Beyond Prisons Podcast

Hope is A Discipline feat. Mariame Kaba

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Jared Ware: Welcome to Beyond Prisons. This is Jay. This episode we have a special treat for you as Brian and Kim got the opportunity to interview Mariame Kaba. Kaba is an organizer, educator, and curator. Her work focuses on ending violence, dismantling the prison-industrial complex, transformative justice, and supporting youth leadership development. She's the founder and director of project NIA, a grassroots organization with a vision to end youth incarceration.

She was a member of the editorial board for *Violence Against Women*, an international and interdisciplinary journal from January 2003 to December 2008. She's a founder advisory board member of the Chicago Community Bond Fund and she's a member of Critical Resistance's community advisory board. Kaba currently organizers with the Survived and Punished collective and in addition to organizing and serving many other organizations, she's an educator and also runs the blog Prison Culture.

Kim Wilson: Absolutely thrilled to have you here. I think it's just an honor that you could join us and give us some of your time. So, we're going to go ahead and just dive right in and ask you to tell us a little bit about the work that you're doing.

Mariame Kaba: Sure. I run an organization called Project NIA, which was started in 2009. Project NIA is an abolitionist organization that is committed to the eradication of youth incarceration in particular, using a transformative justice approach. So, that's been my main work for the last eight years.

I'm also involved in several other formations that I've helped to co-found. The most recent of those is a formation called Survived and Punished that works with and in partnership with criminalized survivors of violence who are usually fighting cases that involve them using violence or survival tactics in order to live. So, that's the other organization that I'm doing a lot of recent work with, which is Survived and Punished.

My trajectory of my work... I've been doing anti-criminalization work for a couple of decades now, so I've been working on these issues for a long time. I came out of doing work around anti-gender based violence work, anti-domestic violence and sexual violence work and it was through that work that I became interested in abolition. That's a little bit about me and what I'm doing in a very discreet way. I'm involved in a lot of other things, but I'm not going to make a whole litany of that for people.

[Brian and Kim laugh]

Kim: Well, thank you. That's great. I'd like to ask you if you could tell us a little bit about Bresha Meadows.

Mariame: Oh sure. So, Bresha Meadows is a young woman. I came to know about her case last summer. She was 14 years old when she killed her father. She killed him after years and years and years of living in torment and fear. The father had been very severely abusing her mother physically, mentally, emotionally, allegations of sexual abuse against his daughter, and constant threats of threatening to kill them, so she ended up killing him in late July of 2016. I learned about the story through a friend of mine, Kelly Hayes, who is an organizer in Chicago who saw an article about the story of what happened to Bresha or at least just talking about her case and sent that around to a few of us who'd been doing work in support of criminalized survivors of violence for many years.

It was not something initially that I myself was rushing to help support this young woman. I took the story, saw what was going on and thought, *Obviously there's a lot more to this story than what's in the press, but I'm really busy and so are everybody that I organize with around these kinds of issues.* After a week or so, some of us talked again and said, "Well, we wonder what's going on in Ohio." This happened in Ohio. When she was arrested, she was put into juvenile detention. The prosecutors were making a decision on whether to charge her as an adult or in the juvenile system. The difference between that would have been that in the juvenile system, if she'd been convicted of the charges that were leveled against her, she would have stayed in juvenile detention until she turned 21. She was 14, turning 15 later in the year, so that would have been at least six-and-a-half more years.

If she had been tried as an adult, then she was facing 25-to-life for the charges that were being leveled against her, which were first-degree murder. Anyway, long story short is we, meaning a lot of us who were part of Survived and Punished and some other formations, talked to each other about figuring out whether there was mobilization or organizing happening in Ohio already and making ourselves available as a resource for those people if there was organizing happening already; and what we found was there wasn't. So, there was going to be a need to reach out to local folks in Ohio to ask them if they were interested in doing organizing around this and how we could be helpful as a national resource to them for that to happen.

So, long story short is that that's how we got involved, all of us, and I specifically got involved in trying to raise awareness about Bresha's case, connecting with her family, finding out what the needs were, making sure that we could help cover costs that were associated with both her detention and also, all of the stuff that was family related that were the collateral consequences of her detention.

So, that's a little bit about what Bresha['s case] is. It ended up in December of last year that prosecutors said that they were not going to try her as an adult. That was the first mini-victory to keep her in the juvenile system.

Eventually, she was evaluated by mental health people, practitioners, which she had to pay for in January to the tune of almost $20,000 for a month. And then the prosecutors took all that stuff into consideration, supposedly, and offered her a plea eventually, sometime in April, end of April. Bresha and her family decided to take that plea. We were prepping for a trial in May and that ended up mainly being a conversation in front of the judge about the plea deal. And her plea, basically, is that she would spend a couple of more months in juvenile detention and then she would be moved to a mental health facility for six months, and then the mental health facility has the right to decide if she's ready or not ready to

be back out into the world, along with the court, and then, she eventually would be "free," eventually also able to hopefully expunge her record. Those were the terms of the plea deal.

Her family's very excited about that, very relieved, something that I obviously understand. For our part, the "Free Bresha" campaign is an abolitionist-focused campaign. We have a different view but we don't impose that ideology or that philosophy onto people we work with. We really follow the lead of the families and the people that are directly impacted, that do what they need to do in order to survive. And we support those decisions but we don't have to agree that putting someone in [an] involuntary mental health facility for six months, where they have to come up with the money for that, we don't agree that that's not a form of jailing, we think it is; it's another form of forced confinement, which we're against. But we understand why Bresha chose this. I connected with her about three weeks ago and she seems to be doing well in that setting, as well as you could imagine; it's much better for her than juvenile detention where she was on suicide watch more than once. She really hated it there.

That's a little bit about her.

Kim: Thank you for sharing that. I want to talk a little bit more, or have you talk a little bit more about Bresha Meadows. I read the article in *Quartz* from earlier this year, where you discuss the costs of her defense, including the cost of securing expert witnesses and the cost of the mental health evaluation and the treatment costs of just the private mental health facility. And I would love to hear you say something more about the financial burden associated with having someone, a loved one, in prison, but how specifically in this case, how you describe that. I found that really [it's] one of the things, or issues, we don't often discuss.

Mariame: I should say that Bresha's not the only young person I've worked to support over the years. I spent a really long time working with young folks who are in conflict with the law and for all of them, not just for Bresha, those spaces that they're incarcerated in make them worse. They have a lot of obviously mental health challenges as a result. If they didn't have it going in, which many of them do, going into detention or prison, they certainly have it when they're there and when they're coming out. So, certainly facing those kinds of things, those kind of mental health challenges.

That means that they need to get some sort of treatment or some sort of intervention for that. One of the things that I think people don't understand about... When it's often said that families do the time with the person who's doing time, that that's something that I don't think people really understand. One person's incarceration is everybody's captivity. The impact is widespread, the ripples are large.

An example would be, Bresha's mother lost her job in the process of this whole thing. She lost her job for a lot of reasons: she had to keep going to court to go and support her daughter, she had to go and visit her daughter, she had to take time off all the time. She was already in a precarious job. So, when she lost her job, then that puts the whole entire family's financial situation on a cliff. Now we don't have money coming in, we're probably about to lose our home, that's going to lead to homelessness, which will compound our precarity and it just becomes this vicious cycle for the entire family.

While the young person, who is now in detention, knows that their family is now in that situation and often then feels totally like they caused it because of their actions and that leads to their guilt and a

further retraumatization. So, these things are going on. Aside from just the money that you have to keep putting out, if you're even lucky enough to get a private attorney. In a lot of cases, people who take on, for Bresha in particular, the lawyers who took on her case were pro bono. They stepped in and took the case pro bono, but what that means then is that you're then responsible for covering all the costs. The state doesn't come in and cover the costs for your expert witness, even as paltry as that sum might be. You don't get the benefit of all that stuff. You cover your own court costs. So, the pro bono part of the legal team is great, but there are all sorts of other costs that are affiliated and associated with, when you are in the criminal punishment system.

The other part is the loss, not just the lost income from your family's side, but also the fact that your siblings who now are traumatized because you're no longer there. In the case of Bresha, that was the case. Her siblings didn't actually get to visit her at the detention center, they weren't allowed. Some of them were underage so they only got to see her when she went to the mental health facility for that one month evaluation in January. They got to come in and meet her and hang out with her and they didn't have to be on a list of only two people can show up for you at this particular time of day at the time that the facility chooses that may or may not be actually convenient for you and your schedule as the family members.

So, there are a whole bunch of things that are associated, really, with incarceration and criminalization that most people don't see. And the truth is, most people don't see it because there's still a lot of shame around what happens to people who are caught up in the system or in conflict with the law. There's a lot of societal shame around it and that's internalized by the people who are close to that person. The people who have loved ones who are incarcerated. Not everybody wants to trumpet that to the world.

There are lots and lots of layers to what it means to end up being criminalized and incarcerated that aren't just about the person who is criminalized or incarcerated.

Brian Sonenstein: Definitely. In thinking about Bresha's case and other cases like hers, I wanted to talk about some of those layers a little bit. When we're talking about young survivors of domestic violence, very often we see situations where a child may try to run away from home and gets caught by law enforcement, or they can't get help because a parent doesn't report the abuse to the proper authorities. They may end up separated from their family, which can increase that traumatization. And at the same time, we also see prosecutors, like you mentioned, considering or going the extra mile to try a child as an adult for an act committed in self-defense, which not only means harsher charges and sentences, but can mean incarceration as an adult as well.

I was just wondering if you had anything to say about this contradictory legal regime that kids are put in where their options are so limited while they're experiencing this trauma and undergoing this abuse, and then the penalties for acting out in self-defense become so hard on them. I'm just curious if you have anything to say about that or about, more broadly, our society's attitude towards children in these situations and particularly children of color.

Mariame: I don't think anybody would be surprised to know that the way that our culture has evolved and based on the long histories of oppression that we live under still, the afterlife of, that particularly kids of color and particularly Black kids are not kids, they're not children. The conversation about

children is moot in some way. The idea is that those young people are basically criminals in training so the punitive levels of the state and the levers of the state come down on them to the full extent. I think that there's always been a contradiction between Black people, in particular, and Native people in some respects as well, who are often treated as though they are less than human, they are dehumanized certainly, so their agency is stripped from them. But when they are caught up in the system, they have complete agency.

Brian: Exactly.

Mariame: They are completely responsible for any actions that are seen as transgressive of the law or transgressive of whatever norms are set up as the main norms to uphold. That's been the way that we've handled most things and that goes across generation. It's not just age. It isn't just for kids. It's also how we treat adults who are people of color and in the system. It's the example of Celia, an eighteen year old young woman who killed her master in 1855 in Missouri and whose lawyers tried to introduce a law that covers free women's ability to defend themselves when they're being defiled, so to speak, and the response is, "No, actually Celia is property, not person, so how can you transgress against your own property?" So really she's then un-rapeable, but she can be charged, which she was, with a capital case, where she's charged with killing her white master and then she hangs for it. On the one hand, she actually doesn't have a self that's worth defending, but on the other hand she can be completely liable and responsible and harshly punished for taking actions that she took in self-defense.

That's the long history, that's not new, that's not going to end today. People don't address that when they think about what needs to be "reformed." What needs to be uprooted is the whole punishment mindset, it's white supremacy, and it's a whole lot of things that make it so that it's very, very hard for people who find themselves in conflict with the law and are people of color, poor, trans, disabled, whatever. It's an additional burden based on oppression and domination that's very hard for those people to find a way to find any form of actual "justice" within a system that's just profoundly and inherently unjust.

Brian: Absolutely. I couldn't imagine anybody saying it any better than that. That was tremendous. Thank you. To that point, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the work that Survived and Punished is doing on the ground against domestic violence. I know that you guys have a toolkit that you published online and I really encourage anybody listening to this to go seek that out and read into it. But I was wondering if you could talk about the toolkit and what went into developing it and these survivor defense committees that are discussed in it, just to give people some idea of what they can do in their own communities.

Mariame: Sure. If people go to our website survivedandpunished.org they can learn more about our work. Particularly, if you click on our Analysis and Vision, you'll have a general sense of what we're trying to do. Our basic premise is that for many survivors of violence, the experiences of domestic violence and rape and other forms of gender violence are bound up with systems of incarceration and police violence. We're making the case from the beginning that there's an inextricable link between domestic violence, sexual violence, and criminalization and incarceration.

That is understood many ways. It's understood through the idea that a lot of people, up to 90% of some people in women's prisons are survivors of domestic and sexual violence *before* they actually were criminalized or incarcerated. So, that is its own pipeline into criminalization or pipeline into the prison system, is trauma and abuse in the first place. You see that a lot. Then when you get into that system, you are re-traumatized and re-abused because prisons are violence themselves. I think people like Dean Spade and others talk about prisons themselves being serial rapists and serial murderers. The prison itself is that.

So, putting somebody who's already experienced a history of violence into a system that is itself violent is an ultimate, huge form of general life violence. We're really interested in supporting particularly survivors of violence who are criminalized because they are using violence to defend themselves and/or are criminalized because of survival actions. For example, they're being criminalized for failure to protect their children while they are being abused themselves, or they are being charged with kidnapping because they took their kid away from their abuser and they were undocumented (so we're criminalizing migratory patterns). The ways in which, often, survivors themselves are coerced by abusers into taking actions that are criminal actions and they then become criminalized through that cycle of violence that they're enduring that forced them into that action in the first place. So, that is really what we're doing.

We demand the immediate release of survivors of domestic and sexual violence and other forms of gender violence who are currently in prison for survival actions, including self-defense and all those other things I mentioned before. Also, people who are just trying to secure the resources that they need to live and they're doing that within a context of abuse and a history of that.

People can go to our site and we have this new toolkit that we put out. We put it out in conjunction with a national convening that I co-organized this summer in June in Detroit as part of the Allied Media conference. The day before there were all these institutions that you could offer and we offered one called No Perfect Victim, which was a national gathering of people who are doing work around the issue of criminalized survivors and also people who were criminalized survivors themselves doing work. We were lucky enough to bring and fly in Marissa Alexander, who was finally free officially of her house arrest in January of 2017. Marissa was able to join us and Cherelle Baldwin who was also criminalized and had a defense campaign help her get free.

We also had Nan-Hui Jo who's also a criminalized survivor who had a defense campaign. So, we're lucky enough to have all these people, who we'd all in various ways worked to help free, be with us in that space. We had Miss Major be able to come and join us as a formerly criminalized survivor. So, a bunch of really cool folks and we talked about a whole series of things. And then in advance of that gathering, we put out this toolkit, which is a summary of the learnings that many of us have as a result of organizing to defend the lives of criminalized survivors and to create freedom campaigns or defense campaigns as a tool and a means to do that.

So people can learn about what we think works in supporting immigrant survivors, what we think works in supporting trans survivors, how to do media work, how do you engage with the media around these cases? How do you work with the legal team, which is very tricky and very difficult? How do you make sure that you're raising money in a way that also allows you to be building a base of folks who want to continue to support this person when they are "free," even though people are never completely free? All

of that is in the toolkit. We invite people to look at it. It's something we wish we had had when we started years ago and so we tried to put that together. And if people go to our site, they can also see videos and interviews that were done at No Perfect Victims where we talked to advocates, organizers, and survivors about their experiences so they can look and see those interviews, they're all up on the website. So yeah, that's a little bit about that. We're a national formation that's made up of several different groups working across different parts of the country to actually address these issues. So, that's what Survived and Punished is about.

Kim: Thank you. I'd like to switch gears now and talk a little bit about something else that I know we always get asked as abolitionists. People always want to know, "What about people that have caused serious harm to others?" I'd love to hear your thoughts about how you respond to this question.

Mariame: First, I understand, why people ask the question because society has done a really good job inculcating a bunch of fear in people. I don't know if people know who's actually in prison and who's not, so there's just a lot of misinformation. "Law and Order" really has done a real job on people, a real kind of brainwashing job about who gets incarcerated, who those folks are, what that means. There's also a huge conflation I think that people have around connecting crime and connecting incarceration, and so those things have connections to each other when even the most conservative criminologists and theorists and researchers have found that "crime" and incarceration, the correlation between them is very faint and not as statistically significant as people think.

So, I understand that. I guess for me, if people think about sexual assault or murder, that usually happens between people who know each other really well. It's very rare that you have actual "serial rapists" in the world that are portrayed on TV. That's not what most sexual assault actually is. Most sexual assault is actually not reported, most people who engage in it are not actually in prison. This idea that if you don't have prison that's going to flood the universe with all these sexual predators is completely not borne out by the actual empirical facts that we have going on right now. And it's a great moment to think about that when more and more people are being either outed as sexual harassers and assaulters in the media through these revelations, ever since the Weinstein article in the [*New York] Times*. Can you imagine incarcerating all those men? They're mostly men, as sexual predators. What would the system need to look like for that to be the solution to a problem that is actually about systemic, structural inequities in power?

I just think people have this idea that the 5% of the people who are actually in prison for murder and rape are everybody who's in prison. And so, the ending of prisons doesn't actually do the thing that you're thinking in your head would happen. In fact, the prison itself is such a perpetrator of sexual violence that if you are somebody who cares about ending sexual violence, you have to end the prison, too. These things are not separate from each other. If you are somebody who's concerned with murder, the prison is a murderer. You have to end that, too. It's its own form of violence.

That's really a way of thinking about that. Prisons don't stop murder because we have murder, you know? So, you have to ask yourself the question about, "What are you trying to do?" and if it's to increase actual safety, "What would lead to that? What would actually get us safe?"

We know that strong relationships with each other that are based on healthy accountability is the way to go, so, the question is how do we get to that? My interest has been in trying to figure that part of the equation out and I don't feel in any way defensive when people kind of point the finger at the abolitionist and say, *[mock yelling]* "Well what are we going to do about all the…?" and it's usually like that, it's not ever like a calm-

Brian: *[laughing]* Right.

Mariame: …*[mock yelling]* "But what about all the rapists and murderers?" I always say to people, "Ask yourself what's happening to you right now. Why are you so agitated?" You know what I mean? "What's going on?" Because the prison and the police are so in your head and your heart, you're feeling personally affronted, because you think, these institutions matter to you quite a bit and the question is, "Why do they matter so much to you? Are they doing what they say they're doing? Are they keeping the world safe?" I'm just asking you to think about that, to answer that question yourself. If you feel like these institutions are working well and doing exactly what it is that you'd hope they do, then you shouldn't be mad at people who are trying to... then you're fine, you're just living in the world that exists. But if you're somebody that thinks these things are actually damaging and you think them "working" is actually working to further oppress and cause more violence, then you're interested in something else and then, you and I can have this conversation about that. We can talk.

I also want to say that abolition is a collective project, it isn't an individual project. Even though we individually are doing abolitionist acts on a daily basis whether we know it or not, it is a collective project, which means that one person is not responsible for coming up with "the solution."

Kim: Absolutely.

Mariame: We have to come up with *a* solution based on our cultures and our communities and it's again, based on our needs, our desires, our wants. So, me standing up there and making a big speech to you about abolition as a lofty… means zero. What does that mean in your life, in your world, in your context, in your community, with your people? How are you practicing abolition and how are you getting your ultimate goal if your ultimate goal is more safety?

So, when people say, "What about the rapists and the murderers?" I really want to say, "Well what about them?" because they're pretty much already not in prison.

Kim: Exactly.

Mariame: We're already living, if you want to call that abolition, we're already living that kind of abolition, so that's why abolition for me is not mainly about the destruction or dismantling of the prison and the police and surveillance, though that's critically important, it's creating the conditions necessary so that those things don't need to exist. That's a very different project and that's a very different angle. That's something that allows for a freedom to do a whole bunch of things that aren't even only and mainly about trying to end prisons or policing or surveillance. That's about making sure people have living wages, that's about making sure people have actual housing, making sure people have good

educations, making sure people have environmental health and not environmental racism, making sure we don't all die on the planet. All these things are abolitionist projects.

That's the thing that most people that aren't abolitionists in terms of, people who've studied, who have practiced, who've organized under an abolitionist set of framework and ideology… I think most people think about it in an analytic exercise. But for me, it's always been actual practice. I'm an organizer and an educator first and that's where I learned about abolition, through practice. And yes, I've read a lot and I've read people that I've come to become friends with and respect, but that's not the gist of how I came to that. I came through action and looking for something that would change the circumstances that I was encountering that were super frustrating to me when I was working with survivors of violence.

So yeah, I think that's what I would say about, *What about the sociopath? And the dangerous people and all this other kind of thing* and, *this is completely unrealistic.* Oh really, is the current system realistic? Like really? I don't understand that. To me, of course it's realistic, like it's the most realistic thing there is. Your cynicism is unrealistic.

Kim: I think someone retweeted something you posted the other day and the last few days, it just really resonated with me and just has helped me tremendously. There are a lot of times where I'm kind of lurking on Twitter, not necessarily engaging for a lot of reasons, but I saw this… it is something you wrote about hope being a discipline. I got to tell you, it made my day, if not my week, absolutely! Because it's something that... it is easy to get down on everything that's going on.

Mariame: Sure.

Kim: It's really easy to kind of look around and be like, "Oh my God, everything… set it all on fire and let's just be done!" *[laughs]* Especially right now and I think that plugging in with folks and reading things and listening to things that are affirming and uplifting and do allow you to focus on the hopeful side of things are part of abolition. I'd like you to say something about that, but I have another part to that question because they are both related or at least, in my thinking, which is about self-care for those of us doing this work. And that's something I spend a lot of time thinking about and talking about as well with the folks that I'm connected with.

Mariame: I always tell people, for me, hope doesn't preclude feeling sadness or frustration or anger or any other emotion that makes total sense. Hope isn't an emotion, you know? Hope is not optimism.

I think that for me, understanding that is really helpful in my practice around organizing, which is that, I believe that there's always a potential for transformation and for change. And that is in any direction, good or bad. The idea of hope being a discipline is something I heard from a nun many years ago who was talking about it in conjunction with making sure we were of the world and in the world. Living in the afterlife already in the present was kind of a form of escape, but that actually it was really, really important for us to live in the world and be of the world. The hope that she was talking about was this grounded hope that was practiced every day, that people actually practiced it all the time.

And so, I bowed down to that. I heard that many years ago and then I felt the sense of, *Oh my god. That speaks to me as a philosophy of living, that hope is a discipline and that we have to practice it every*

single day. Because in the world which we live in, it's easy to feel a sense of hope*less*ness, that everything is all bad all the time, that there is nothing going to change ever, that people are evil and bad at the bottom. It feels sometimes that it's being proven in various, different ways, so I get that, so I really get that. I understand why people feel that way. I just choose differently. I choose to think a different way and I choose to act in a different way. I choose to trust people until they prove themselves untrustworthy.

Jim Wallace, who people know as a liberal Evangelical, who thinks about faith a lot and talks about faith a lot and he always talks about the fact that hope is really believing in spite of the evidence and watching the evidence change. And that, to me, makes total sense. I believe ultimately that we're going to win, because I believe there are more people who want justice, real justice, than there are those who are working against that.

And I don't also take a short-time view, I take a long view, understanding full well that I'm just a tiny, little part of a story that already has a huge antecedent and has something that is going to come after that, that I'm definitely not going to be even close to around for seeing the end of. So, that also puts me in the right frame of mind, that my little friggin' thing I'm doing, is actually pretty insignificant in world history, but [if] it's significant to one or two people, I feel good about that.

If I'm making my stand in the world and that benefits my particular community of people, the people I designate as my community, and I see them benefiting by my labor, I feel good about that. That actually is enough for me.

So, maybe I just have a different perspective and I talk to a lot of young organizers - people reach out to me a lot because I've been organizing for a long time - I'm always telling them, "Your timeline is not the timeline on which movements occur. Your timeline is incidental. Your timeline is only for yourself to mark your growth and your living." But that's a fraction of the living that's going to be done by the universe and that has already been done by the universe. So, when you understand that you're really insignificant in the grand scheme of things, you just are, then it's a freedom, in my opinion, to actually be able to do the work that's necessary as you see it and to contribute in the ways that you can see fit. So, I think that's my answer to that.

And self-care is really tricky for me, because I don't believe in the self in the way that people determine it here in this capitalist society that we live in. I don't believe in self-care, I believe in collective care, collectivizing our care, and thinking more about how we can help each other. How can we collectivize the care of children so that more people can feel like they can actually have their kids but also live in the world and contribute and participate in various different kinds of ways? How do we do that?

How do we collectivize care so that when we're sick and we're not feeling ourselves, we've got a crew of people that are not just our prayer warriors, but our action warriors who are thinking through with us? Like, *I'm not just going to be able to cook this week,* and you have a whole bunch of folks there, who are just putting a list together for you and bringing the food every day that week and you're doing the same for your community, too.

I want that as the focus of how I do things and that really comes from the fact that I grew up the daughter of returned migrants, African-returned migrants. I don't see the world the way that people do here, I just don't. I don't agree with it, I think capitalism is actually continuously alienating us from each other, but also even from ourselves and I just don't subscribe. And for me, it's too much with, "Yeah I'm going to go do yoga and then, I'm going to go and do some sit-ups and maybe I'll like, you know, go to…" You don't have to go anywhere to care for yourself.

Brian: *[chuckles]* Right.

Mariame: You can just care for yourself and your community in tandem and that can actually be much more healthy for you, by the way. Because all this internalized, internal reflection is not good for people. You have to be able to have... Yes, think about yourself, reflect on your practice, okay, but then you need to test it in the world, you've got to be with people. So, that's important. And I hate people! So, I say that as somebody who actually is really anti-social...

[Brian and Kim laugh]

Mariame: … and I say, "I hate people." I don't want to socialize in that kind of way but I do want to be social with other folks as it relates to collectivizing care.

Kim: It's something I say quite often, so…

Brian: Yeah, I deeply identify with that.

Kim: …the way you say it, like "Oh my gosh, I hate people," but yeah, I totally hear you, I mean I get it, I get it. Brian?

Brian: Yeah, I loved that so much. Thank you for that response right there.

We don't have a lot of time left. I do have one, maybe sort of strange question for you, but I was wondering... I'd be interested to know what is on your reading list/bookshelf right now? I want to know something that you've read recently and enjoyed.

Mariame: That's a great question. I read all the time so I don't have one thing on my reading shelf, I have like a hundred things on my reading shelf all the time. I'm reading three books as I speak right now together and I'm enjoying all three. One of the most recent books I've completed is a book that's coming out soon written by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor - sorry, edited by Keeanga - it's called *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*.

Brian: Yes! I just got this, too! *[laughs*]

Mariame: Yeah! What I really appreciate about the book, its interviews with the founders of Combahee and Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith and Demita Frazier, and then an interview with Alicia Garza from Black Lives Matter, and then a statement written by Barbara Ransby. Keeanga writes the introduction, where she does a really good job situating the CRC statement, which is the first text where the term

identity politics is actually used. It's just such an important statement that draws from the past and has informed the future and I don't know that there's any manifesto in recent history in the last fifty years that has done the same. Of course you have *The Communist Manifesto*, but that's longer term in the past. But in the recent past, I don't know another manifesto that has the longevity and the impact that the CRC statement had.

I've always been impressed and inspired by Barbara Smith and her work, but I now met for the first time through this interview that I read, Demita Frazier, who I feel now is some sort of touchstone/long-lost twin of mine. The way she thinks and talks is like, "Oh my god! Oh my god! This is me!" That's what I was doing the whole time I was reading this. I was like, "YES, YES, YES, YES!" I was just cheering her as I read her interview. So, I now want to meet her so desperately and I think I'll get the chance to in the next couple weeks. I'm really excited to let her know that we're actually twins and we should be friends, but um…

[All laugh heartily]

Mariame: … I'm sure she'll find that *not* creepy *at all*.

[Kim and Brian laugh]

Mariame: This strange Black woman is coming up to me saying, "We really should be friends."

But yeah, I read that and really was excited by it. The books that I'm currently reading right now, I'm reading a book called *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* by Ula Taylor. It's a new book that just came out last month and it tells the history of women in the NOI and that's very different from the histories that we've read about NOI, very masculinist focused and almost no focus on Black women and girls. So, I'm reading that book and finding it really interesting for lots of personal reasons and also political reasons. And then I'm reading a book by Marcia Walker-McWilliams about Reverend Addie Wyatt, who is just this amazing, either understudied or underappreciated or unknown Black woman, who had this breadth of experience with Chicago-based... I just discovered her about two years ago, but this book hadn't come out yet and now, I'm reading this book and I'm like, "How do they not know this woman?" She was a labor leader, a civil rights activist, she was a total feminist, a suffragette, she started a church, she became… Just fascinating. She was a confidante of Dr. King, she was involved in Selma, she was involved in his Chicago Campaign, the Chicago Freedom Movement, just fascinating and awesome and great. And then, finally I'm reading stories by John Edgar Wideman, an old book called *All Stories are True*.

I always like to read... I like to have some fiction. Some of the stuff is fiction but I love how he writes, he's such a good writer. So, I'm reading that book in between these other two kinds of more historical-focused books. And I'm a big fan of biography and history and stuff, so I read a lot of that kind of stuff. So, those are the books that I have that I just read and that I'm reading right now and that I'm very much enjoying.

Kim: Fantastic.

Brian: Awesome. I'm definitely adding those to my list. They sound great.

Kim: Right?

Mariame: Yeah, they're great.

Kim: *[laughing]* Yeah, I just got some book recommendations that I definitely need to start. We definitely need to contact those publishers.

[Brian and Mariame laugh]

Brian: Yeah definitely.

Kim: Well, it's been an absolute pleasure talking with you today This interview could go on for six hours and I'd probably absolutely love it.

Brian: Seriously.

Kim: But I want to say thank you so much on behalf of Brian and I. We really appreciate your time. We both follow your blog, we follow you on Twitter, we pay attention to the work that you're doing and I know I've learned a great deal. I know Brian has as well, from you…

Brian: Totally, yeah.

Kim: … and we both really deeply appreciate that and thank you for being here today.

Mariame: Thank you. I appreciate that too, and thanks for having me on. I've been listening to your other podcasts and I think they're great, so thanks for having me on.

Kim: Thank you. Can you tell folks before we let you go where they can find your work?

Mariame: Sure. I'm mostly, in terms of communication or whatever, I'm on Twitter @prisonculture. People can go to the blog, though over the last couple years, I've really fallen off in terms of doing regular blogging. I've just been organizing a lot and that's exhausting, so I haven't had that much time to post on that. But people can find me on USPrisonCulture.com. That's my blog and I'm committing to trying to blog more in 2018, so hopefully I'll have more things up there. That's the gist of it. I can be found on those two platforms.

Kim: Great. Thank you so much for being here.

Brian: Thank you.

Mariame: Yeah, no problem, thanks for having me. Oh, I do want to say one quick thing. If people are interested, there's two organizations I'm affiliated with that if people want to look into, they should, especially if they're in Chicago. The Chicago Bond Fund, I'm on the founding advisory board for, and the

Liberation Library. Both are on Twitter, that people can connect with. Their work is really important and I just feel like everyone should know what they're doing.

Kim: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Brian: Thank you.

Mariame: No problem! Bye.

Kim: Take care.

Mariame: Thank you, take care.