

Decarceration Nation Episode 73 Lisa Fithian

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Joshua B. Hoe

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Hello and welcome to Episode 73 of the decarceration nation podcast, a podcast about radically reimagining America's criminal justice system. I'm Josh Hoe, among other things, I'm formerly incarcerated freelance writer, criminal justice reform advocate, and the author of the book writing your own best story addiction and living hope.

We'll get to my interview with Lisa 50. And in just a minute, but first, the news.

It has been a really trying week in the criminal justice reform world as the crisis continues to unfold in Mississippi 13 of our brothers and sisters in incarceration have died in the last month. And while governor Tate Reeves has started to respond, real change is desperately needed. I'm working on putting together an expert panel of folks on the ground in Mississippi for a special episode of decarceration Nation. So stay tuned over the next several weeks. I will include some article links about the crisis in the show notes if you want to learn more. I especially want to thank the Mississippi prison reform coalition. Black No Chaser, Mississippi rising, Jay Z. Yo Gotti, the American Conservative Union Foundation, Arthur riser and all of my friends at the reform Alliance and everyone else was working hard to address the crisis and Mississippi prisons.

In personal news, thanks to the bureau Institute for Justice for recognizing decarceration Nation Episode 42 my interview with James Forman, Jr. as one of the best podcast episodes of 2019. I also think the veer Institute for recognizing me as an important social media thought leader and influencer over the last year, the recognition is flattering and humbling. I'll do my very best to exceed those expectations in 2020. I also want to thank my team at the decarceration Nation, which includes my sound guy, Andy, Robert, and Kate, for all the great work they do to help make me look good. So several weeks ago, I was invited to the national Network for justice is Great Lakes convening to talk to many of the participants.

The National Network for justice supports and strengthens the works of state-based groups seeking to safely and permanently reduce prison, jail and detention populations. The NNJ envisions well informed, educated and resource state-based organizations. This interview with Lisa Fithian is one of two episodes that I conducted at the Great Lakes convening. So let's get to my discussion with Lisa Fithian.

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Hello, I'm here with Lisa Fithian from extinction rebellion and the end white supremacy action in Austin. Mother Jones called Lisa, the nation's best known protest consultant which is an interesting title to say the least, least one part of shutting down the CIA occupying Wall Street

disrupting the World Trade Organization and walked in solidarity with tribal leaders at Standing Rock. She's also the author of the book, shut it down, and I'd like to welcome her to the decarceration nation podcast. Welcome.

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Losa Fithian

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Awesome. Thank you so much.

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Joshua Hoe

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Yeah. So I always ask the same first question, how did you go from wherever you started to it to activism, and then to working with folks to make protests more effective.

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Lisa Fithian

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I mean, I think quite simply, I didn't come from a political family. But I learned when I was young, that there was an injustice, and that people working together could make a difference. And for some crazy reason that has fueled my life work. And I think over many years, I've just, you know, deepened my understanding of the importance of that organizing work. And when people reclaim their power and exercise it amazing things can happen.

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Joshua Hoe

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So you said that you learned that at some point, what do you remember kind of a story or something that when you really started to realize that that was possible?

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Lisa Fithian

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Um, well, I think there's a couple things. One, I was born in Georgia, and was raised outside of New York City. And so my mom's whole family's in Georgia. And when you're in Georgia, you can't escape the blatant racism that is there and I knew as a young person that something was not right even though I didn't, couldn't, couldn't fully understand it. But when in high school, I started organizing, I became president, my student government. And there was a situation where the principal who was totally awesome was being fired and forced to resign and we all knew it was unjust. And so we began organizing around that and I was you know, some of the teachers were likely see you need to let him go because if they do fire him I'll never get another job. But within the context of being President of Student Government, we organized all kinds of things student walk out we organize door to door knocking to you know, put the budget to school budget that had been defeated past again, looking at violence heading school wide dialogues about violence on the campus so so let's just you know, doing things but again, it was you know, I, I learned by doing but again, as I've gotten older, I've begun to understand more

and more about how this world is really set up, and the harm that it can do and again, the power we have to change

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Joshua Hoe

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And we're here at the National Network for Justice Great Lakes strategy exchange, what brought you here? And what are you? What were you looking forward to?

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Lisa Fithian

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I mean, it was relationships with organizing the conference that brought me here some shared work around climate, particularly extinction rebellion. But also, I think my new book, shut it down. I mean, whenever any community of people is organizing for change, it's important to look at a wide range of strategies, not just working in the system to policy and legislation and lobbying, but also the organizing, but even more. So I think creative nonviolent direct action is, at least in my experience it can be a game-changer.

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Joshua Hoe

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Can you talk a little bit more about that method or that particular solution?

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Lisa Fithian

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Well, I think one of the greatest challenges we face in this country is that people have given up their power because they don't believe they don't have it. And because we are socialized to not exercise our power or much less even understand these dynamics of power, and nonviolent direct action is making a choice. That is an exercise of your power that will, may involve risks. But ultimately, I actually think it's a sacred act. It's a willingness to put our bodies on the line to interrupt an injustice that may cause us harm, we may lose some of our freedom. But we know that there's a higher good must be that we must achieve. So, you know, I don't know it's, I always call it one of the most rapidly radically transforming strategies I've ever seen. And, you know, it's like, I think it's also important to remember that we don't all have to do the same thing we don't all have to take with the same risk. Clearly, the different privileges or lack of privileges we have makes it different in our choices, but we all have something to contribute and something to offer to the larger scheme of change and so try and work in such a way that everybody can offer

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Joshua Hoe

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Yes, so when I was reading your book, one thing struck me toward the end. I want to ask a few political questions and then kind of get to more direct action questions. And that thing that struck me was that you talked about how campaigns take native needed resources, political campaigns, take needed resources away from movement initiatives. And I was just thinking

about, you know, we have two people who won almost a very recently in the race, who are spending, you know, 10s of millions of dollars, essentially, to get other people to contribute to their campaigns so they can make a campaign so they can make a debate stage, which you talk about wasting a lot of resources. That just seems like a very perverse form of democracy to me. So I just thought I'd ask you, who's done a lot of the kind of on the ground kind of work, what kind of your feeling is about kind of the way the process is working or not working right now.

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Lisa Fithian

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I mean, clearly, the process is not working. Clearly whoever is in office, it does make a difference. People gave their lives for the right to vote. So I think we need to really honor the importance of that, that place of political change to the election. But we also have to understand that whoever gets in that is likely not going to fundamentally address the problems that we're dealing with. I think one of the things I would say is that we need to be more mindful about, you know, when these election years come in, yes, we do need to pivot and do everything we can. But we have to understand there's a cost for that as well. And one of the things that gets sacrificed is, for lack of a better word, the street heat, and we know that, you know, protests can affect the way people choose to vote. And so I've always been about inside outside strategies, but elections, for the most part, leave the outside strategy behind and I think particularly as we go into 2020, we can't do that.

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Joshua Hoe

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So you talk in the book about being that we're kind of in a weird place because we're on the brink of a bunch of big ideas. And one of the ones you talk about is like Medicaid, Medicare for All. But we have kind of these Empire Strikes Back moments to, like all of a sudden, it seems like the combined forces of media and money are silencing some of these, you're trying to shame these ideas. So how do we best negotiate those these moments kind of from the ground up? Well, I'm asking all kinds of tough questions,

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Lisa Fithian

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yeah, yeah. No, it is not a simple answer. And that's one of the things that we're learning here also, at this conference is that this these issues in mass incarceration are complex, and there's so many different points of entry and like, what do you do first intervention prevention. It's, it's big. And so I think for me, I keep going back to what are the roots of these problems? Because I think one of our challenges is that we have become very siloed in our movements and our organizing and the issues we're facing here. So come plexes so deadly, we are easily overwhelmed. And like no one movement has all the power that they need to make the changes that we need. So I keep looking more and more about how do we build healthier movements? How do we build real solidarity? How do we stay on the offense instead of the defense? Because again, so much of this time, we're just reacting, which is actually also a place of

trauma. So how do we do the healing and so for me, it's actually several years back, when I took a break to write the book, I said, I don't want to work on any issues anymore. I want to work on organizing against racism, and see what happens. And through that work that we've done in my community of Austin, we've seen radical things happen and the idea of how to movements show up for one another is happening quite naturally now. And so all of these movements, if you look at the roots of it, you know, we often throw these words around to patriarchy, white supremacy, you know, wealth supremacy, partial status. carceral state. And but the thing is, is that those words and ideologies translate into very concrete behaviors, and very concrete policies. And so if we can begin to really sort of speak to the roots, figure out how to do the undoing of them. I'm, I've been trained a lot by the people's Institute for survive and beyond. And they talk about how these when you look at a community and the the oppressions that happened to hold communities down, they call it a franchise, and it's replicated in every city across the country. And what they would say is that if it was done, it can be undone. So how do we keep our focus on undoing those beliefs, those practices, and start, you know, operating from a place of like, building real connections, really supporting one another, taking the time we need to grieve and heal. And I think that may lay the foundation for a very different world.

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Joshua Hoe

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So, way back in 1990, I won a national college debate champion Ship arguing for essentially having the government stop contributing to what will do what they could to stop climate change. I think if you had told me in 1990, that we still really wouldn't have done very much, I would have been pretty shocked. But here we are. And I think one of the first intersections between kind of criminal justice work and other work that we'll talk about is the environment. We've seen prisons in Texas, where people are essentially getting into serious health trauma because of the heat in the prisons. We've seen that all over the country, you have any thoughts kind of about where we are on kind of both climate and on that kind of intersection between criminal justice and climate?

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Lisa Fithian

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Yeah, absolutely. You know, both of them are examples of the crimes of this state, quite frankly, like we we look at these these criminal systems, but we have to really understand that the political structures we're living in are, are creating high crimes. And so another piece of that is that we can all see, like during Hurricane Katrina and other natural disasters, it's people who are in prisons that are extremely vulnerable, you know, being locked up, you can't get the floodwaters coming up, right? And so there's a, there's that intersection of just daily lives we know again and again, there can be in hot climates, no air conditioning and cold climates, no heat. But there's, there's definitely a lot of overlap. And, and part of that overlap is, again, I believe, a government decision to dehumanize certain groups of people consider them expendable. I mean, we have a long history of that. And whether it's from using mass incarceration, slavery back in the day. The climate migration crisis is another example of that. People are having to leave their homes for food insecurity, drought, rising waters, trying to come to safety. We're not they're not met with the humanitarian response. We're putting them in cages

and deporting them and separating their kids. So the whole orientation to how we're Dealing with this human crisis has got to change. And again, it's like when we see the intersections and can bring these things together, I think we're going to become more powerful.

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Joshua Hoe

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And what about instances where there are tension between the intersections? I think the kind of textbook example for me is that, you know, there's this very real and important movement that you talked about in the book called me too, which is, in a lot of ways trying to expose both patriarchy and the lack of accountability. And at the same time, we've got this mass incarceration crisis, a lot of which is based in the punishment of people through accountability. And a lot of times are tension between those two things. You know, there are a lot of people who have done harm, who end up incarcerated, and a lot of people who've had harm done to them who have been incarcerated and a lot of people who've had harm done to them and want accountability. So how do we keep all of these things in our mind at the same time, deal with the tension still make progress on all fronts. And you may not have a good answer to that. But it's, I think, important question.

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Lisa Fithian

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Well, I think it's actually something that one of the participants said earlier to understand that those who do harm or have also been harmed. So I think a lot of what we're seeing playing out whether it's in the metoo movement, mass incarceration, but is people reacting out of common because we've all been traumatized and trauma leads us to one of the ways that leads us to is to be reactive and act out. And I think part of what we need to do here is understanding that I actually am somewhat excited. I think there's so much wisdom that is starting to come through our movements, and so many new practice like restorative justice circles, transformative justice, redefining accountability, a lot of people feel like accountability is like because you did something wrong and you're in trouble and you're right, you're somebody's trying to control you. When really accountability is an is a process that can actually be a gift to people around us by taking responsibility for what we did and also helping people understand that you may have made a mistake, but you're not the mistake, and that we want to stay in relationship as we move forward. Yes, there are some people that have been more damaged than others, and there's some people who do great harm. And, you know, I don't have a good clear answer. But what I do know is that thinking that punishment is the solution to our problems doesn't work. And when we have systems that are not only punishing, but they're profiting off of people's bodies, that doesn't work. So the strategies that we have in our mainstream culture in this country don't work. And so let's try something else.

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Joshua Hoe

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So when we've had tensions in movements over the last decades, you know, a lot of times the the kind of people with the most to lose from what movements are trying to accomplish, tend to

try to play us off of each other, I think is another element of why I asked that question. You're experienced and you've had experience probably dealing with this more than most people ever talk to. How have you? How have people been able to negotiate that more successfully as kind of experience and movement has grown?

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Lisa Fithian

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Well, what I've learned over the years is the importance of developing agreements, like taking the time to really talk about what is it that we need from one another, we don't have to actually all be on the same strategy or the same page. But when we are in the street organizing together, we have to have some basic terms by which we know that our needs are going to be met and have some basis of trust. And that also becomes the basis of accountability. And as we do that work, we have to always be mindful of the fact that divide and conquer right, we are always pitted against each other had been forever. And we also have to understand that that again, the one of the manifestations of a white culture is this division and competition and distancing this so we are been socialized to Really not show up in community well, so it takes a lot of consciousness to sort of hold, you know, heal ourselves from that, and the agreement process and taking the time to make sure that those are things that can really be a good foundation. And then I think there's that conflict resolution process so that when there is conflict, we know that there's a path forward, as opposed to just distancing and never going to deal with you again, because we just don't have the time, energy and resources to keep doing that.

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Joshua Hoe

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I think a lot of times, things get presented as if the what we should really hope for as a society I think a lot of people seem to think is kind of order. This kind of notion of, you know, even if terrible things are happening under the surface as long as everything seems calmer, okay. And you kind of introduced this idea of embracing the edge of chaos. Can you talk about that a little bit. I think my friend Peter Linebaugh calls it embracing the ruins i think is I think it's a similar ideas.

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Lisa Fithian

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When when I was writing this book, I started to learn about what's called complexity science, which most people when I say that they have no idea what I'm talking about. But it's actually a new worldview, chaos, systems theory, network theory, all that stuff. And really, it's the study of how organic living systems change. And it was in learning more about that, that I came to see that actually, it's the science behind a lot of know about direct action networks, you have like many different parts that make up the whole, the whole great of some of the parts, open environments, different feedback, loops, multiple strategies, yada, yada. But it all takes you to this place called the edge of chaos. And that edge of chaos is that moment where that potential tipping point where something new can emerge. And it's the organizing that we've done up to that point. That's going to help determine what will come out of that period of chaos because

we're not in control of it. But what we are in control of is the organizing that builds to it. And you know, sometimes and I talked about this people like Yeah, but like 45 is creating chaos for us all the time, which is true. But I'm talking about us using our power to build escalating actions in a form of sort of organized chaos that, again, is getting us to where we want to go. I also one reasons I talk about this and push it a lot is because I think people are so afraid in this country, to take risks and to challenge power. And so much of the organizing is, you know, done in ways it doesn't really do that. And I really feel like we have got to enter a period where we are will, you know, I just want to call it up rising weight, two people in this country need to rise up. And we've seen throughout history, the power of that we're seeing happening around the world, in light of how deeply deeply messed up the system are and how much pain people are going through. I don't think anything should have a mass uprising that is done in a loving way is going to get us what we need.

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Joshua Hoe

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So, I mean, we both I know I think I remember you saying you've probably been arrested like 40 times or something like that I, I did some time myself. So I'm sure you've been probably shot out with rubber bullets, you've probably had some tear gas, you know, so much of what you're talking about is sold to us as kind of the politics of fear. How have you kind of been able to overcome your own fear in the moment and how have you been able to put yourself on the line like that over time.

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Lisa Fithian

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I had been arrested actually, way over 100. But I also understand that my willingness to put my body in the line and be arrested and go to jail, I still have enormous privilege in that process, you know, and I'm so aware of that when I'm here with people who spent decades in prison.

Joshua Hoe

I'm gonna ask you a question about that just a second.

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Lisa Fithian

22:04

Okay, so, so one of the things is that we can still act with courage despite our fear. And that one of the best ways to deal with the fear is to make sure that we're connected with other people. And we know that people have our backs. You know, we can't you know, that's, again, one of the reasons I think this work is so powerful forces us to work collectively, in terms of how we're going to, like take care of one another. And I think actually facing our peers where there's fear, there's power. When you do that, you come out much stronger on the other side, and quite frankly, I, I really encourage a lot of white people to get arrested and go into jail. I know it's just going to be a little glimmer. But I've seen again and again, how sort of unaware white people go into jail for civil disobedience and actually get an inside view of what's happening in these

systems. And once you see it, you can't unsee it. So I think there's a tremendous amount of learning that can happen by those There's a lot of honor and privilege, facing their fears, taking risks, and being willing to have a lived experience outside what they've ever had before.

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Joshua Hoe

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So I do have a couple questions about kind of how privilege kind of works within this kind of organizing. And the first one, I think you've addressed a little bit, but I just want to ask more specifically, is that, you know, so many people who are in my network and kind of listening to this kind of discussion are people who have records. And, you know, I mean, for lack of a better way to put it face sentencing enhancements, a lot of times if they're arrested again, so how do how do people without the privilege of being able to, like you said, kind of risk, arrest, participate and still be a big part of what's going on, aside from just sharing experience?

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Lisa Fithian

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I think one of the things is that they know the solutions, they know what needs to happen. And so I think it's somewhat is a partnership and that's part of my work as a anti racist white person is under stating that part of my job is to get out of the way. Right? dissenter, myself, listen to people who have been dealing with these unjust laws situations. And then do the work that you know that what somebody else's agenda for lack of a better word and that's part of what we've been doing in Austin is like, we had this network of white folks, we have directly accountable relationships with people of color organization to basically say, this is what we want, this is going to be our plan. This is what we need you to do. And then we do it, but it show up and speak, give people rides, to childcare bring food. So I would say also, in this situation, if you took that, you know, again, just being present, and sharing your lived experiences an enormous gift, being able to bring food, being able to contribute art spoken word.

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Lisa Fithian

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So I think you know, it's You know, I, you know, there's always a question about not creating emotional labor for people who have been harmed. But when there is a situation where people stories, which is why this pop things like this podcast is so important, you know, for those of us that are white, who, again, have been so protected from how a lot of the evils of his system, it's when we have an opportunity to learn about other people's lived experience, that it really can start a trend or eternal transformative process. And I think one of the reasons why organizing essential, we don't need chain, we don't need Guild, but we need to sort of like understanding recognizing justice and being willing to move forward in action to help enact the changes that people are calling for. I don't know if I did a great job of answering that question, but it's like, everybody's gotta find their own way. We got to figure it out. How we Collectively amplify each other's risks.

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Joshua Hoe

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I know in Michigan during the recent poor people's campaign about a year ago, that we saw a real rise in how the state was kind of addressing this through court costs, fees, fines and even arrest. And almost like it was, it seemed like in a sense that their strategy was to make it impossible for poor people to protest. The people who really couldn't afford any of those things. Wondering if you you know, in even for privileged people, it seemed like, in a way kind of a death by 1000 cuts kind of way to stop protest. Have you seen changes in the way that the state is kind of adapting to kind of organizing and protest

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Lisa Fithian

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your question, that they are moving all kinds of internal police changes to legislative changes to make it harder for people to protest? And one of the things I would say is like in terms of the poor people's campaign, you know, when you see the government strong response? It's because you know, there's a lot of power there and they're ultimately afraid. But for people like working on environmental stuff, trying to stop pipelines is now a felony to do nonviolent direct action, trying to stop the pipeline. So, you know, in during Trump's inauguration when people were arrested, all thrown with felony, so they think that Scott Walker in Arizona bringing water to people facing felonies. So we've seen them trying to change the laws and put very high charges on people. We're seeing a lot of that not stick after you go to the court process, but it's time people up for years. And this is why it's like, I mean, we're going to have to keep doing this no matter what we might have to get smarter. But, you know, as someone that has organized using the tactic of civil disobedience a lot, I also say to people, if your numbers are large enough, you don't need to do civil disobedience, right? You are just being there is a form of civil disobedience, but it's like not having to make an intention to go to jail. And I also want to clear about that nobody wants to go to jail. Nobody wants to go to jail haven't been there enough. I can tell you, nobody can go to jail and but we're willing to risk it. But I mean, there may become a point in time where we just have to, I don't know. Aim to get the large numbers that we need so that we're not having to do civil disobedience campaigns that are like getting us in jail.

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Joshua Hoe

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I thought one of the really interesting parts at the end of the book was I think we've been briefly referenced a little bit earlier, is this kind of notion of kind of balance and health and wellness. Within activism. My pastor often says that it's really important to take the time to really celebrate almost anything that happens because it's, you know, organizing and activism in a lot of ways can be very depressing and a lot of bad things can happen it you know, and I just wonder, it seems like you've really thought about that a lot lately. You said that you took some time off. And it definitely was a part of the last part of the book. So could you talk a little bit about how you tried to kind of maintain balance and stay healthy within activism?

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Lisa Fithian

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Yeah, I mean, I've had many strategies over the years, you know, like cooking good food and trying to work the earth. But I think even when I was doing this, I wasn't realizing the accumulated effect of trauma until was I till I got older and, and began to understand I had to learn more about that. But I wanted to just say one other thing. Going back to that last question, I'll bring it back to this is it I've often say that when people are rising in their power, to the state's going to come come at you. And in any movement of deep social change, there are people that always end up in jail. And so the question is for us really is, does it on our terms are their terms and how is it that we're actually preparing and training people for what may happen so that we can actually better survive it and that training, and preparing ourselves is also part of that building that Beloved Community We're we can actually embrace to each other with love and joy. Because I do think that's a key part is that if we're just throwing down all the time, I mean, life is so hard. So there's got to be culture, our song joy is part of that. And you see that woven throughout this whole gathering here right now. So it's that really is awesome. And we have to, you know, I love to do actions that are full of poetry and puppets because I think it's just more attractive. So I don't I just have, you know, there's some basic foundational elements in that healing work that will allow us to sustain this longer allow, sustain this work in healthier ways. Allow us to be very intentional about when we are organizing, how we're acting in our spaces that will allow everybody to sort of be authentic and fully human is key and Knowing that sometimes you have to step out to and that's another piece like in the group, I work with an Austin, we have agreements that you know what, I may be out for two months, but I can come back and we just help cover time and space knowing that you can't do you cannot always be full on all the time. So yeah, we've got to be gentle with ourselves. And we have to be fierce at the same time.

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Joshua Hoe

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Yeah, so let me kind of circle back to where we kind of started in a way. So, you know, I was really struck, like I said, by the kind of notion that, you know, while there can be importance to political change, a lot of times politicians aren't going to give us the answers that we really need. So what is what are what do you think the end game is? What are what how do we get to what we really need?

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Lisa Fithian

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Well, I think it's organizing with the people that were closest to, you know, imagining something beyond what we have now. I mean, this system and capitalism there was a Life before this, there are many other cultures that know how to. Like I often say that jobs is part of the problem that, you know, jobs hooks us in. But really humans need a purpose and meaningful work and our have our basic needs met. And I know I really want to challenge people to think about how we turn to community for the solutions and take responsibility for ourselves, as opposed to expecting some government over here to do something. Because again, I think that is part of the setup of our dominant culture. We're always expecting somebody else to solve our problems. And when they don't we blame them. And then right, but how do we look to each

other, to meet our needs? And honestly, I think if you look back at many more frontline communities, poor communities, the power of those communities is exactly because people have had to rely on one another and are sharing with one another and trying to look out for one another. That is, I think some of the kernels of what it is that we want, because that's I mean, we want to be treated with love, respect, have dignity in our lives. have food and shelter, have family, we don't we don't need a lot more than that. And so part of it is just like giving up this notion that we need all of this stuff in order to be happy and turn to one another, and sort of just work simply to get our basic needs met and, and that one of that would also be his community and each other.

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Joshua Hoe

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Yeah, I definitely think that I in a weird kind of way, one of the few things I would say that I learned from my prison experience is how little space I actually need. So there are many several silver linings from having been in president but one of them is definitely that I think,

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Lisa Fithian

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what do you think I would just say real quickly is that when the state comes down like it did in New Orleans after Katrina, you know, people self organized, right. And that's part of it is like and and which I think we have to understand as we go forward, as more and more disasters happen. It's people in the community that come together to meet each other's needs. When the uprisings happen. There's always people that come and take care of sanitation is always people that come and do medical this right? We don't wait to be told we don't wait to be have that job title, people show up and do what needs to be done. And I think that is the strength and power of our community.

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Joshua Hoe

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Is that what happened more or less than occupy when it was a really long? Absolutely

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Lisa Fithian

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occupy was another example of that Fergus was in Standing Rock was an example that it's like, again, it was terms you come into community, you were here to do service. You were we're asking you to come in a prayerful way. We asked you to ask for consent, not just to do things. So it's like, yeah, trusting the power of the people to self organize and take responsibility. We will be agreements, you know, have processes for transformative justice when we make when harm is done, and not throw each other away.

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Joshua Hoe

34:49

I always ask the same last question, which is, What do you wish I had asked her what should I have asked but did not. And if there's not a good answer, that's fine.

2

Lisa Fithian

34:58

Yeah, no, I think you've had bad It was questions. I love this. I've been doing lots of it. So some fresh questions. I appreciate that a lot. I mean, I just think I'd say I feel really honored to be here. And I feel like I'm good. I'm learning a lot and listening to people's stories, and also really having me to also think about the challenges of how do you organize when you're dealing with such complex systems, which do such harm? And again, I don't think any of us have the answers if we did, we'd be in a different place. But I think people were asking a lot of good questions, sharing a lot of stories. And I think, you know, for everyone that's here, this I see a lot of deep learning going on and a lot of gratitude and respect and I'm just very honored to be a part of it.

1

Joshua Hoe

35:42

Well, I want to thank you so much for doing this was great to have you on and get to know you a little bit.

Lisa Fithian

Thank you so much. All right.

1

Joshua Hoe

35:51

And now my take that potential tipping point where something new can emerge So much of our lives are bound up and never taking risks in never challenging power, for fear of what might happen, or fear of what we might lose. Lisa mentions the need for a mass uprising, but she says that it needs to be a mass uprising done in a loving way. We have a lot of people who want disrupt disruption, and violent change, but people people but people putting people's lives at risk in order to benefit them more. We have seen this in our immigration policy. We've seen this in the over policing of black and brown communities. What we need is for more people to come together around loving and supportive communities, where the goal is common health and well being and not solely the accumulation of wealth and privilege. We need to build welcome in my backyard movement instead of not in my backyard movements. When our only goal is personal wealth and accumulation, we start to build fences and walls. We start dismantling the fragile safety net that makes sure that every person has access to basic needs and basic care. When are we when our goal becomes ensuring that everyone succeeds together. When we work to ensure basic human rights are recognized, the people have health care that everyone can best enjoy common spaces together, we start to build a beloved community. Maybe the most profound change in my life was recognizing after living for prison in prison for three years, that I did not need much space or much stuff to be a happy person. I also recognized that I needed people more than I needed space or things. After living in pole barns with 159 other

incarcerated human beings. I also realized that our obsession with the notion of protection this obsession is misguided at best and dangerous at worse. This is not me ranting It's capitalism per se. Our system has always been a mix of capitalism and socialism. But what matters is what that mix represents for people. What our common vision becomes, I want one day for myself to have a condo. But I don't really want to have a mansion. I don't want to have a mansion or even a condo in a world where people don't have health care. I don't want to live in a gated community when people can't afford food. And I don't want to care more about money, the money in my pocket that I do about the person on the street in need. I'm talking about fundamental change in our orientation towards succeeding together instead of an idea of success dominated by a fundamental zero sum competition between ourselves and our other fellow human beings. In conversation, I often challenged my conservative friends to reinvest in new ideas about how to make capitalism work. for everyone to make sure that our economic system about reduce is about reducing and not exacerbating income inequality, to make our policies about creating hope for everyone, instead of building walls to protect only the privileged. This is fundamentally not a discussion about economics are about politics. It's discussion about what we care about, about what kind of society we want to live in. I want a society where everyone has a safe place to live, where the dignity of every human being is respected, where everyone has food, where people are allowed to exercise the liberty to be whoever they want to be, and where everyone can see a doctor when they are sick. If this sounds utopian, that is probably only because we have refused to care about building healthy communities, as much as we have chosen to care about protecting individual accumulation. I am absolutely not saying that people cannot accumulate but I am saying that our central organized In principle should not be about ourselves or about creating gated communities. It should be about creating healthy and connected communities and a healthy, free and caring nation.

Thanks so much to Lisa Fithian for taking the time to talk with me. As always, you can find the show notes or leave us comments at [decarceration Nation com](http://decarcerationNation.com). If you want to support the podcast directly, you can do so from [patreon.com slash decarceration Nation](https://www.patreon.com/decarcerationNation). I want to thank all of our new patrons. Carolyn Gill, Kate summers, and kimia nuru Dennis. This week we published the third episode of decarceration nation on Patreon which is our series where Robert Alvarez interviews me about important criminal justice issues. The third episode was about parole, probation and supervision. You can access dN dN on Patreon by becoming a supporter of the decarceration nation patient podcast on Patreon.

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