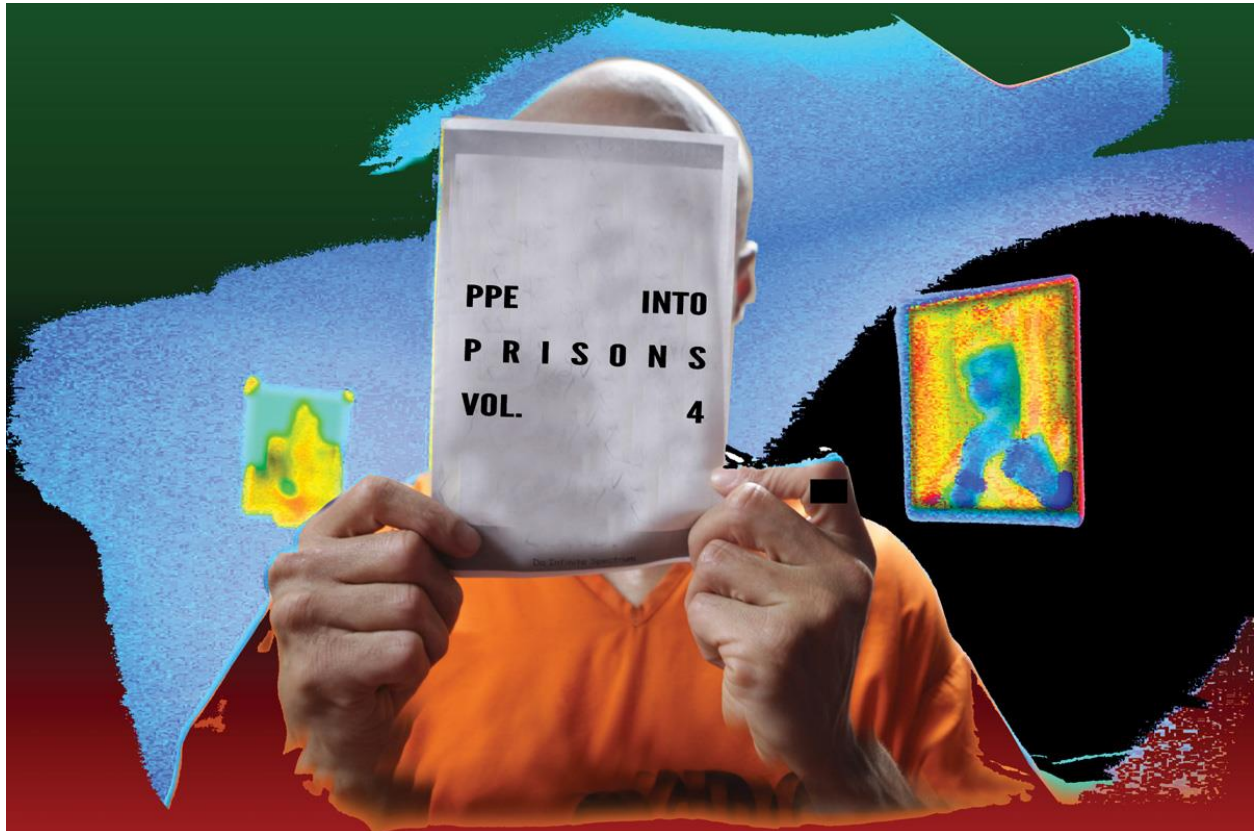


MISSISSIPPI FREE PRESS



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Incarcerated Youth, Adults Benefit From Die Jim Crow Records' PPE Campaign

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In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, [Die Jim Crow Records](#) Executive Director Fury Young got a call from BL Shirelle, the label's deputy director and a DJC artist. Shirelle spent her twenties inside a Pennsylvania prison and wanted to do something for individuals currently incarcerated.

“She made a donation to a local women’s shelter for returning citizens of 50 masks of her own money, which I really respected and was inspired by. I let the idea fester in my head. Well, what can we do?” he told Mississippi Free Press.

Young made some calls to those he knew in prison and asked what they needed, he said. From there, [Die Jim Crow Records launched a campaign on April 13](#) to buy and send PPE, or personal protective equipment, to penitentiaries across the country including Mississippi. The company has raised more than \$11,000, and with those donations, the record label has been able to supply masks and hand sanitizer.

Young said the nonprofit record label, which started in 2013, was an offshoot from his idea to make a concept album inspired by Michelle Alexander’s book, [“The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.”](#)

“When I read that book, it definitely clicked with me, and I was pretty propelled to take on an art project that tackled the issue,” the executive director said. “Over the years, I got access to some prisons and kept meeting more and more people, mostly currently incarcerated but also some very important people who had been incarcerated who were musicians, and it just kept growing and growing.”

Helping Locked-up Youth in Mississippi Through COVID-19

Young and his engineer, Dr. Israel, recorded the first project, “Die Jim Crow EP,” at the Warren Correctional Institute in Lebanon, Ohio, and with formerly

incarcerated musicians from Brooklyn in New York City and in Philadelphia, Pa. The label released the six-song project in 2016.



Milishia Gosha is a Die Jim Crow Records artist being held at the Pulaski State Prison in Hawkinsville, Ga. As of April 25, no cases on COVID-19 have been reported at her facility. Courtesy DJC Record.

After the first project, Young and Israel visited and recorded in prisons in South Carolina, Colorado and Mississippi. Following those trips, they recorded with 26 new people. After Young spoke with his board of directors, the idea for a record label was a no-brainer, he said. In March 2019, he launched Die Jim Crow Records for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated citizens.

“I felt like if we were able to get access to record music for a project called ‘Die Jim Crow,’ I think we can get access to bring some masks and some hand sanitizer in there,” Young said.

The Central Mississippi Correctional Facility Youthful Offender Unit, where the organization recorded last year, was a recipient of the label’s fundraiser. They recently gave 100 KN95 masks and 24 bottles of 16-ounce hand sanitizer to a population of about 42 individuals, Young said.

Prison conditions were a particular topic of concern earlier this year after inmates of the Mississippi State Penitentiary of Parchman [filed a lawsuit against the state due to inhumane conditions inside the prison](#). COVID-19 is wreaking havoc across the world, and prisons that were in dire need before are worse now, with limited to no resources and no room to social distance.

'I Can Express How I Feel About COVID-19'

Mico Smallie, 18, was one of the participants of the Die Jim Crow project when Young and Israel stopped in Mississippi. Smallie is currently in prison at the Holmes-Humphreys County/Regional Correctional Facility after being transferred three months ago. Where he once had access to a clean facility that provided everything he needed, it's not the case at the new facility, he said.

"I mean, the system is very corrupt," Smallie told the Mississippi Free Press.

"They barely give us stuff that we need to keep the phone clean and for basic hygiene and stuff like that. We'd have to put in grievance forms to get the exact hygiene that we need to make sure our community is safe and clean."

Smallie said they have masks, but that's it. Fortunately, no one in the facility has contracted COVID-19, though he said some have common colds. He's finding solace through creative writing and rapping, the teen said.

"It clears my mind and stuff. I can express how I feel about COVID-19," he said.

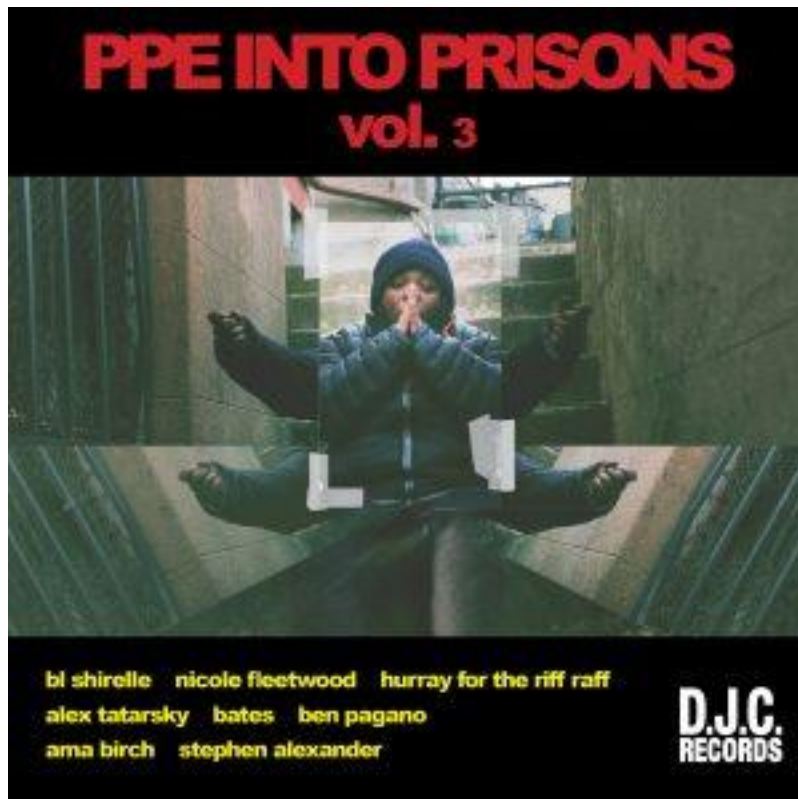
Fury Young said he's had similar conversations with others currently incarcerated and anxious about what is happening.

"I think people are doing their best to hang on. I think that's the most positive thing you can do is to keep a positive attitude," Young said.

Fury's Advice: "See If They Need Anything"

Outside of supplying PPE, writing letters and keeping in constant communication are ways people on the outside can support those that are incarcerated.

“See if they need anything. I think commissary is hard right now, so donations of even \$20 could go a long way if you wanted to send it directly. But start by reaching out,” Fury said.



“I felt like if we were able to get access to record music for a project called ‘Die Jim Crow,’ I think we can get access to bring some masks and some hand sanitizer in there,” co-founder Fury Young says.

With the difficulty of getting quality PPE, Young said he wants the campaign to continue to grow and give to prisons that need it the most or who request it. So far, they’ve sent out PPE to prisons in Mississippi, New York, Ohio and Georgia, with supplies on the way for more prisons in Ohio and a prison in New Jersey.

But even after the pandemic is over, those who are incarcerated still have needs that must be met for their health and safety, and Young is interested in seeing what happens when the dust settles.

“I hope that COVID-19 is a silver lining for the prison system, where it’s like we really can’t maintain prison systems per state that have 49,000 residents like Ohio,” he said. “So, I hope that this crisis just leads to way more people getting out and having good reentry opportunities. I just hope for all that.”

For more information or to donate, visit the label’s website [here](#). A link to the campaign will be on the front page. Die Jim Crow Records also hosts free weekly performance benefits every Sunday at 7 p.m. central time.

Jackson, Miss., native Aliyah Veal is a proud alumna of Spelman College, where she earned her bachelor’s degree in English in 2017. Afterward, she attended the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism in New York, gaining a master’s degree in journalism in 2018. After moving back home in 2019, she interned at the Jackson Free Press, covering city council and Jackson neighborhoods before moving up to culture writer. Her interests include tattoos, music and food, really, really good food. She now writes about culture, music and the arts for the Mississippi Free Press.