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Event: Socialism 2022 conference, Chicago
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Panel: Study and Struggle sponsoring Prison Is Censorship
Charlotte Rosen, moderator
Jessica Phoenix Sylvia
Robert Saleem Holbrook
Kim Wilson
Stevie Wilson
Safear Ness
Bryant Arroyo

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Thanks, everyone. We're going to get started. Before we begin, I just wanted to remind everyone that all Socialism conference attendees are required to wear a mask, fully covering the nose and mouth, while indoors at the conference spaces, including hallways and meeting rooms. Speakers in the front of sessions may remove their masks in order to deliver presentations, but only while actively speaking. Audience members are still required to wear masks even while asking questions or making comments. That policy is in place to protect all of us, especially immunocompromised folks from the risk of contracting Covid.

Now, on to our panel for this afternoon, "Prison is Censorship." My name is Charlotte Rosen. I'm an abolitionist and historian based here in Chicago, and a member of the organization sponsoring today's panel, Study and Struggle.

We are a collective that organizes towards abolition through political education and mutual aid and community building across prison walls. The focus currently [is] on organizing in Mississippi. We encourage folks in the audience today to learn more about our work. You can check out our fall 2022 curriculum and sign up to be a pan pal of an incarcerated person in Mississippi at studyandstruggle.com. You can also talk to Mariana afterwards who will help sign you up today if you want.

I'm really honored to be moderating this panel on issues that I think many of us in the free world don't really understand and are perhaps not angry enough about, and that is the crisis of prison censorship.

Our panelists today will be discussing the numerous ways that criminalize people struggling to receive and produce knowledge while inside, and the effects of this censorship on their organizing and their relationships.

We'll also touch on the insidious digitization of mail in prisons, such that imprisoned people in a number of states can no longer receive physical mail, and are subjected then to heightened surveillance by private prison communications firms that, of course, makes millions off of these physical mail bans.

So in an effort to disrupt one of the most fundamental ways prison censors and imprisoned people, by making it extremely difficult if not impossible for them to participate in conferences such as this one, we developed a conference format that maximizes participation from currently imprisoned people.

So just to give you an overview how today's going to work, in 15 minutes, one of our panelists, Stevie Wilson, who's also in many ways the brainchild behind this entire panel—coming up with the questions and the framework—will be joining us via Zoom from a state correctional institution, Camp Hill, which is in Pennsylvania.

Another one of our panelists, Kim Wilson, will also be joining us virtually, just she was unable to join us in person.

They will both be with us for 45 minutes, and during that time, I hope we'll have the bulk of our discussion. After we depart, we'll then also have an around 15-minute recording with two of our panelists who are also imprisoned in Pennsylvania, Safear and Bryant. We'll hear their prerecorded thoughts on prison censorship.

Then the panelists who are with us here today, Jess and Saleem, will share closing reflections, and it will end. We apologize that as a result of this hybrid format, there's not really going to be time for substantial discussion or Q&A. I really apologize about that, but definitely encourage folks to stick around and chat if you have additional questions for the panelists certainly. Thank you in advance for your patience as we manage all the moving pieces of this. Hopefully, we won't have any major issues.

Next, I'm going to go and introduce everyone up front before we get into the discussion. First, going in alphabetical order, we have Bryant Arroyo who you'll hear from later. He is currently in prison at SCI Coal Township.

He is, according to friend and mentor Mumia Abu-Jamal, the first jailhouse environmentalist, a title he earned after successfully organizing his fellow prisoners against the construction of a \$400 million coal gasification plant that was slated to built 300 feet from SCI-Frackville. This plant would have poisoned the environment around the prison as well as the nearby community. Because of his fearless activism, the project was ultimately scrapped.

Sentenced to life without the possibility of parole for a crime that he did not commit, Arroyo has since fought tirelessly for the betterment of himself and his fellow prisoners. He's currently fighting against the for-profit privatization of the prison mail system, which we'll talk about more today, encouraging his fellow prisoners to boycott the mail service entirely since the 2018 implementation of these draconian new policies in which prisoner mail is sent to a for-profit third party where it is opened, photocopied, and then stored on private servers.

Next, we have Robert Saleem Holbrook, who is with us here today, and who is the executive director of the Abolitionist Law Center, a law practice dedicated to ending race- and class-based

discrimination and the criminal justice system and all forms of state violence. He's also a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania Law School.

He is cofounder of the Human Rights Coalition, an organization with chapters in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh that is composed of family members of prisoners that advocate on behalf of the civil and human rights of prisoners. He is also a cofounder of the Coalition to Abolish Death by Incarceration in Pennsylvania. [Inaudible] without [inaudible] sentences.

While incarcerated, Saleem wrote extensively on prison abuse, social injustice, state violence and juveniles charged and sentenced as adults. His writings were featured in *Truthout*, *The Appeal*, *San Francisco Bay View*, and *Solitary Watch*.

He was released from prison in 2018 after spending over two decades incarcerated for an offense he was convicted of as a child offender.

Next, we have Safear Ness. Safear is a white Mexican Muslim practicing prison abolition at SCI-Coal Township in Pennsylvania. Safear grew up in Philadelphia and has spent all of their adult life under various forms of carceral supervision. And although they are held captive, they have transformed their cell into a learning center, and education is now their weapon of resistance.

Next, we have Jessica Phoenix Sylvia, also with us here today. She is a formerly incarcerated trans woman, writer, speaker, community organizer, abolitionist, and advocate for the humanization of trans prisoners. She's a self-described radical revolutionary, abolitionist thinker and musical artist.

Her writing and reporting characteristically ascribes to consciousness and the cultural reflections that highlight self-determination, resilience, and resistance.

She considers herself an abolitionist first and a writer second, preferring to write only about that which supports the work that she values with the greatest passion for writing about the racist, gendered, ableist, colonial violence of the criminal legal system.

She focuses her work on power over powerlessness, [inaudible] transformative justice solutions that build community accountability.

Next, we have Dr. Kim Wilson, who will be joining us via Zoom in a second. She is an educator, organizer, writer and artist. She's also co-host and producer of *Beyond Prisons*, a really great podcast on incarceration and prison abolition.

Kim has three adult children, a daughter and two sons, and both of her sons are currently sentenced to life in prison. She has a PhD in urban affairs and public policy, and more than two decades of teaching and facilitation experience. Her current work focuses on creating abolitionist media and teaching others how to use storytelling, research data, and community voices in the fight for human rights.

Finally, we have Stephen Wilson, or Stevie Wilson. He is a currently incarcerated, Black, queer writer, activist and student. For over two decades, he was active in the ballroom community and worked as an HIV prevention specialist and community organizer.

His work and practice inherit teachings from prison abolition, transformative and racial justice, Black feminist theory, and gender and queer theory, and liberation.

Specifically, he works to end cycles of poverty and incarceration that have plagued his community. He works to expose and dismantle the prison industrial complex, and to build a world in which we deal with harm without caging or exiling other people.

While we wait for Stevie and Kim to join us on Zoom, perhaps we can get started with our first question, and then we'll loop in Stevie and Kim when they join us.

One thing that I talked about with Stevie actually yesterday in prep for this panel was what we hear about censorship as an issue today, people often think about banning books. But I'm wondering for our panelists here with us today, how would you expand this idea, and what does prison censorship really mean to you?

JESSICA PHOENIX SYLVIA: If I could get started. I would say that censorship is more than just thinking about language or ideas. Many things can be censored, including bodies. There are people who are kidnapped by body snatchers who, in my eyes, human traffickers, erasing people out of communities, censoring them out of their own communities and putting them in prison.

I know that as a trans woman, I've had my own body censored. I've had my health care censored. We can see that reproductive rights are censored today. And I would think of there are folks who want to actually criminalize health care for trans kids, which I think of as almost a preemptive genocide, which would erase a whole generation of individuals collectively, and generations of people cannot exist.

Censorship is very serious. I look back through the history of this country with censorship, when Native Americans couldn't actually speak their language, and couldn't practice their culture; where Black folks were not allowed to read or write.

Thinking about censorship and how it supports the criminal legal system today in mass incarceration, it's very serious. It's more than just language. It's more than just ideas. It is about bodies. It is about actions and it functions through time and through space in various ways.

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Great. Thank you so much. I just want to pause briefly to welcome Kim and Stevie. Can you hear us okay? I hope. Okay, cool. So, just so to loop y'all both in, and Saleem hopefully you can jump into that question as well. I just kicked us off with a question about, what does prison censorship mean to you? Most people when we think about censorship think oh maybe it's just banning books. But what does it actually mean? So that's the question that we're discussing, and if you all want to jump in, go for it. Or Saleem, you can pop in as well.

ROBERT SALEEM HOLBROOK: Yeah, I think that everything [Jess] Sylvia said, I totally agree with, so I'm not going to expound too much on that. I think that censorship in prison serves several purposes.

One is to erase prisoners, to erase your identity. Also, to disappear you. Prison is very adept at disappearing you, not just from society or your community or your neighborhood, but even from within the prison itself.

There's many layers of the hole that you could be disappeared in—for political content, political speech, challenging the prison, or for being different. Being queer or trans in prison can get you disappeared because that's not something that the prison system wants to deal with. It's inconvenient to the prison system itself. What's convenient is disappearing people places people the hole.

That's the political side of it. If you're a prisoner that's politicized, if you were influenced by George Jackson, if you were influenced by the Black prison movement, you're going to be disappeared. You're going to be censored. You're going to be contained. You're going to be isolated.

But there's another side of it, the human side. There's self-censorship that you do to yourself. I tell people that dealing with the repression and prison censorship was something that was very easy for me to deal with. Going into prison at the age of 16, I had adjusted to that. That was my norm. Prison, cells, isolation, things like that.

But what was abnormal for me was censoring a lot of the human feelings. It's hard to explain, but I tell people that being in prison, I had to kill a part of me, and I feel like every prisoner when you go in there, you kind of do that to yourself, censor yourself. You disappear a part of yourself because prison is not an environment where you can really have feelings about other people. You kind of dehumanize yourself.

Even today, having been out of those cages for five years, after 27 years in prison, I still have to find ways to rediscover those parts of me that I censored, those parts of me that I erased those 27 years in prison in order for me to survive, particularly the way I did my time. I did my time in a very particular way. I did it on my own terms, and so I lost a lot, and so it's always a process of recovering that.

When I think back on those 27 years—10 years in solitary confinement, being transferred 20-something times to different prisons across the state, being in cells with no clothes for three or four days with the guards pumping in cold air to my cell—I've recovered from all of that. That is what it was. I dealt with it.

What lingers most is the self-censorship, what I took away from myself that I struggle to recover every day. That's also like the human side of the censorship that we all go through as prisoners, so I think I wanted to share my thoughts on that because that doesn't stop at the door when you release. It's something that you continue to carry on.

If you listen to political prisoners in other parts of the country, in Uruguay, in South Africa, New York who were released from prison, you'll see that many of them say that that was the most brutal part of the prison experience, censoring themselves. Marilyn Buck talked about that as well.

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Stevie or Kim, do either one of you—yeah, Stevie, do you want to go first? Okay. Stevie, do you want to try talking? Can you hear me, Stevie?

STEVIE WILSON: I can hear you.

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Perfect.

STEVIE WILSON: I wanted Kim to go first [inaudible].

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Okay.

KIM WILSON: Do you mind repeating the question? I caught the tail end.

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: For sure. It was, what does prison censorship mean to you? Maybe kind of how does it go beyond just simple discussion about banned books, for example?

KIM WILSON: Okay. Wow, that's a big question, and I think part of what I think about in terms of prison censorship is the docile bodies are easier to discipline. Making sure that people don't have access to legal materials, medical information, anything that has to do with race, civil rights. Anything. Politics. Talking about the most pressing issues of our time. All of those things are being banned and have been banned from prisons across the country for decades.

Restricting that access makes it really difficult for people to self-educate. And that's also connected to something that I've been thinking about and have this conversation with a few people around higher ed in prison.

But also the decline, or the complete elimination of higher education in prison, happening around the same time as many of these books have been banned or many books have been banned.

It's not just limited to books. We're focusing on books in part because at the end of September, we always talk about Banned Books Week, or many of us observe Banned Books Week.

We don't tend to talk about it in the context of prison. We don't tend to think about banned books in the context of prisoner rights and what the implications of that are beyond just the "well, so and so couldn't get this book." This is really a systemic problem that we're seeing across the country.

The rules are arbitrary and nonsensical. They vary from state to state. They vary between the federal prisons and state prisons. It varies also between state prisons and jails.

The decisions are being left up to individuals, either in the mailroom or other prison officials who are, I would argue, ill-equipped at best on how best to make decisions about what prisoners should have access to.

I was refreshing my memory in reading a piece in preparation for today's panel around the idea of censorship and books in American prisons, and how this is such an under-discussed problem across the board. It's not something that—I'm grateful to be part of this panel and on this panel with amazing folks.

This is probably the first panel that I've been on that is actually focused on censorship in prison, and that's very telling, considering that we talk about prisons so much. It may appear or show up as a topic or a subset within somebody else's presentation, but I believe, in all my years of organizing, this is the very first panel that I've been on that has focused on censorship in prison, and it's not, like I said earlier, not just limited to books.

I think it's really important for us to recognize as Saleem pointed out how this destroys individuals, but also how it destroys ties between people and their communities. Hopefully, we can get a little deeper into that. I could go on and on about this, but I'd love to hear what Stevie has to say.

STEVIE WILSON: Thank you. First of all, I want to thank you for just being a part of a panel once again. I completely agree with what Kim said about censorship being...

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Stevie? I think you're a little bit quiet, so if you could just project as much as possible, that would be great.

STEVIE WILSON: Can you hear me now?

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Yeah, that's better. Thanks.

STEVIE WILSON: I just want to reiterate what Kim was talking about prison. Prison censorship not being a topic that we talk about quite often. And we need to talk more about it. People talk about prisons, people talk about what's happening, but they're not talking about censorship. And to me, censorship is actually the denial of connection.

At the end of the day it's about the fact that I cannot be in relationships and be connected with people outside, and I cannot be in relationships and be connected with people inside. In a sense you cannot be connected to yourself. You can't learn about yourself. You can't grow yourself. To me censorship in a nutshell is about denial of connection.

This is how they are able to keep us docile. Going back to what Kim said also, I think we need to talk about censorship in terms of access, content, form, and procedure. These are the ways that censorship is enacted upon us. These are the avenues that we can fight against it.

There are some things we cannot access. Period. Obviously, the internet, things like that. When people think about that often, they think about content. They think about the prison as an institution.

Also though, there's form. For instance, I had a struggle with Camp Hill—SCI-Camp Hill in Pennsylvania—over form. They didn't want me to have access to PDFs. If you mailed me a PDF, they wouldn't let me have it. If there's something in a PDF form, I couldn't get it. We had a whole struggle to be able to do that.

People have to know exactly where to send it and what color of envelope, and how many pages can you put into this envelope and all these things. So you know, when I think about it, I think about access, I think about content, I think about form, and I think about procedure and these are the ways that censorship is enacted upon us inside.

Also, another thing that we are not talking about is who are the censors? Okay, and I say that because we're talking about this thing as if it's just happening. And I say that because I just recently received an issue of *Poets and Writers*. And since it's Banned Books Week, it's at the end of September, so there's a lot of [inaudible] about banned books. Really great article, really great issue period.

But in it there's an advertisement for the Freedom Reads Program. This is a program that received millions of dollars of funding. They are actually coming into prisons, partnering with the Department of Corrections, and the whole idea is supposed to be that they're giving people are giving people access to books, more access to books.

And it really blew my mind because the first thing I said was they are the censors! The reason people don't have access is because of the Department of Corrections.

So it frazzled me when I'm thinking about that amount of money [inaudible] is actually being used by the Department of Corrections to supposedly give incarcerated people more access to books, when in fact it is the Department of Corrections that are making it so we can't get access to books. So I think that the people in charge of that program, should ask their partners, the Department of Corrections, why can't we get Toni Morrison? Why can't we get *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*? Why can't we get certain books? You know it's supposed to be about freedom of expression and supposedly about allowing us transformative change. Then why can't we get these type of books?

So I think if we talk about who are the censors, who is actually doing the censoring, because that become our target. So I think we should talk about who are the censors, we should talk about how it manifests itself. It's not always books. Sometimes it's access, sometimes it's form, and sometimes it's just the procedures which are so onerous.

If you are going to appeal in Kansas, if you're going to appeal the fact that that a book didn't [inaudible]. Prisoners don't make much money. If it costs me ten dollars to appeal then I'm not going to appeal it. In Pennsylvania, where I'm at—Camp Hill—forty three percent of the books that have come to Camp Hill in the last eighteen months that have been banned, have been sent

to me personally. Forty three percent of the books that have been sent, and banned, over the last eighteen months at this prison have been addressed to me, personally. I have to appeal each and every one. If I don't appeal it, that means no one can ever get that book again. That is the rule.

So that means that if I don't appeal it and someone else goes to buy it, it will already be banned. So I must appeal it, and that costs money. I must appeal and that costs time, energy, and money to do it.

What can we do about this problem? What kind of action can we take to stop this problem?

36:22: CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Thanks so much, Stevie. I'm definitely going to make sure we have time to talk about, what can we do about what folks in this room do, so that people feel like they have something to take away from this that's actionable, and I want to hear folks' thoughts on that.

But maybe to pick up on some of the themes of what you all just said and take it back a step, for folks who maybe don't know, what kinds of materials are censored? What even is the process there?

You mentioned, Stevie, being able to appeal, but it costs money. Or I think some folks in here have also referenced repression—repression in response to attempting to perhaps get knowledge out into the world or something like that.

I just want to open that question to folks on the panel. Yeah, Jess, do you want to take it away?

JESSICA PHOENIX SYLVIA: Sure. I'd love to open with that. I had an issue where I was trying to start an intersectional feminist course inside a men's prison with a comrade. When I had the material sent into me, a staff member had rejected it, so I appealed, and I won.

However, that same staff member appealed that decision, and I couldn't figure out how to actually navigate the system, who to appeal to within a strict timeline. They gave me something like three days to figure it out.

Restricting my access to that wasn't just about me getting access to that. It was about starting an intersectional feminist course so that we could talk about gender-based, racialized violence inside a men's prison. So, restricting my access to that means that we can't have those conversations.

I just want to really think about why is it that having a conversation about racialized, gendered violence is such a threat to these people. That's a very interesting question, right? I've seen mostly Black feminist material being rejected more than anything else.

Really, in my eyes, I think that what I'm seeing in terms of wanting to support penological objectives, it ends up being like a collateral consequence of a ban on Black feminism.

And, of course, I've seen that it's very random sometimes. You get, say, Simone de Beauvoir. I remember she was banned in Washington State prisons. Simone de Beauvoir, the pornographer. Why? Because the title is *The Second Sex*. And I wanted to study philosophy, wanting to study Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir. At least I've still got Judith Butler. I don't understand half of what she wrote. [laughter]

Then there's the other idea that we can get farther down in. What's happened and who's actually banning material? What's actually happening, say, what the policies are, but then, what's actually happening, and we get into things I will probably speak on later—the exhaustion loop, what happens in non-distribution so that even when folks are told to give us material it doesn't actually ever get there.

ROBERT SALEEM HOLBROOK: It was my experience that any reading material that promoted self-agency or self-expression, or anytime the prisoners decided to define themselves, that's more likely when your material was censored.

The warden had several reasons. One, the system, for one, does not want prisoners defining themselves. I remember vividly it being very clear to us that “You're a murderer.” “You're a robber.” “You're not even that. You're just BL5140. That's your number. You're here to just process through this system.

Once we took that power back, and said, “Actually, I'm not a number,” and you start defining yourself, that's when you're going to be targeted. That's when your political material is going to be censored, your person is going to be censored. A lot of my writings in prison, really, it was almost comical that for years, I wrote for different publications, and those publications would be banned in the prison I was in for revenge.

They would tell me “It's contraband. You can't have this magazine because this article that you wrote is in it.” [laughter] And I would say, “I have the draft in my cell.” [laughter]

It's funny, but it was just really ridiculous, because they would say, “This is advocating a threat to government. It's promoting violence.” Then I'd send them the article that I wrote and said, “Where in that page do you see that?”

It never was about being threatening, about promoting or advocating insurrection or violence, or one of the catch terms that they'd use. It was just, “Motherfucker, how you dare you have something to say that we didn't sanction, in opposition to us.”

Then it's whims of anyone. This is really one of the most ridiculous things because in all the years of different prisons I've been in, you have a mailroom supervisor. We filed a lawsuit when I was still on the inside. I actually drafted it, and it was the Abolitionist Law Center's second lawsuit. We won the lawsuit. It was about prison censorship.

But one of the things that we learned from the depositions of the mailroom supervisors [is] these are not incredibly bright people. [laughter] I'm serious! It really makes me think of the banality of evil term that you hear a lot; how the person that was censoring all of my writings, just like

really disappearing me, making sure other prisoners did not have anything that dealt with Black history, anything that was a book, like Joy James, *The New Abolitionists*, anything about slave revolts, was just being denied.

It was like a 60-year-old grandmother, who was a very gentle, pleasant person in the deposition, but her mindset was “These people broke the law. They don’t have the right to criticize the state. They don’t have the right to define themselves. They don’t have the right to read stuff that criticizes America.”

That’s one of the amazing things, but then you could go to a prison like SCI-Greene where I was at where the mailroom supervisor was someone that was a former Marine reservist in the Army, the military, so he was clearcut that “We’re keeping material out of here that these prisoners are going to cause an insurrection, going to try to escape, going to mobilize in the yard.” They’re following around Russell Maroon Shoatz, a political prisoner, member of the Black Liberation Army. “They’re organizing to take the prison over,” which really was just a bunch of nonsense.

But he was trained to see us as that. And this is what the prison system does. It’s really amazing how they just take these people, and they just process them into the system. In a sense, they become cogs in the machine, too.

We won that lawsuit, though, and I think that was a lesson because we had to do that ourselves. I’m not going to name a lot of groups out there, but they weren’t really interested in taking on prison censorship as a battle with the Department of Corrections. I think the reason why we won that case *Holbrook v. Jellen*, and it did open up some breathing space, because I’m going to tell you that as long as there’s prisons, there’s going to be censorship. As an abolitionist, I don’t believe that litigation is going to bring about the end of prisons. The only thing that’s going to bring about the end of prisons, policing and the social contract that has governed the United States and these repressive institutions is social upheaval.

But the whole purpose of litigation when I was on the inside against censorship was to give us breathing space so that we could organize inside. Because this literature that we were getting, these books, this was our ability to have political education, political classes. So, we were able to win some breathing space.

But in America, rights that you have are only rights that you can keep and hold. So, in Stevie’s case what he’s going through right now, the prison is going to censor you. Regardless of whether you beat them in court, they’re going to continue to try and extinguish that light from coming into the prison system.

One of the ironies about the *Holbrook v. Jellen* case that I like to tell people about is that when we won the case, we were able to settle the case right before I came home. One of the good things that came about that case was people on the outside could now challenge censorship by the Department of Corrections, but a lot of people don’t know about it. But authors, publishers. They can challenge if their book is censored, in addition to people on the inside, as well as their families. But it’s just that people don’t really have this information.

Also, in winning that case, in the settlement one of the ironies is that all that labor the Department of Corrections put in censoring my writings, the Human Rights Coalition's writings. The money that we got from the censorship we actually used to pay my salary the first year at the Abolitionist Law Center when I came home.

I always find that there's a way of us expropriating resources from the state in order for us to build up the formations that we need to continue to push back, but I want to be clear that regardless of how many cases we bring against the prisons, the prisons are going to continue to censor reading material. They're going to continue to censor and disappear prisoners because that's the purpose of prisons.

As abolitionists, we shouldn't lose focus of this, but our challenges to censorship are advocacy, organizing against it, and going around it, under it, is all to create breathing space for our people on the inside so that they can mobilize, they can organize. More importantly, they can define themselves, discover themselves, discover their politics, and discover the principles that they want to live by, and the society they want to live by.

Out here, but also in there, because I like to tell people that we also have a society in there. We didn't allow the prison system just to have us processed and do the system as numbers. We created our own society and values inside that system that tried to suppress that and take us out of civic engagement.

STEVIE WILSON: I want to say thank you, first of all, to Saleem Holbrook for those words. Can you hear me?

SALEEM HOLBROOK: Yes, sir.

STEVIE WILSON: Saleem was in Pennsylvania, locked up for a really long time. And his work, and effort, and energy has actually given us some breathing room. Thank you so much for all that work you did and continue to do.

When you think about the people who are actually responsible for deciding what I can read it blows my mind. I have been through the same thing where my very own writing, I can't have my writing. People have sent me my own work and they've said you can't have it. My work. I was told by one person, Dr. Garrett Felber, he called and said he was told prisoners can't publish. Prisoners can't publish, what are you talking about? The people who are making these decisions are very unintelligent.

The book *The Revolution Starts at Home*, which is very well-known in abolition and transformative justice circles. They said that I can't have the book because it says revolution in the title. Anything with Black on it. Talking about Black Freedom Struggle. And anything that says Black Panther, because they say that the Black Panthers are a security threat group. Are you serious? But this is what's going on at Camp Hill.

I have only experienced this at Camp Hill. I was at SCI-Fayette, I was at SCI-Smithfield. And I never had any problems. My property, all of my books, my paperwork, was destroyed, by the

officers at SCI-Fayette. So people were trying to send me the same books I already had. And this is how we got in this situation here where what I was able to receive at one prison, and had for years, all of the sudden it was banned. *Captive Genders* was banned. *Blood in the Water* was banned *here*, but somehow another incarcerated person got it at another prison. So we're still fighting.

The people making these decisions are rural conservative Trump supporters and they are dictating what mainly an urbanized population—a Black and brown population—can read and they are not really familiar at all with the material. They see one word and it's banned. Radical—that's banned. Revolution—that's banned. Black—that's banned. And this has been an issue. And I'll tell you something else about this situation that I'm going through also: I have won numerous times with Central Office, where Central Office has said "give him the book." I still don't receive it. What Jess was talking about non-distribution. Even when I win, they don't give me the book. Even when I win, they don't give me my mail, I still don't get it.

The mailroom supervisor is the person I'm having a problem with. Going to back to [inaudible].

The problem with the prison regimes is that they tend to rubber stamp each other's actions as you go up. They don't want to challenge each other. So when the mailroom person says no, they rubber stamp it. It's been a thing I've been going through since March 2021. I've been dealing with this issue. We finally are in court, we filed it. But you have to understand what Jess said.

Why are they so afraid, what are they so afraid of if we read this material? Like Saleem said, it is really about organizing, connecting, seeing things differently, finding ways of growing. They really don't want that to happen. Our study group cannot go forward without materials. We cannot go forward without a political education if we are going to organize, and they know that we need these things. They know that we need these things and so they make it very hard. We find innovative ways to get around it, but they make it very hard.

This is why I'm saying on the outside we have to have outside allies; what we can do, the pressure points that we can target because this is a problem.

I read recently that half the book challenges in this last year, in 2021, were actually from state officials or elected officials. So it is not all about the review board or the librarian, but we see that state officials and elected officials are making a big deal about books. So going back to targeting, who can we put pressure on? Where can we leverage power?

Why can't we read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*? That was actually taken from me. *Imprisoned Intellectuals* by Joy James, was taken from me, you can't have it. *Captive Genders*, you can't have it. The top ten books that were challenged and removed by the ALA are books about issues of people of color or nonbinary people. So what's going on? Who is being attacked? Who is being erased? Why can't we talk about the issues? What is the problem?

So this is why I'm trying to connect what's happening with prison censorship with what's happening out there. Those populations are the marginalized populations inside. You will rarely ever find a book dealing with these issues, with queer and trans issues inside a prison. You're not

going to find them. If you go to the library to find a book about the Black freedom struggle. You are not going to find anything, you might find a few books about Martin Luther King, Jr. and that's it. You talk about the history, you talk about learning what happened, what is happening, connecting with the past, connecting with those people. This is something they don't want to happen.

The other thing I wanted to say is that Saleem was a part of the program, actually created a program called Address This, right Saleem? [Saleem confirms] And Address This is this great program, and is actually how I got started. With the study groups I was using their course reader and getting people involved in this. And I just had to fight all over again Saleem, right here at Camp Hill, I had to fight to get this back in. That's a fight that we already won, but I had to go back and fight them so we could get all eight course readers back inside again.

[Address It?] It was a great program that was started and we used the course reader for the study group. After it was already approved I had to fight at [this prison] after it was already approved, to get it all over again, the eight course reader.

Anything that is gonna help you grow, change, and connect with people, they are like no you can't have it, and it would be the most ridiculous reason as to why. And if you're concerned about people growing and transforming, if you're concerned about people really getting an opportunity to change, then we need to fight this.

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Thank you, Stevie. Saleem, did you want to quickly respond?

SALEEM HOLBROOK: Yeah, I just real quick wanted to touch on that Address This. First, I'm glad you had the chance to take that right, and really I didn't know that you went through those courses, but we put those courses together because of the censorship we were going through in prison. We were not able to organize together. We weren't able to congregate together for political education. A lot of us were in solitary confinement or in another prison that we put this correspondence course together that was able to serve prisoners all across the state and get around the censorship.

But, like I said, they're always going to come back. We had to fight and Stevie's continuing to fight, but I'm really glad that you were able to take that. But also, we talk a lot about prison censorship, but we should definitely uplift when prisoners get around it. That was the way of us getting around it and beating it. That was a way of us politicizing not just each other but our outside supporters. It was about relationship building all across the country.

Actually, that was something that was really more local in Pennsylvania. When I see what Stevie and Charlotte are doing now with Study and Struggle, it's national, so it's really just great to see it explode larger. Whereas something like that we set up close to 13, 14 years ago. It was like 2010 was really when we were at SCI-Greene, a supermax prison.

Prisoners that were literally 100 yards from me, I could never see because that's how the prison was set up that we couldn't interact with each other, so we had to figure out a way that we could

politically educate each other, correspond with each other, and dialog with each other. We had to actually go to people on the outside to have that material sent back into the prisons.

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Kim, I want to give you a chance to speak, but also, just noting that we have 10 minutes left on Zoom, so maybe, Kim, you want to jump in. Also, we'll go to Stevie next. But if both of you want to maybe talk a little bit about what folks can do, like some strategies, or that there's a responding and resisting and supporting people inside who are dealing with censorship, that would be great. Then we'll bring it back to Jess and make sure that we don't get cut off. So, Kim, take it away.

KIM WILSON: I just wanted to add on to what was already said in terms of the censorship that's been happening. I think that one important thing is to recognize that we live in a fascist police state. Prisons are not disconnected from what is happening out here.

When we think of prison as a separate place out there, somewhere where we just put people away, that becomes part of the problem. I was in a prison recently where they have literally redecorated the entire prison in the colors of *The Thin Blue Line* flag [audience gasping].

For people who don't know, walking into that prison they don't know, but the rest of us were terrified, because that's a signal right there as to who matters in that setting. When books are banned, when any kind of material is banned, and what Stevie has been describing about his own particular situation, what Saleem has been describing about what he went through, and so on and so forth, they target individuals because the point is to keep you distracted.

The whole point is you can't challenge the entire list of books. Texas, for example, has 12,000 books on their list that are banned. You have to challenge every single one of those books.

It's also not about content. I want to dispel this myth that it's only about content. I have sent books to people on the inside that are blank journals. Or journals that have little prompts. Those are banned. Those are banned. So, it's not just about content, and that's part of the fallacy—there are a lot of myths—but I think about what materials get in, what materials don't get in.

The other thing I wanted to say real quick, and I know we're very short on time. I don't know if there's a way we can call back in for the remainder of the session, Charlotte, but you can text me and let me know. It's that this notion that this is about security. This is not about security. Security is the pretext that they use to continue to ban books and all the materials; that somehow these materials are a threat; that a child's drawing, because it's done with crayons or something and, I don't know, people are in their homes melting K2 into a children's book page or something, and that's what's getting drugs in.

This is nonsense. This nonsense. This is not how drugs are entering prison, contraband is entering prison, contraband is entering prison, and so on and so forth. We've talked about that in other contexts.

I can go on, but I want to give Stevie time because I know, again, and if there's another way for me to join back in, even if it's just audio, let me know Charlotte.

STEVIE WILSON: As this panel moves on, I really want to think about what can we do? We know that Banned Books Week is coming up and I really want to talk about what can we do? What action we can do. And to bring more awareness too, because as Kim has said, it's not just about content.

Some of these myths that actually need to be dispelled. Some of the books that are let in. There's a white supremacist text that is allowed in here, but you can't have a book about the Black Panthers. They told me I couldn't have a book about the Black Panthers but they actually showed *Judas the Black Messiah* on the [inaudible] channel. I was like, it's about Fred Hampton right, the Black Panthers! (laughter).

So this is what goes on here. So I hope that the people there, the panel and the people in the audience can suggest ways: what can we do action-wise to help people inside fight censorship inside. As Saleem said there will always be censorship and there will always be this fight.

I want to say one last thing: I have a twitter account called The Work and Us and I also have a website (<https://theworkandus.wordpress.com/>), and I mention this because we're doing a labor survey all across the country about what work looks like from the perspective of incarcerated folks. And I want people, if you can, to go to the website and download the survey and send it to people inside. If you could look at it, download the survey, and send it to people inside, we'd appreciate it.

We're trying to see what does it look like and we're going to look at it from the perspectives of incarcerated people. This is the second time we're doing this.

And I want to say Kim, I love what you're doing with your podcast, thank you so much for all the work you're doing. Thank you Charlotte. Jess, I love you and I can't wait to work with you also. And everyone there, thank you for having me there. Saleem, love you and thank you so much for all the work, you are leg-en-dary for all you have done, so thank you so much.

I hope to be home soon to join you. [Applause]. And Kim I want to say one last thing, I read this quotation [inaudible]. Censors—and then he defined it—censors are people that know more than they think you ought to. It's about knowledge—acquisition and knowledge production. And relationships and connection, so let's stay connected. Charlotte if you could tell them how to get in touch with me I'd appreciate that, through email or you can write to me. I'm interested in all this work. Have a wonderful day and thank you so much for letting me participate in this panel. [applause].

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Kim, there are three minutes if you want to just keep going. Just keep going with whatever you want, really.

KIM WILSON: I always write notes and always have, way more notes than I'm ever going to be able to touch on. But I think that one of the places to turn to is the *Prison Legal News*. They have done a tremendous amount of work. They have a non-profit actually that focuses on prison censorship. And that's a resource there for people to check out.

The American Library Association, which tracks banned books, they also have a vast list of resources but they've also developed a model for prison libraries, which they argue should model what is happening in libraries on the outside. Unfortunately, libraries are under-resourced because we all know who the primary users of libraries are, so that also makes sense.

But also, I wanted to go back to the point that I made earlier about the connection between the censorship and also higher ed in prisons, because I think that that's something that, for a lot of people, I know that there are people there who are part of, run, or been through college programs in prison that that's something to also have on their radar.

Because the kinds of books they allow in, there's no way to decouple the censorship of books from prison education. I can say that. I'm also very, very tired right now, so my apologies for that.

I don't know what else to say. No, I do know what else to say. I think that one of the things that I've often seen when we're talking about censorship amongst our own little groups is that we tend to focus on incarcerated men, and we exclude women's prisons and the experiences of women or woman-identifying persons, and what they have to say, what they experience of terms of censorship, because that also matters.

Also, this is also a disability rights issue. Access is not just access to the texts, but it's also for other folks. If you are blind, there are books that can't get in. The push to have, in a lot of states, you can only purchase books through certain bona fide vendors, whatever the hell that means. We all know what that is. This really makes it very difficult for a lot of people to get the kinds of books that they want into the prisons.

But also, there are size restrictions on books. You can't send hardbacks. The list goes on and on and on, and it's really hard to keep up, because what's banned one week may not be banned the next week. And on and on down the line. It's the arbitrariness of it all [laughing] that's also part of the problem.

Obviously, I could go on and on and on, but I'll leave it there.

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Thank you so much, Kim. I'm going to see if we can try to get you in another way, but we're going to transition to showing a video of if that's cool but thank you so much.

I thought that was going to happen soon, but anyway, okay, so give us one second. We're going to get the video up of Safear and Bryant.

SAFEAR NESS: All incoming and outgoing information has to pass through DOC or Department of Correction's gateways. That means every single transfer of information is highly regulated and has to meet stringent standards. They just make it difficult. That's the point. They make it difficult to receive information in every way possible.

I can give you an example. If we want to receive books from the outside world, we are able to receive books. But you, as an individual, cannot send me a book. You have to go through the store or through the publisher.

Then, when this book gets sent in, it doesn't come straight to me at the prison. It has to go through a security processing center, which is designed to look through the book materially, but then they also have a committee called the Incoming Publication Review Committee, the IPRC. This committee is specifically structured to either let books in or deny and censor books, right?

Once that happens, once it goes through the security processing center, and then once it's approved by the IPRC, then it will get transferred to the prison, and then hopefully I will receive that book.

And that's just one example of the many ways that all of the transfers of information are just highly surveilled, and all with the intent to be censored. I'll just leave it at that.

BRYANT ARROYO: Most recently, I had a publication from the *San Francisco Bay View*, volume 47, issue no. 3, and allegedly it was due to pages 13 through 14, and they wrote out Section B—3B and D—which contains, listen to this, “revolutionary advocacy” and “unauthorized organizing.” I've basically filed my grievance, and I stated that is protected under Article 1, Section 7, 9 and 26 of the Pennsylvania Constitution, coupled with the First and Fourteenth Amendment rights of the United States Constitution. And the First Amendment is the bedrock principle, that the speech may not be suppressed “simply because it expresses ideas that are offensive or disagreeable. Speech may not be banned on the ground that it expresses ideas that offend.”

“For this reason, I am requesting for your office to overturn IPRC's arbitrary and unconstitutional decision and provide me with the above-mentioned newspaper.”

So I went through the appellate stages and then the superintendent is a facility manager, first-level appeal. He denied it and then I went to the central office, and they gave me what they call a grievance referral. And basically, it says in here that they needed more time, so they sent it to the Office of Policy Grants and Legislative Affairs. The referral date was 5/26/2022.

Last week some time, I was out doing some phone calls and the officer called me to the desk and said, “Hey, you have a *Bay View*.” And it is the March edition that they denied me based on the pages 13 and 14, where they talked about that it allegedly had something revolutionary and unauthorized group activity.

I went there and I was curious to see what all the fuss was about. When I went, of course, being as Curious George, Garrett, on this page here where my finger's at—can you see it?

GARRETT FELBER: Yup, “know your rights.”

BRYANT ARROYO: There you go. They don't want you to know that [laughing]. That's what the denial was all about.

SAFEAR NESS: The materials most likely to be censored are liberation-based materials, especially Black liberation types of material.

That's like public enemy number one. Materials criticizing the prison or police. Materials that are authored by incarcerated people, or formerly incarcerated people, are also likely, especially prominent authors like George Jackson. All of his books are banned in PA prisons.

Even historical mentions of prison uprisings and organizing, something you might see on the History Channel, even those books are censored and banned at prison.

There's another thing I think a lot of people on the outside don't know, is that photos are censored, too, meaning that photos that family, friends, and comrades send in are often censored.

I remember years ago I received this photo. It was a group of white kids. They were in a group shot—some people I know—and somebody threw up the peace sign in this photo. And I got the photo. It was no problem. I got the photo.

Just recently, a very close friend of mine sends me a photo. From what he explains to me—because I never actually got the photo—is that it was a group shot. It was after a business dinner. They're all dressed in suits, and somebody threw up the peace sign. But I didn't get this photo. This photo was censored.

And the only difference between the two photos is that the first photo was all white kids and in the second photo, they were Black. So, when the white kid threw up the peace sign, it was cool, but when the Black guy threw up the peace sign, I had a notice of confiscation that said this was a security threat group/gang-related material.

GARRETT FELBER: So, for the audience, can you describe prior to that change two or three years ago—when you used to get a book or mail, can you describe what it looked like before the process and then after?

BRYANT ARROYO: Just to get, for example, Carole Seligman from the *Socialist Viewpoint*, she's always sent me some beautiful cards. There would be a card with something that she typed and attached to the card inside. Outwardly, it would be like a picture of a blue heron, something that I don't normally see that she got to see, take a picture of, and send.

There was pictures, little pieces of art or drawings that my daughter would send me. Basically, all of that now is, if you don't send it, it gets photographed, and it loses its personal human touch to it. Before, there was even a time where you could have them spray some sort of perfume to make the connection more personable. All of that is gone, even the pictures, the actual pictures.

The pictures that I do have, I have those as relics. There's been a lot of the cards that I do have, some I held onto, some I've sent home because I don't want to have those lost or destroyed if, in fact, one day, unbeknownst to me, like it happened to me over there, they picked me up and put

me in a hole under investigation for whatever reason. Just in that transaction right there alone, you're stuff will end up ruined.

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: How does censorship affect your relationships?

SAFEAR NESS: Hm. To keep it 100 with you, because of censorship, I am no longer able to have a completely authentic relationship with anybody in the free world. There is always a barrier preventing me from being able to completely express myself.

Even in this conversation about censorship, I have to be mindful to censor my own self. Because if I don't, and I say something that does not fit the criteria of what they want me to say, then it's possible that I could receive punishment as a result of that, even in this conversation right here.

Likewise, people in the free world, you yourself know this that when you're talking to an incarcerated person, you have to be mindful of what you're saying because you don't want to say the wrong thing that can get us in trouble.

So, there's always somebody listening and waiting for us to say the wrong thing, and they use the surveillance as a radar for censorship. Like I said, in prison, censorship is meted out with punishment, like going to the hole.

Truly, there's a comrade that I became very close to over the past couple of years. We were building through all these methods that are highly surveilled and censored. We were talking on the phone and messaging, and we got close.

Then, about a year ago, they came up to visit me in person for the first time. In this type of visit, there is no more censorship. There is that ability to have a real, genuine interaction. All of the things that I couldn't say before—I mean, just imagine that. You can have nobody to really connect with. You can't tell anybody your secrets. You can't tell anybody your true inner feelings. You can't talk about your organizing work in detail.

You can't talk about any of these things, and then finally, I was able to do that. Honestly, it was so deep that it really brought tears to my eyes in the midst of this conversation, and they felt the same way. After all this time of finally we can talk, and we can connect. So, with censorship, you can't be your true self.

BRYANT ARROYO: I always go back to that one thing that the psychologist taught me at Graterford. He said, "If you fail to learn, to read, to write, to understand the English language, you will forever be enslaved." The sad part about it is it's enslaved to imprisonment, to a system that does not want to educate you, and refrains from doing so, and also denies you access to the benefit of what an education would do for you.

In essence, that is, I guess, the most gross way that I can put it to unconstitutionally violate a person's right is to deprive you of that education, because education means breaking the bars and the chains of your mind and transcending them, rising above being imprisoned.

So, imprisonment is not steel, concrete, barbed wires. Those are the physical elements of what we call prison. But prison is here [points to head]. It's mental. Psychological.

SAFEAR NESS: I mean, censorship, really, I even go to the hole purely based on censorship. There was a time during the beginning of the pandemic when my friend, Stevie, went to the hole. And when he went to the hole, it was a very oppressive and unjust situation, so I decided I wanted to write about it. I wrote a small message to just three of my comrades explaining what happened to Stevie, explaining the conditions that we were under, and I sent it out to them and hoped that they would post it on social media. Two days later, they called me down to security, locked me up, and put me right in the hole, and they gave me 60 days for inciting a petition. That's pure censorship right there.

GARRETT FELBER: I feel like people sometimes get wind of censorship and then just feel outraged. But what are some things that people outside can do to fight censorship?

BRYANT ARROYO: I always encourage people that—the phone that you guys have—there's basically the world in that phone, so to collectively and individually call. Perfect example, when I was retaliated against for expressing my First Amendment and telling them to put it on YouTube, there was over 2,000 calls made to central office as a result of them retaliating against me, for censoring me and my conversation and my GTL messages to attorneys, advocates, reporters, like Joe, Carol, Betsy, yourself, Ted, numerous people. Therefore, they found that offensive. Nonetheless, it took them 11 days to consider whether they were going to execute it, but they did. Then they put me in the hole, and I was retaliated against.

Therefore, by me being under that particular status, I had access to one phone call, I think every two or three days. And in the phone calls, I told Joe, "There has to be some sort of report placed in the newspaper."

So, using the newspapers, using the emails, using the web sites, and also individually and collectively notifying the taxpaying citizen that "You can make a difference. Don't think for one minute just because you don't see the results and the repercussions of that phone call, they don't like that. They don't want to be tsunami'd, overwhelmed by thousands of people calling up about one person, so it does make a difference.

Nine days later, they kicked me out of Frackville. Thank Joe, thank Workers World, and thank all the people that actually called in, which I thank them. Because I don't know half of all those people or who they were, but nonetheless, they cared. They cared enough, and I definitely appreciated that, and was heartfelt and moved by that.

So much so that when the one officer escorted me to the shower, he said, "Hey, Mr. Arroyo, I've got some great news for you." And I was like, "Uh, what? I said, 'Are they releasing me?' He's like, "No, you're out of here tomorrow." I was like "Whoooo!" [laughing] He's like, "Too many calls. That's all I'm going to say. Too many calls."

[Video ends. Back to the panel. 01:17:46]

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: Great. I know that we only have a little bit of time left, but I just was wondering, Saleem and Jess, if you both could reflect on what you heard a little bit in the video, or maybe even if you want to [unintelligible 01:18:00] a little bit on the question before about what books can you do around censorship, or anything else?

JESSICA PHOENIX SYLVIA: I think it comes down to the fact that everything I've heard supports the idea that prison is dehumanizing, and it's meant to be dehumanizing. When people take steps to humanize themselves and each other, there is going to be someone there to try to stop that from happening.

And prison is slavery in so many ways, whether you're talking about prison labor, or the different number of ways those things show up.

I know that as a trans person, I've had my health care censored. I know that I've been retaliated against, being thrown in the hole for inciting group demonstrations.

I know that one of the things that's happened to me is because I've written so much in support of the humanization of trans people. I've had TERFs and carceral feminists publish some really nasty shit about me, half of which is completely lies. Saying shit like I'm a pedophile, that my mother has a restraining order against me.

People read that and they think it's true because it's published. It's just shit that happens to me because I stand up and want to see trans folks and prisoners humanized. When I talk about, what can actually be done, yeah, phone zaps would be great.

One of the things that we don't want to see is for a prisoner to be isolated. When prisoners are isolated, these animals that want to torture people and get away with it, the most effective thing there is to make sure that a person is not isolated, to make sure that we're there to find out what's happening, what can we do to support you?

Phone zaps can be effective but I'm going to tell you right now, there's this thing called the exhaustion loop. You can have all the policies in the world. However, what they'll do is somewhere along the line, if you make it through all the hoops, someone will just say, "Oops."

It's like what happened with my last book. Someone said, "Give her the book." Guess what? "We don't know what happened to your book. You can file a complaint if you want."

So, basically, these people have all the power. When it comes down to it, the only solution, besides helping people survive living in a cage for now, yes, show them support in various ways- is prison abolition. That's it. [many fingers clicking] That's the only solution because they have all the power when it comes down to it, and we're just trying to survive it.

But prison abolition, and with my other work, and if you'd like to keep up with my work, you can see during Banned Books Week. I'll have an interview with [Pen America?] on their web site. I'll also be contributing an article. If you'd like to check me out, you can find me on Instagram as Jessica Phoenix Sylvia. Thank you.

SALEEM HOLBROOK: I think what I'll say is that we've got to continue to support prisoners that are resisting on the inside. I agree with what Sylvia said that phone zaps would be effective, but you have to look at phone zaps litigation direct-action protests, and all these actions, whether you're doing legislative work, whether you're in the streets, whether you're in the courtroom, wherever your place is on the battlefield, you have to look at all of these tools in your abolitionist toolbox that we have to employ.

The thing that I would really encourage people to do is get involved with an organization that is in contact with prisoners and is supporting prisoners, because oftentimes, they're going to have the key to their chains. What I mean is they're going to know the targets, they're going to know the tactics. And a lot of times, I feel like the organizations that are closest to prisoners and their families are often the ones that are overlooked by activists.

Social media is good, but we're not going to [free anyone with social media. That's where you're going to find your information about prison struggles, prison abolition and abolition in general is good, but it has to be your starting point. It has to be your on-ramp.

But I'm not here today, Sylvia is not here today, we're not going to get Stevie out of the cage or many other comrades across the country by how many times we "like" something on Twitter or Instagram, or how many times we read many of the numerous books that are being published, abolition is almost mainstream now, so I would encourage people to get involved with local abolitionist organizations that are on the ground and are actually working to dismantle and free people from prison.

I'd like to say that abolishing prisons is the horizon that we're all working to, but you damn sure better be helping free people on the way to that horizon. That's the only way you're going to get the abolition.

Harriet Tubman did it, but she was liberating people from plantations following the North Star. She didn't pass by other plantations and say, "All right, y'all, see you on the other side of the horizon." She got them out of the plantations on the way to that horizon. And that's something that as abolitionists, we should work to.

And last—and this is very important—that abolition is not about abolishing prisons and police. That's one part of abolition. At the end of the day, if you're an abolitionist, you're going to have to face the fact that in order for us to live in this society where there's no more police and no more prisons, we're going to have to start talking about abolishing the social contract that is governing the United States. [many fingers clicking]

At the end of the day, that's what this is about, so that's something really important, because then you're looking beyond the prison and the policing. Capitalism would like us to believe that that's the problem, prisons and policing; that mass incarceration, over-policing, and racist prosecutions are anomalies within American society. They're not. They're part and parcel of it. They're extensions of it.

At the end of the day, look beyond abolishing prisons and police. I don't know. I've just got a smile on my face. I'm going to put you on the spot. Imagine they just [roll their head? 01:24:55]. One of our mentors in the abolitionist space is [unintelligible 01:24:59]. [laughter]

At the end of the day, that's something that's really important for us to remember and to stay focused on. Capitalism would do away with prisons and policing if it's going to extend itself. They will find other ways to control human beings.

That's very important for us to understand. Thank you for having me.

[Applause]

CHARLOTTE ROSEN: I just want to say thank you so much to all of you for being here today. A huge thanks to Jess, Saleem, Kim, Safear, Stevie and Bryant, and thank you, Haymarket, for inviting us to have this panel.

Thanks to everyone and enjoy the rest of the conference. We'll be hanging up here if you want to chat. Thanks so much.

[Applause]

END