

**Moderator:**

Aya Saed, JD, MPA

**Panelists:**

Atra Flemons

Jimmie C. Gardner

Dr. Yusef Salaam

*But Unbowed:*  
Black Muslims Speak  
On Mass Incarceration  
in the Age of COVID

MAY 2, 2020 | 4:00PM-5:30PMEST

RSVP REQUIRED: [BIT.LY/UNBOWED](https://bit.ly/unbowed) | [BLACKMUSLIMCOALITION.COM/UNBOWED](https://blackmuslimcoalition.com/unbowed)

Prisons, jails and detention centers are ticking time bombs for COVID-19. As of April 21, 2020, over 10,000 people in prison tested positive for the illness, and the number of new cases among prisons is more than doubling each week. Public health experts have advised that the only effective way to reduce the risk of severe illness or death for vulnerable individuals is sustained social distancing and vigilant hygiene -- all of which is impossible to achieve behind bars.

## According to the 2019 Muslim Advocates Report:

### *Fulfilling the Promise of Free Exercise for All: Muslim Prisoner Accommodation in State Prisons*

- Muslims make up about 9% of state prisoners, though they are only about 1% of the U.S. population.
  - In Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, and D.C., the share of Muslim prisoners is around 20 percent or higher.
  - The number of incarcerated Muslim women is also growing, with 8% of female prisoners identifying as Muslim in Pennsylvania and 2.5% identifying as Muslim in Texas and Wisconsin.
- For this reason, health care professionals, activists and have urgently called for the release of those incarcerated.

Moderator Aya Saed, Dr. Yusef Salaam, Atra Flemons, and Jimmie C. Gardner discuss the ways in which our brothers and sisters behind bars are coping, persevering, and organizing in this moment of crisis.

Unbowed: Black Muslims Speak On Mass Incarceration in the Age of COVID

# SPEAKERS

NAI DAKI  
BLACK  
MUSLIM  
COVID COALITION

# Aya Saed, JD, MPA

- Bertha Justice Fellow, Center for Constitutional Rights
- Board Member, Muslim Wellness Foundation
- co-Founder, Deeply Rooted Emerging Leaders [DREL] Fellowship

Twitter: @SaedaAya | [“The New World Order”](#)





# Atra Flemons

- Community Organizer, CAIR-Los Angeles
- American Muslim Anti-Racism Leadership (AMAL) Fellow, Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative
- Member, Essie Justice



# Jimmie C. Gardner

- Board Member, Georgia Innocence Project
- Motivational Speaker
- Founder, JC Gardner Speaks

Twitter: @jcgardnerspeaks | [JC Gardner Speaks](#)





# Dr. Yusef Salaam

- Exonerated Five
- Board Member, Innocence Project
- Founder, Yusef Speaks, LLC
- Recipient, Lifetime Achievement Award from President Barack Obama (2016)

Twitter: @dr\_yusefsalaam | [Yusef Speaks, LLC](#)



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

# Unbowed Question #1

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

# Unbowed Question #2

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

# Unbowed Question #3

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



# Unbowed Question #4

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

# Unbowed Question #5

A few days ago, a Native woman by the name of Andrea Clay Bear died while delivering her child behind bars while she was on a ventilator. This health crisis brings to focus the lack of health access and health care -- especially as it pertains to women. I would love to hear from sister Atra Flemons what she can share about the state of health care in the prison industrial complex, and for women in particular.

# Unbowed Question #6

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

# Unbowed Question #7

We are convened here today by the wonderful and remarkable work of the National Black Muslim COVID Coalition team. I want to know if there are organizers or organizations who are doing the work of liberation that you want all of us to be aware of and support?

# CLOSING DUA



## Surah Al-Asr

[Holy Qu'ran Chapter 103]

In the name of Allah, the most

Gracious, the most Merciful

By the token of Time

Verily Man is in loss,

Except such as have Faith, and do

righteous deeds, and (join together) in

the truth, patience and constancy.

**Invictus by William Ernest Henley**

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, **but unbowed.**

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.

# Organizations/Links

[National Black Muslim COVID Coalition](https://blackmuslimcoalition.com) - blackmuslimcoalition.com

[Believers Bail Out](https://believersbailout.org) - believersbailout.org

[Council on American-Islamic Relations \(CAIR\)](https://cairla.org) - Los Angeles - cairla.org

[Essie Justice Group](https://essiejusticegroup.org) - essiejusticegroup.org

[Muslim Advocates Prison Report 2019](#) -

Fulfilling the Promise of Free Exercise for All: Muslim Prisoner Accommodation in State Prisons

[Georgia Innocence Project](https://georgiainnocenceproject.org) - georgiainnocenceproject.org

[Get Counted](https://my2020census.gov) - my2020census.gov

[Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative](https://muslimarc.org) - muslimarc.org

[Muslim Wellness Foundation](https://muslimwellness.com) - muslimwellness.com

RLUIPA - [Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act](#)

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# National Black Muslim COVID Coalition

Follow and Like Us on Social Media. Email Us! We'd love to hear from you!

Website: [Blackmuslimcoalition.com](https://blackmuslimcoalition.com)

Email: [blackmuslimcoalition@gmail.com](mailto:blackmuslimcoalition@gmail.com)

Twitter: [@BMCoalition](https://twitter.com/BMCoalition)

IG: [BlackMuslimCoalition](https://www.instagram.com/BlackMuslimCoalition)

FB: [Black Muslim Coalition](https://www.facebook.com/BlackMuslimCoalition)

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