



MINISTRY  
AGAINST THE  
DEATH  
PENALTY

## Fair Wayne Bryant

August 7, 2020

How can I not cry out for justice for Fair Wayne Bryant, a 62-year-old African American man whose life sentence for stealing hedge clippers was just upheld by the Louisiana Supreme Court?

Five white justices on the court did not find the sentence excessive, but the one African American on the court, Chief Justice Bernette Johnson, fired off her spirited dissent, exposing the scandalous racism inherent in the majority's decision. She, who in her life-bones is quick to see the legacy of slavery at play in our court system, readily made the connection between Mr. Bryant's extreme sentence and the "Pig Laws" enacted after Reconstruction. These laws, enacted by all-white Southern legislatures, imposed extremely harsh penal sentences on Black people for crimes of poverty such as petty theft.

Since we witnessed George Floyd's agonized death under the knee of racist law enforcement, it's become clear, even to white folk, that the retrograde, ignorant, isolated attitude of "racism died when slavery was abolished" is history. In this new moment of awakened national consciousness about systemic racism, I urge you, my fellow citizens, not to be silent, but to join me in raising our voices to decry this outrageously racist decision by the Louisiana Supreme Court. I especially urge my fellow white Americans to join people of color in their long-suffering, righteous struggle for justice.

On Fair Wayne Bryant's behalf, be creative. Write letters to the editor in your local newspaper, fire off messages on social media, sign the change.org petition to Gov. Bel Edwards, or whatever other actions your creative spirit devises. Most importantly, write a personal letter of support to Mr. Bryant. His 63rd birthday is coming soon on August 22. In such a crushing moment, think what it will mean for his dignity to receive a windfall of letters of loving support from his fellow citizens. Be a part of the warm, beating heart that is the soul of our democracy.

You can find Mr. Bryant's address and instructions for writing a letter on my website at: [sisterhelen.org/fair-wayne-bryant](http://sisterhelen.org/fair-wayne-bryant).

Stay on fire for justice,

Sister Helen Prejean, csj

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