

Andrea Ambam_Western Kentucky University_Done_Persuasive

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SPEAKERS

Andrea Ambam

- A** Andrea Ambam 00:02
From behind the walls of solitary confinement. In May, Kevin Johnson sneaks pen and paper to furiously begin detailing the horrors of his lifelong imprisonment. He tells the Guardian on August 23, 2018, in the past three decades, I have endured every level of abuse, starved, beaten, chained to a wall for weeks and then sent to solitary confinement for speaking out. Shedding light on grotesque prison conditions, standard in America, which imprisons more and rehabilitates less than any other country and, according to the Marshall Project on August 23 2018, forces inmates to live with overcrowding, violence and slave-like forced labor.
- A** Andrea Ambam 00:46
Tensions reached a fever pitch this past fall, when prisoners nationwide organized a three week hunger strike. Emboldening a growing collective of advocates who believe the only way to fix prisons is to envision a world without them.
- A** Andrea Ambam 01:05
Critics smear prison abolition as too radical, the same critique levied against slavery abolitionists in the 1800s. Then before judging that comparison, consider America incarcerates more black men today than were ever slaves. As an uprising against the penal system rises, we must join the fight. So today, we'll uncover how the prison industrial complex is perpetuated through two lenses, each immediately followed by the abolitionist counter. Finally, we'll identify tools to tear down one of white supremacy's most powerful institutions. Because burning it all down isn't just a catchy phrase.
- A** Andrea Ambam 01:48
It's happening.

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Andrea Ambam 01:50

So grab your torches.

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Andrea Ambam 01:54

An enormous challenge when embarking on radical change is countering flawed but pervasive arguments. Our initial framework addresses the first excuse critics often give. We need prisons to protect us. And the abolitionist response. First, the punishment paradigm protects prisons from excessive criticism as abolitionist Maya Schenwar tells Politico on October 18, 2018. A big obstacle to abolition is this persistent idea that we need prisons to keep us safe.

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Andrea Ambam 02:27

We draw comfort from the fantasy that all the bad people are in one place and incapable of touching our daily lives. Prison convinces us that with the click of a jail cell, Justice is restored. Future crime is deterred and dangerous criminals no longer lurk the streets. However, as abolitionists so graciously put it, finding safety in the presence of prisons is foolish and privileged. A 2018 study from the Prison Paradox revealed since 2000 the increased use of jails and prisons had zero effect on the reduction of violent crime, and in some cases correlated with growth. The Independent on March 29, 2018 furthers, that sense of security

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is out of touch for our nation's most vulnerable,

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the black, the brown, the poor, the victims of domestic violence and so many more who are repeatedly

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failed by our justice system.

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It is the perfect example of the power of white privilege and its ability to fuel racist institutions.

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Andrea Ambam 03:34

In the 1970s, James Baldwin wrote an open letter to the then incarcerated Angela Davis. One would hope that the sight of black flesh in chains would be intolerable for the American people. But no, they measured their safety in chains and corpses. This past winter, when temperatures in New York hit negative 56

degrees, The Washington Post reports on February 9, 2019. Inmates were denied access to extra clothing and blankets and left to bang pots and pans on their cell windows, praying pedestrians would hear them. Such horrific narratives often motivate our second response.

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Just reform the worst parts of prison.

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And the abolitionist counter.

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First, prison remains a powerful institution, because all too often activists like us settle for regressive quick fixes. As the Good Men Project details on October 18 2018, much of the debate surrounding prisons is centered on harm and cost reduction, leading liberal activists to label prison abolition a fervid dream and instead desperately cling to reasonable and bipartisan effort, inadvertently fighting to better condition in a irredeemable system. So why not reform? Because, as Angela Davis preaches in an interview with History is a Weapon, there is a seemingly unbreakable link between prison reform and prison development. Progress in reform has tended to render the prison more impermeable to change, resulting in bigger and better prisons. The August 24, 2017 Jacobin Mag breaks down the tragic historical pattern following prison reform. Fixing indeterminate sentencing led to mandatory minimums.

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Andrea Ambam 05:39

The death penalty became life without parole and sexual violence against gender non conforming people gave rise to gender responsive prisons. Reform, although well meaning, only distracts from the truth, prison is violent, racist and ineffective. No matter how often we water its rotten roots. For many Americans, the 2018 Prison strikes stoked the fire for conversations surrounding abolition. But what now? As the Politic condemns on October 22, 2017 It's a process. The question isn't how do we get everyone out of prison right now? Instead ask, how do we create a society that has no need for prisons? Feminist scholar Julia Oparah describes a three pronged abolitionist approach. Stop, shrink, build. Phase one, stop building cages. According to the Nation on July 31, 2018, the current administration has plans to build six mega prisons, but we can stop them. Nonprofit, Curb Prison Spending, published a guide to teach advocates how to organize against new jail construction Their efforts have prevented over 140,000 new prison beds. So join them by rejecting efforts to make your backyard a part of the prison industrial complex and demand all candidates vocally support the mantra, no new prisons.

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Andrea Ambam 07:18

Phase two shrink prison populations. We fought hard for the decriminalization of drug use and re-evaluating sentencing terms of nonviolent offenders. But as Abolition in 2018 bemoans, if we freed every nonviolent drug offender tomorrow, America would still have the world's largest prison system. Real efforts against mass incarceration,

A Andrea Ambam 07:44
begin with expanding our notions of deserving candidates. Abolition suggests we begin with violent offenders over 50, which research shows are the safest group to release from prison.

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Finally, Phase Three.

A Andrea Ambam 08:01
Abolition isn't just tearing down. It's also building up what we want to see. Advocates should demand resources free from rejecting new prisons be diverted to social goods,

A Andrea Ambam 08:15
like schools, rehabilitation, and community programs. Joining the building efforts of abolitionists across the country, This past year, I created and implemented "Locked Up, Speak Up," a persuasive speaking program for the juveniles in the detention center just walking distance from my apartment.

A Andrea Ambam 08:36
Through weekly lessons and team building

A Andrea Ambam 08:38
I pass on the skills I've learned in this very activity. So they can speak confidently at parole hearings, in front of juries, and for themselves. When we stop, shrink, build, we give millions the opportunity to live in a world that chooses transformation and redemption.

A Andrea Ambam 09:01
Not cages.

A Andrea Ambam 09:05
The chilling words of inmate Kevin Johnson inspired our examination of abolitionists' counter arguments and a detailed plan. It's clear abolishment is a radical, but humane solution.

A Andrea Ambam 09:21
As we sneak. Kevin Johnson

As he speaks, Kevin Johnson

A Andrea Ambam 09:23
sits on death row, not even

A Andrea Ambam 09:26
a death row prisoner. He tells the Guardian, "will I face reprisals for writing this column? Sure? Do I fear such reprisals? No. I have nothing left to fear."