

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/centering-black-voices-in-the-struggle-for-immigrant-rights>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

On Juneteenth, [Black Cameroonian asylum seekers made a video](#) from a holding cell at the Pine Prairie Detention Center in Louisiana. The men had fled persecution in their homelands and sought refuge in America, only to be detained indefinitely in a facility in the deep South run by a for-profit corporation that has long been [accused of human rights abuses](#).

The men continue to conduct hunger strikes as part of their fight to be treated with dignity, and their video ends with a plea:

America represents a beacon of hope to immigrants, including Black immigrants who come here in search of opportunity and freedom. Instead, too many find discrimination, criminalization, and oppression by intersecting criminal legal and immigration systems that are historically rooted in anti-Blackness. Racial profiling and overpolicing by local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities leave Black immigrants doubly vulnerable to detention and deportation.

The unique suffering of Black immigrants is not surprising given the countrys troubling history of racism in its immigration laws. The first law about American citizenship, written in 1790, explicitly excluded Black people. Since then, the U.S. government has implemented racial exclusion policies, quotas, and restrictions that have ensured white immigrants are privileged above all others, while Black immigrants are shut out.

Black immigrants who reach America continue to face intersecting systems of oppression as well as disproportionate criminalization and deportation. In the immigration system, Black immigrants are more likely to face enforcement and are [disproportionately represented among immigrants facing deportation on criminal grounds](#), even though Black immigrants do not commit crimes at greater rates than other immigrants. In the criminal legal system, [Black people are 3.7 times more likely than white people to be arrested for marijuana possession](#), even though the two groups use the drug at roughly equal rates. Such racially biased criminal convictions feed Black immigrants into the deportation machine: [76 percent of Black immigrants who were deported in 2013 were removed on criminal grounds](#), compared to 45 percent for all immigrants.

As a nation, we face one of the most profound societal reckonings with racism that we have seen in our lifetimes. Race and anti-Blackness have been intentionally overlooked and neglected by the immigrant rights movement. This moment calls on all of us to take concrete actions in our movements and communities to shift the narrative of the immigration conversation to center Black voices and challenge anti-Blackness. We urge advocates and supporters to act on a number of fronts.

*For more information on centering Black voices and challenging anti-Blackness in the immigration reform movement, access a recording of our [webinar](#) *Anti-Blackness and Immigration: A Conversation About Intersecting Systems of Oppression and the Fight for Justice*.*

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