



# JOIN US IN THE STREETS!



# FAMILIES FOR FREEDOM NEWSLETTER 2018

## On Outreach

Families for Freedom pursues the objective of remedying the social and economic conditions which cause the hardships many of us have endured, which means combatting and ultimately revolutionizing the oppressive system that produces these conditions. In order to achieve the overthrow of this system in the interest of the oppressed members of the non-ruling class, it is crucial that we strengthen our numbers. Even at what feels like a small scale, involvement in this process contributes to Families for Freedom's ability to provide guidance for those in need, and grow strength for further actions to directly affect current conditions. Altogether, when it comes to political and socio-economic revolutions, a weighty factor in the outcome is the strength in numbers.

"How can we strengthen our numbers?" Well, an effective answer to that is through community outreach. *WE MUST ASSIST OURSELVES*. Our opposition makes every effort to make it difficult to connect with one another—people locked up are isolated from communication, people outside are busy going to work to make money to survive. However, we refuse to accept these efforts to silence us. One way we can always try to strengthen our movement is by increasing the amount of community outreach we conduct in the streets. We encourage members, friends, and anyone reading this who is on the outside to get in touch and join us!

Sometimes people are reluctant to start doing community outreach because they are

worried about being annoying, or being a nuisance. This attitude both hinders you from getting out of your comfort zone and into the streets, but also greatly underestimates the value that outreach and organizing can bring. Making connections with people in your community is crucial, and if you are giving out "Know Your Rights" information, you are providing oppressed people with information that could quite possibly save them or a loved one. This is not "annoying"—it is considerate for the communal life we are trying to build. For all of us—inside and outside—it's crucial to build power through connection.

**Meet us in the streets!**

## March 10th

FFF Women's March



## June 30th

National Day of Action

## April 21st

NYC People's Tribunal - Foley Square



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## Welcome to the Families for Freedom Newsletter.

We are a grassroots organization founded and led by people directly affected by the US detention and deportation system. In operation since 2002, we are a source of support, education, and advocacy for directly affected families and communities in New York and across the country. Together we work towards the goal of abolishing the violent and unjust immigration system in the United States and securing justice for all oppressed people.

This print newsletter brings together writing from Families for Freedom staff, members, and friends. The goal is to distribute the analysis and experiences of the

the Families for Freedom community—to share knowledge and make connections. In this issue, you will find reflections on the state of immigration enforcement, the anti-deportation movement, the



history of immigration policy, and writing from people who are locked up by ICE in immigration prisons around the country. We hope you find these articles interesting, informative, and motivating.

If you are reading this inside an immigration prison, we encourage you to get in touch with us by sending letters to the mailing address in the bottom left corner of this page. You can send us writing or artwork to have it published in the newsletter, to share information with us about your situation, or just to say hello. We want to be in contact with you.

If you are reading this out in the world, especially if you're in New York City, please get in touch with us as well. Call us, email us, or visit us in the office!

Until next time,

Families for Freedom

**"Freedom is a must and the chains must bust."**

- Families for Freedom member

Freedom. It is said that the broadest scope of this word implies the absence of hindrance, restraint, confinement, repression: liberation from the control of some other person or power. Yet the way many use it at times seems to set the word and the reality it describes at opposite poles.

On the one hand, there are those who believe that they have the freedom to exert control through the methods just mentioned. On the other, some bandy about the word and try to brand it, as if just by saying it or having it around means that the work is done or that they have done it. But the word cannot be sustained without work.

We at Families for Freedom have no choice but to work for the word to be a reality. For us, it means all the above and then some. We have admiration for the person who gave reality to the word earlier this year at JFK when he said "deuces"

to ICE and jumped in a cab. It is that physical reality of the word that matters most to our members: freedom from detention, freedom from electronic shackles, freedom from the COs and the DOs. Freedom to fight.

Freedom also to question the motives and methods of those that want to see us in prolonged detention or fettered by an electronic shackle. Families for Freedom has always been against the concept of "alternatives to detention," given the obscene hyped-up notions that led to the widespread use of these shackles: e-incarceration. A chief obscenity lay in the application—of acclaimed so-called progressives—of cost-benefit analysis to the situation of immigrant detention. They said it didn't make sense to detain someone for \$126 a day when the shackle would only cost \$15. What a bargain. While it didn't make sense to us, it made dollars for some. And in their analysis, little was mentioned as to who exactly would profit from commodifying our freedom. Nary a word, either, about whether their application would bring any value to the wider work towards freedom. The only alternative to detention is freedom.

The word and its sound has the power to move people towards its reality: from the mythical exodus, to the factual Underground Railroad, to saying "deuces" at JFK. The root of these actions is the basic need to be free.

The quote at the beginning of this article comes from a member of Families for Freedom who was incarcerated at the age of 18 for a crime he has always maintained he was not guilty of. He spent 32 years fighting for his freedom. We met him during a presentation in a state prison as he neared the end of his bid. Many were skeptical, but with our guidance, three years later he was able to walk out of detention, free to continue his fight for freedom.

Freedom... it is a must and the chains and shackles will bust.

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# HISTORY & ANALYSIS

## BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP

Before the midterms in November, everyone was rushing to figure out how to react to Trump's announced intent to dismantle birthright citizenship—the right of children born to non-citizens in the US to claim citizenship. As many have pointed out, Trump's legal authority to single-handedly take down the 14th Amendment is basically nonexistent. But relying on and dissecting procedural safeguards is not enough. We need to hold in mind both that the legal means of dismantling the 14th Amendment are not likely to come immediately, and that it has been a stated goal of organized white supremacists for a long time.

It's important then to understand these kinds of threats and attacks in the context of a long history of repression aimed at maintaining a white ruling class dependent on a politically hindered oppressed class. From the Naturalization Act of 1790, which established citizenship as only available to "free white persons," to Dred Scott, to the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882—the history of explicitly racist laws aimed at subjugating non-white populations is long and well-known.

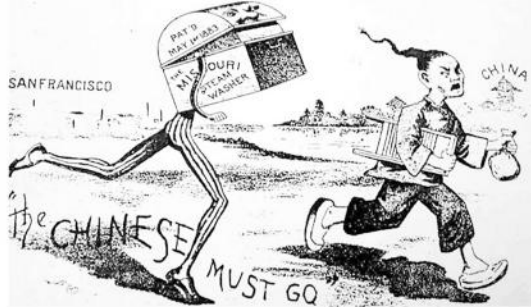
Dred Scott, a Virginia-born enslaved man who had been taken by his owners to free states, was attempting to fight for him and his family's freedom all the way to the Supreme court after 10 years of legal battle with assistance from abolitionists and his previous owners' family descents. Sadly, he did not succeed as the court ruled that "a negro, whose ancestors were imported into, and sold as slaves, whether enslaved or free, could not be an American citizen, and therefore had no standing to sue in federal court." It was

only in 1868, after the Civil War, that the 14th Amendment was established, granting citizenship rights and equal protection of the laws to all persons born or naturalized in the US.



In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was signed into law by President Chester Arthur. The first major immigration law in United States history, it set the pattern of exclusion, discrimination, exploited labor, and nativist aggression. When it was passed, the law prohibited almost all Chinese people from entering the US, breaking up families, and excluded any Chinese immigrant from become a citizen.

Five years later, the case of Wong Kim Ark came before the Supreme Court. Wong Kim



Ark, a Chinese American born and raised in San Francisco, was barred from reentering the country after one of his trips to China visiting his parents. His birthright citizenship was challenged in court, the argument being that his 'accident of birth' shouldn't grant him citizenship. However, after a year of legal battle and with the help of Chinese community organization Six Companies, the Supreme Court ruled in his favor, ratifying the content of the 14th

Amendment established 30 years beforehand.

But the counterattacks from white nationalist citizens groups with a voice and allies in government came soon after with the Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924. And just as then, today we have a combination of grassroots white supremacy stoked and amplified at the highest levels of government. The Muslim ban, continued attacks on TPS, and the militarization of the border are efforts to demonize and decimate immigrants' access to rights and due process. And even for those who have been naturalized, colonized, or living on these lands before the establishment of this country, those rights are always under attack: Puerto Ricans cannot vote in federal elections, despite their population being fodder for the military, and Black and Indigenous Americans are disproportionately affected by restrictive voter ID laws. The goal of eliminating birthright citizenship is disturbing, but the chief activity that stems from citizenship—the right to vote granted by the 15th Amendment—has never been safe from attack.

The policies have taken many forms throughout the history of the United States, but the intentions and effects are clear: targeting and attacking the ability of poor and non-white communities to organize so that the white-majority ruling class can maintain their grip on power, and white supremacists can angle for their goal of a white dominant nation. Whether or not they come to pass, these threats about birthright citizenship only make that clearer.

# WORDS FROM THE INSIDE

## BRISTOL COUNTY

*This past August, we got word from a group of people detained by ICE in Massachusetts that they were engaging in a hunger strike. With demands ranging from improved access to health care, timely responses from government officials, and hygiene and overcrowding in the facility, the strikers were demanding an end to the brutal conditions of their incarceration.*

*About a month after the strike ended, some of the participants co-wrote a letter to us detailing their perspectives on detention: the conditions inside the jails, the exploitation of the incarcerated, and the hypocrisy of American values. What follows is their writing:*

### The Silence is Betrayal!

It is always my intention to stand up for those issues that are the most important to me and those who have no voice. I try to follow my moral compass, even when it may have conflicted with the realities of the moment.

I have lots to say about this system. What we need in here is the support from people and organizations on the outside to help us raise our voices to denounce the system. We've been kidnapped. We need people to use every tool they might have at their disposal to help us that have been kidnapped by ICE. I sometimes blame those of us who have been in there and got a chance to go home and did nothing after, even having witnessed the atrocity, the treatment, the unhealthy food...

In County Jail we are detainees with other inmates. We share the living conditions: An unsanitary bathroom is shared by 80-100 detainees/inmates, inmates/detainees. There is no privacy here. Flies, bugs all over our faces while we are in the shower or the bathroom, nothing is sanitized. We are not entitled to extra clothes, things that should be free are being sold in the commissary. The items are so expensive that we can't even buy them.

Detainees are scared to complain. And when we do, or when we go on strike, nothing happens. Instead, we end up in isolation for weeks or months after that, or they ship us to a new jail. We have been kidnapped by ICE and are being confined against our will. ICE picked us up in a store, at work, or while we were in the streets. Human lives are being trafficked by so-called peace officers.

We cannot truly complain because we are immigrants. We do not have any rights in this country—that's what we are told. Some of us were picked up in state prison after doing time, and were brought here to Bristol County.

We have been punished twice: for committing a crime; and punished again by ICE. We're labeled vicious predators and violent criminals. Why should we be treated like we aren't human? Why can't there be a path to citizenship for us? Any time we try and do something right, here comes an ICE officer to arrest us.

Our human rights are at stake. We as detainees/inmates are not allowed to use the phone when they do canteen. We as detainees/inmates have to do lock up and miss our time outside. They strip search us any time they want. Lock us down after each meal.

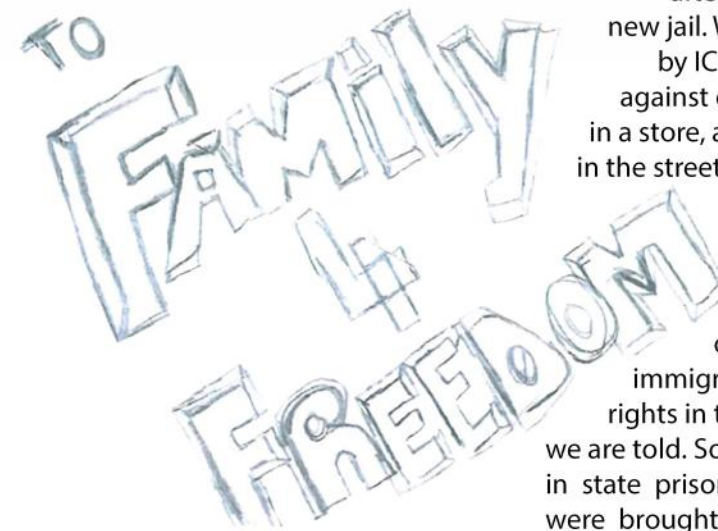
Some weeks ago a group of "rookies" came to the unit, destroyed our cells, and spent three hours to take apart our foods that we bought in the canteen with our money. Treated us like an animal. Why do we have to endure all of these senseless things? A lieutenant comes to scare us every night. Once when he saw people praying in a cell he opened the door in the middle of their prayer and stopped them, tell him them to get out. One of them said: "We were praying," and he said "I don't care, I don't give a fuck. I hate you all."

The laws say that everyone should be treated as equals, but the interpretation of the laws is different. We could be assisted by the government, but they won't do it. Instead, they've organized themselves in a mafia group to make money off of us. Like human traffickers.

Please pass this on.

Thank you,

Detainees/Inmates at Bristol County



- Artwork from someone from the inside

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