



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for March 14th

26 Feb - Mean Men by Mumia Abu-Jamal

It's been a while since we've seen printed commentaries from Mumia and are happy to share what we have.

MORE:

The regime of Donald Trump has radiated a global aura of dread, fear and the bared teeth of the state as a predator, hungry for power.

From Day One the Trump Regime has used fear, innuendo and lies to sell its program of repression, so much so that one of the most conservative institutions of government, the courts, have been forced to slap down Trump's maniac Muslim Ban.

Former U.S. Chief Justice William Rehnquist once opined that 'in times of war, the law is silent'. This axiom provided that the President had his strongest hand in cases involving national security.

Because Trump was so ham-handed, he signed an executive order that essentially dared the courts to defy him, barring Muslims (especially Syrian Muslims) from entering the US, even those holding valid visas. His defeat at the hands of the US Court of Appeals was epic.

But even an illegal, unconstitutional executive order effects real lives, separating and shattering families, tearing parents from their American-born children, sowing the seeds of grief and pain that will last for generations.

Donald Trump rode the waves of xenophobia, fear and lies into the Oval office, and is stoking the embers of racial hatred for power.

He represents the dying generation of people, who see their way of life passing away.

They are biting, bitching and clawing to hold back the clock of change.

They will not go quietly into the night.

They will spill their guts of fear, of terror against Change, and fight like hell as they try to Make America White Again.

26 Feb - Update from Political Prisoner Jalil Muntaqim on Tier III Disciplinary Charges

Here is a brief update on Jalil Muntaqim.

MORE:

For certain I will be here until March 21, 2017, since Albany DOCCS affirmed the disciplinary conviction and excessive sanctions. DOCCS SHU Commissioner D. Venettozzi did this while Prisoners' Legal Service of Buffalo, who were to file a Supplemental Brief on the appeal, never received the records of the Tier II disciplinary hearing. PLS also never received the audio or video recordings, in violation of my due process rights on appeal.

Essentially, DOCCS is adamant about violating prisoners' first amendment rights of speech and being able to express our beliefs. The disciplinary proceedings and appeal process further confirm what was reported

in the *New York Times* articles of Dec. 4 and 5, 2016. Hence, was my being placed in SHU on Dec. 6 a coincidence?

These DOCCS discriminatory practices must be exposed and challenged by all freedom loving people!

26 Feb - New release of Black Panther file reveals FBI rigged investigation of murdered policeman

Buried in the Federal Bureau of Investigation file of deceased Black Panther leader Wopashitwe Mondo Even we Langa (formerly David Rice) are secrets still hidden by Bureau censors, missing records, a misleading letter to a New Jersey Congressman, and a handwritten note revealing the FBI called off the search for a policeman's killer just four days after the officer was buried.

MORE:

by Michael Richardson (*SF Bay View*)

An FBI memo dated Aug. 20, 1970, approves the Omaha Police request for help comparing voices – the voice of the person who called police with the voices of the suspects. But two days later, in a handwritten note at the lower right, the voice exams are cancelled, indicating a setup.

Mondo was deputy of information for the National Committee to Combat Fascism in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1970 when he was accused of murdering a policeman with a bomb. The NCCF was a Black Panther affiliate organization targeted by the FBI under an illegal and clandestine counterintelligence operation dubbed COINTELPRO.

Mondo was on a secret detention list called the Security Index, and Director J. Edgar Hoover ordered the Omaha FBI office to get Mondo off the streets. Mondo died serving a life sentence for murder on March 11, 2016, at the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

The heavily redacted file contains three pages of content still censored from public release 46 years after the crime. Many redactions go to protect the identity of informant OM T-7. The three redacted pages of interview information were "immediately furnished to the Intelligence Division of the Omaha Police Department."

The sequence of the pages in the file suggests the unknown source may have been one of three men arrested in possession of dynamite in Omaha three weeks before the fatal bombing. Charges were dropped against all three men several days after the trial that convicted Mondo and co-defendant Edward Poindexter, NCCF chairman.

The "smoking gun" of a counterintelligence operation in the case was a handwritten notation about the cancellation of a test by the FBI Laboratory of a recording of the 911 call which lured Patrolman Larry Minard Sr. to his death. The test, to discern the identity of an anonymous caller, was ordered by Hoover to be conducted informally, with no written report.

Five days after Hoover's command for a verbal report only, the assistant special agent in charge of the Omaha office called FBI headquarters and cancelled the test altogether, even before the arrest of the prime suspect, 15-year-old Duane Peak. As there is no legitimate investigative reason to cancel a test of the 911 recording of a killer's voice just one week into the murder probe, the call from the Omaha FBI office speaks to a fixed outcome.

Mondo's FBI file details the close collaboration between the Bureau and the Omaha police. By 7:45 a.m., FBI agents had been briefed by a police inspector about the 2 a.m. bombing and had swung into action. "Omaha Office offered assistance in covering out-of-state leads and FBI Laboratory facilities offered. Omaha advised it had notified military and Secret Service, was following closely, and alerted its racial informants in pursuit of investigation."

A FBI teletype memorandum reported, "Close liaison is being maintained with Omaha PD, and the Omaha Office has furnished and is furnishing helpful info to PD to aid them in this investigation." A second teletype memo stated, "Omaha initiating intensive investigation to locate and apprehend fugitives."

A FBI letterhead memorandum boasted, "Special Agents of the FBI in conjunction with members of the Omaha Police Department arrested [Duane Peak]." Further, "Captain [Hartford] advised that the Police Department was in the process of obtaining a search warrant ... and that he would advise the FBI as to the results." Another FBI memo reported, "Captain [Hartford] requested our assistance in interviewing [REDACTED] for any information he may have regarding the bomb slaying."

A second FBI letterhead memo spelled out the degree of cooperation. "On a continuing basis, the Omaha Division has exchanged information with the Intelligence Division of the Omaha Police Department, regularly furnishing that department information pertinent to their investigation when same can be done without compromising Omaha informants. Background information obtained by the Omaha Division of the FBI on members of the NCCF was furnished to the Omaha Police Department."

The FBI and Omaha police even shared at least one informant. "[REDACTED] is an Omaha police informant whose use as an informant should be kept confidential." However, the Omaha police chief claimed this joint investigation never happened.

Chief Richard Anderson testified at a post-trial hearing to the contrary of the FBI documents. In May 1980, Anderson stated there was no Bureau involvement in the case. Either Anderson was lying to the court or he had been lied to by his subordinates, who worked closely with FBI agents.

In December 1982, Congressman Richard Roe from New Jersey asked the FBI for a report on Mondo's case. Assistant Director in Charge Roger Young with the Office of Congressional and Public Affairs misleadingly replied two weeks later that there was no Bureau role to report. "The investigation of these two individuals was conducted by the Omaha Police Department and the trial was held in state District Court, not in a federal court. ... I am, therefore, not in a position to furnish you a report."

Some FBI records on Mondo have disappeared. David Hardy, section chief of the Records Management Division, explained some material may have been destroyed during two major purges of records in 1978 and 1998. However, according to Hardy, "there was an additional record potentially responsive" but the record "was not in its expected location and could not be located after a reasonable search."

Mondo's file does reveal in January 1971, three months before the murder trial, the FBI Laboratory did return the dictabelt recording of the 911 call submitted by Paul Young, the special agent in charge of the Omaha FBI office. The file does not reveal if Young returned it to the Omaha Police Department as instructed. Omaha police officials and prosecutors have all testified in post-trial proceedings that there was no communication with the FBI and that the Bureau did not participate in the investigation.

Although Mondo died in prison and cannot benefit from a new trial, Ed Poindexter remains imprisoned for a crime he vehemently denies. The jury that convicted the Omaha Two, as the pair are now known, never heard the 911 recording of a killer's voice. The tape recording was kept from the defense and during the discovery process was never provided.

The jury was never told the FBI called off an analysis of the anonymous 911 caller's voice to determine identity. In short, the jury was unaware the case was fixed and that J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI were willing to let a policeman's killer get away with murder to imprison two COINTELPRO targets.

The official story, told at trial, was that Mondo and Poindexter put 15-year-old Duane Peak up to the crime. Peak, a squeaky-voiced youth, said he made the 911 call, however the recording is of a deep baritone voice. The reason the tape was not analyzed to discern if Peak's voice was on the recording was because of his

confession, prosecutors and police later said. However, the handwritten notation found in Mondo's FBI file gives lie to that explanation because the test was cancelled three days before Peak was even arrested.

Ed Poindexter remains confined under harsh maximum-security conditions, serving a life-without-parole sentence. After Mondo's death, Poindexter wrote to a supporter the loss was great but that it was important to "continue the struggle."

28 Feb - Federal Subpoena Dropped Against Grand Jury Resister Steve Martinez

A federal grand jury subpoena issued to Water Protector Steve Martinez was withdrawn on February 27, without warning or explanation.

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Mr. Martinez had been summoned to appear on Wednesday March 1, as a witness before a grand jury in Bismarck, ND. The putative subject of the investigation is the November 20 incident on Backwater Bridge, and in particular, the injury to Sophia Wilansky, who nearly lost her arm from being struck at close range by a law enforcement projectile.

Federal grand juries are panels of citizens investigating a federal crime. The proceedings are secret, and the grand jury has broad power to compel testimony on a range of issues even outside of, and unrelated to the ostensible focus of the investigation. They are therefore ripe for abuse; prosecutors often use them as "fishing expeditions" for gathering intelligence on individuals or groups whose activities or beliefs they perceive to be distasteful or politically undesirable. From the McCarthy era Red Scare of the mid-20th century, and liberation movements of the 1970s and '80s, to the environmental movements of the 1990s and today, politically-motivated grand juries have been in perpetual tension with the imperatives of the First Amendment.

Given this long history of grand jury abuse, Mr. Martinez refused to cooperate with the grand jury's requests for information that could have been used against others. In a statement before his first appearance on January 4 he said, "I will in no way condone or cooperate with this attempt to repress the movement here at Standing Rock."

The subpoena was withdrawn just as WPLC lawyers were moving to quash on First, Fourth, and Fifth Amendment grounds, as well as on a statutory prohibition against propounding a subpoena on the basis of unlawful electronic surveillance. The office of the federal prosecutor declined to elaborate on the reasons for, or future implications of the decision to withdraw the subpoena.

WPLC considers this grand jury to be one piece of a broader effort to criminalize Water Protectors and to unfairly target individuals in an effort to divide the movement. This is a huge victory for Steve Martinez and for the Water Protector Legal Collective's efforts to provide effective legal defense.

Moira Meltzer-Cohen stated, "It's critical for people who are active in social movements to know and vigorously exercise their rights and stand up to government's unconstitutional efforts to gather intelligence for the purpose of suppressing legally protected, and socially valuable activity. When people recognize these state tactics and push back against them, they can be successful."

Water Protectors who are contacted by law enforcement or served a subpoena are encouraged to contact the Water Protector Legal Collective for advice and representation.

1 Mar - 43 Years and Still In by Herman Bell

We've got the latest by Herman Bell. It's moving and thought-provoking.

MORE:

I've lived in this cell longer than I've lived on the streets. Its metal locker where I keep my food from the mice, the toilet and face bowl, the bed, the floor, the cell bars and metal clothes rack all have come to know some part of me. I want to talk about me today.

Through and beyond the iron-framed windows before me, I see blue sky and the free world where I yearn to rejoin my family and community, wherein with just a single click serrated metal handcuffs produce extreme pain, and rattling gate keys may at any moment echo chain-like rushing down prison corridors often resulting in broken bones, bruised bodies, and affronted dignity. Prison is a dangerous place. And in a courtroom, whose words bear more weight -- the prisoner's or the prison guard's? Here, you may live or you may die; a prisoner awakens, a prison guard leaves home for work, both may never do so again. At the edge of some distant tomorrow, I may walk free out the front gate. I am 69 years old and my youthful and optimistic heart and good intentions have not gone unchallenged.

I remember back-in-the-day when I was a small boy in my old neighborhood in Brooklyn. The neighborhood boys and I used to hang out at the local grocery store on Saturday morning helping mothers carry their groceries so that we could earn movie money. I recall helping one mother lug her bags up tall flights of stairs to her apartment, and when she got them all in she smiled, thanked me, and closed the door in my face. For her, that was perfectly fine – after all, my face is black.

Throughout the ensuing years, I have occasionally wondered about that. Racial abuse, stereotyping and bigotry are deeply rooted in u.s. society. Even as an adolescent, I've felt like a stranger in my own country, and I've not been given reason to feel much different today. I've often been made to feel invisible, uncomfortable, out of place. A black face, especially a male black face, automatically prompts suspicion.

While blacks and Native Americans in particular have long been excluded in u.s. society, they are inextricably linked to its origins and know too well its violence and bigotry. No amount of native blood could quench the white settler's thirst for native land, and the Afrikan whose slave labor largely built north america fared no better. Wealth generated from this enforced labor profoundly transformed the u.s. and sowed the seeds of the modern world. Slave owners drove their slaves from dawn to dusk into the tobacco and cotton fields, the mines, the rice paddies, the woods, sawmills and brick kilns. This back-breaking labor, therefore, is what bind u.s. blacks to this land, and in a way, I believe, Native Americans can understand. Not forgetting what the Buffalo Soldiers were ordered to do to them out West.

Yet despite this, slavery's legacy endures. It prevails not only in the U.S. Constitution as regards U.S. prisons, providing for "involuntary servitude," where a disproportionate number of Afrikan-Americans now find themselves on "modern plantations," but also in u.s. institutions and culture. The ravages of slavery transformed the Afrikan into a nameless, stateless being bereft of tongue and cultural memory, and of some means to cut through the agony of his desolation and despair. This bode ill for his descendants. I am one of them.

As a young man, my thinking changed when I discovered my people in history. Their significant contribution to the advance of human civilization amazed me. This and their historic struggle to reclaim their rightful place under the sun affected me profoundly. It changed the course of my life as well as that of many young people of my generation cognizant of this history. Accordingly, we became advocates in the long-denied and unrecognized black struggle for social justice in the u.s. The white power structure felt threatened by this advocacy, by its assertiveness and growing confidence. Rather than with reason and fair treatment as its response, it chose a stick disguised as law enforcement. Unfortunately, violence ensued and some of us went underground, some of us were subsequently murdered, imprisoned, or both. As time passed, a few among us were released and have gone home. But I and those left are still in after over 43 years.

Imprisonment exacts an incalculable toll on the body and mind and is the closest descent into Hell as one can imagine. The warders aim to impress that every part of your being belongs to them. If not now, then soon or soon enough, that time is on their side. Whether you do or don't know how to hate, they will teach

you. If God does not exist, in here, you may wish that he or somebody like him did exist to intercede and comfort you. For you will presently discover that you and you alone are all there is in here. Enduring prison is one thing, surviving it is another.

The alchemy of a prison sentence transforms a person into an "alien" or social outcast, which exempts him from the rights, privileges, and tender mercies that are commonly accorded to the non-sentenced person. He is inventory on a shelf, color-coded, numbered, thrown in a cell and counted several times a day. His mail is delivered with neither a smile nor eye contact. He's a blank face to be treated with studied aloofness.

All sentenced prisoners have experienced this. Though our black faces abound inordinately in here, each prisoner is viewed up close as he steps inside the prison. And while the government seem never to run out of money for guns, bombs and planes, prisons seem never to run out of cells to put somebody in. Like shaking hands with the Devil, I found coming to terms with being in a cell to be quite the experience. It bears a distinct quality with which one has to reconcile. When you're engaged in constructive activity in the cell, it seems less confining than it actually is. Yet its distinct mind-squeezing quality applies especially when you brood, do nothing, indulge in self-pity, and see the space as having no possibilities.

Visualize a cell wall with a poster of an old tree-lined street, a bustling flower garden, a towering bridge and cityscape lighting up the night -- those are portals through which I can be elsewhere whenever my mind falls upon them. And when they are packed away for a cell move, the cell reverts to its dead, steely, cavernous state, echoing what it hears, and maybe could use a little paint.

Emerging from the cell heading down the tier and stairway out into the corridor towards the mess hall, an interview room or an assigned program area, regardless what jail I happen to be in, it's "just another day at Flat Rock." This contrived routine often leaves me feeling like a mouse running a maze. Often enough, I've had to remind myself that in this maze, I can become lost to family and friends and the outside world, that as I navigate this space of endless tomorrows, continuous close contact with them is imperative. Their presence in my life is what keeps me grounded, keeps my mind and hope alive.

I've been in a lot of prisons. The older ones where I've been held most – Clinton, Attica, Comstock – their worn-down stone steps stand out, and if they could speak, I've often wondered what would they say about the men who trod on them, about what they dreamed, their life's ambition, what went wrong. One can but assume that their crimes were mostly economic ones. If poverty generates obesity in that people eat what they can afford, the same may be said of certain crimes, because the vast majority of people in prison are poor and marginally educated. Poverty, ignorance, and desperation are no strangers to crime. It's not uncommon for people in dire circumstances to commit illegal acts that they might otherwise refrain from committing. When all else fails, people will desperately resort to doing whatever it takes, including crime, to support themselves and their families. For taking a crust of bread, the police will pursue a poor man to the ends of the earth and turn a blind eye to a rich man's theft of millions. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial ruin of countless U.S. citizens, none of the Wall Street bankers and traders rushed for the exit doors. Rich people, educated people, seldom go to prison or go to prison for very long. And as the "race card" plays out, whites in general who do land in here get better job assignments than do people who look like me.

The box (solitary confinement) is another nasty lil spot to avoid in here if you can. Rich people are seldom found in these places, because they are so good at escaping. I've been in the box more than a time or two, though less so lately. It's a cheerless, unpleasant place, and it smells bad. It brims with the sins and crimes committed against helpless men that can never be atoned for. In this world I live in, you have to make the best of what's before you. Laughter, for example, is "on the house," and no laughter is quite like the laughter you encounter in prison, often because we have little else. Sometimes, when we're feeling up to it and "on the down low," we talk so bad about a guard's momma, his fat kids, his big-nose wife with one eye, til if he knew, we'd never make it out the box alive.

One time I was in the box, they gave me a blanket that covered only half my body. The guards were amused. I was pissed! But after several days, they gave me a full one, just to keep me quiet. Each time in the box, its cold, gray, cheerless atmosphere packs me down inside myself, affording no relief except what I create for myself. So I would save my dry breakfast cereal and seek a trade with the guys. The haggling excited some – how many tiny boxes of cereal to trade for a piece of fruit, a chicken leg, or for something else? Others never saved and therefore had nothing to trade. From a sheet of writing paper, I would create a chessboard, write numbers on the squares, and fashion chess pieces with sliced bread. Push-ups and sit-ups, jogging in place, and taking naps were a fixed part of my daily routine.

During the night and early morning, I would sometimes lie awake, feeling the silence and its peace wash over me. Throughout the day, one can write but so long with a pen the length of my middle finger, read but so much "piss-poor" material that's almost like not reading at all, do but so many exercises. And my naps had to be sparing, otherwise my nights would be restless. Our rations were meager, and our hunger the day long.

Indeed, a routine in the box is imperative – making a way out of no way – and is as basic and urgent as a desperate gasp for air around something lodged in your throat. Some days I feel my blood racing to the stout beat of my heart; my thoughts refuse to be still. I want to shut down, but there's no off-switch. My years in the box were long, hurtful, mentally exhausting, and they may put me there again. What happens to men confined this way, for decades, often without feeling or seeing sunlight and devoid of meaningful human contact? When retribution becomes torment, prison conditions often teach men to hate. I ponder this in general population as I walk lock-step down prison corridors with other men.

As these years trickled by, photos of family and friends show that they have aged. My own face, hair, declining agility, show that I, too, have aged. A new world is out there now. It's as though I've hibernated these past 40+ years. So much has changed; so much to learn anew. The guards and prisoners I see now were not even born when I started this sentence. I was brave and brash back then. I was bold and presumed to know more about life and people than I had a right to. My aging journey has taught me that youth and ignorance often pave a thorny path. It's just as thorny as the one laid out for those who fight for social justice and what they believe is right.

Forty-three years in prison? Someone may wonder do I ask myself, "What am I doing here?" Or ask, "What's this prolonged imprisonment all about?" Save the occasional visit and phone call, my children, and now my grandchildren, have spent only a bit of time with me. Holding everything together while I'm away, my wife has suffered throughout all this. Family pressure, prolonged separation, all too often break up families. Thus, new relationships may form, and the prisoner may find himself even further removed from his family than he was before. A harsh penalty on top of his sentence. He himself may sometimes wonder: "Does anyone care?" His children, his grandchildren might sometimes ask, as do mine, "Why you, Dad; why you, Grampa?" Or wonder to themselves, "Why couldn't someone else take his place?" Questions born of love and earnest desire to have me home, not out of selfishness.

I serve an indefinite prison sentence and hope to survive it, but the parole board or you, my supporters, will decide my fate. Sensitive to both political pressure and "special interest groups," the Board's decisions are widely regarded as arbitrary and capricious. Because I'm a political prisoner, the Parole Board is far more predisposed to releasing an apolitical (or social) prisoner on parole than it is to releasing me. Otherwise, I would have been home years ago.

It maintains that its decisions are impartially made after an interview. Myself and others are persuaded that their decision is made prior to the parole interview. Before commencing the interview, Board commissioners rifle through their papers, which I think is mostly theater. But it's the only time you get to size them up; and they in turn take a quick peek at you. Though now most interviews are done by teleconference, seldom in person. They talk to you and you to them on video-screen. A panel of three usually conduct the interview, though sometimes two does it. They are ex-prosecutors, state investigators, and retired police. They will interpret and even twist every explanation of insight and expression of

remorse offered by a prisoner. They ignore favorable psychological evaluations, rob prisoners of hope, promote despair, discourage personal growth, and strip us of incentives. They are well practiced in manipulating human emotions. They open with pummeling questions about your offense, rake up your "criminal history," pick and pause over reports on your prison activity. They then make you wait five to six days before sending you their decision, which almost always is a denial.

"If the envelope bearing your decision is thick," guys used to say, "you've been denied, and if it's thin, you've made it." And there are those who say theirs were "thin" and they were still denied parole. Obviously, size doesn't matter. You simply know when you know! As the guard callously opened the envelope from my last Board appearance, "the appeal form" fell out before I could read the decision. I had only waited 40 years for it. Still, I read it, looking for some sign of hope. Accordingly, guys are reluctant to open a parole board decision. Having complied with all the rules and satisfied all structural requirements, how would you feel having to tell your mother, wife, and children that you've failed them!? You smother your disappointment and wish that you could shield them from that feeling, too.

The thought of spending the rest of my days in prison is despairing. I've not begun to think that yet and hope I never shall. Nowadays, people my age say, "Due to terminal illness or incapacitation, write a will and tell how you wish your remains disposed of." Talk like that makes me nervous. Before and during these 43 years in prison, I've lived according to my beliefs, fought for myself-respect, my community, and for social justice; along the way I've helped people where I could and have striven to make myself a better human being. I've kept faith with the belief that we humans are responsible for each other and for the welfare of all. So what to make of these long years in prison, I cannot say, I'm still here.

All Power To The People!

3 Mar - Seen This Before

We are happy to share a new poem from Marius Mason.

MORE:

Once on a snowy Detroit street, I saw a dog I knew
Crouched, tail-tucked and teeth-bared,
Freezing and arrested in the road
The Pound's truck parked
Engine running, door flung open
And a man in uniform, purring love-words, recklessly,
A hand held out in friendship
While the other one, the driver,
Hung back quietly, looking for the net and noose...
This moment like an image in a snow globe
Unveils itself to me as I listen to the radio,
The tone and timbre of the bi-cameral address contested and considered by journalists
(like King Louie in his Hall of Mirrors, an eternal royal image in procession becomes the media's reflection
and obsession)
And the ostensibly more mellow autocrat was quoted for our endless delectation
As he speechified before the howling mob, barking in response to
The singing, soothing and smoothly blandished platitudes of unity
And some seem mesmerized by this new manner and have paused in hope,
But like my friend, the old dog – who had to learn sly new human tricks-
I realized that these soft words can only mean
That right this moment, someone else behind the scenes
Is carrying the stick

5 Mar - Eric King Out of SHU and Officially Staying at FCI Florence

We are thrilled to announce that Eric is out of the SHU and has been officially transferred to FCI Florence.

MORE:

Even though we knew a transfer was imminent, it was up in the air where he would end up. Staying at FCI Florence is a great relief for Eric and his friends and family. His sanctions on canteen, phone and visits will continue for the next 36 days. All said and done he will have lost 93 days of connection with the outside aside from letters. Though the BOP attempted to crush Eric's support system, folks were relentless in showing them that we would not stand by and let them do this to our friend. Every phone call, email, letter and pushback to the BOP and inspector general was instrumental in making sure that his sanctions and placement were not more severe. Y'all are amazing and Eric feels thankful to have so many awesome folks by his side during this precarious journey. Inevitably Eric will need us to rally again in the future, but for now he is tucked into the mountains of Colorado still close to his family.

For those who wrote to Eric within the last few months: he only has 5 stamps right now and is waiting to get some more, so if you wrote Eric recently those letters will be delayed. He also is still waiting to receive his property from Englewood so it is possible that he has lost some addresses.

7 Mar - The Death of Lynne Stewart

Former political prisoner, radical attorney, and committed revolutionary Lynne Stewart has passed. We're including tributes and other writings about Lynne below.

MORE:

March 7th - Lynne Stewart, Lifelong Fighter and People's Lawyer, Dies

After suffering a major stroke on March 1, Lynne Stewart died Tuesday evening at home, after being granted a compassionate release from prison three years ago due to fourth-stage breast cancer.

Stewart devoted her law practice to defending the poor, underprivileged, unwanted and forgotten, according to her partner Ralph Poynter.

The human rights attorney was arrested on April 9, 2002, on charges of helping pass messages from her client, Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, an Egyptian cleric convicted of masterminding the 1993 World Trade Center attack in New York City, to his followers in al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, an organization designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S.

Stewart was subsequently convicted for conspiracy and providing material support to terrorists, while her felony conviction led to her automatic disbarment.

Her sentence was characterized by many as an attempt by the U.S. government to silence dissent, curtail vigorous defense by lawyers, instill fear in those who seek to help Arabs and Muslims being prosecuted for free speech and defend the rights of all oppressed people.

Attorney Leonard Weinglass, said of her incarceration, "The Lynne Stewart case is the case that's going to mark this era as the era of the war on terrorists, which includes the war on lawyers who defend those who are accused of terrorism. To put her behind bars when no one was injured, no one was harmed, when those who produced the torture memos, those who produced the war are going free and even prospering is really the irony of our time."

Stewart fought false accusations and a government frame-up. Originally sentenced to 28 months in prison, she was resentenced on July 10, 2010 — in an unprecedented move after her bail was suddenly revoked — to 10 years in prison for showing an alleged lack of remorse after her initial sentencing.

In a statement after her release on Dec. 31, 2013, Poynter said, "The enduring global movement for social justice has persevered — ever inspired by Lynne Stewart's steadfast refusal to bend the knee, submit to coercion or official duplicity."

March 8th - Honoring Lynne Stewart by Noelle Hanrahan (Prison Radio)

Yesterday at 7:00pm in New York, Lynne Stewart passed away. On Thursday, sitting with Ralph, Ginny, and Don, Lynne - barely able to talk - said to me, "Don't cry".

Our memories of Lynne include her blue ribbon apple, blueberry, and rhubarb pie- just ask me and her grandkids.

Way back before she went to prison in 2002, we sat recording a piece at Prison Radio. I had her read a William O Douglas quote. She looked at me, winked and smiled. She said, "You know Noelle, he is not Irish". I turned bright red and just about bust a gut laughing. Being 100% Irish, I assumed William O. Douglas was Irish.

One night, we were having dinner at my house in San Francisco, and I said I would bring strawberries and whipped cream to the table. Some time later, Lynne yells upstairs, "Tell Noelle she isn't going to be able to whip the cream, the person she sent out to get it brought back half and half."

Lynne Stewart had a number of amazing qualities- she was a compass for the truth with a bitter wit that could cut to the quick. She, like Judi Bari, was a woman unwilling to suffer fools.

She put a bright white hot spotlight on justice.

Under indictment, she spoke out for political prisoners. While appealing her sentence, she spoke out for Mumia.

Her example is courageous. She followed in the tradition of John Brown and Marilyn Buck. She believed in the humanity and the promise of freedom for all, and she fought every single day to make sure that our political prisoners were represented.

March 8th - Farewell thoughts to my friend Lynne Stewart by Jaan Laaman

With a sunny sky outside, and a "Day Without Woman Strikes" and other very positive and powerful events taking place all across the United States and around the world, I am sitting quietly and sadly reflecting on the life of my friend Lynne, who died last night.

There is so much that can, and probably will be said about this dynamic and wonderful woman. For decade Lynne Stewart was a, if not the, preeminent human rights, civil rights, peoples' lawyer, boldly fighting for justice, equality, and freedom in many of the most important and widely reported cases in the United States.

Lynne truly was fearless and could not be intimidated by prosecutors, judges or FBI and other gun-toting goons. She believed in, and fought for Constitutional rights and equal justice. She always fought for her clients.

Lynne was not only brave and determined, but she was a brilliant attorney. She also was very hard working, doing the necessary research and innovative paperwork that often forced the courts to accept her arguments.

Lynne touched so many people and lives in large and dynamic ways, in personal, caring and nurturing ways. As a lawyer, Lynne was a very significant part of the legal team for all of us Ohio-7 people in our many trials. Beyond just her work and skill as an attorney, Lynne was also there for our children and families. As a small boy, my son Ricky always stayed at Lynne's home when he came to visit me and his

mother while we were being held in MCC New York. Lynne was our family friend, as well as a sister and a comrade in the struggle.

So many people will miss you, Lynne, your guidance and wisdom, your concern and care. the love you had for the people and the freedom struggle is only matched by the love so many people, freedom fighters included, have and will continue, to have for you.

Rest easy my sister. We will shed our tears for you then firm up our hearts and spirits and continue in the revolutionary freedom and justice struggle that you contributed so much and uniquely to.

March 8th - Lynne Stewart: People's Lawyer, Freedom Fighter Presentè! by Mumia Abu-Jamal

Lynne Stewart, after 78 winters in America, has died, after battling for years against breast cancer.

But that was just some of her battles, and like most of us, she won some, and lost some. But she never stopped fighting!

For decades, she and her husband, Ralph, fought for New York's site political activists and revolutionaries, like Black Panthers and Young Lords—a Puerto Rican socialist collective. But mostly, they fought for the freedom of the poor and dispossessed of New York's Black and Brown ghettos.

She—they—fought often and fought well in the city's courts.

Her husband, Ralph, was a stalwart of the Black Panther Party, and her most committed defender.

When Lynne was targeted by the US Justice department, and she was tried and convicted for putting out a press release for her client, the blind Egyptian sheikh, Omar Abdul Rahman, Ralph stood in the hot Washington, DC sun, with a sign in front of the White House, demanding his wife's release.

Her defense of her client was in the best tradition of criminal defense lawyers, and she received significant support from a broad swath of the Bar—from lawyers-yes; judges, no.

Initially sentenced to 28 months, the 2d Circuit sent it back for resentencing-and she got 10 years!

Her support only grew.

The late activist lawyer, Bill Kunstler once opined that defense lawyers should be officers of their clients, instead of officers of the court.

Lynne Stewart was an officer of her clients; a People's Lawyer, beloved and respected.

May she ever be so.

March 9th - Tribute from Puerto Rican former political prisoner Dylcia Pagan

Lynne Stewart – My Comrade, Sister Warrior Woman

During the 20 years of my Revolutionary Sabbatical, there wasn't a birthday of mine that Lynne forgot. To me it was always my personal New Year's greeting from her.

I have shared many memories in my life with her. She was always there with unconditional love, support from her revolutionary heart and soul. She is truly a woman warrior because what took precedence in her life was struggle for human rights, Political Prisoners in all of the movements of true struggle. There was Lynne.

Her smile and eyes were always filled with determination striving for a victorious result. I am very fortunate to have had her in my life. The distance of time and place didn't matter – I knew she was there.

Lynne, Hermana de Lucha!
Te amo Hoy, Manana y Siempre
Hasta la Victoria Camarada
I carry you in my heart
Ashe!

8 Mar - Day Without a Woman Strike

Please read this solidarity statement from Jaan Laaman.

MORE:

A salute of Solidarity and Support on International Women's Day, March 8, 2017 from political prisoner Jaan Laaman.

Allow me to send warm, positive, hopeful and militant solidarity and revolutionary support to all the women leading, pushing, planning and participating in the very necessary ongoing freedom and justice struggles all across the US and around the world.

From the dynamic and historic marches of January 21 to the "Day Without a Woman Strike" today, March 8, women have been leading and advancing the overall freedom struggle just when this has been most needed.

Even behind these prison walls, the insight, fighting spirit, and direction you sisters are providing is seen and felt. We need this, and all of you, more than ever.

Let me close with the words of a fierce revolutionary, Marilyn Buck: "I thank all of you who struggle for a day, for a year, for a lifetime."

And I send this out in the spirit of Lynne Stewart, our fearless Peoples' Attorney, and dear friend, who just yesterday passed away.

10 Mar - The Cleveland 4

Justine Strehle was awoken on a Monday morning by a phone call from a friend. Her boyfriend, Brandon Baxter, had been arrested. It was a Cleveland spring just under five years ago.

MORE:

by Bea Aldrich (*14 East*)

At first, Strehle thought it was a joke. She lived with Baxter at the time and describes him today as one of the sweetest people she has ever dated.

The couple was essentially homeless back then — living in a warehouse that the Occupy Cleveland Movement had rented with as many as 20 other people at a time. Baxter's room was nothing more than a tent, stocked with the few possessions he had brought from his dad's house that was being foreclosed. At one point, half of their mattress was covered in black mold, causing Strehle to become sick after nights of sleeping on it. Baxter nursed her back to health. He had paid their bills and made sure they could eat.

Then he was arrested.

Baxter and four others — Douglas Wright, Connor Stevens, Joshua Stafford and Anthony Hayne — were arrested on April 30, 2012, in what the FBI characterized as a sting operation. According to court documents, the five had been charged with conspiracy to use explosives, attempt to use explosives and

malicious attempt to destroy a northeast Ohio bridge. However, Strehle believes that it was actually FBI entrapment, and that they were manipulated by FBI informant Shaquille Azir to participate in the attempted destruction of the bridge.

According to the Justice Department, entrapment is a criminal defense that argues the government has coerced innocent people into criminal acts in order to prosecute them. In the court of law, this defense can rest on “mild coercion, [pleas] based on need, sympathy, or friendship [or] extraordinary promises of the sort ‘that would blind the ordinary person to his legal duties.’”

Anthony Hayne, according to court documents, pleaded guilty on July 25, 2012. He was followed by Wright, Baxter and Stevens, who pleaded guilty on Sept. 5, 2012. Stafford took his case to trial and was found guilty on all charges June 13, 2013.

Baxter and Strehle are no longer a couple. But Strehle still cares deeply about him and the other members of the Cleveland 4 — a name that supporters created after the arrest. Strehle said a lot of political prisoners have a name, and it was an easy way to refer to them all. She runs their support website that has updates about their sentencing and new information about their case.

Part 1: The Beginning

Baxter is blond and well built. In 2011 he had one-half of his head shaved; he would wear a bandana around his neck or sport a colorful tie-dyed shirt. Sometimes, he would go by the nickname “Scavi,” according to Strehle (this is different from the criminal complaint that indicates his nickname was “Skabby”). Baxter first realized he was an anarchist in 2010 when the Occupy Movement was just beginning. He was 18 years old and had a growing dissatisfaction with government and a drive to fight corruption. Most of the others in the Cleveland 4 identified as anarchists in 2011, according to Strehle.

“It was not an identity which I created for myself. Rather, I had an epiphany one day that government is inherently bound for corruption,” Baxter wrote in a personal statement in support of his petition for clemency, which he made in the fall of 2016.

Baxter surrounded himself with friends who felt the same and became involved with Food Not Bombs, an organization filled with activists trying to provide food to those living in poverty.

“I love to cook, and I love being on the streets meeting all of its wonderfully idiosyncratic characters,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency.

Food Not Bombs provided food to those involved in Occupy Cleveland, heartily filling the stomachs of all protesters from one tent on the street. Baxter first attended Occupy Cleveland in its early months representing Food Not Bombs, and became more and more engaged in the protest.

The Occupy Movement was a protest that started on Wall Street — commonly known as Occupy Wall Street. The goal was to fight back against big banks and the one percent that owned them — going by the slogan “We are the 99 percent.” The movement popped up in major cities across the country — including Cleveland and Chicago — and protested the “corrosive power” of the big banks and corporations controlling the global market, according to the Occupy Wall Street website.

Baxter had solid friends in Occupy and Food Not Bombs, including the other members of the Cleveland 4: Doug Wright, Connor Stevens and Josh Stafford. There was a whole community. The Food Not Bombs tent was turned into a pantry that was open all day and night for the protesters to feast from. Baxter’s girlfriend at the time, Justine Strehle, was a part of this community. She rotates her hair color, but in 2011 it was bright red. She met him on her very first day of working at Occupy in the fall of 2011.

Stevens was also involved in Food Not Bombs for a time, as well as the Anarchist Black Cross — a movement “supporting those imprisoned for struggling for freedom and liberty,” according to their website. But he met most of the others that would become the Cleveland 4 at Occupy.

Another close friend was Gus Hurst, a protester who shared Baxter’s political viewpoints. Hurst is skinny with slicked-back light hair. A rolled cigarette sat between his gap-toothed smile during an interview last spring. While he is a bit hazy about some of the details of what happened five years ago, other memories remain crystal clear.

“They weren’t idiots,” Hurst said. “They were smart people with good intentions.”

Baxter expressed interest in wanting to help people, then and now. “I got involved with Occupy Cleveland not with the intent to terrorize and cause chaos, but to be part of something to affect [sic] substantial change for the better,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency. “I just had no idea what I was doing back then.”

The beginning was good, but the movement was crumbling with each passing day. According to Strehle, at the time of Baxter’s arrest, a divide was developing between anarchists and liberals within the Occupy Movement. Or, as Strehle describes it, it was a divide between those who wanted to cooperate with the police and those, like Baxter, who did not think it was necessary. But she insists this protest was never intended to be violent.

“[The members of Cleveland 4] were picked out and assembled for the ability to be alienated,” Hurst said.

According to a document released by the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund (PCJF), the FBI treated the Occupy Movement as a potential terrorist threat and had been monitoring the organization since August 2011, at least a month before the protests actually began. In some cases, the FBI notified businesses and the public of Occupy action before the movement organizers had announced anything.

FBI spokesperson Christopher Allen declined to comment on this particular case, but said in an email that the “FBI does not investigate individuals based solely on First Amendment-protected activity.”

Although five people were arrested in spring 2012, Cleveland 4 only refers to Baxter, Stevens, Wright and Stafford. The fifth man, Hayne, is not included because he testified against the others in court, according to Strehle and Hurst. Hayne took a plea deal for a shorter sentence than the other defendants eventually received. The court rejected the original plea deal between Hayne and the government on Nov. 30, 2012. He received six years in prison and life on parole.

Hayne was the oldest of those involved, approximately 37 years old at the time of the arrest. By testifying, Hayne lost the others’ trust, Hurst said. That is why the convicted are known as the Cleveland 4 and not the Cleveland 5, as seen on the support website Strehle runs.

Part 2: The Informant

It was autumn. The FBI had directed a paid informant — going by the name of Shaquille Azir — to investigate any suspicious or potentially threatening activity at an Occupy Cleveland protest on Oct. 21, 2011. It was there Azir met Douglas Wright.

Wright was in his mid-twenties; he had black hair and a mohawk. He was part of a group of men that the court documents describe as suspicious — walkie-talkies hanging around their necks and masks covering their faces, wearing black clothes and holding anarchist flags.

Wright told Azir he had been identifying as an anarchist for the past 12 years, showing him scars of a broken nose and missing teeth from previous protests turned riots, according to the criminal complaint— a document of evidence the FBI presented to the court. The two exchanged phone numbers and, from that point on, Azir made himself a fixture in Wright’s life.

“He was always a lot closer to Doug,” Baxter wrote in an email interview in early 2017. “He met Doug first and used Doug to lure the rest of us into the conspiracy. He spent a lot more time with Doug. Azir definitely tried to insert himself as a parental figure in Doug’s life. Mine as well, but to a lesser degree.”

According to Hurst and Strehle, Wright did not have a relationship with his family. Strehle recalls a conversation she had with Wright where he had stated that being involved with Azir was the first time he had ever felt like he had had a father figure. Hurst was 16 at the time and had a very close relationship with his family, which is why he believes he wasn’t targeted like the others.

“Call it entrapment or not,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency. “The fact remains that Azir took advantage of my poverty by buying me meals, giving me money, giving me a job working directly for him, offering me a place to stay rent-free, and dozens of other promises to assist me in various ways, some more significant than others.”

Baxter first met Azir at a 24-hour restaurant in Cleveland in November 2011. Wright, who was a friend of Baxter’s, had introduced them.

“We wanted to affect [sic] tangible change, but realized our limitations,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency explaining why meeting with Azir was enticing.

According to Baxter, the Occupy encampment had been evicted downtown and there was nowhere for them to go. According to Strehle, they had been living in an abandoned church around this time. And Azir made it easy to talk with him. Right off the bat, he gave them money to cover the meal they were sharing.

“Here we were, a group of young white men, torn black jeans, tattoos, piercings, disheveled and dirty from days and weeks on the streets and on the road, a very odd lot smoking re-rolled cigarette butts and copious amounts of marijuana, sitting in a storefront diner in a decent neighborhood with a middle-aged black man dressed in crisp casual attire and studs in his ears, having what happened to be a strange business meeting,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency.

Azir was a paid informant of the FBI. According to the criminal complaint, he was paid approximately \$5,750 and \$550 for expenses. He had a long criminal record, including one conviction for cocaine possession in 1990, another for robbery in 1991, and several more for passing bad checks. And here he was, working undercover.

Azir came with the promise of money and food, and with that a sense of hope. He offered the friends jobs flipping houses, an offer they could not pass up.

Baxter’s father was going through his second divorce and was close to being evicted from Baxter’s childhood home.

“I had taken to leaving home for long stretches at a time, sleeping wherever I happened to be that night, or not at all,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency. “If I didn’t have a place to crash I’d sleep outside tucked between buildings, under a bench, behind a dumpster. It didn’t matter.”

Food was sparse; sometimes Baxter would have to eat meals out of a dumpster. At the same time, Baxter was suffering from drug addiction. He would take and re-roll cigarette butts that he found in ashtrays. At one point Azir gave him Adderall.

“He signed a statement claiming that I told him I was prescribed [adderall] and had forgotten to take my dose that day, and he had a prescription and was only trying to help me,” Baxter wrote in an email interview. “But that was bogus, twisting words, something I had said along the lines about wishing that I was prescribed it because I felt that it leveled me out. And he gave me more than a prescribed dose.”

Azir offered Baxter stability. He said he was going to teach Baxter how to drive (he never actually did). But, on a bigger scale, according to Baxter, Azir offered to buy his father's house that he was close to being evicted from, selling it back to him at a rate he could afford.

"If Azir didn't say stuff like this regularly, his constant offers of assistance, I probably would have steered very clear of him and his talk of explosives," Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency.

When they first met Azir back in November, Baxter remembers that Azir wanted to know about specific actions they could take beyond just protesting. According to Baxter, he had never viewed the conversation as anything serious — jokes at best.

It was not until February 2012 that any conversations between the group and Azir were recorded after three months of contact. According to the criminal complaint, this was because Wright "did not discuss more definite or detailed plans for criminal activity." They met up again about three months later. According to the statement Baxter wrote for his clemency petition, he did not even remember Azir's name.

On Feb. 15, 2012, Azir picked Wright up from a local drugstore to get breakfast. Again, he asked Wright about any plans to follow through with their talk of tearing down bank signs. According to the criminal complaint, Wright had not talked with the four others for some time, and they weren't as sure about getting involved with Azir.

By Feb. 20, the Occupy Cleveland movement was beginning to crumble. All that was left was one booth, according to Baxter, and he had nowhere to go. He felt constrained, like he could not do anything of actual significance as an activist, sensing an overall apathy among his peers.

"Whenever I hear the phrase 'hanging out' I imagine clothes drying on a line, being blown this way and that by the wind, not doing much of anything," Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency.

Azir was the guy with the money — someone to help them out financially in ways they could not help themselves. And so, conversations with Azir continued.

At one point, Baxter recalls kidding about doing a protest at a newly opened Cleveland casino.

"I joked that we could find people to lock themselves to the casino doors and take bets on how long it would take for them to be arrested," Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency. He viewed this as nothing more than a joke.

The next meeting Wright and Baxter had with Azir, on Feb. 24, 2012, was the first meeting that was recorded.

Court documents suggest that Wright mentioned buying explosives at this meeting as well, but there is no recorded evidence, only what Azir told the FBI after the meeting.

Azir met two more members of the group during the third meeting: Connor Stevens and Anthony Hayne. This was the first meeting that was taped by Azir. The next several meetings, according to court documents, were about the group potentially obtaining a copy of the "Anarchist Cookbook," which details how to build weapons and explosives.

When reading back over the transcript of the recordings, Strehle is doubtful that actual plans for violence were ever set in motion.

"They sounded like a joke," Strehle said. "It was like reading a really bad movie plot."

In one conversation, Wright is shown to have laughed when talking about the “Anarchist Cookbook.”

Azir went on to ask Wright how much money they might need to make explosives, which Wright was unsure about.

“I haven’t really read too much into yet [sic], um, I’ll have to get into that,” Wright said on the tape. Azir kept pushing the need for explosives, saying, “Well you gotta get with me,” to Wright.

Baxter said he was wary of getting explosives during these conversations with Azir, but there is one piece of incriminating evidence in the transcript — a single line — that suggested Baxter was in favor of blowing up a bridge.

The statement was laid out plainly, easy to reach like low-hanging fruit. However, a lot of the conversation around this line is described as unintelligible by the court documents. There is nothing written down about what was said beforehand, and much of what comes after are select snippets of an incomplete conversation.

On March 28, 2012, Azir arranged a meeting with a man who he said could supply them with explosives. In actuality, this man was the undercover FBI agent. Wright, Baxter and Azir discussed obtaining riot gear that they could take to the NATO summit protest in Chicago. The informant showed them pictures of possible explosives they could purchase, which Wright and Baxter turned down.

“Yeah, we are going to wait on that,” Wright said, according to the court documents. “We definitely might be interested later but not right this minute.”

Baxter claims there are hours of missing conversations they had with the informant. According to Baxter, Azir would not let the idea of getting explosives go, but this interaction wasn’t recorded. As a result, it didn’t make it into the evidence provided by law enforcement.

“Azir always took the lead, while crafting the situation so as to lead from behind,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency. “He told Doug to make the call to the agent. He would give Doug this look, one that said, ‘I’ll let you do the talking.’ Doug looked up to Azir. Azir validated Doug. Fed his ego.”

Part 3: The Summit

Gus Hurst was also planning to go to the NATO summit protests in Chicago with Stevens. The two had bus tickets until Stevens was arrested with the rest of the Cleveland 4.

The protest was meant as an anti-war demonstration. Former President Barack Obama held the summit of NATO leaders in Chicago to discuss the war in Afghanistan in May 2012. Protesters from the Occupy Movement were in heavy attendance.

In a case that is similar in many ways to the Cleveland 4’s, three activists dubbed the NATO 3 were arrested in May 2012. The three had been charged with making Molotov cocktails – a destructive device made from a flammable substance that is normally alcohol – in preparation for the NATO summit meeting in Chicago, according to a report by the Chicago Tribune. Like the Cleveland 4, they were young male anarchist activists who had gotten caught up in an FBI sting operation that many supporters of the three men believe to be entrapment.

According to a 2014 article by the Chicago Tribune, the judge in charge of the case gave lighter prison sentences to the NATO 3 than the prosecutors had sought. All three were found not guilty of any serious terrorism charges because the judge and jury did not believe that a serious, cunning plan was ever set in motion. Instead they were convicted of “possessing an incendiary device and misdemeanor mob action,” according to the Chicago Tribune. This is perhaps the biggest difference between the two cases: The Cleveland 4 were viewed as national terrorists, while the NATO 3 were not.

According to a report from In These Times, the police and FBI were investigating numerous activists — particularly those who identified as anarchists — leading up to the NATO summit protest in Chicago. And it was the Occupy Movement that was targeted the most. Following the NATO 3 arrests, Chicago police officers acknowledged that undercover investigations were going on and that law enforcement was targeting anarchists. Meetings were monitored by informants or by electronic surveillance with help from Chicago police. It was an investigation that seemed like an undercover anarchist witch hunt.

According to a report by The Guardian, big banks played a role in the government's investigation of Occupy. They worked with the Department of Homeland Security, FBI and local police.

The arrests were brutal. According to The Guardian, police action was characterized by “group disruption, canister missiles to the skulls of protesters, people held in handcuffs so tight they were injured, [and] people held in bondage till they were forced to wet or soil themselves.”

This all came with the FBI insistence that the Occupy Movement was a terrorist threat.

Part 4: The Arrest

Joshua Stafford — a friend of the others — was unaware of any potential use of explosives until April 27, just a few days before the arrest. He went by the nickname Skelly, according to Strehle (this is different from the criminal complaint that indicates his nickname was “Skully”). He is lean with curly hair.

At that point, talks about picking up the explosives from the undercover agent were underway. According to court documents, Wright had told Stafford about retrieving explosives and Stafford had agreed to go with Wright and Azir. This delivery was originally supposed to be on Saturday, April 28. However, Wright, Stevens and Baxter all said they could not make it because there was another protest event they wanted to attend.

Azir called Baxter that Saturday, according to court documents, at which point Baxter said he was concerned with police surveillance from the protest happening later that day, but “[Baxter] wanted the plan [of bombing a bridge] to proceed.” This phone call was never recorded. It was one of several phone calls that went unrecorded that day — another one with Baxter and one with Wright. The taping wouldn't resume until the next day.

On Sunday, Azir picked up Wright, Baxter and Hayne to retrieve the explosives, along with vests and gas masks. Shortly after purchasing the explosives, Wright became nervous about being arrested, even turning on the television to muffle their conversation in case they were being bugged. According to court documents, Azir assured him that everything was fine.

Hayne tossed around some ideas of what they could potentially blow up, but Azir told him that they would be placing the explosives on a bridge off a highway.

As the actual threat of violence seemed more and more real, Stevens wanted out. According to court documents, he had told Wright that he did not want to be a part of this, but still wanted to work on rehabbing houses with Azir. But it was already too late.

“I played lookout the day we set the fake explosives at the bridge,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency. “I never touched the devices or the detonators. You couldn't have paid me to touch them.”

Baxter owns up to his own actions that late Sunday night, fading into early Monday morning. “I'm not saying that in the end I wasn't there, in the middle of the night, under that bridge. I was,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency. “But how we got to that point doesn't follow the FBI narrative of a simple sting operation.”

They attempted to detonate the explosives from a remote location, according to court documents.

Baxter was only 20 years old at the time of his arrest. And on May 3, 2012, the five were charged “in a three-count indictment with conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction,” according to court documents.

The first count, according to court documents, charged that they “did knowingly conspire to use a weapon of mass destruction.” The second count charged that they “did knowingly attempt to use a weapon of mass destruction.” And the third count charged that they “maliciously attempted to damage and destroy, by means of explosives... real property used in interstate commerce, specifically the Brecksville-Northfield High Level Bridge, and aided and abetted each other to do the same.”

Hayne was the first to plead guilty on on all three counts on July 25, 2012, according to records retrieved from Public Access to Electronic Court Records (PACER).

In August 2012, Stevens argued in court that the obtainment of his statement was a violation of his Miranda rights – that allows arrested individuals the right to remain silent and the right to an attorney – as outlined in *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966). The FBI agents interrogating Stevens took his statement despite Stevens saying several times he did not want to talk. The motion to suppress his statement was denied, according to court documents, because the interrogation was in the interest of public safety. However, police officials insisted in a recorded 2012 press conference that the public was never in danger during the course of the sting operation.

On Sept. 5, 2012, Baxter appeared in court. The judge told him he was not required to plead guilty.

Baxter pleaded guilty to the charges. Wright and Stevens also pleaded guilty that day.

“I didn’t fully understand the law surrounding entrapment when I was awaiting trial,” Baxter wrote in an email interview.

Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency that for the first three months of his pretrial detention he was placed in solitary confinement.

Baxter feels his court-appointed attorney – John Pyle – did not have enough time to work on his case.

“When he would come to visit me in the pretrial facility in Youngstown, Ohio, he was also coming to visit up to half a dozen other prisoners he was representing,” Baxter wrote in an email interview.

Pyle, however, said that there was no shortage of time devoted to Baxter’s case. “I am very comfortable with the advice I gave him,” Pyle said in a phone interview.

In November 2012, Anthony Hayne’s testimony was presented in court. It was a petition for a plea deal that intended to give him a shorter sentence. In his testimony, he claimed there was discussion of explosives without the informant, Azir, present.

This was the moment that the Cleveland 5 became the Cleveland 4. Hayne later said in the testimony that the undercover FBI agent taught them how to use the explosives step by step.

Anthony Hayne did receive a shorter sentence — six years in prison and life on parole. According to the Cleveland 4 website, Hayne was recently released from prison into a halfway house. Strehle only found out he had been released because Hayne had messaged her on Facebook asking for forgiveness. She responded once to see if it really was him and then did not message again once she was sure. According to Strehle, she was not the only person that Hayne had messaged.

Hayne could not be reached for comment.

According to previous court rulings — precedents that were used in this case — there are two things a case needs to be a federal crime of terrorism, and neither necessarily have to be considered violent. The first is that the act must attempt “to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation or coercion, or to retaliate against government conduct.” The second is that it includes one of the crimes described in the “Terrorism Transcending National Boundaries” clause of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, such as assault or murder.

Wright was sentenced to 11 years and six months in prison. Baxter was sentenced to nine years and nine months in prison. Stevens was sentenced to eight years and one month in prison. All three received life on parole after release.

Baxter’s attorney argued before the sentencing on Nov. 20, 2012, that the court should give Baxter a lesser sentence based on the fact he “had a traumatic childhood, and is a reparable individual, the explosives were inert, and an FBI paid informant... played a major role in facilitating the offense.” The court agreed with many of the attorney’s arguments and sentenced Baxter to less than what the federal guidelines suggested.

Stafford went to trial, not agreeing to plead guilty like the others. The jury found him guilty on all three counts on which he had been charged. He received the second-longest sentence with 10 years in prison and life on parole.

“If I would have had half the comprehension of the law that I do today, I would have done everything differently,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency. “I would have gone to trial.”

Part 5: The Aftermath

Baxter has about three years and nine months left on his sentence. He spends his days studying to become a paralegal.

Baxter is quiet and maintains a soft tone when speaking over the phone. There was a mix-up over time zones as to when he was supposed to call me. He apologized profusely, despite it being my fault for not indicating I am in Chicago. But, mostly, he sounds exhausted — almost as if the place is devouring his very being.

“Someone told me early on that this time can be used for great things. I’ve never stopped holding onto those words, sometimes for dear life,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency.

Baxter believes becoming a paralegal will give him many options to pursue. He can provide prisoner support. “I can assist a criminal defense attorney, and as a former prisoner I will have invaluable experience and perspective to offer,” he wrote for his petition for clemency.

Baxter has a bigger goal: He wants to start a nonprofit organization that is meant to help those living in poverty.

“Ultimately what I want to do is reduce the cost of living for as many low-income people as possible because I want to empower these people,” Baxter wrote in his statement for his petition for clemency. “And I believe in the potential they can achieve if their struggles weren’t constrained by day-to-day survival.”

Baxter’s goal of helping those in poverty is not too different from what it was in 2011; he believes that it is just more thoroughly articulated now.

“When I was 19 I would say that I was still trying to figure out what it was I wanted to do, and that I was merely moving in a direction,” Baxter wrote in an email interview. “I’d say that I’m still only moving in a direction, but that that direction is more clear to me now.”

Prison has, by no means, been easy for Baxter. He wrote that resources are limited — he does not receive the same opportunities for education as he would on the outside. But he will not let this hold him back.

“Nothing about this system is conducive to growth, and I continue to grow despite this reality,” Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency. “Imagine a flower growing between the cracks in concrete, then imagine how that flower can blossom into a beautiful garden once transplanted into a field with all it needs to be nurtured.”

Baxter spends long stretches in solitary confinement — or, as it is commonly referred to, the SHU. He once did nine months in the SHU, immediately followed by six months. He said a lot of the reason why has to do with prison politics. He said the longest time he spent in the SHU was for disciplinary action. He was accused of assaulting an officer, who Baxter said actually assaulted him.

“The assault infraction was dropped down to making a threat because there was absolutely no evidence that I had made an assault,” Baxter wrote in an email interview.

Baxter and Stevens have been moved around to different prisons quite a bit over the course of their sentences. Baxter has stayed in prisons from Indiana to California to Louisiana. Stevens is currently in Kentucky.

“[But] overall it is a deadly monotony. This is perhaps the most dangerous part of prison life: the dull, mind-numbing, soul-defacing routine,” Stevens wrote in an email interview. “This is the real threat: not so much to the flesh, but the almost imperceptible damage wrought against the soul, such that we become like automatons, cut off from our souls, our depth, the endlessly rich content of our psyches which can find no expression in outward forms.”

Stevens spends his days writing poetry. He started writing when he was 13 years old, and now most of his work is published on the Cleveland 4 website.

“I believe that at this point in my life, my poetry has been perhaps my greatest contribution to the world,” Stevens wrote in an email interview. “Which isn’t saying much, really, but I do believe there is some worth to it, and folks often tell me how it resonates with them.”

He signs his email “Warm Regards, Connor Stevens,” almost as if he is reaching through the computer screen with a heartfelt embrace.

Wright and Stafford could not be reached for comment.

Baxter has been in prison for the past five years. In 2015, he motioned to the court to have his sentence corrected. The motion was denied. According to the court documents, the judge responded to Baxter’s argument that Azir had been manipulating him with, “And I know... you want to tell me how bad the [informant] is but you didn’t — you pled guilty, so entrapment is not a defense. The [informant] is obviously a facilitator, but a facilitator does not mean it’s a defense.”

The court also ruled that Baxter could not show that any lack of preparation by his attorney – John Pyle – affected the proceedings.

In June 2016, lawyer Amanda Schemkes says she started working on Baxter’s case. The two were connected through the National Lawyers Guild. Baxter had wanted help submitting a Freedom of Information Act request through a National Lawyers Guild support committee for political prisoners.

Baxter and Schemkes began working on a petition of clemency, requesting his sentences be commuted to time served in prison and a five-year cap on his supervised release.

The petition for clemency is made to the President of the United States. Former President Barack Obama was still in office when the petition was made last fall. According to Schemkes, dozens of friends and family wrote letters on Baxter's behalf, as well as several people that Baxter did not even know, including people from advocacy groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, as well as journalists and professors. Obama granted clemency to 1,927 people during his time in office, the most petitions granted since Harry Truman. Baxter was not one of them.

Schemkes said that it is not uncommon for the FBI to target vulnerable young men in the name of fighting terrorism.

A year and a half before the members of Cleveland 4 were arrested, *Mother Jones* released an investigation conducted with the University of California-Berkeley. In 2011, the FBI had over 15,000 paid informants working for the bureau, according to FBI records. Upon reviewing 508 prosecution cases, the researchers concluded that, of the 158 prosecutions that relied on sting operations, 49 of the defendants were led by "an agent provocateur — an FBI operative instigating terrorist action." In response to the *Mother Jones* investigation, FBI spokeswoman Kathleen Wright said, "We are prohibited from using threats or coercion."

"It's a pretty horrific trend," Schemkes said, tying it to the Patriot Act — a national security bill that expanded government surveillance on a massive scale after the 9/11 attacks.

Baxter will not give up trying to reduce his sentence, grasping at even the faintest glimmers of hope.

"I need the chance to see what it means to go from being a flower growing out of concrete to being a flower in the world," Baxter wrote for his petition for clemency.

He's not finished yet.

11 Mar - Walter Bond Update

We haven't heard a lot from Walter Bond lately, but want to share the following by him.

MORE:

I am preparing to transfer to another institution. I am going to need some extra funds to get set up as quickly and smoothly as possible. So I am asking you in the Animal Rights and associated communities to lend a helping hand. I love my supporters and I really do my best to stay in contact but prison has it's financial burdens. For me to write and receive emails I am charged a fee. phone calls cost up to five dollars a call! and my Vegan diet is not accommodated by the prison system which means that I must pay for my food at the prison commissary and hustle what I can. In short just like where you are, everything costs money. Accept here I am afforded no real opportunities to make money and support myself.

I now have 7 years behind bars with approximately 4 more to go. It feels good to be getting closer to the door and closer to returning to life outside these bars and walls. I want to thank all the great people who continue to write me after all these years from all over the world! The Vegans and Straight Edge kids from Sweden and Finland especially have showed me so much love!

Remember injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere and the Animals and the Earth are currently experiencing the most injustice of all. Thank you all for hanging in there with me and more importantly for defending this Earth in every way we can. Until next time take care and I'll do the same. Animal Liberation, Whatever It May Take!

25 Mar - Futures without Walls: A Welcome Home Celebration for Maliki Shakur Latine

WHAT: Tribute and Celebration

WHEN: 4:00-8:00pm, Saturday, March 25

WHERE: MayDay Space - 176 St Nicholas Ave, Brooklyn, New York 11237*

**NOTE:* Unfortunately, the 3rd floor is not wheelchair accessible and can only be accessed by the stairs.

COST: \$10

MORE:

Featuring...

Abiodun of the Last Poets * Amina Baraka * Asha Bandele * Daniel McGowan Maliki Shakur Latine * Matt Meyer * Ngoma * Nicole Goodwin * Release Aging People in Prison: RAPP Campaign * Shanelle Jenkins * Art by Sophia Dawson * Music by Spiritchild * Squala Orphan * Verbal Artisan

If you want to support but can't attend, please donate at rally.org/maliki

Maliki Shakur Latine is a former Black Panther who walked out of Shawangunk Correctional Facility on December 6, 2016, released on parole, after 37 years behind the walls! Learn more about Maliki here: <https://justiceformaliki.org/about>