.

“And after reading a very fine book, which I recommend called “The Devil You Know,” by New York Times columnist Charles Blow, about redistricting of political lines within states and so forth, I did some research and found out that to date, there has never been, or at least not to my knowledge, a petition for Leonard Peltier that has gotten more than 70,000 votes. **And they've there've been signatures of mixed races. To build an indigenous bloc of voters when there are 3.6 million Native Americans, indigenous people in America, to collect 1 million signatures of Indigenous people for Leonard's release as well as fact sheets about Leonard's case and also the war crimes against humanity that are going on in different specific areas of our country.** Like Oak Flat in Arizona, where the copper mine company is trying to build the copper mine on

sacred ground, a massive copper mine. And that's been fought for quite some time to inform and educate and really bring people up to date.”

Enrique Benavidez, a young activist from Colorado who was a guest speaker in New York City at the “2022 Symbols of Resistance: A Tribute to the Martyrs of the Chicano Movement,” has revolution in his bloodlines as the son of lifelong Chicago activist Ricardo Romero, who co-founded the Crusade for Justice in Denver in 1966. “It’s important to know that the social conditions of every generation change because capitalism is continuously changing. And in the united states, capitalism always finds a way to turn itself into fascism. The world is waiting for all of us to wake up, especially because we live in the first world, and we have a very big responsibility.

“How do we create social consciousness amongst our peers and amongst our friends and amongst every space that we really embody? And I think for me, and from what I’ve been taught, the social consciousness that I really want to create for young people, and for people like me, is how do they find dignity. How do they get justice and how do they fight for humanity? Because humanity needs to be the social existence of our life. That’s what we all need to really fight for, is humanity.

“In our society, we’re seeing our young people being attacked left and right. We live in a society that is anti-young and anti-youth. How do we challenge that? How do we change that as educators and as community members?”

In 1977, Ricardo Romero was subpoenaed to appear before a Federal Grand Jury in Chicago, which was investigating the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, and he was imprisoned for refusing to testify. He also founded the Mexican National Liberation Movement earlier that same year. Benavidez has built his life around that same kind of radical spirit and chose to share part of an article his father wrote. “He said that ‘our task is to organize and do the necessary work that will carry us forward within this state of oppression. Knowing from the revolutionary struggles in Mexico, we must struggle to achieve socialism. north american imperialism will most certainly intervene militarily when the puppet forces begin to crumble. At that stage, we must deepen our struggle from within, tearing out the heart of the beast while the rest of our people, all Latin America, and the rest of the world deliver blows to the limbs of u.s. imperialism. Based on this position, we do not recognize the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in having any legal substance. Any of the unjust treaties that are the fruit of war crimes cannot be vested with any legitimacy because to do so would grant, [to] even [a] minimal degree, imperialism the right to colonize our people. For these reasons, we reject the border. Our position holds true from the state of Chiapas to the state of Colorado. We are the Mexican Nation and our homeland is one.’

“And I think it’s important to talk about what’s happening in the world today. We see all the repression that our people are facing in Mexico today. That is a huge thing that we all need to stand up for and talk about. We see Tren Maya (an intercity railway that has been described as an environmental disaster) being built in Chiapas and what is that going to do to all the indigenous people that live in that land. All these things are very interconnected, and I think that this is a really great program that y’all are hosting because it allows us to talk about all of these things.”

NEW YORK

The New York City “Liberate Our Elders” panel was co-sponsored by the NYU law students and hosted at the university’s School of Law Vanderbilt Hall.

Brother Shep opened the session with words about the weekend’s mission and beyond: “Our focus today is dealing with our Elders. Throughout the 60s, the 70s, and the early 80s, those members of the Black Liberation Army and New Afrikan Independence Movement were heavily involved in our liberation and our freedom. Many were captured and put into these dungeons. Some were sent to exile, and of course we lost many in battle and in combat against this fascist government. We're talking about nearly 60 years ago, and some have been locked up more than five decades. Prior to this, we have basically been focusing on releasing our Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, but as time has gone on, they have become Elders. Most of them are in their 70s, so in expanding our campaign, what we have all come together to do beginning this weekend is to look at bringing all of our Elders home because if we bring all of our Elders home, we automatically will bring our Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War home because they, of course, as I mentioned, are also Elders. We're going to be talking this evening about medical neglect, and we're going to be speaking about elder abuse behind the walls, against not just our Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, but all our elders. We all know the majority of those who are in these prisons are Black, Brown, and all oppressed people. So, it behooves us to make sure that we bring all of our resources, all of our organizations, all of our communities together to bring our Elders home.”

Sekou Odinga used the opportunity to speak about those Elders like him who have brought so much to the Liberation Movement and how the lessons learned have paved the way for the Spirit of Mandela to develop the People’s Senate. “I’m glad to get a chance to speak about Elders in prison, freeing them from prison and continuing the work that our Elders started.

“When we think about our Elders, we should think about the work that put them in there. Many of them come out of the different formations like the Black Panther Party. They were feeding our children; they were walking our elders to the banks, making sure they got back with their funds. They were organizing housing programs to hold those slum lords accountable. And they were fighting back. They were fighting when attacked,” he noted.

“Most of our officers throughout the Black Panther Party were attacked by the so-called officers of the law, police, pigs, whatever you want to call them. So, many of them decided that they were going to fight back. They were not going to just lay down and die, being shot at and not shooting back, being brutalized, and not fighting back. A lot of that brought many of our Political Prisoners of War into those prisons. They're being charged with attacking police, for fighting back, really.

“Of course, we want to release all our prisoners out of these joints, especially Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, because almost none of them never had a fair trial based on the laws of this land. Very, very, very few of us had what you call ‘juries of our peers.’”

Bringing that historical perspective to today, Odinga said, “At the International Tribunal in 2021, after a weekend of testimony and evidence, the international jurors came back with a guilty verdict. They found the u.s. guilty of genocide on five counts against Black, Brown and Indigenous people. Of course, most of us knew that anyhow. Most of us knew they were guilty before we even started the process of charging them. But we wanted to make it public, open.

And after that, we wanted to build on that. We didn't want that just to be the sum, that the u.s. is guilty of genocide. As I said, we know that. We've been knowing that. We know this country was built on genocide and the enslaving of African people.

“So, the Spirit of Mandela, along with others who joined us, pushed the program called the People's Senate. It's a new structure. So, we're looking for ideas, work efforts to bring this together. We all talk about the need for unity. We're trying to develop a vehicle we can unify under. We can start doing work collectively,” Odinga suggested.

“We have brothers behind the wall, brothers like Kwame Shakur, who brought people together for this conference. He is a good example of the reason why we need to free all our prisoners, not only our Political Prisoners, or even our social prisoners. Because this young man, he's a genius. We've got all these brilliant brothers and sisters locked up behind these bars that have so much to give, but we're not offering them a chance to do that. Kwame Shakur has already put forth the work. He's not waiting for us to organize anything for him. He's organizing something for us.”

“Brothers and sisters, it is important that we understand that what we are trying to achieve here is something historic, it's novel. It's novel in as much as our goals and objectives are to move our struggle away from the ideas of civil rights and moving toward the ideas of National Liberation and independence. We feel that based upon the decision of the International Tribunal that found the united states guilty of charges of genocide in five categories, that we need to remove ourselves from any future harm,” explained Jalil Muntaqim, one of the architects of the Tribunal and the People's Senate. “That's what the objective of the People's Senate is – to organize the institutional bodies that are capable of ensuring institutional change that will remove us from harm, harm from continued practice of genocide that essentially dehumanizes, degrades and devalues our very existence, especially that of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.”

13th Amendment

The 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution provides 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."

“Of course, one of the charges the u.s. was found guilty of genocide is the issue of mass incarceration. We know that mass incarceration is genocidal because it puts young people in prison at an early age. In the 60s, you'd be 16 years old, be charged as an adult, and given a life in prison until possibly being released in your 50s, 60s, or 70s. I spent 49 years in prison. Fortunately for me, I was able to bear a child prior to going into prison. Otherwise, I would have been 68 years old when I came out of prison trying to build a family.

“What I'm saying is that for many of those who are incarcerated in the penal slavery system will not be able to reproduce because of the school to prison pipeline. The penal slave system is a part of population control, which is genocidal,” Muntaqim expressed. “That's what we're

suffering. Therefore, part of the process of challenging the system of mass incarceration is to remove the incentive for mass incarceration and its free labor. 13th Forward is a national campaign to challenge the system of penal slavery by demanding of those individuals who we are now identifying as incarcerated workers. We are changing the narrative, changing the name, changing the behavior.

“Thought precedes action. How you think determines what you are going to do. If we continue to have people identify themselves as prisoners, and we know that the word prisoner is synonymous to a slave, according to the law, not to us. The law says that prisoners are slaves of the state. Therefore, we need to change the name from prisoners, to identify our people on the inside as incarcerated workers. Because they're workers. Once they get inside the system, what do they do? They put them to work, right? Pennies on the dollar, if that. Slave wages, they're slaves like the law says.

“We're challenging mass incarceration by challenging the law, in this case, by taking the incentive out of free labor and demanding that our people inside get equitable compensation for the labor. Seven states have done so thus far, New York state hopefully will be the eighth or the ninth state that will change the law to end penal slavery. Once we do this across the country, en masse, we challenge mass incarceration in a very substantial way. There is no need for putting our young people in prison for life and working them and trying to get our profits from them.”

King Downing, an activist attorney, a lawyer at war for the People, who worked with the Black Panther Party as a member of community organizing groups spoke on how the so-called law of the land is used by the oppressor, particularly as it relates to incarceration and enslavement: “Almost everything flows out of the 13th Amendment. People forget that Congress still has the power to change this.

“I just want to give a little bit of background about the whole issue of incarceration behind bars. The first important thing is that incarcerated workers, which is the word that we use, are not counted in any of the statistics for any of the u.s. government labor agencies that collect those numbers. There's no information whatsoever on it at all. Most of the work that's being done is in the form of maintenance of prisons. The second form is public service or public works. The third one is private industries, some that are run by state and federal governments and others that are run by major corporations, and the last is agricultural.

“Prison maintenance takes up about 80% of the labor. Of course, there is a whole issue in race around the way these work assignments go because white prisoners are more likely to get to go outside to do public work incarcerated labor. Black people are more prevalent doing the inside so-called incarcerated labor, the maintenance. And the pay is 38% higher for white incarcerated workers than for Black incarcerated male workers. For women, the pay is 33% higher for white incarcerated women workers versus Black incarcerated women workers. They try to claim these things aren't happening. It's a multi-billion dollar a year industry. Nobody's surprised at that.

“Incarcerated workers produce \$2 billion worth of goods and \$9 billion worth of services every year. It's \$11 billion total, and that's 4% of the labor workforce in the country. 4% of the

production in the country is being done by incarcerated workers. It's the classic definition of slavery if people don't have any choice, including solitary confinement, for not working. And a 2005 study showed that 1.5 million incarcerated people are in labor or at labor in any given year. And as I said before, that's 4% of the workforce."

While a few states have removed the slavery wording from the 13th Amendment, New York State is not one of them, though there are ongoing efforts to do so from many freedom fighters who were part of the PLM conference, including Jose Saldaña, Director of Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP). "I want to tune in to that word aging. Everybody's going to age in prison. Two things are going to happen. You're going to age and get out when you're an old man or woman, or you're going to age and die in prison.

"In reference to being considered a slave, New York is a typical state where the Constitution literally defines us as slaves. While we, as the people were emancipated, we don't call it that, but they call it that. The idea is that they can give us slave wages. And we're talking about pennies for decades, 40 years of working for pennies. And if you're released, you have no access to unemployment. You're excluded from the whole concept of workers in America.

"You are part of a people who probably work the hardest of all people, but for pennies. To exclude people, and this goes even deeper than slave wages, we don't get a vacation. And you could work for four decades straight. And no, not even a sick day. We're talking about real slavery in our prison system. You know, when I came out of prison, I tried to go on vacation. And the parole officer told me that I couldn't go on vacation because that required me to go overseas. I challenged that because I'm saying I'm an American worker now. You classify me as a worker, so I'm entitled to a vacation like every other American worker is. They eventually succumbed and said I was right, but only because I was released from prison," Saldaña shared.

Showcasing that voting in Democrats does not bring liberation, he laid out some facts about the "blue state" of New York: "We have a democratic supermajority in the Senate and the Assembly in New York State with people of color leading both, yet we can't get legislation that eradicates slavery and puts it back into the history books. This is a sad situation we're in, but we have a responsibility, and this is where RAPP comes in.

"We are a grassroots organization with boots on the ground. We change the narrative when people talk about incarcerated men and women, who they look at as murderers, rapists, and robbers. We change the narrative because we have scholars in our prison system, we have Elder people who have been responsible for educating and empowering an entire younger generation in our prison system, and they did it with no compensation or hope of a reward. Most of them are dying in our prison so this is what we're talking about: men and women who are deserving and who have already demonstrated their worth as human beings. That they should be released is the real answer, not higher pay. The real answer is liberation. Free these people who have demonstrated their value to us because without them, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be the person I am today."

"13th Forward is a strategic goal of abolition. We understand the broader scale and we are doing it under the principles and concepts of the People's Senate, an entirely new national body of determining what our goals and objectives are, and not only that, but how we are to be governed. We understand that the system we now live in is a corporation. The U.S. government

is a corporation based upon a Supreme Court decision that identifies corporations as people. Basically, what they are saying is that this government functions as a corporation on behalf of other corporations. When they say on behalf of the people, being by the people, they're talking about corporations. And that's the reason why most of us who live in this territory (misidentified as united states, which is actually named Turtle Island, by Indigenous people) are slave laborers for this entire corporation," Muntaqim made clear.

"We must understand how we've been complicit in the function of this government, this corporate entity, this settler colonial corporate government. The method and tactical initiative of removing ourselves from this system of corporate exploitation is the People's Senate. We must do more than simply celebrate the international panel of jurors' guilty verdict. Our job now is to organize a meaningful resistance to this genocide rooted in the Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities themselves.

"There are many ongoing and vital organizing efforts across the country and many local, some focused on single issues, others broader. All could be assisted by networking, linking the various efforts, informing the many forces of the work of others, and amplifying our voices for all. We have got to find some unifying principles across the country that we can identify and say, yes, we agree with that. Yes, we'll unite on that. And yes, we will promote various organizations and groups, and one of them being Release Aging People in Prison.

"Speaking out against genocide and other abuses with a collective voice and developing a program of action to address various issues and struggles that can unite and strengthen our collective voice, the People's Senate, over time, will be working to provide a model for an alternative to existing governance and show how a body might work that truly represents the People and strives to put decision-making processes in their hands."

Political Prisoners

Veteran Black Panther Party comrade Claudia Williams used a memorable name for this land in discussing Political Prisoners: "We all know our Political Prisoners were targeted, yet the 'United States of Amnesia' keeps saying they do not have any Political Prisoners, but we know better than that."

Not only has the u.s. held Political Prisoners for generations, but it also medically abuses them as well. Williams discussed this through the case of Political Prisoner Abdullah Majid, who died on April 3, 2016, in a New York hospital from acute cholecystitis, which affects the gallbladder. "In this time and age, gallbladder disease should not have been his demise. That's something that is very simple to treat. But he was a Black Panther. He was an activist. He was a freedom fighter – which is not a cop killer; while the government wants everybody to think our Political Prisoners are terrorists.

"We're talking about freedom fighters who have been behind the walls for years and years. Some of them have been behind the walls longer than your parents have been alive. We're talking about how can we stop medical abuse? How can we get them out? How can we stop them from being targeted? If you can stay in solitary confinement for 20 or 30 years, what is that? That's medical abuse. We're talking about things that you could not imagine, right from

when they first go to jail, and they're tortured. Then the whole time they are in jail, they are targeted," she shared.

The imprisonment and medical neglect not only directly affects the Political Prisoners, but also their loved ones and all those fighting on their behalf. K'sisay Sadiki is the daughter of Kamau Sadiki, who is currently enslaved in a so-called medical prison in Augusta, Georgia. "It saddens me every time I get an emergency call from my father. He has two wounds each on his right and left that are constantly getting infected. When he went into prison, he did not have those wounds. Since being there, he has had hepatitis and sarcoidosis, but my father has always been very proactive about his health. He is a vegan and needs certain kinds of meals.

"He had none of these health issues when he went in. He is in a so-called medical prison and is being neglected. There have been times he has had to be taken to hospitals and I have almost lost him. I'm so close to my father and I love my father so much. To have to act (calls to action, engaging others to make calls on his behalf) when I'm devastated has made me very strong.

"I have to communicate with my father through JPay. He can't just call me unless it is an emergency and is approved by the warden. To only get messages through JPay when he needs my help is just horrible. Sometimes it is just simple things like recently when he wasn't getting his blood pressure medications. The prison is also understaffed so when my father needs medical attention on the weekend, there is no one there. This is just a little of what my father has experienced on the inside," she described.

Dr. Barbara Zeller, who has been a part of the anti-imperialist movement since the 70s, talked about the abuse from her medical perspective: "I really have become a medical advocate for so many Political Prisoners over the years. I just want to say I know this crowd is celebrating the life of Mutulu Shakur. I had the great privilege of working with him in the late 70s and early 80s at the Lincoln Hospital Acupuncture Program and with the Black Acupuncture Association of North America. I was a medical advisor for his legal team, which worked to get him parole, so I am grieving his passing along with everyone else. We need more medical people to do this. We have a role to try to keep people alive, while their campaigns and their legal teams and the movement are working to get them out, to get them home, and to do all the work we need to do in order to end this terrible situation and mass incarceration.

"Over the years, I have both visited people and talked to people on the inside who have so many questions. They are being told stuff about their health that they have no idea whether it's true or not. And a lot of times it's not true. To have someone to say, 'this is what I've been told.' I get medical records for people, and I can interpret the medical records. I can listen to them if they make a phone call or listen to the families if they're calling for a question. Of course, it's been very important to review medical records for the legal teams as legal cases go on. So, it's one role that I've been privileged to have, but I've also grown old with our Political Prisoners and have witnessed the medical neglect over the years.

"One model of care in prison is that the prison provides the medical care through hiring the staff, and of course that staff reports to the prison. Who can trust that? The newest thing is that there are new corporations that the prison gets as vendors and they're for-profit corporations, so their job is to reduce costs. You can imagine that the cost on each prisoner for medical care is dismal anyway, but now they have these organizations that come in, and run and hire the entire

medical care, and that's happened recently for Kamau in his prison. I'm part of his support committee as well. And this new system, it's very concerning and very worrisome," Dr. Zeller explained.

She also related the difficulties of navigating the medical system even from the outside and how much more difficult it is for those on the inside. "What we've learned over the years is that, particularly for the Political Prisoners, I think everybody you know who's taken care of their parents understands about medical care. I'm speaking primarily about elders right now; that medical care is incredibly complicated. To do it well you need to have lab tests, you need to have CAT scans, you need to have MRIs, you need to have specialists. You need people, you know, not just the primary care physician's assistant who might be able to treat your cold; you need people that are going to think about complicated diagnoses.

"And for the Political Prisoners, security concerns trump everything. If they go out for an MRI, if they go out for a specialist, if they go out for a CAT scan, they need to have guards as the prison sees it as a security issue and often, they don't let them go. It's like it's delayed and delayed and delayed.

"It brings me to the serious question about what's happened with cancer diagnoses with the Political Prisoners. Every single one of them has had a delayed and botched diagnosis," she ruminated. "Mutulu was, in terms of my reviewing the records, at least 2 1/2 to 3 years late in his diagnosis. He died six months after he got out. Russell Maroon Shoatz died about two months after he got out. Marilyn Buck died three weeks after she got out. Bashir Hameed died in prison. Alan Berkman was diagnosed in prison and was able to get out after a massive medical campaign to get him care. Silvia Baraldini had cancer. Albert "Nuh" Washington died in prison. Andrés Figueroa-Cordero died shortly after he was released. These are all cases of medical neglect.

"In most cases, they did not have to die from these tumors. Once they are finally diagnosed, the medical neglect and delays continue. Can you imagine, if anybody's gone through cancer treatment with their loved ones, what it means to go through chemotherapy when you're in prison, when you're in pain, when you're nauseous and vomiting? This is elder abuse. It's medical neglect and it's elder abuse.

"In every state in this country, you're supposed to report elder abuse, whether it's physical, emotional, financial. Any kind of abuse is reported to the state. We don't get to report people in prison that are run by the states. So those are some of the issues that we're dealing with. Again, I feel like people do have to understand because of who our freedom fighters are, that the security issues mean that they don't get out for most of the things that they need."

With ever-increasing shutdowns across the u.s. slave camps, the first part of medical neglect is not receiving any medical care whatsoever. "We have issued a call for folks to call the Bureau of Prisons and to send an email regarding the lockdowns over the last three months. Federal prisons have been locked down 90% of the time, which means during that time, there is no medical checkup. There is no care for diabetes or to get finger sticks. If you fall or hurt yourself, there's no medical care; they just ignore it," stated Paulette Dauteuil of the Jericho Movement and Free Leonard Peltier campaigns who has been a major force in revolutionary politics since the 1960s and has been involved with Peltier's campaign for decades.

“Their guards are on vacation, so rather than have somebody double up, they just lock them down. It also means families don't get to visit or if they go and find out that it's locked down, then they've wasted all that money on going to visit. Leonard's people are from North Dakota, and he is being held in Florida. Veronza Bowers' daughter is in California, while he is in North Carolina. You can see their whole thing is to make it financially difficult for families to visit.”

Kwame Shakur used his call from his slave camp to the New York session to discuss decolonization and unity: “Prison Lives Matter was established on the foundation of the FROLINAN (Front for the Liberation of the New Afrikan Nation) strategy. In that national strategy, we have 10 decolonization programs. And in those programs there's something for every single person within this movement. Childcare, Food Co-Op and Agriculture, the Political Prisoners of War Assistance Programs, the National Alliance of New Afrikan Students, the Panther Youth Corps, something for everybody.

“What we want to see coming out of this webinar and out of these panel discussions is people stepping up and joining this organization, joining this movement in this United Front and the coalition of the Spirit of Mandela. Let us know who you are, who your organization is, the work that you're already doing. And as Jihad said last night, we're not asking you to compromise your morals, your principles, your vision statement, or mission statement. It's about all of us coming together in establishing that national agenda and national strategy.

“Right now, we're so fragmented; and sectarianism is running rampant throughout our movement and our Nation. All we're doing is reducing our own power against our common enemy. And we're saying the same things, we're reading from the same text. Yet in California, Chicago, New York, Indiana, Detroit, we're not coming together and finding that collective ideology, that collective policy that will move us forward together.

“The way that Prison Lives Matter is structured is on a National Coordinating Committee,” he described. “Since 2017, that National Coordinating Committee is made up of some of our nation's leading Political Prisoners, prison formations on the inside, as well as former Political Prisoners and POWs, and outside abolitionists and Revolutionary Nationalist organizations and formations. In recent years, we've broken down the National Coordinating Committee into regional organizing committees that will allow us to build statewide chapters and structures. It's about all of us connecting the dots and putting those people in your region and in your state in tune with the people on the inside just doing that work, so that we can establish that infrastructure and move everything forward.”

CHICAGO

The revolutionary spirit in Chicago is synonymous with street tribes and powerful leaders like Larry Hoover, Benny Lee, and Ike Taylor. Lee and Taylor were both panelists for the Prison Lives Matter: Liberate Our Elders conference, while T Lamar spoke on behalf of the Hoover family and the Free My Father campaign.

“Ike and I are two of the Pontiac Brothers. We came together, we were thrust together, on July 22, 1978, in the Pontiac Prison Rebellion. We were scapegoated and I took the hit to be transferred. I was not happy that I was leaving, but I knew somebody would be taken away,” Lee recalled. “When I got on the bus, I saw Larry there. All those guys with the highest rank positions in the street organizations were in that prison. Scapegoating us brought together all the street organizations and brothers on the street on our behalf.” Lee, Taylor, and Hoover were all among the ‘Pontiac 17,’ all of whom were acquitted and taken off death row.

Taylor, a current member of the PLM National Coordinating Committee, was a childhood friend of Hoover’s and co-founder with him of the GDN. “I’m still a prisoner. I am going to be a prisoner forever. You don’t build like I build without being a prisoner of this system. And I fight and will fight as long as I am alive,” he stated.

“We have to arm ourselves with knowledge. My organization is the National Alliance for the Empowerment of the Formerly Incarcerated (NAEFI). We came about because in 2009, I got too many letters and calls from brothers and sisters about how they were treated when they came out,” added Lee. “The 13th Amendment suggests no u.s. citizen should be subject to slavery unless they are convicted of a crime. So, what they do is put a convicted felon under the state of a slave. This is why a regulation board that set criteria to exclude a convicted felon from getting a certain license. I’ve been out of prison 39 years, but I still can’t become a licensed real estate broker. ‘Paying our debt’ is a myth. We need to know how to fight.”

As moderator, Andy Williams, Jr. encapsulated, “legalized slavery has been going on for centuries. We are in a condition right now that we are demanding that our Political Prisoners, Politicized Prisoners, and POWs (Prisoners of War) come home. When we talk about Prison Lives Matter, we’re talking about the physical, spiritual and mental imprisonment of our people.”

Nicholas Richard Thompson, an organizer with a focus on abolition, human rights and international solidarity stated: “We have to make political prisoners a large focus of our anti-colonialism work because they are there precisely because they have been advocating, organizing and fighting against the system on behalf of all of us. When they are repressed, we must recognize that as an assault, not just on them, but on our collective liberation movement.

“Now, there are a lot of organizations within the united states that claim to be anti-colonial, anti imperialist, anti-capitalist, but any movement that is so called progressive, moving forward, has to be concerned with political prisoners. We’re not a part of this general population. We are a domestic colony. We are still enslaved. When we’re thinking about prison lives, we’re thinking specifically about our Political Prisoners again. They are there because they fought against the same system that brutally murdered Black and Indigenous people daily; the same system that keeps us being confined and incarcerated.”

Fighting For All Those Affected by Incarceration

T Lamar spoke about the Hoover Enterprise’s Free My Father campaign, whose aim is to bring awareness and advocate for the children whose parents have been incarcerated. “I’m glad that Brother Benny Lee is here because he can attest to this. Prison life is a rough life and just as he described it, it is about genocide. When we’re talking about prison life, we’re also talking about children, we’re talking about families, we’re talking about wives, we’re talking about a future generation. And that is what the problem is. It’s not just that you grab one body, you’re grabbing a whole family.

“So let me say that ‘Free My Father’ is a campaign to bring awareness and advocacy for the children whose parents have been incarcerated. Not necessarily for those who have been incarcerated, but for the children and the families suffering from the unjust life without parole sentencing, unfair sentencing of Black and Brown people in low-economic communities and long-term solitary confinement,” he commented.

“Of America’s roughly two million prisoners, two million people, that’s a lot of people. That’s a lot of people to be incarcerated. That’s larger than some countries. There are more than 800,000 who are parents. 800,000 parents from two million prisoners are locked up,” Lamar continued. “And here’s the key: This is why you see ‘Free My Father’ on my t-shirt. 92% of those incarcerated parents are fathers. Around 2.7 million children have at least one parent incarcerated. We didn’t even go to cousin, we didn’t go to uncle, we didn’t go to grandfather.

“Almost three million children have a parent who is incarcerated. 75% of adolescent patients in substance abuse centers are from fatherless homes. Children who feel closer to their fathers are 80% less likely to spend time in jail. Some data suggests 72% of adolescent murderers and 70% of long-term prison inmates come from fatherless homes. What happens when we say that we’re abolishing crime and we get rid of some of these criminal activities and some of these people who perpetuate this? What we actually do is we create another generation of them. We lock a father away and then the children now are prone to this type of activity that their father was locked away for because their father’s not there to say, ‘don’t do that, don’t go there.’”

PLM foundationally believes that we are fighting for all Political Prisoners, for all those oppressed by the system, and that no one is left out. Formerly incarcerated activist Taquitta Hollywood Cross, who came home six years ago, advocates specifically for women prisoners: “I’m here because of the mass incarceration of women, the mistreatment of women in the prison system and in the jail system, and the raping of the women in the system. They talk to us like we are children. ‘Don’t move. Stand at attention.’ Who do you think you’re talking to? I’m a grown woman. We’re not children. We had to walk around like we were children, like slaves. Just because I am incarcerated doesn’t mean I should be treated like I am nothing,” she explained.

“I have a program called ‘Enriching Lifestyle.’ My goal is to help 30,000 incarcerated women start their own business while they’re incarcerated. I want these sisters to leave the joint educated, with a business platform of their own so when they step up out of there they have the ability to purchase their own apartment, house, and car,” said Cross. “Remember, there are sisters in there who can’t read. We must teach them, first of all, how to read. That’s one thing. Once they learn how to read, we teach them how to comprehend what they read. Once they comprehend what they read, then we teach them how to write down what they think about, what they comprehend, what they read. Then we help them to get their diplomas, their degrees. Or they don’t have to get a degree. They can write their own PhD. I’m talking about solutions. I got no time to talk about the problem. Because we know what the problem is. Why do we have to keep talking about the problem?”

Sustainability

Kwame Shakur, whose own street tribe experiences in Terre Haute, Indiana, have led to his connection to those who ran the streets in Chicago, called in from his slave camp to talk about

building something that will last: “As Benny Lee said, it is time for us to create something sustainable. We all know that throughout history, especially in the past 50 years, we continue to regroup, rebuild, and start over every 10, 15, or 20 years because we didn’t properly build our infrastructure to face the constant state of attack from the colonial government on all levels. What that causes is what we call ‘on the go politics,’ where we’re constantly reacting to every individual thing coming at us in a thousand directions instead of trying to focus in and build infrastructure and programs for decolonization that allow us to cut the umbilical cord from the colonial system, in the so-called united states government.

“Right now, we depend on our oppressor for every one of our needs: educational, economic, political, social and cultural. What we are calling for with Prison Lives Matter, Spirit of Mandela, and the People’s Senate is to immediately come back after these webinars and panel discussions to start developing cadre in political education formations and determining where we are going to start these community gardens so that we can sustain life on the most basic need,” he reiterated.

“Prison Lives Matter is not all about prison and prison issues. It is a United Front of all anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist organizations across this nation working in solidarity to abolish legalized slavery, and the national liberation of New Afrikan, Chicano, and Indigenous people. What we’re establishing with Prison Lives Matter regional organizing committees is for us to come together and establish that inside-outside coordination.

“We know in every state across this empire, there are people on the outside doing the work. Sister Janice and Benny Lee have been doing that in Illinois for 40-to-50 years. We know that in every state there are politicized individuals, Political Prisoners, and Prisoners of War are doing the work. With PLM, we aim to connect the two forces together where we can build that political people power and move this thing forward.

“Within that national strategy, we made out 10 programs for decolonization. There's something in that 10 -point program for every single individual, whether you're a doctor, a lawyer, a professor, a student, a security builder within the community, or a Black farmer, we need you to step up because we've got a space for you,” assured Shakur. “The reason that we've been in this state that we're in for so many decades and so many generations is because of the lack of unification. And even more than that, even when we are unified and people have been doing this work for so long, what we're seeing through our study and our analysis of our struggle, is a need to create concrete programs that will turn the theory out of books that we've written, the lectures we've given, the People's assemblies we've attended, into practice.”

Mental Health and Liberation

Dr. Amber Siler, a licensed clinical psychologist in the Chicago area and member of the PLM Midwest Regional Organizing Committee: “I want to speak to the importance of mental health professionals and psychologists being involved in understanding the ramifications of genocide on our Black and Brown people and Indigenous peoples living in the so-called united states and across the world. As a mental health professional and psychologist of African descent, I think the importance of participating in dialogue that will broaden and understanding the insidiousness and the nature of historical colonization and the neocolonial mindset is critical to understand these things, so that we can disrupt the perpetuation of dehumanization, systemic oppression, and institutional racism. We must recognize how imperialism and capitalism allow

for these tools of genocide to continue to be normalized, not only in society, but also in the context of mass incarceration.

“We need to identify the impact these tools of genocide have on the mental health of oppressed populations and incarcerated populations, primarily the people of African descent and Indigenous people who have been living in oppression here. We need to recognize the practices of violence and colonization within these historical systems and in the systems that are continuing to exist today,” she explained. “Neocolonial violence is a modern-day tool of genocide and that is the reality. The chronic traumatization of living with domestic terror and violence has had a lasting cultural and psychological impact on people of African descent and indigenous peoples and other people of color living here.

“When we look at complex traumatic stress of people who have been living in a state of domestic terror that targets Black and Brown people, we must recognize and validate that there’s a lasting cultural and psychological impact on our psyche. When we look at how people respond to death or threats of death, we look at direct exposure, witnessing the trauma. Every time we see bodies killed by the police, every time we see graphic examples of brutality, it normalizes a sense that our lives are not valuable and that we are dispensable, that we are not going to be fought for. It instills a sense of powerlessness for some people, for some people it’s depression and hopelessness, for some people it’s rage and anger, for some people it’s paranoia.

“I say paranoia, but I don’t say it in a derogatory sense. I say it with the level of awareness that you must have to survive. It’s so heightened that it’s hard to trust what you see and believe. And that’s a survival mechanism. It’s not a mental illness,” Siler clarified. “We need to, as mental health providers and healthcare providers, to be conscientious and de-pathologizing cultural paranoia responses of people of color, because these are survival instincts on overdrive, particularly coming out of the incarcerated systems, particularly coming out of overpoliced communities.

“We need to look at maladaptive coping responses, such as substance abuse, dismissing or minimizing emotional responses, avoiding places, isolation, emotional inhibition, and not being able to feel safe to express any kind of normal emotional range outside of anger, because that is a societal response to oppression. That is, these are normative responses when you look at the impact of genocide over history. We need to look at hypervigilance, suspicion, mistrust of authority, mistrust of healthcare, mistrust of education.”

OAKLAND

Oakland, California has been a bastion of revolutionary New Afrikan movements for generations, including the site of the original Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, founded in 1966 on the campus of Merritt College by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. Much of that work continues there today, particularly the People’s Programs, built upon the same foundations as the BPP.

Abbas Muntaqim, co-founder and co-chair of People’s Programs, spoke about continuing the BPP legacy and how it relates to this day and age: “Jalil Muntaqim, one of longest-held Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, articulated that we have to move past ‘survival pending revolution’ to decolonization programs, understanding that we have the human right to free the

land. It is not merely about surviving, but it is about us going on the offensive for New Afrikan Liberation.

“Our program for decolonization has various food programs in Oakland, a grocery program, and a free breakfast program. We have a free community health program. We have a farm where we're growing our own produce that will be our grocery program in the neighborhoods. In this process of building these different programs in the community, we can see that we, in fact, can become our own liberators. If we don't see that we can become our own liberators, we ain't worthy of liberation. We must have that belief within our heart that we can, and will be, free. And if we have that belief, we also must have the proper ideological understanding on what freedom is.”

Kwame Shakur's call into the Oakland panel reiterated the importance of the decolonization programs: “Abbas mentioned the People's Program in Oakland. There is also a People's Liberation Program in Rochester, New York. Last year, I purchased a building, a formerly Black-owned grocery store in my hometown of Terre Haute, Indiana, which is being renovated for the People's Programs for Decolonization. What we're trying to get everybody to overstand is just because the building is in Terre Haute, it is a National building. This building is a cadre training hub and a cadre development center for all these decolonization programs for the National Alliance of New Afrikan Students; for the lawyers and professors and pre-law students who we are working with around the nation to be able to come here and train; and for others to come and get that hands-on experience so that you can get the tools to go back to your region, to your area or your city, to implement these decolonization programs,” he described.

“What we're asking for right now is for people to be able to help us on a grassroots level to raise these funds to help renovate this building so we can get this up and going; because anybody who's done a study and analysis of our struggle over the past 35-plus years understands we are lacking cadre because we do not have physical infrastructure. In this new technological age that we're in, and the digital era, it's great that we can all be on Zoom from across the nation. But at the same time it's a double-edged sword and we can't establish abolition and uplifting our nation through Zoom conference calls. What is taking place right now is these conference calls are taking the place of the tangible cadre training centers. We're asking you to be able to step up and help us with that funding, because right now myself and other prisoners have been doing it and getting the donations from the inside for everything that we've done so far.”

What is Freedom?

“Now the question is how do we get free? Is freedom under integration? Is freedom Barack Obama? Is freedom Kamala Harris? Is freedom these Black pigs? Is freedom Black DAs? If we understand the foundation of this country is genocide, if you integrate into a genocidal system, what are you a part of? A genocidal system. Just the facts.

“This constitution that you're sworn to protect was written by white slaveholding men with enslaved Africans' teeth in their mouths. This is still the law of the land. So, if we say we can be free, we must develop the proper ideological understanding. If we integrate, we ain't gonna be free. We see it every single day in Oakland, California. We see it every single day in the various New Afrikan communities that are occupied by these so-called settlers. If we have the proper

understanding, the proper understanding is that we want independence. We want to establish the Republic of New Afrika,” Abbas Muntaqim stressed.

“When we think about community control, we have to have a proper understanding of how we get community control. Not community control to maintain this empire of the so-called united states of america, but community control to lead to national liberation,” he continued. “This is where the People's Senate comes in. If we understand that we are under genocide, if we understand that we can't integrate, then we as a People who are colonized, Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, who are under genocidal conditions, we have the right to come together and to develop a plan. That's what we've got to do.

“Part of the People's Senate is getting people in the room like we are doing right now and figuring out how we build. If you bring a brick, I bring a brick, you bring a brick, you bring a brick, we all bring some bricks. There's some building that we can be doing. Ultimately, we have to embody the fact that we are our own liberators. Ain't nobody going to come save us. Nobody is going to come save us but ourselves. The genocide, even though it's recognized by the International Tribunal, even though it's illegal under the united nations, ultimately, it is we ourselves who have to decide that we will unify.”

“Many of us are more ‘american’ than we think. What that means is we are neo-colonized – even some of the most revolutionary nationalist organizations and individuals are neo-colonized just based on our existence on this land,” Shakur pointed out. “If you don't have a garden in your back yard or your community, it just shows how neo-colonized we are and how attached we are to the colonial system and this empire.

“We have to be trained and educated on how to be a self-determined group of people, on how to control our own destiny, even on the most basic sense of sustaining life, which is food and agriculture. We have been trained to do that because we can go to Walmart, we can go to the corner store, we can go online and order food and have groceries delivered to our house at the push of a button. So why would we be growing our own food and teaching our people on how to farm and sustain life in that manner? It is the same at the educational, economic, political, social, cultural, and military level as well. We depend on the master, on our oppressor, for education. We send our kids into day schools to be brainwashed and taught what to think instead of being educated on how to think.”

Shakur went on to explain the economic and political reality of being neo-colonized in a white supremacist-controlled land. “Economically, we will go into their jobs, to those labor forces in the never-ending cycle of economic exploitation, living paycheck to paycheck, making pennies on the dollar from the person who owns the land, who owns the building, who owns the machinery, and is making millions and billions of dollars on the backs of the physical labor of the proletariat class,” he stated. “On the political level, instead of becoming our own liberators and developing international political power for ourselves and for our Nation, we're going to vote for 78-year-old Europeans and neo-colonized house-niggaz, who don't have our interests at heart. That's neocolonialism. What Franz Fanon talks about in ‘Wretched of the Earth’ is that transition period during the national liberation struggle. A lot of people, especially over here in north america, can't overlook that or don't grasp the severity of that phrase. That is where the Decolonization Programs come into play.”

Identity and Unity

“Part of unification means dealing with the roaches. We got some roaches in our community. We got some rats in our community. Not all skin is kin. Some people want to sell us out just for a little bit of change. Some people want to sell us out for a position as an elected official rather than working for the People. So, in that process, we have to unify. Unity is the strongest weapon that we have. It's stronger than any imperialist weapon. It is stronger than any nuclear bomb.

“We have to unify as part of the process of building the People's Senate, of different communities coming together and saying: ‘Hey, we agree on this. We agree on that. We agree for national liberation. We agree for national liberation of Indigenous people. We agree for national liberation of Brown people. We agree for national liberation of New Afrikans, Abbas Muntaqim formulated.

“Why are we still calling ourselves african-american? African and american are diametrically opposed. That's psychological warfare to call yourself african-american. We have the right identification. Without proper identification, we won't know where we are going. Like Jalil Muntaqim says: ‘We got to free our minds, so our ass can follow.’ We got to free our minds from the captivity of settler colonialism. My brother, Delency (Parham) called it a ‘menticide.’ If we understand the genocide, it's also a menticide of the mind, where our mind is stuck in chains. Our mind is thinking we are american. Some of us are more american than we wanna admit, even though we are conscious New Afrikans.

“Part of this process, again going back to the People's Senate, is we have to unify as a community and develop a proper strategy to where we can understand that ultimately, we must have independence all day. I know no such thing as half freedom. I know no such thing as half liberation. I know no such thing as integration into a burning house,” he commented. “Even the most praised integrationist, Martin Luther King, said, ‘I'm afraid that I've integrated my people into a burning house.’ Martin Luther King said that back in the 60s. Why are we talking about integration still? Why are we trying to integrate into a system that is killing our People? Why are we trying to integrate into a genocidal system?”

Beyond Genocide

“In October 2021, the so-called united states was found guilty of genocide on all five counts by international jurors convened from around the world. Since that time, several of our cadre and our leaders, members of the original Black Panther Party, veterans of the Black Liberation Army, and other formations from around the country have been working together to figure how to move that guilty verdict into something tangible,” Shakur added. “The work that came out of that is the People's Senate. We are working for, and striving for, a senate body for New Afrikans, Chicanos, and Indigenous people on this Turtle Island, the united states empire to create a Unified Front of all the organizations and collectives already doing this work. We're not asking you or your organization to compromise your morals and principles or your vision and mission statement; rather it's all of us coming together so that we can establish the political power and the international political power we need to free ourselves.”

“We talk about ‘We charge genocide.’ We were here before. How do we begin to move that narrative forward when you think about the Elders right now being subjected to elder abuse? We have Elders incarcerated right now. What do we do? Do we just leave them there? We say, hell no! That's why we say that ‘Liberate Our Elders’ is a demand, not an empty slogan. You

have to give them adequate resources to move from one structure to another,” according to Minister King X, who moderated the Oakland panel and has worked extensively with incarcerated Elder campaigns.

King went on to say: “We create programs for those who are finally released and then they’re disrupted by poor education, inadequate health care, and being unhoused. I only did 18 years. I say that because we have Elders that did 50 years. It is coming home to a culture shock. We have beautiful concepts, but we don’t even have Black-owned businesses.

“The reality is what we are living through is a real struggle. The concrete solution to our problems is you, people coming together without romanticizing this thing. Our Elders are walking encyclopedias. They know how to restructure and rebuild the buildings and programs that have been torn down because for decades inside and out, they have been subjected to the destruction of Black civilization.”

“The key work of Prison Lives Matter at the regional and local level is establishing the inside/outside coordination,” Shakur concluded. “We know that in every state across Turtle Island, we have outside people doing Revolutionary Nationalism and abolitionist work. We know in every single prison we have Political Prisoners and Politicized individuals doing the work and resisting against their captivity. So that’s where in our aims and objectives, PLM is to unite those people and implement structure and give them the proper tools to help develop cadre, and implement Political Education classes on a state by state and camp by camp basis.”

Resources Mentioned in Story (For online publication, not for printed copy of journal)

[The People’s Senate \(PDF\)](#)

[Prison Lives Matter Website](#)

[Kwame Shakur Kriminal Konviction Kase](#)

[Kwame Shakur Freedom Campaign Email](#)

[Spirit of Mandela International Tribunal](#)

[Official International Tribunal Verdict \(PDF\)](#)

[13th Forward](#)

[Free Leonard Peltier Now](#)

[Free My Father](#)