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These Prisoners Dropped The Single Off Their 'Die Jim Crow' EP On Juneteenth

The album is set to drop in 2020.

by [Maya J.](#)

June 21, 2018 at 9:42 am

What if the incarcerated had a voice?

In 2013, New York artist and activist Fury Young combined relationships with his formerly and currently incarcerated loved ones with his artistry and activism to create Die Jim Crow. Inspired by Michelle Alexander's groundbreaking book *The New Jim Crow*, what started as a small project has grown into larger-than-life art, visuals, music and soul. [Young immersed himself in prison reform](#) and birthed Die Jim Crow as a "multimedia concept album" centered around the black American experience during the steady rise of mass incarceration.

The full-length album, set for release in 2020, will include 30 current and former prisoners who are suffering from the traumatizing effects of modern-day slavery. Why an album? Music connects people, so why not use it as a tool to create a stronger [sense of empathy](#)? And to get

listeners to "step inside the shoes of someone that grew up in a community infested with discriminatory policing and a high incarceration rate," Young said.

The first video from the album, "Headed to the Streets," appropriately dropped on Juneteenth as a sobering reminder that although we've come far, we still have a ways to go.

How did this particular song come together? Young recorded Anthony McKinney, who is serving a life sentence and appears in the first half of the video. Before her release in 2015, B.L. Shirelle added her vocals and style as she approached her last days in prison. [Rolling Stone](#) reports she was unsure about what life outside prison would look like and was quickly able to put those feelings over a track. "It took me maybe 15 minutes to write that song," Shirelle told Rolling Stone.

"The song is showing how vulnerable a state it is to be in coming out of prison," Shirelle said. In the video, she raps, "Tell me what this liberty means. Now that I'm out, can I live and be free? Can I work for a company that pays more than minimally? Will I give up before I get to see what's in it for me?"

Young and his counterparts are hoping to expand Die Jim Crow's outreach beyond prison walls and to hit screens internationally eventually. "My goal as an activist is to take the project into communities that are most affected by mass incarceration and the broken criminal justice system that we have," [he said](#).

This approach to prison reform could significantly impact the black American narrative. Be on the lookout for the full project in 2020, and in the meantime, enjoy the raw video below.