



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for February 9<sup>th</sup>

## **26 Jan - Stronger Than Their Bars: An Interview with David Campbell's Supporters**

*An interview/reflection from the supporters of David Campbell, a recently-released antifascist prisoner.*

### **MORE:**

*via It's Going Down*

David Campbell is an anti-fascist activist and former anti-fascist political prisoner who served 12 months at Rikers Island in New York. Here, David and a few other members of the Defense Committee reflect on the committee, with the intention of sharing lessons and possibilities from lived experience with those facing down terrifying charges and those who want to support them. This conversation began with a letter received from David in June 2020, when he was serving the last third of his sentence. The responses of the other Defense Committee members were compiled shortly after.

### **How did the Defense Committee form?**

**David:** It happened kinda naturally because I already knew some people in the anarchist scene. A lot of people were reaching out to me after my arrest to see how I was doing and if I needed help with stuff like laundry and groceries, since my leg was broken when I was arrested, so I couldn't really get around. People would come by to visit too, and one time a bunch of people came over and we cooked and ate a big dinner together. That turned into a regular thing and when my case started heating up a few months later and the idea to form a defense committee came up, that group formed the core of the defense committee. I asked each person individually if they'd be down to help me navigate my court case and tried to convey that it was totally OK for them to say no or take time off later, since it could be a lot of work. Everyone I asked said yes, which was super cool. I asked a few older, more experienced activists we knew, my brother, and a close friend of 15 years (neither of whom are anarchists) to join as well. Later, a couple others joined, including my therapist and my best friend growing up.

**T:** Before David's arrest, I knew David in passing through anarchist circles—we were friendly but not yet friends. After he was arrested and injured by the police, a small group of us reached out to David and offered to come by his apartment to have a little potluck dinner. I think these kinds of small acts of support can go a long way in building relationships and trust. A few months later, David asked us if we would be part of his defense committee, and we all agreed.

**DIO:** I had known David for a while before the arrest. We lived in the same neighborhood and would work together on various street actions. When David was arrested I was on the scene providing jail support. It seemed obvious to me to continue to provide support throughout his case, whatever the outcome, so I did.

**Carmichael:** I already knew David for about a year before he was arrested, we met in an ultimately sidelined effort to organize neighborhood response teams to address xenophobic and Islamophobic harassment that was becoming more obvious during Trump's election campaign. It turned out we were neighbors, and saw each other at a lot of other political organizing meetings and low-key anti-ICE actions.

I had been involved in prisoner support through NYC Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) letter writing events, Metropolitan Coordinating Council (MACC) legal, and J20 defense, and I've had friends go to prison before. So I of course wanted to do anything I could to help when David needed a support committee. And I was livid to hear he'd not only been arrested at a protest but had his leg badly broken by the police.

**M:** David approached me and asked if I would be willing to join. I was so flattered to be considered and accepted immediately. Prior to this, we did a few group dinners and drinks for him and I think that helped him to feel supported.

**N:** I was in very loose proximity to David's arrest and the circumstances surrounding it. I knew the people who started the defense committee and was invited into it. I didn't know what a defense committee really was before joining, only that it's something that had been done for political prisoners in the past to facilitate fundraising and letter writing, etc.

**What did a normal defense committee meeting look like before sentencing?**

**David:** We'd usually meet at someone's house, maybe with some snacks, drinks, or sometimes a full-blown dinner. I'd bring everyone up to speed about my case, if there were any new developments – what my lawyer had told me, what the prosecutor had told them, possible outcomes and time frames, when the next court date was and what it was for. Others would report back about the various things they were working on. One person would take notes in a shared doc. Before we broke, we'd make sure there was someone to bottom-line each action item, and set the date, time, and place of our next meeting. Meetings usually lasted about one and a half hours.

**N:** We'd talk through the issues of the week, and decide who would be responsible for what by the end of it. Only about once did we ever have a meeting where David was absent before he got taken in. It was also important to spend time with one another that was based on having fun and hanging out, maybe over drinks or with a board game or something.

**T:** We would discuss potential legal and media strategies and possible outcomes. We also planned for the possibility of David's incarceration. Though we very much hoped this would not be the ultimate outcome, we wanted to be well prepared so we would not be left scrambling at the last minute. The preparatory work included, but was not limited to: setting up a support website (including a statement on David's case, visitation info, a form to submit letters, a list of topics David would be interested in corresponding about, a list of books David would be interested in receiving, etc.), planning fundraising efforts and setting up the necessary financial infrastructure, making a plan for facilitating visits, and thinking about how to support David post-release. We made sure that each necessary task had one or more bottom-liners.

For the weeks immediately following sentencing, the committee met frequently as we navigated the specifics of supporting David throughout his incarceration. We reported back on our experiences visiting David at Rikers, noting any problems that we encountered so we could relay this information to future visitors. Following this initial burst of activity, we transitioned to meeting monthly over dinner or drinks to check in and discuss any significant actions, such as fundraising efforts, but most of our work took place over our Signal loop. After COVID-19 hit NYC, we had one video meeting to plan our efforts to get David released from Rikers. Otherwise, we've continued to coordinate over our Signal loop.

**DIO:** We'd get updates on whatever tasks had been completed and determine what still needed to be done. We'd make sure every task has a bottom-liner so nothing fell through the cracks.

**Carmichael:** Before he was taken into custody we did a lot of hypothetical planning, not knowing for a long time whether or not he'd even have to do time. Once he was in, we divided up the work that needed to be done and met a lot less. Now because of Covid we don't meet at all but we talk every day by Signal.

**M:** They were long, but organized and smooth meetings. The bulk of our work was really leading up to David's incarceration. We still have people who bottom-line specific things and that have for a while, so there is less of a need for regular, more formal, meetings.

**What actions did people take while you were still fighting the case? What were you responsible for?**

**David:** They were constantly checking in to see how I was doing and meeting up to socialize so I felt less alone. People researched all kinds of random stuff that might help, researched facilities I might be sent to if sentenced, kept an ear to the ground for news that might affect the way my case was handled. We even met with my lawyer, with their consent of course. The defense committee ensured that someone was handling fundraising, media stuff, online presence (including buying a domain in advance in case I ended up doing time). They put me in touch with a radical therapist, a sympathetic journalist, a half-dozen former political prisoners (including one who'd done time at the facility I was ultimately sent to), self-defense and meditation trainers, all of which were enormously helpful. They also took time off from work and school to show up in support at my court appearances, helped me move and store my stuff before I went in, and packed the courtroom on the day I was sentenced.

**T:** Because the tasks I volunteered to bottom-line would only begin in the event of David's incarceration, the actions I took while David was still fighting the case mostly included showing up to defense committee meetings and court dates. After the court dates, a group of us would usually go to a nearby coffee shop to decompress, debrief, and hang out for a bit. Afterwards, one of us, usually David, would send a summary of the court proceedings to our defense committee signal loop.

**DIO:** My primary responsibility was technical support. I built the website and set-up various email accounts for the committee to use.

**Carmichael:** When he was still fighting the case we did research on where he might be taken and what kind of sentence he might have, we raised some money for him, and talked a lot about hypotheticals and questions: would we sublet his room, could he defer doing his taxes, could he travel beforehand, could he travel after, would it be better to do a short amount of time with a long probation or a longer time with no probation...we were there for emotional support and to help grapple with these questions. I like to host and cook for everyone, I did some of that back then. The most important thing is to show up for people even if you don't have the skills to do more. I'm not a lawyer but I could help with things his lawyers couldn't.

**M:** I think I took on more of an emotional support role during this time. I would meet with David regularly to hang out and talk about how he was doing. I wasn't always sure how to be most useful with so many exceptional and skilled group members, but felt I could always offer my time and support.

**N:** I would mostly attend court dates and research circumstances of the arrest, thinking a lot about the narrative that should be forwarded to the larger world that would result in the most lenient sentencing. I also organized a couple of our meetings. The work picked up much more once he was inside. There were always at least about a dozen of us, so many hands made little work, except for that work which required some expertise (website design, legal knowledge, etc.).

**What does support look like now?**

**David:** Keeping my commissary account full with money from their continued fundraising efforts, visiting me regularly and organizing a visiting schedule for others, helping first-time visitors through the process, taking my calls at all hours of the day [which was necessary because of the limited access to phone calls, only two every three hours], writing me letters and forwarding my international mail and messages from the website, speaking to the media and just generally being awesome. They also stay in touch with my lawyer, send me any clothes, books or other materials I might request, and manage the website, including posting my updates. They've also helped immensely with a translation project I'm working on. Since the pandemic hit, they invested a lot of time into trying to get me out, including call-in and email campaigns.

**T:** After David's sentencing, I was one of several people bottom-lining David's visitation schedule and corresponding with visitors. Rikers has an absurd visit system, so this definitely needed some upkeep, particularly in the beginning when people were still figuring out how everything worked. Once COVID-19 hit NYC, all visits were suspended indefinitely. The new video visits require less upkeep, mostly because the seemingly random video visit process is impossible to coordinate.

Prior to COVID-19, I was also responsible for printing and forwarding letters to David that we received through the support site, as well as forwarding David's international correspondence. Due to unanticipated circumstances related to COVID-19, this responsibility has since been taken on by another member.

**DIO:** Now I maintain the website. I post updates when I get them from David, and make any and all changes the committee wants.

**Carmichael:** Now I answer some of the emails, forward letters to him, or scan his letters and email them to their destinations. I've been scanning a book that he's translating: others are doing the transcription and editing, it's great that we have a big team. I helped run the visitation calendar for a while and I talked to media and other prisoner support groups when we were advocating for his release (and a general release) when the pandemic began. Since Covid shut down visitations, I no longer help coordinate that calendar or visit regularly, I just try to send a lot of mail and do televisitation when I can. We're starting to think about what he'll need when he gets out, I think that's 99 days from today.

**M:** I used to make it to Rikers once a month if not more, just to make sure he had consistent visits. Now, I wait excitedly for his phone calls and schedule monthly televisits just to see how he is doing. He has playfully told me I have written too many letters to respond to, but also it is important to make sure he has regular mail. I also work on transcribing the book he is translating. With so much going on, that is at least something to do that selfishly helps me feel useful in some small way. We have also worked on various call-in campaigns for him and I have made countless phone calls to Rikers and the DOC on his behalf (at one point being chastised by the DOC for calling over fifteen times to advocate for him on a specific issue).

**N:** Mostly just staying in touch! Occasionally responsibilities become apparent to the group that need to be taken up, maybe such as putting this document together, but we prepared very intentionally and very well before the beginning of David's sentence such that the vast majority of the work has to do with maintaining the project itself.

**What sort of strengths and skills do people bring to the group?**

**David:** Patience, level-headedness, knowing me well, knowing radical history well, connections to the anarchist community. Our group also has social workers/therapists, one person who has done time and is in their third year of law school, techies, and my brother, who I was able to toss around my craziest ideas and deepest concerns with.

**DIO:** My day job is programming so I was happy to use those skills for something that directly benefits someone I care about.

**M:** I think the beauty of this committee is that we all brought such different but compatible skill sets to the table. Maybe that is why he asked us all to come together. We had care workers, friends, comrades, experienced organizers with specialized knowledge in things such as the law or skills related to technology and web design. Everyone is so smart, organized, and dedicated to the cause. It never felt like labor to support our friend.

I am a social worker working as a therapist in my field. This was my first time being a part of a defense committee, let alone such an efficient and successful one. I took on smaller tasks, such as making phone calls, ordering books and mailing legal pads. I suppose I used my background in the sense of trying to provide consistent emotional support to David. That felt important to me.

**What were the most successful fundraising efforts? Least successful?**

**DIO:** Fundraising through our networks proved to be really effective and we quickly raised enough money to support David's commissary. We also had a comrade, not part of the committee, put on a punk show to collect donations, which was also very successful. We haven't had to do any other fundraising besides that.

**M:** The punk show for his post-release fund made a lot of money, and was amazing to see. The call for regular monthly donations through our website brought in a great deal of funds to help us manage his commissary needs and more. People have really showed up for David, and I think that says a lot about who he is as a person, and the fact that he has always shown up for others in the community.

**N:** From my perspective, the most money seemed to have come in the lead-up to and immediate aftermath of the sentencing. A lot of people came to the court that day, and became connected by giving us their contact info, such that so many of those people who felt directly connected (friends, family, community) were the ones to contribute the most. Not too sure if I could speak on the least successful.

**How did the committee find people to come pack the court?**

**M:** David has had such an impressive and wide array of supporters throughout this entire process. It was amazing to see and definitely warmed my heart. I think the work we did as a defense committee helped many others find digestible updates and concrete ways to support such as showing up for court dates. On the day of sentencing, our side of the court room was filled with people who called out "We love you, David" as he was escorted away.

**N:** Since David was part of a larger political community, it was relatively easy to pull people from that community who could come for the most important court dates. Otherwise, we ourselves would be the only ones present. There were many court dates at inconvenient times that were not as high stakes, so less people were needed during those.

**Were there ever any conflicts within the committee? If so, why did they happen and were they resolved well? If not, what about the group dynamic do you think prevented conflict?**

**DIO:** I don't remember any conflicts coming up. Having David as a singular focus didn't seem to leave room for much else, and everyone was just committed to helping in any way they could.

**M:** None that I am aware of. I think we all got along well from the start, some of us already knew each other from organizing circles, but some of us met for the first time through this committee for David. Everyone is so smart and talented and dedicated to both this cause and the general well being of David that we were always able to talk through our decisions and arrive at a consensus. Not only did we work well together, but also, it never felt like work to meet.

**N:** We didn't have conflicts to the degree that other political projects might have had historically, ones that result in relationships torn and work neglected and such. Our dynamic was very easy and flexible, which I think in large part was intentional. We spent a lot of time and energy making meals together and things like that, but many of us also maybe retained a certain distance, which allowed us to focus crucially on the tasks at hand. We are also a decently wide mix of David's friends, and his brother, but mostly political community.

**Were there any disagreements about the narrative around David's case? How did they resolve?**

**DIO:** Others could probably speak to this better than I could, but I do remember some back and forth on whether to describe David as more normie or more radical in his politics.

**N:** We spent a great deal of time going back and forth among one another about how the world should see David, depending on whose support we thought we could get. Should we appeal more to liberals or radicals? Who are these people and what makes them sympathetic or not? That seemed to be a major subject of debate that was resolved with David's best interests and his own input in mind. We always default to what David wants to do, because it is always his decision, but that doesn't mean we couldn't spend a lot of time working through an issue together as a group. Thankfully it seems like the disagreements about that didn't happen too much on the sidelines and in gossip, and stayed entirely internal to people within the committee.

**Is it ever ethical to mediate how David or other political prisoners want to represent themselves to the world once they're inside?**

**N:** No. Never. Sometimes a political prisoner has their communications cut off to the outside world, and the defense committee's primary responsibility once something like that happens is NOT putting words in their mouth, but to call out as the defense committee for support in the form of an anti-repression campaign.

**DIO:** I think how political prisoners represent themselves once they're inside (and before they go inside) should be their choice, and theirs alone. I think it is fine to offer advice if you have experience and knowledge to share, but it should be up to the one doing the time to represent themselves how they see fit.

**Do you maintain any infrastructure for the committee? JPay/commissary, email address, website, etc? What should a new defense committee make sure to have? How did you delegate responsibility?**

**DIO:** Yes, email and website. Between myself and one other member, we've had plenty of resources to maintain the website and monitoring the emails is split amongst even more of the team. Delegating responsibility for these was a matter of folks volunteering to take on that work.

A new defense committee should definitely have both of these things, and if possible, some social media accounts, if they expect the defendant to serve time. Email, website, and social media are each pretty large tasks, especially in the weeks leading up to sentencing, and shortly after. Make sure you have enough folks to handle these tasks, at the very least three.

**N:** I'm one of three or four of us who check up on [contact@freedavidcampbell.org](mailto:contact@freedavidcampbell.org). We've used that email to announce initial updates immediately after fundraising, as well as on the letter writing and call-in campaigns to get David and his incarcerated peers the necessary PPE in the first phases of the novel coronavirus pandemic. We maintain a list of emails who we blast to for such things. Defense committees seem to benefit highly from 1) a clear way of getting a political prisoner's immediate needs met once inside, 2) a clear and consistent means of staying in contact with supporters, 3) a centralized source of information which includes updated mailing address, rules and regulations for what can be mailed, background on the case, updates, means of contact, etc. In our case [freedavidcampbell.com](http://freedavidcampbell.com) was crucial. We hardly had to use social media because we maintained direct contact with supporters who got in touch with us through the website. It's important to remember that social media isn't the only way to reach sympathetic people for support.

**What would you suggest for people facing charges who aren't connected to the radical community in their area?**

**David:** They should definitely get and read the Tilted Scales Collective's Tilted Guide to Being a Defendant, (AK Press, 2017). If they know anybody at all in the radical community, they should reach out

and hope that they can point them in the right direction. There will probably also be large-scale defense committees like the one for J20, but for people who don't have that option for whatever reason, I'd say form a defense committee with friends or acquaintances you trust, who show good judgment.

**Anything that surprised you?**

**David:** Just how well everyone worked together and how patient and giving everyone was, even offering up their homes for meeting places on the regular. Maybe I should've known that when they said they were there for me, they meant it, but it was still surprising in a good way.

**Anything else to add?**

**David:** Know that if you're scared and facing charges, people *will* show up to take care of you!

**26 Jan - Never forgotten**

*Activists are in urgent fight for release of aging political prisoners held captive inside the U.S.*

**MORE:**

by Michael Z. Muhammad

The United States' denial of Black & Brown political prisoners oozes a greasy history of hypocrisy and lies.

And as social justice movements begin to gain momentum and talk of dealing with mass incarceration and defunding or radically reforming police grows, they are a reminder of how prisons are used as a tool for social control and a warehouse for socially oppressed people.

Political imprisonment and political prosecutions have a long and deep history: Huey P. Newton, Black Panther Party co-founder and leader, was accused in 1968 in Oakland of first-degree murder, felonious assault, and kidnapping connected with the death of one police officer and the shooting and injury of another police officer. With a majority White jury, Mr. Newton was acquitted of assaulting an officer, and convicted of voluntary manslaughter. His conviction was reversed by the California Court of Appeals. Two more unsuccessful trials followed before all charges were dismissed in December 1970.

Black power activist Angela Davis was charged and acquitted on charges of conspiracy, murder and kidnapping by a jury in San Jose, California in 1972.

Ramona Africa, of MOVE, a Philadelphia-based Black liberation organization, lived through the 1985 police bombing of MOVE headquarters. "Eleven people had died in the MOVE house from the resulting fire, 6 adults and five children, and 250 neighborhood residents left homeless from the incident," according to the Amistad Research Center. She was imprisoned for seven years on riot charges, but a lawsuit led to her being awarded \$500,000 "for pain, suffering, and injuries related to the 1985 incident," said the center.

Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former Black Panther, MOVE member and community journalist, has served almost 40 years in prison for allegedly killing a Philadelphia police officer. Supporters say he is innocent and are awaiting a new trial with the discovery of evidence not given to the defense at his initial trial. His death sentence was overturned by a federal judge in 2001. He was given life without parole.

Longtime Native American political prisoner Leonard Peltier, who based on a June 26, 1975 shoot out and has been in captivity for over 30 years, was wrongfully convicted in the deaths of two FBI agents and targeted by FBI Counterintelligence operations against him and American Indian Movement leaders. He is serving two consecutive life terms.

Imam Jamil Al-Amin, formerly known as Black Panther leader and activist H. Rap Brown, was convicted for a murder that he did not commit in 2002, say supporters. They say his prosecution was politically motivated and he remains imprisoned despite someone else confessing to the killing of the police officer authorities say he is guilty of.

American political prisoners and their existence go to the core of a society's racist nature. To dismiss the issue of political prisoners in the U.S. is to ignore America's authentic character.

Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans and others have been jailed for their politics since the era of the 1960s and 1970s. They have languished in jails for years, labeled "common criminals" to hide the human rights violations that they have suffered.

While the true number of political prisoners in the United States is hard to quantify, there are about 100 political prisoners in various prisons throughout the United States, according to progressive organizations and groups such as the Jericho Movement, which is devoted to freeing Black political prisoners (actually Jericho's mission is to free ALL political prisoners).

Many of these domestic prisoners of war go back to the heyday of the civil rights, Black Power, and New African Liberation struggles.

They also include members of the Puerto Rican independence movement, Indigenous peoples and the Chicano liberation movements and other political struggles.

Some are well known, others not so much. Most of these political prisoners today have been locked down since the 1970s and 1980s. Some were convicted on made up charges, others under vague political conspiracies or acts of resistance.

All received extensive sentences for their political beliefs or actions to demand freedom for oppressed people, say supporters.

Active in the fight for justice is the Jericho Movement. In an interview, its chairman talked about how the organization had to pivot in terms of strategy as time is running out for many of these men and women.

"I would say the movement is still alive, and those freedom fighters that have come through the movements from the '60s and '70s, they're getting older, and the situation in terms of strategy to get them out is changing," said Jihad Abdulmumit, chairman of the Jericho Movement.

The strategy has moved away from a militant stance in advocating in their behalf to a more humanistic approach in appealing to parole boards.

"So what we do now is trying to focus on the violations and abuses of discretion of parole boards, and this is in essence how many prisoners have been getting out. We point out their exemplary prison records, participation in education programs, and help given to other inmates. We ask the question do they meet all their qualifications of parole? They served their time. We ask the question, if a judge gives you 25 years, why are you in prison for 50 years? Nothing is mentioned about being a political prisoner," he said.

Eddie Conway, a former Black Panther who served a 44-year prison sentence says time is running out. "It's the government's intention to let them die in the prison system. They're treated unlike any other prisoners in terms of length of sentence and time served," said Mr. Conway.

He vows to continue to advocate for his comrades and intends to highlight the case of Sundiata Acoli, a mathematician that has been incarcerated since 1974. He was granted parole only to see it overturned.

Mr. Conway also pointed out how those who come to political consciousness behind the walls are targeted for political beliefs. "These are people who became more politically aware and active once they landed in prison. Many of these prisoners also get singled out for extra harsh and restrictive treatment like the political prisoners," he explained.

Pam Africa of the MOVE organization remains optimistic. "We will continue to fight. Who would have thought the MOVE 9 would be released from prison? Who thought that Seth Hayes would be released from prison? I am very hopeful. People have to push and expose and that's what we're asking people to do now, to expose what is going on with Mumia now more than ever. And he has a chance to come out within a year based on prosecutorial misconduct in his case," she said.

Mr. Abdulmumit said the Jericho Movement represents about 30 political prisoners.

"We are in communication with everybody; we help assist with their medical needs, help with legal fees and advocate parole boards on their behalf. It's really hands on. It's just not slapping your name up on a website and leaving it there," he said.

Pam Africa said, "We got to keep on working. We must stay consistent. We got to bring the Black Lives Matter movement along and sit them down and talk with them and to have them understand whose backs they are standing on."

For Eddie Conway an education initiative includes naming projects after political prisoners to keep their names in public. He also advocates having potential elected officials pass a litmus test on support for political prisoners before any elections.

Mr. Abdulmumit, discussing the role of the international community in this struggle, talked about the United Nations Special Rapporteur's non-position on Black political prisoners in the U.S. today.

"The International Commission of Jurists back in the 1970s came through and visited with Ed Poindexter and Sundiata Acoli and acknowledged that they were Black political prisoners. The United Nations is a little tough to deal with on that issue," he said.

"I've represented the issue of the political prisoners at the Geneva Convention, at different treaties (discussions). It's a hard sell. You sit there, and you talk about political prisoners through the United Nations networks, and they look at you like looking at a deer in the headlights. I think to be very candid, the United Nations has been very lame, insipid and weak when it comes to issues that deal with Black people in the United States. Period."

Ted Kelly of the Prisoners Solidarity Committee argues the definition of political prisoners should be broadened to include all Black and Brown people who are incarcerated. "The fact of the matter is this is a White supremacist system. The justice system is White supremacist as well as the institutions of the country. So from that perspective, people of color in the U.S. penal system are political prisoners because the justice system is not designed for justice. It's designed to kidnap Black and Brown people disproportionately from their communities and force them into free labor. They're concentration camps for the poor and oppressed, they're concentration camps for Black and Brown people," he said.

Mr. Kelly said of paramount importance are health issues suffered by these "prisoners of war." "Covid has accelerated everything now. Every day our soldiers and our political prisoners are stuck behind bars is another day that the state could steal them from us. Russell Maroon Shoatz has Stage Four cancer and covid, and he's in his late 70s. This month was the one-year anniversary of Delbert Africa's prison release. He was part of the MOVE 9. It was a major victory, but Delbert died like months after his release because these prisons are killing people."

## **27 Jan - Kings Bay Plowshares 7 Updates and Writings**

*As members of the Kings Bay Plowshares 7 (KBP7) enter prison, they are starting to write for the public. We are including those writings as well as recent updates and articles about the Seven.*

### **MORE:**

#### **January 27<sup>th</sup> - Carmen Trotta's First Prison Report**

I am in the "Satellite Camp" of the Otisville prison. I never asked for the camp and I was very surprised that I was assigned there. The camp is a very low security prison, and it has some benefits (this is the prison camp that Michael Cohen spent his limited time in). I think the greatest benefit is that I can go out into the fresh air around the camp anytime I want. I walk around the perimeter most days for a bit of exercise and air. In most areas the perimeter is defined by trees: evergreens, birch, and oaks. Out of the forest come dozens of deer every day, looking, of course, for something to eat in this lean time of year. We also see Canada geese and an array of colorful birds the size of sparrows.

Other benefits are that the food is decent and the other prisoners are pretty easy to get along with. Many of them are flat out friendly and caring. I live in a "pod" in the camp. A pod is not a cell; it has no doors nor bars. The walls of the pod are 5 ½ feet high. If I look out over the dorm space I can see the tops of the heads of the other prisoners. Presently 60 prisoners are housed here. It's a somewhat older population than the main facility and it is predominantly Jewish, mainly Orthodox Jewish. I'm making friends with the Jewish guru in the place hoping to get my hands on Jewish Midrashic texts, which I find mind blowing.

Meanwhile, I have plenty to read. I am currently re-reading Zinn's A People's History of the United States, as well as a book by Lisa Pease about the assassination of Bobby Kennedy entitled A Lie Too Big to Fail. It's a 500 pager. I'm a quarter of the way in and I'm convinced that Sirhan Sirhan was not the lone shooter and did not shoot the fatal shot. I've finished Kendi's Stamped from the Beginning, another 500 pager. It tells us all sorts of things we should have learned in high school and were never taught in college. I'm sure to read it a second time, that time taking notes.

Prior to my time in the camp I spent about 18 days in quarantine in the main facility. Basically, it was a sort of soft and civil variety of isolation. I was in a cell with my own toilet. Like any prison, however, you're subject to some humiliation. I suppose this is to remind you that you are a prisoner. Without fail, in my experience, you are required to make your bed, but the linens don't fit. Also, every prison has a series of stand-up counts, so they are assured that no one has escaped. One of our stand-up counts in quarantine was at 5:30 a.m. You could be berated if you are not standing at attention looking through the 12 x 5 inch window on the cell door, before they got there. There is no watch on your wrist nor clock on the wall. If you are sleeping, they will bang on the door till you rise. I've also noticed that they keep prison cells cold. This was more pronounced in my cell because the small window to the outer world was cracked and there was plenty of snow on the ground. Even after purchasing thermal underwear, a sweatshirt, and sweatpants, I was close to shivering every night from a maybe four to six a.m.

It took them four days before offering me a shower, and I wondered if the water would be hot or at least warm. (At the Camden County Jail in Georgia the shower was cold!) So, I was greatly relieved when I was able to get a good, hot shower.

Otherwise, my time in quarantine was... interesting. I very quickly received a Bible, a good book, and the first chapter of a book on Christian Yoga. Years earlier Fr. Steve Kelly, my co-defendant, sent me the photocopies of this book. While I have long been attracted to yoga, I'd never taken the time to develop a practice. Now I had a cell and more than 2 weeks to myself.

This variety of yoga is not primarily for exercise. It is for meditation, which I've always found elusive.

As it turned out, I not only had the time and the text to begin a practice, I also had a serious need for some meditation and discernment as I was going through a great deal of turmoil regarding the integrity of the Kings Bay plowshares action.

To wit, the government is demanding restitution for property destruction. During conversations among the defendants who were on supervised release, this issue came up repeatedly, but seemed never to have been resolved. The court upon sentencing demands that the payment of restitution would begin immediately, meaning that, upon being given a job in prison some portion of my meager salary would be garnished.

Ideally, I was hoping that this prison would possibly have a non-paying job, like many other prisons do. No luck here. So, the question before me was, would I work and pay or not? Were I to do so I would be paying into a genocidal criminal conspiracy. And hopefully, what did my conscience say.

Again, in conversation with some of my out co-defendants (meaning those out of prison) some said there were strong disincentives to refusing to work. I could be sent to a local county jail to do my time; I could be shipped around the country to several different prisons from here to California; or I might be put in long-term solitary confinement.

Personally, I thought the most likely outcome would be solitary confinement. I imagined that the recourse of being shipped to other prisons would be ruled out due to COVID. I didn't know much about the conditions in solitary. I did come to learn that I could get some books, but possibly only the books in the prison's library and only by having random samplings of these brought into the solitary cell periodically. I knew that I could receive mail, so part of me thought, okay, I could survive for 11 months like that... Maybe. And if I could get mail I could get the yoga instructions and then maybe I could survive.

I am by no means an evangelist, but it was through the daily readings, prayer, and yoga that I came to ask myself, "What would God want?" I cannot but think that God finds this existential threat to ourselves and this Earth that he created for us OUTRAGEOUS. And if I broke, the very effort would be appreciated. Didn't Pope Francis say that "the very possession of nuclear weapons was to be firmly condemned"? Didn't we break our promise to the world to pare down our nuclear arsenal as soon as possible and put them under international control, i.e., the Non-proliferation treaty? And didn't the Russians offer us total nuclear disarmament in 1987, only to be refused?

So, shortly after I arrived at the camp I met my counselor and my case manager. I immediately told them I wouldn't pay restitution, and, while startled, they said, "Well, okay, you're within your rights." Who knew?

However, there are some consequences. I can only receive \$25 per month in commissary and I will not be given any "good time" so I'll be here until mid-November.

## **January 29<sup>th</sup> - Martha Hennessy Report from Danbury**

Tomorrow, January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2021, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons becomes a legally binding document. President Biden, in his inaugural speech yesterday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, spoke of the challenges our country is facing: massive unemployment, divisiveness, lack of truth telling and clear factual information, pollution, climate collapse. He could not change the long-standing policy of ignoring what is hidden-in-plain-sight, the discussion of our deadly, expensive nuclear arsenal. In fact, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, (ICAN), points out that the U.S. military plan is to spend \$100,000 a minute over the next decade to maintain and update the nuclear weapons system. This will be the end of us, one way or the other.

Our travels to Afghanistan and the history of our perpetual war brought this phrase to our ears: “the graveyard of empires.”

The United States can no longer afford this kind of spending. How much profit can the weapons industry absorb before the country is unsustainable, or nuclear holocaust ends us all?

The Danbury Federal Correctional Institution reminds me of the Kings Bay Naval Base, with huge swathes of beautiful, indigenous lands taken up for a frightful enterprise. The groaning of the earth and its people is quite audible in my monastic life here.

Atonement and punishment are the roles played, but not in all sincerity. All sides seem to be gaming the system and it is working for none of us. Even the Trump family, retreating to the mirage of untouchable luxury at the pinnacle of power and wealth.

There are so many holes in this image held up to the people. Who are the select few families hiding behind this veil that will eventually be torn down?

The women here weep and yearn for their children, their families.

President Biden promises to find the lost children, taken at the border, sent around the country in grey sweats, the prison uniform of empire. Will the lousy, rotten system give them up, will they be found and returned to their families? This is the measure by which we can judge ourselves on whether we are turning over a new leaf after four (or four hundred) years of debauched, racist, practices.

The hours of available reading time here are many.

In his searing, small book, *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin asks, “What will happen to all that beauty then?” After the supposed vengeance of God, on behalf of man, is wrought on the deserving ones.

I see this beauty in the faces of the women here despite the ravages of the for profit system that dictates every aspect of our lives. The community here, like at Maryhouse, shares what they have with each other.

Yesterday, an inmate’s birthday brought out an amazing feast, items of food not seen in our daily meals or commissary. Domestic tasks of cleaning, cooking and decorating go on, no matter how hard the tactics and protocols grind on the women.

The forces of life and nature are something to behold when placed under inhumane pressure. I am reminded of the story of the Guantanamo Bay prisoners planting watermelon seeds. Little insurrections and subversions go on daily in the eyes and through the voices and hands of those kept here. The banter between inmates reflects knowledge of what is wrong with the way we live and how it could be better.

Scripture from today's Catholic Daily Missal reading includes verses from Mark, Chapter 3, narrating how crowds, desperate for healing, press in on Jesus. He risks being crushed.

The simple acts and deeds of bringing comfort and healing to people in need, marginalized by greed, are an example we take upon ourselves many times over the course of a day. That is if we are able to. The opportunities abound in prison and elsewhere as our way of living unravels. Hebrews 7 expresses it this way: "We now have a mediator of a better covenant, enacted on better promises." We are faced with our own moral obligations and choices as we receive God's living will for us.

It was a pleasant shock to hear President Biden quote Augustine, – too bad I can't fully recall the quote. Will it translate into action on the ground to alleviate the suffering and inequality?

There is such a pall of depression that hangs over inmate and staff alike in this rabid model of an institution. But we can either reflect that depression or deflect it into joy and loving respect for one another.

With the "national lock down" since the January 6<sup>th</sup> violence at the capitol in D.C., we have not been allowed outdoor exercise time.

I take my practice of loving kindness to the officer's desk and ask about when we will be able to walk and jog outside. Of course, the answer is no one knows until someone says it's o.k. Personal responsibility doesn't thrive in a top down dictate.

There is something about the German Shepherd guard dog plastic silhouette that twists in the wind outside the door that brings me profound sadness. Images of Birmingham, Nazi death camps and Abu Ghraib jump into my mind's eye. Also, my daughter's dog, given to her from a doctor at work who took an assignment in New Haven, a pure bred that cost thousands of dollars, brought from China. She is gentle, loyal, and skittish. Life as a family dog in Vermont is a blessed one.

I can't imagine what the military training does to these dogs.

Dear readers, I apologize for my random, loose association of thoughts. At 65 my physical and mental stamina isn't what it used to be, and becomes further eroded in an unstable, unpredictable environment.

I strive for spiritual clarity and grace under the extremity of opposing the nuclear beast.

Both doubt and certainty walk with me daily, especially in the waking hours. I take refuge in the daily Scripture readings, they have guided us throughout the KBP7 experiment in truth.

My 3:00 p.m. Rosary group in the chapel is growing both in numbers and lightness. This is a gift.

Someone sent some of Granny's New Year's resolutions, one of which says: "Stop complaining, judge less." My rebelliousness and submissiveness vie for my heart. Oh help my unbelief in this place of anguish rising to the sky.

### **January 31<sup>st</sup> - Martha Hennessy's Second Report from Danbury**

Today's parable in Mark 4:1-20 is "a sower went out to sow." The mystery of the Kingdom of God is granted to us. I'm still trying to understand any and all of the parables. This prison seems to have both barren and rich soil. And plenty of thorns and thistles to navigate around and through sometimes. I am only six weeks in so far, others face eight years. Unimaginable suffering. What makes for a responsible hearer?

My mother was all about the soil, how to improve it and care for the medium we are all dependent upon. There is a horticulture program that includes a greenhouse but I'm not sure it's still functioning. I hear there is a great upsurge in gardening and the seed orders are pouring in causing shortages. I will miss my Vermont spring gardening tasks, perhaps it's time to start seed saving from one's own garden.

I am on the snow shoveling detail and many inmates are telling me I'm too old for that kind of work. I have to admit I became a bit short of breath with a silly two inches of snow. The forced bed rest, inactivity, diet and stress do take a toll, especially at my age now. I will have to undergo work hardening with the return to my Vermont family farm and Maryhouse. COVID has come to both houses in Manhattan. I am praying hard for everyone there. The phone minutes are used up until February 1<sup>st</sup> so I feel anxious & out of touch.

Support has come in from far and wide. The letters abroad include Ireland, Germany, Australia and France. What a lovely global community. Details of the treatment of Aboriginals throughout Australia's history echoes what we have here in the United States. Such a slow evolution, overcoming the centuries of false constructs regarding our fellow human beings and the natural world. I just finished reading *Orange is the New Black*, a story that takes place here at Danbury. Ardeth (Platte) is described as always cheerful and very supportive of the women around her, the ministry of prison. This is a good reminder for me. The drama can be quite intense among us here and to rise above it requires a heart of flesh, not stone. A good measuring stick is to ask oneself, am I hurting or helping others? The women take pride in participating in work, the good old all American standard of what makes us of value. The dignity of work is inherent in all of us naturally, to engage in what is meaningful and productive. To be forced to do work that is demeaning is a great violation of the human spirit.

Many of the CO's (corrections officers) here are trained in the military and then come to finish out their 20 years for a decent federal pension. In Piper Kerman's story of 2004 she tells of a soldier just back from Fallujah, Iraq who loses it as a CO, tearing apart one of the dorms here. A recent report speaks of how 7% of our population comes through our military program and many are part of the group that stormed the Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Harvesting what we sow is another wretched aspect of both the conditions here at the prison but also in our greater culture.

Watching TV news this morning Andrew Cuomo references the "loaves and fishes" within the context of a shortage of the COVID vaccines. Only Jesus can create something from nothing. The analogy just falls flat. Capitalism relies on creating shortages and a mindset of getting as much as we can in material ways. The parable of the loaves and fishes is about sharing and so we have plenty for all. Today we had a big shake-down where rooms were inspected. Inmates were frantically trying to clear and put away stuff, the accumulation happens fast even in this environment of want. My shoe collection already rivals Imelda Marcos's!

I think of my fellow co-conspirators Carmen and Patrick now in, Steve in transport and Clare to go in mid-February. I pray for them and their families, households, broader communities that are going without them. I suppose we are the sacrificial lambs, along with our fellow inmates, offered up for the collective sins of violence, greed, ineptitude and blindness. "Whoever has ears ought to hear." Lying in my cubical I awake in the dead of night. My ears pick up the dull thrum of this plant maintaining itself with massive quantities of energy while we all sleep. The panic and claustrophobia rise in my chest, threatening to overtake my body and mind. Will this subterranean warehouse become my grave? I resort to a Hail Mary to regain focus and equilibrium. And so the days go by, doing time.

Some of us have managed to carve out times of the day to do Lectio and Rosary together. What a treat to share, whether Catholic or not. The days are blessed with the presence of God in each other.

## **February 5<sup>th</sup> - Updates**

**PATRICK O'NEILL** reported to the Elkton Federal Correctional Institution on January 14 at 1:59 PM, having been told to report no later than 2. Mary Rider, his partner, drove Patrick the 550 miles from their home in Garner, NC to Lisbon, OH, through the mountains of Virginia, West Virginia and Ohio. Upon his arrival Patrick was placed into COVID quarantine. He remained isolated in the Segregated Housing Unit (Solitary Confinement) for 15 days with almost no human interaction but for the substandard meals passed through a slot in his door three times a day. Patrick spent his time praying, reading, writing and walking/jogging in his small cell. (Please note that the United Nations defines any time spent in solitary confinement beyond 15 days as torture.) Patrick was then transferred to a medium security prison at Elkton.

Having expected to be in the Federal Prison Camp, this came as a surprise. Due to COVID 19 restrictions the prisoners are only allowed to leave the building three times a day for meals and exercise 3 times a week outside (in the snow) and few of them have jobs. Most of his fellow prisoners have sentences of 8-10 years. Fortunately, Patrick is now able to call family and send letters and emails. He plans to start a Bible study and a book club soon. Although there is a priest on the campus he does not visit Patrick's building and no one is allowed to go to the chapel because of the pandemic. No visitation is allowed at this time due to COVID restrictions. Patrick can receive letters on white paper in blue or black ink only on one side of the page and be sure to include your full name and address in return.

**CARMEN TROTTA** and **MARTHA HENNESSY** have been in prison now for seven weeks. They have gone through quarantine and settled in to the regular population. You can read their updates at the KBP website in Jail Reflections. You can write to them following same restrictions.

**MARK COLVILLE** is scheduled for sentencing on February 19 but it is not known if this will go forward on that day as he is expected to ask for more delays.

**FR. STEVE KELLY** was moved from Florida to Oklahoma on January 27 but it is not known how long he will be there on the way to Washington State.

## **27 Jan - For Black radicals released after decades, the carceral system is still a threat**

*Since the emergence of the Movement for Black Lives and the uprising against police violence that sparked new waves of activism last summer, an entire generation has returned to the lessons and tenets of past thinkers, organizers, and agitators, namely the Black Panther Party.*

### **MORE:**

by Tamar Sarai Davis (*Prism Reports*)

Meanwhile in the mainstream, celebrities, activists, and public figures frequently don Black Panther aesthetics to signal their adherence to a certain type of revolutionary politics. Even despite the visual and ideological links between the Black Panther Party and organizing in the present, many Black Panther Party members who are still alive today have largely been rendered invisible by prison walls and forgotten by the broader public.

Until last year, Jalil Muntaqim was among 13 former Black Panthers still imprisoned since the late 1960s. After 49 years of incarceration, he was finally paroled in October 2020—less than two weeks before his 69<sup>th</sup> birthday—but he's now facing the threat of reincarceration for allegedly attempting to vote. In the shift from political prisoner to newly paroled and disenfranchised, Muntaqim's life story exemplifies how at every stage, the carceral system is wielded to quell Black political activism: From the policing and incarceration of Black liberation organizers, the release of those leaders is often only under the condition that they renounce their political allegiances, the stripping of their right to vote upon release, and the omnipresent surveillance of their bodies and behavior while on parole.

## **From revolutionary to 'evolutionary'**

Muntaqim came of age in an era when both federal and local law enforcement devoted significant resources to policing and brutalizing Black communities.

While the targeting of Black political activists and organizations by the FBI is well known—particularly the history of the covert counter intelligence program (COINTELPRO)—scholar Dr. Dan Berger notes that law enforcement entities, which received an influx of resources and power in the late '60s, also worked toward similar ends.

"I think we have to see what the FBI was doing on the one hand, and what local police and prosecutors are doing, which were sometimes in tandem and sometimes separate," said Berger in an interview with *Prism*. "Some of the FBI COINTELPRO operations were aimed at trying to incarcerate people but their main purpose was to destroy the organized space of Black liberation, whether that was SNCC or the Black Panther Party or the Republic of New Africa or other groups. That also overlaps with the kind of law and order politics that tried to give voice to a broader racist and anti radical sentiment that was aimed not just at members of these organizations, but at people who could have been members of these organizations. So, where we have a kind of targeted political repression in the case of COINTELPRO that was actively trying to destroy the radical left then you also have just a broader racist movement among the police and other officials trying to weed out the community bases of support and those two things really align after 1968."

It was in that political and social context that the 18-year-old Muntaqim joined the Black Panther Party and a more militant underground organization, the Black Liberation Army. The Black Liberation Army coordinated prison breaks and police car bombings, and expressed its aim to "take up arms for the liberation and self-determination of black people in the United States." Its activity throughout the 1970s and into the '80s was often in response to police violence and the impunity with which law enforcement brutalized Black communities.

In 1974, at 23 years old, Muntaqim was sentenced to 25 years to life for the 1971 murder of two NYPD officers in Harlem, Joseph Piagentini and Waverly Jones. Over the course of his nearly five decades in prison thereafter, his political identity shifted, though he is still committed to racial equity and the pursuit of justice, Muntaqim told *The Guardian* in 2018.

"I now take the 'r' off the word and make it 'evolutionary,'" Muntaqim told *The Guardian*. "Revolution for me is the evolutionary process of building a higher level of consciousness in society at large. I'm an evolutionary revolutionary."

While inside, Muntaqim was a noted mentor for other incarcerated people, earned a number of degrees and certifications, and expanded his activism. In 1998 he helped found the National Jericho Movement, a group advocating for the amnesty and release of incarcerated political prisoners, and in 2004 he filed a lawsuit challenging the New York state law that barred incarcerated people with felony convictions from voting. The case was later dismissed.

## **A long road to release, and a threat to return**

Despite Muntaqim's exemplary record inside, the notoriety of his case coupled with its ongoing politicization thwarted his 11 prior efforts to seek parole, and now looms over his life even after returning home—so much so that it may result in his reincarceration.

As an initial matter, in parole hearings it is often essential that parole board members believe the person has an adequate level of genuine remorse for the offense committed. However, some—including writer, scholar and activist Angela Davis—argue that the process seeks to force activists to denounce their political ideologies in order to return home, representing another stage at which the system seeks to quell dissent.

The politicization of Muntaqim's case also drew negative attention to his parole requests. Once Muntaqim became eligible for parole in 2002, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA), the largest municipal law enforcement union in the country, vehemently opposed his release and even created a website with information on every person incarcerated for the murder of an on-duty New York City police officer. An automated feature on the database allows users to send letters directly to parole boards in opposition of their release. Alongside the PBA, family members of Joseph Piagentini—most notably his wife—also opposed Muntaqim's parole requests.

While opposition from victims' families and law enforcement organizations was perhaps expected, Muntaqim saw bipartisan political resistance to his release as well. In 2002, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the majority of the New York City Council opposed his first request for parole and in 2020, Democrat Attorney General Leticia James also opposed his early release, even after Muntaqim contracted COVID-19 inside. Muntaqim is among the over 358,000 people who contracted the virus while incarcerated in prisons and jails across the country while government officials—particularly governors who have the ability to grant mass commutations and offer compassionate release—fail to adequately respond. Last year, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo commuted a total of five sentences and pardoned only 18 incarcerated people despite receiving 2,518 total applications.

On Oct. 7, after his 12<sup>th</sup> parole hearing, Muntaqim was finally granted release and returned home. The return was welcomed by organizers within the Jericho Movement, some 75 public scholars and activists who advocated on his behalf, and his own family which includes his mother, his daughter, his grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

No less than a month later however, Muntaqim was faced with the threat of reincarceration. In late October, Monroe County District Attorney Sandra Doorley charged Muntaqim with voter fraud, at the behest of the county's Republican Party chairman, Bill Napier. On Oct. 22, Napier held a news conference alleging that the day after his release, Muntaqim committed voter fraud by registering to vote despite not having his right to vote restored.

New York state law prohibits people with felony records from voting, but in 2018, Cuomo issued an executive order stating that upon release, formerly incarcerated people will be automatically considered for a voting restoration pardon, through which the governor could restore their rights.

The voting restoration pardon process can be complicated and intimidating. People on parole can check their eligibility via the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision's (DOCCS) "Parolee Lookup" website, but many don't know the site exists according to reporting by Roshan Abraham in City Limits. The site itself can also be inaccurate. According to reporting from Rochester City News, the DOCCS website was updated sometime between Nov. 13 and Nov. 17 showing that Muntaqim had been granted a voting pardon by the governor. A spokesperson from DOCCS says that the website's assertion that Muntaqim received a voting pardon was a "clerical error" and now shows that his pardon was denied. Indeed, in November, after Muntaqim's arrest, Cuomo denied his pardon.

Muntaqim is now charged with a misdemeanor for filing a completed voter registration form and two felonies, the first for tampering with public records and the second for offering a false instrument for filing. One felony carries a maximum of seven years in prison, the other, four. In a conversation with *Prism*,

Muntaqim's cousin Blake Simons said that to his knowledge, this is the first time the state has imposed these charges, representing yet another way the law is wielded against Black radicals. Simons says it's also important to remember that the charges were filed against the backdrop of the 2020 election—one of the most heated, controversial, and consequential elections of our time—and that he wouldn't be surprised if the directive came from former President Donald Trump himself.

"It's painful that the threat of incarceration is looming over his head," said Simon.

In a mid-November rally held outside the Spiritus Christi Church, Billie Bottom Brown, Muntaqim's mother, shared that "this is the first time that I have been able to bond with my child in 49 years, and the thought of him being put back in (to prison) for a mistake that was made on a packet of papers that was issued to him to help him assimilate himself back into society is devastating."

Brown and other friends of Muntaqim assert that the voter registration form in question was included in a packet of paper provided by the Monroe County Department of Human Services. The packet included other integral documents like organ donor forms, information on medicare, food stamps, and the like.

Advocates have been circulating a petition opposing the current attempts to reincarcerate Muntaqim; it now has over 11,000 signatures. His most recent court hearing was slated for Dec. 14, but was postponed.

Muntaqim's story is one that is both deeply personal and unmistakably political. Beneath five decades of headlines is a 69-year-old man, recovering from a nearly fatal disease, seeking to reconnect with the life and the people he was separated from for over half of his life. However, his story also speaks to how the carceral system fears and attacks Black political representation and dissent. While the Black Power movement continues to light the torch now being carried by the Movement for Black Lives—creating an ideological link between the past and the present—too many of the actual organizers of the time have fallen into chasm between the dreams of Black radical organizers of the '60s/'70s and the reality we live in today.

"Political prisoners are often forgotten about even though they've made the most crucial impact on abolition," said Simons. "It's important for us to uplift the names of the Black Panthers."

## **29 Jan - To See the Danger of a Domestic “War on Terror,” Look No Further Than This Florida Case**

*Convinced his state capitol was set to be attacked by violent, far-right extremists, a Florida man called for armed resistance on social media and was promptly jailed.*

### **MORE:**

by Branko Marcetic (*Jacobin*)

The episode is a case study of how easily a domestic "war on terror" will be turned on the Left.

In the wake of January's pro-Trump protest-turned-riot at the Capitol, some have warned of the dangers of a "war on terror"-style response to the episode, and how easily it could be turned against a host of activists, dissidents, and marginalized communities. A recent criminal case out of Florida shows these warnings are not just theoretical.

On January 15, in Tallahassee, the FBI arrested thirty-three-year-old Daniel Alan Baker, a veteran and self-described "hardcore leftist" who had traveled the country last year participating in protests against police brutality. Described by various news outlets as involved in a "Florida Capitol plot" or plotting an attack on Trump supporters, Baker faces federal charges, denied bail on the grounds that he's a flight risk.

“Extremists intent on violence from either end of the political and social spectrums must be stopped, and they will be stopped,” said US attorney Larry Keefe. “This arrest serves as a message to anyone who intends to incite or commit violence in the Northern District of Florida: if you represent a threat to public safety, we will come for you, we will find you, and we will prosecute you.”

Baker’s arrest was as dramatic as any of the scenes that came out of the Capitol three weeks ago. According to witnesses, early on a Friday morning, agents rushed Baker’s apartment, guns drawn, broke open the door, and threw a flash bang grenade, before arresting Baker “without incident.”

How did a man described by his blind, elderly landlady as “a joy, very intelligent” and “considerate of the others who live here, quiet, well-behaved,” turn into what Keefe described as a “dangerous extremist” whose arrest had made the public safer? And what exactly had Baker done to justify a swarm of federal agents smashing down his door?

### **Convinced of a Coup**

As the FBI’s criminal complaint lays out, Baker stands accused of “threatening the use of violence in the United States” and “using social media to recruit and train like-minded individuals in furtherance of his Ant-Government or Anti-Authority Violent Extremist Ideology.”

It certainly sounds alarming. Such language suggests a left-wing version of this month’s thwarted violence in Washington and all manner of frightful scenarios: a plot to bomb the capitol, to assassinate lawmakers, or perhaps even to massacre the police officers he’d spent the previous year demonstrating against.

But in fact, the FBI has neither presented evidence, nor accused Baker, of anything of the sort. Instead, the government’s case against Baker centers exclusively on his constitutionally protected speech — “extremist rhetoric,” in the FBI’s words. Namely, this refers to a series of social media posts targeting, as the complaint outlines, “those he claims are white supremacists, fascists, United States persons with different ideologies than his, and allies of the United States.”

As thoroughly documented, Baker in recent months had become concerned that Trump was planning a “violent militant coup” since losing the election, and believed at several points that the United States was about to erupt in bloodshed and even civil war, even as these predictions failed to come true. These fears were escalated by what happened at the US Capitol weeks earlier.

“With the riot, he was afraid there was going to be an armed coup, and it was going to happen at the state capitol,” says Jack Fox Keen, a friend of Baker’s.

Alarmed at reports that Trump supporters and far-right demonstrators were planning armed protests in state capitols around the country—and concerned that local law enforcement neither had the numbers nor inclination to repel them, Baker urged people to take up arms and confront the protesters, envisioning himself and allies encircling the crowd, trapping them inside the Capitol, before driving them out of the state.

“They are staging an armed takeover, so only an armed community can stop them!” Baker wrote in the description of the “Defend Tallahassee” Facebook event he created, warning that “the enemy will have high power rifles and explosives,” and “is coming from every racist community in the area.”

Prosecutors are also pointing to a flier titled “CALL TO ARMS JANUARY 20TH!” Baker allegedly posted as a comment to a local Tallahassee news station’s web article and printed physical copies of. Warning of “an ARMED COUP at every American Capitol,” the flier called on Floridians to “protect capitol

RESIDENTS and CIVILIANS from armed racist mobs WITH EVERY CALIBER AVAILABLE,” and again urged attendees to “encircle” any protesters, “let them take the capitol and fight with the cops, SURROUND THEM AND TRAP THEM INSIDE!”

“This is an armed COUP and can only be stopped by an armed community!” the flier reads. “If you’re afraid to die fighting the enemy, stay in bed and live.”

This is the entire basis of the prosecution’s claim that Baker was “using social media to recruit and train” others to further an “Anti-Government or Anti-Authority” agenda: a Facebook event, a flier, and a handful of comments, all centered on protecting government property and personnel from what he believed would be an armed, far-right assault. The complaint highlights Baker’s most inflammatory language, ignoring the fact that he repeatedly made clear that his goal, if any such incident even happened, was to trap pro-Trump protesters in the Florida Capitol, and to protect those who might be threatened by them.

“He felt he needed to defend black and brown people from white supremacists,” says Keen. “In his way he was using his privilege to defend.”

Roommate Eric Champagne says Baker was “writing to a polarized audience” to mobilize people to come out, and that his real plans were a step down from even this rhetoric.

“What he was discussing with me was doing normal street medic stuff, driving around,” says Champagne. “There’s concentric roads around the capitol, you can drive around and not be attacked, but you can stop and help someone who’s injured. This time he would just have a registered firearm just in case.”

Baker had experience as a medic, and was at the time trying to raise money for an EMT program at his local community college. Those who know him recall stories of Baker rushing to apply first aid to strangers shot at protests or involved in accidents.

“I always felt very safe with him, knowing there’s a fallback there,” says Susanna Matthews, Baker’s landlady. “Cause I’m eighty years old and blind.”

### **The Most Dangerous Memes**

Perhaps most alarming is that the charges against Baker aren’t just based on his rhetoric around the pro-Trump Capitol protest that barely materialized. They also involve his activism, and a series of earlier, unrelated posts critical of police and military and using leftist slogans.

The complaint focuses on Baker’s 2020 travels across the country to “participate in protests that have resulted in violence,” referring to last year’s George Floyd protests, including his time in Seattle’s CHOP/CHAZ movement. The sole example of his supposedly menacing behavior? Instructing “his followers on how to debilitate law enforcement officers by filling up balloons with paint and to throw them at law enforcement.”

Baker’s criticism of and hostility to police makes up a large part of the complaint. Baker posted that police sound “like cold blooded nazis,” that his style of street judo “works against cops wearing body armor,” that he was “hunting” cops, and his general sense that police had been infiltrated by the far right (something that is objectively true) and were complicit in the Capitol riot (a suspicion shared by at least some lawmakers). At one point, the complaint cites Baker photographing and posting online photos of unmarked law enforcement vehicles parked at his home (“for intelligence purposes for his following”).

Some of Baker's rhetoric crossed over into violent imagery, telling followers, "Hospitalize your local fascist" or that he was "so fucking down to slay enemies again" — though as cases like the Occupy Wall Street protests showed, such rhetoric doesn't necessarily translate into action.

More goofily, the FBI also cites a handful of unremarkable yet superficially threatening leftist clichés in Baker's posts: "I want to watch capitalist society burn"; "death to amerikka"; a meme that shows him "eating the rich"; or the fact that he played "anarchist-type monologues" in the background of his workout videos. It was also partly on the basis of such "repeated public endorsement of violence and violent acts" that the court denied him bail. Baker's attorney has contended this is all political hyperbole, or at worst, too "conditional, equivocal, speculative, and unrealistic" to be taken seriously.

"Politically he was not an accelerationist, but online he liked to feed the delusions," says Champagne.

He points to a tongue-in-cheek post cited in the FBI's complaint: a video Baker put up in the wake of the Capitol incident of Trump supporters attacking a protester. "I have acquired a sponsor (Soros, you know, the antifa card was finally approved) and I and my donors will be offering cash rewards for information leading to the verified identification of any and every individual in this video," he wrote in the description.

The post was brought up by an FBI agent in Baker's initial hearing, say those who attended. When the public defender asked the agent if he knew who George Soros was and if he really believed he was financing Baker, the FBI agent replied that, not knowing who Soros was, he couldn't say. The answer prompted laughter in the courtroom. "I thought to myself, 'Well, I'm not sure where you've been for the past however many years,'" recalls Matthews.

There are also more serious questions about law enforcement's conduct. Matthews and Champagne both recall the FBI agent later testifying that he had immediately identified himself as one when carrying out the arrest. Yet according to them, agents initially presented themselves as Postmates workers, and only identified themselves as FBI later — according to Champagne, once they had already broken down Baker's door and thrown a flash bang. Matthews was so frightened by the "raving maniac" who first knocked on her door, she called 911, while the roommates — on edge due to right-wing death threats Baker had received in the past — had their own guns drawn.

### **An Outlier, or Only the Beginning?**

Keen and Champagne maintain that the government's portrayal of Baker is distorted and stripped of context. The complaint cites his other-than-honorable discharge from the military after going AWOL, for instance, but they say it neglects to mention this was because he'd been sickened by the rape culture he encountered upon enlisting. And while they disagree with his rhetoric online, they say Baker wasn't violent, and instead believed in the tradition of armed self-defense, teaching both of them martial arts.

"When he trained me, he said the best rape defense was knowing jiu-jitsu and being armed, and that vulnerable people in society should protect themselves," says Keen.

They stress his very real fear about impending far-right violence, and the post-traumatic stress disorder his military service left him with. That included his time in Syria fighting with the Kurdish People's Protection Units, cited as an example of the danger he posed in both the charges against him and to deny him bail — even though the US military has backed the very same group.

Yet at heart, Baker was — similar to many of the Capitol protesters who were spurred on by right-wing lies about the election result — responding to the news he was consuming. Much of the news media at the time

designated the event as an “attack,” a “siege,” “terrorism,” and even an “insurrection” — meaning an armed anti-government uprising — and portrayed it as dangerously close to overthrowing US democracy. The following weeks were saturated with lurid warnings of far worse, more organized violence to come, based largely on claims from various authorities, like an FBI bulletin that predicted the armed storming of government buildings across the country. That included this CNN piece that Baker included in his flier.

He was also responding to the language of politicians. Baker uploaded a video of former Rep. Cedric Richmond (D-LA), now in the Biden administration, calling on Americans to “stand up, man up, woman up, and defend this constitution from all enemies, foreign and domestic.” On his channel, Baker pointed to the statement as a call to arms, citing it to justify his plans to confront inauguration day protesters.

If nothing else, Baker’s case shows how easily the martial climate that has prevailed since the Capitol riot can be turned on unrelated individuals who hold vastly different beliefs. Baker’s case is not unlike the government’s prosecution of even nonviolent pro-Trump protesters at the Capitol, which has rested partly on inflammatory social media posts and statements of their own. This is a particularly easy standard to apply to the Left, whose staunchest pacifists use slogans and engage in activities that law enforcement and prosecutors can misconstrue as scary and violent.

In this way, the vow of Larry Keefe, the US attorney who announced Baker’s arrest, to go after “extremists” and “terrorists” across the spectrum in the wake of the riot is especially loaded. Keefe is a Trump appointee whose confirmation was secured by his pro-Trump ally, Representative Matt Gaetz. Gaetz has baselessly blamed antifa for the events at the Capitol, and last year wanted to “hunt them down like we do [terrorists] in the Middle East.”

This isn’t isolated. New York police recently cracked down on Martin Luther King Day marchers, with the city’s mayor citing the Capitol riot as justification. Republican lawmakers across the country swiftly used the riot to repackage and rush through anti-protest bills they first devised in response to last year’s anti-police brutality protests, most notably the vehemently pro-Trump Florida governor, Ron DeSantis. It’s exactly what both liberal and conservative authoritarians hoped for in the wake of the riot: that anything done in response to the pro-Trump crowd that stormed the Capitol would be later used to clamp down on protest from the left.

How far this campaign will go remains to be seen. More immediately, Daniel Baker is awaiting trial in a segregated housing unit in prison. Online isn’t real life, unless the government decides to prosecute you for it.

## **1 Feb - ‘Bring Sundiata home’: The case for freeing elderly political prisoners**

*Sundiata Acoli has been locked up for 48 years. At 84 years old, and after contracting COVID-19 in prison, Acoli's health is suffering—and a coalition of friends, family, and faith leaders are calling for him to be released before it's too late.*

### **MORE:**

by Eddie Conway (*The Real News*)

**Eddie Conway:** Thank you for joining me for this episode of Rattling the Bars. In past episodes, we have been focusing on the well-being of elderly prisoners in the prison industrial complex. Since then, this pandemic, COVID-19 has hit, we have increased our coverage of the conditions inside in relationship to elderly prisoners. Obviously, they are more susceptible to catching COVID-19 than any other part of the population, they're in overcrowded conditions, and we think they need to have available if they want the vaccine, but I want to take a minute today just to focus on one elderly prisoner. So joining me today to talk about Sundiata Acoli, is Reverend Lukata Mjumbe. Thanks for joining me, Reverend Lukata. Would you talk a little bit about Sundiata Acoli's situation? Who is he?

**Rev. Lukata Mjumbe:** Thank you, Brother Conway. My name is the Reverend Lukata Mjumbe, and I'm a member of the Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign, and it's my privilege to be here with you today and to be connected with your listeners to talk about Sundiata Acoli. Sundiata Acoli is an 84 year old father and grandfather. He was born in 1937 in Texas, and has been in prison since 1973. He dedicated his life as an activist, as an organizer connected with the civil rights and the Black Liberation Movement in the 1960s and 70s, And he committed himself to the struggle for freedom and justice, and has been locked in a prison cell since 1973.

I connected with Sundiata back when I was a college student working for Amnesty International USA, and I was looking at a list of men and women from the 1960s and 70s that had been incarcerated in relationship to their political activities and involvement in various political movements, and I connected with Sundiata back then. I began writing to him as a young man in my early 20s, while he was in prison, and have been working since that time for his freedom. I never imagined that I would be almost 50 years old and still working for his freedom, but on January the 14<sup>th</sup>, Sundiata turned 84 years old in prison, and there is a growing movement of people across the State of New Jersey, across the country, that are calling for us to bring Sundiata home.

When I was in my 20s, I was an activist and an organizer myself. Today, I am a pastor. I'm the pastor of a Presbyterian church in Princeton, New Jersey, and I have joined together with other pastors, and imams, and rabbis, and faith leaders from around the state that have said almost 48 years is too long for Sundiata Acoli to have been in prison. This octogenarian prisoner is in jeopardy right now. He was diagnosed with COVID-19 last year, and we prayed, and we prayed, and we prayed that his life would not be lost, and our prayers were answered. But now we know that he continues to be in jeopardy, not only because the institution where he is incarcerated right now is under a lockdown as a result of COVID-19, but because Sundiata, at 84 years old, has a number of other health conditions, which make him especially vulnerable.

So we're calling upon people around the country, around the state, to join with us in saying, "Bring Sundiata home," and again, I thank you for giving me the opportunity just to talk with you just a little bit about Sundiata, about who he is, about who he's been, but as importantly, looking forward to whatever future that he has left, which we hope and pray will be outside of a prison cell, rather than to [inaudible].

**Eddie Conway:** Can you tell me a little bit about his family? Obviously, he's been locked up for 48 years, that's a long time. How is this affecting them? Do he have support, and what's the situation with the family?

**Rev. Lukata Mjumbe:** Well, it's one of those questions that often comes up with any prisoners that you are working for their release. They ask, "Well, do they have family? What's their family situation? Do they have a family and community that would welcome them when they come home?" Oftentimes, when people have been in prison, even for a short period of time, they may have lost all contact with any other people, and that can be a very real contributing factor to difficulties in integrating back into communities outside of the prison facility.

Well, Sundiata has two daughters who love him, who have written letters on his behalf, who have written to the governor, who have made appeals to him. There's one daughter who lives in Texas, the other who is in New York, and they have said, "Look, we are ready to receive our father. We are ready to allow our father to have the rest of his life, not only with us, but also with his grandchildren, where he will have the opportunity to be loved and to be cared for. We have a place for him, there will be no problem," and Sundiata has an extended family, even beyond his daughters and his grandchildren. He has a loving community of people that, as I mentioned before, have been working for decades to see his release and are looking forward to receiving him, and welcoming him, and caring for him, as he moves further into the twilight of his life.

**Eddie Conway:** Okay. I can't verify this, but I believe that somewhere in Texas in his earlier years before he joined the Black Panther Party, he was involved in the NASA program down in Texas. Do you know anything about that?

**Rev. Lukata Mjumbe:** Absolutely. Now there are many, many people who were brilliant and had all kinds of different types of work that they did prior to their involvement in the civil rights movement and during their involvement in the civil rights movement. But yes, Sundiata was and is a mathematician. He was a computer programmer, he worked for NASA, he worked for a number of computer programming firms when he was in New York, and worked as a member of the Black Panther Party while he was in New York. And so, yes, this is someone who had serious and has serious skills and opportunities, and decided aside and alongside all of that, that he wanted to use the natural gifts that he had, and the skills and the talents that he developed as a part of a freedom movement. So when we talk about Sundiata, we talk about him as a human being, that he is someone who yes, was highly skilled, highly educated. Yes, that worked for NASA, was a computer programmer.

Now, my brother, I suspect that computer systems have changed quite a bit in 2021, as opposed to the systems that he was dealing with back in the late 60s and early 70s, but Sundiata is someone who has always been incredibly gifted and talented. I remember when I was a college student, and classmates of mine and student members of the organization that I was a part of in Atlanta, Georgia, we used to write to Sundiata, and call Sundiata and other prisoners who were incarcerated as a result of their political activities, and they would help us with our college papers. They would give us advice and instruction, and do rewrites, and sometimes they were more difficult in their critiques than our professors were. So Sundiata is someone who we have always known, not only as someone who had a deep commitment to the freedom struggle, but someone who was incredibly talented, and skilled, and intellectually developed, he's also an artist and a poet.

And a number of people who wrote to him recently, I mentioned that his birthday was just this month, the day before the birthday of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King on January 14<sup>th</sup>, and so hundreds of people around the country wrote letters to Sundiata. He's in the federal prison in Cumberland, Maryland, and he's been in this federal prison, even though he is a New Jersey State prisoner, since the 1970s, he was moved into the federal system as a result of his history of political activity, and when they are getting letters written back from him, they're just amazed. I have someone who just called me a couple of days ago that said, "I got a letter back from Sundiata Acoli," and this gentleman is an accomplished poet, and he sent Sundiata a poem, and Sundiata read his poem, and gave him an evaluation and a critique, and he said, "I am just honored and privileged that he took the time to look at my work, to share with me, to help me to become better," and that's a testimony that I can give personally about Sundiata, and that so many others can.

So yes, brother, that history is something that we find written up in biographies about Sundiata about his history with NASA. I wouldn't say he was one of those hidden figures that they've done movies about, but certainly, his history and his contribution, in many ways, are hidden, when we only think about him as a prisoner.

**Eddie Conway:** I have a personal story like that to share myself. I was writing the book *The Greatest Threat* and I sent it to him, he offered a suggestion to improve it, and the book turned out pretty well, so I was thankful to him for that. You say you are working with a group of faith leaders to get some support for Acoli. What does that look like, and how can people help with that?

**Rev. Lukata Mjumbe:** Well, it looks like what I would consider to be growth and expansion. Oftentimes, when we talk about those who are connected with our legacy of struggle and the Black Liberation Movement, there's a certain group of people, a certain reliable constituency of folks that we can expect to call for freedom, and justice, and self-determination, who may mobilize or organize, and we have seen

those communities working hard for Sundiata for decades. Now what we're seeing is a growing group of people who you might not expect.

I was on a call just last night with a group of believers from a temple in Hillsborough, New Jersey, and we were talking about the documentary that was on Netflix by Ava DuVernay, 13, and they were able to make a connection with the contradictions that we see within the system of mass incarceration, with the particular case of Sundiata Acoli. And they themselves have made commitments to write letters, to reach out.

So the ways that we can help are manifold. The first thing that I ask people to do, is if you're on social media, and if you receive and connect with information in that way, go to the hashtag, #BringSundiataHome. if you go to the hashtag #BringSundiataHome, you're going to find access to the Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign website, for example, which is [www.sundiata.org](http://www.sundiata.org), and I'll spell it out, Sundiata Acoli, [www.S-U-N-D-I-A-T-A A-C-O-L-I .org](http://www.S-U-N-D-I-A-T-A-A-C-O-L-I.org). And so, when you go to the website, you'll find information in terms of Sundiata's case, you'll find information about how you can write him directly at the federal correctional institution in Cumberland, Maryland, Sundiata's quote, slave name, the name before he accepted his African name, was Clark Squire. And so, you'll have to write him with Sundiata Acoli with Squire in parentheses, and his prison number, number 39794-066, and then you'll send it to P.O. Box 1000, Cumberland, Maryland, to the federal correctional institution at Cumberland, Maryland.

So we're going to ask people to write letters, to send emails, to make phone calls. We're going to ask people to make contributions where they're able, because we still have some legal expenses that are ahead of us this year, and appeals that we are filing. Sundiata has come before the parole board and has been denied parole six times. And so, we don't have six more times, we don't have one more time. Sundiata, at 84 years of age, with serious health contradictions beyond COVID-19, he has issues with his heart, he has intestinal issues. There are other presenting health issues that he has been struggling with, and that anyone would struggle with after they've been locked up in prison for almost 48 years in substandard conditions. This is the year that we have to bring Sundiata home.

So we ask that you be made aware of what's going on, that you keep Sundiata's name on your lips, that you begin to talk with people and connect it, when we have discussions about mass incarceration, when we have discussions about criminal justice. I say to churches, and we've been doing this with Sundiata for over a year now, put Sundiata Acoli on your sick and shut-in list. Every week, we have a group of people who are sick, who are shut in, who we pray [inaudible 00:16:55], who we know that we're not able to connect with directly, who we know are unable to move and to have access the way they would like to or the way that they need to. Certainly, Sundiata Acoli, as well as so many other women and men who are incarcerated within the American prison system, are sick and shut in. And so, add Sundiata to your prayer list, add Sundiata to your advocacy list, and get involved with the Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign, which again, you can connect with at [sundiataacoli.org](http://sundiataacoli.org).

**Eddie Conway:** So all that information you just shared with the public will be found at the end of this video, and they can get in contact with Acoli through the address and so on. Do you have any final thoughts, something you want to share with the public?

**Rev. Lukata Mjumbe:** Well, I just want to emphasize the urgency. One, let me first say, well, thank you. I know that you are one who understands this legacy of struggle, that knows the details of the trial and tribulation of people who are incarcerated and held for long periods of time. And so, I honor you and I respect you, Brother Conway, and I appreciate you. In fact, I remember seeing your name on that list back in the early 90s, when I was looking on the list of various women and men who were locked and bound as a result of their political activities on the injustice of this system. But I say to so many of us who are wanting to advocate for Sundiata, if not now, when? If not us, then who? That we have to do something this year,

and we have to do something which is going to appeal to the broadest cross section of people who will join with us in a harmony that says, "Bring Sundiata home."

I'm not arguing anymore about the particularities of Sundiata's case. I am a pastor, and I have prayed for everybody involved in this case. If you go back and you look at what happened in 1973, I hadn't even turned two years old at the time, I was still one at the time. There were so many people that were impacted. Sundiata was a driver of a car on the New Jersey Turnpike. You may have come to know about Sundiata Acoli as a result of his association with the case of JoAnne Chesimard, now known as Assata Shakur, and there had been so much political angling that has surrounded this case going back all the way to the early 1970s, and Sundiata, in many ways, has been a casualty much of that political angling, but I'm not arguing about that anymore.

Sundiata has already served almost 48 years of prison, it will be 48 years in May. He has served what is almost what would be double a life sentence in the State of New Jersey. He has already paid and served every single year, every single month, every single day that he should serve, and the courts have already said that he should be released. We've gone before panels of judges that said, "Clean disciplinary record. When we look at the parole situation, there's no reason why he should not be released," but the reason has been politics. So moving forward, we're not dealing with a focus and a fixation on politics, we're calling for the compassionate release of an 84 year old man who has almost been in prison for 48 years, who was born in 1937, incarcerated in 1973, who is a grandfather, who is a father, who is sick and who needs to come home.

And so, if people can find it in their hearts to understand that there is no need, and there is no justice, and there is no rational, logical, principled, moral reason to keep Sundiata Acoli in prison, I just ask that you do something. That to send an email, that you write a letter, that you make a phone call, that you let his name be on your lips, that you speak to a friend or a family member, if you have a grandmother, if you have a great-grandmother, if you have someone who is elderly in your life.

In the Book of Colossians, and I'll end with this, I am a preacher. In the Book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul, in the very last verse of a short letter that the Apostle Paul wrote, he said, "Remember my chains. Remember my chains." In the Book of Hebrews it says, "Imagine that you are in prison with me." So imagine if you were in prison with Sundiata for 48 years. Imagine if your grandfather, if your great-grandfather or great-grandmother, or grandmother were in prison, and what would you do? That's what I wake up with in the morning. I think about this man, grandfather, father, activist, organizer, someone who is beloved and needs to come home, and I just ask that you join with us.

### **1 Feb - The Eric King playlist 2.0 is now live!**

*In the midst of a state-enforced mail ban, political prisoner Eric King compiled this new playlist in the first weeks of 2021.*

#### **MORE:**

Learn about Eric, enjoy the music, and do what you can to offer support. #FreeEricKing: [bit.ly/2MLxfsP](https://bit.ly/2MLxfsP)

### **1 Feb - Prison Break: A Key for Every Lock**

*Below is our condensed version of the monthly column by the Certain Days collective.*

#### **MORE:**

Much has happened in the first few weeks of this new year. Illinois is ending cash bail, pressure continues to mount for the new president to curtail Federal executions, and Covid-19 continues to disproportionately

affect those locked behind bars. On January 15<sup>th</sup> former FALN Puerto Rican political prisoner Elizam Escobar succumbed to cancer. Escobar was a committed revolutionary—and a talented artist—until the very end.

If you haven't yet gotten the new 2021 *Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners* calendar, know that they are selling out quickly. Get one now while you still can. The moving essay for the month—a tribute to political prisoners and the inspiration they provide—is by Antoine Riggins, a politicized prisoner serving life in prison in Pennsylvania. The vibrant indigenous artwork for February is by activist and artist Gord Hill, aka Zig Zag.

### **Releases**

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, Standing Rock political prisoner **Rattler** was released from Federal prison to a halfway house. Rattler is recovering from Covid-19 and is working hard while at the halfway house, hoping to be released in the near future. Rattler can use as much support as possible as he returns to life on the outside: [paypalme/siouxic](https://www.paypal.me/siouxic)

Renowned hacktivist and political prisoner **Jeremy Hammond** was released from a halfway house to home-confinement in mid-January. After serving a 10-year sentence, Hammond has been in the halfway house since November.

### **Ongoing Cases and Appeals**

Accused Green Scare activist **Joseph Dibee** was released to home confinement on January 12<sup>th</sup>, after being physically assaulted and contracting Covid-19. Imprisoned since his capture in August 2018, Dibee will continue to fight his case from the outside, via the assistance of a state-mandated ankle monitor.

Vegan anarchist political prisoner **Eric King** has once again been issued a mail ban. Still recovering from Covid-19, and just released from a previous mail ban, Eric can use any and all support, solidarity, and publicity. He is currently facing trumped up charges of assault that could lead to decades more in prison. Learn more about Eric, read his piece in the new 2021 *Certain Days* calendar, check out this recent interview Eric did with the Seattle-Tacoma chapter of Black and Pink, and listen to his latest playlist of his favorite songs: [itsgoingdown.org/prison-break-feb-2021](https://itsgoingdown.org/prison-break-feb-2021)

Speaking of playlists, Indigenous activist **Loren Reed** also has a new collaboration with the Tucson Anti-Repression Committee: [mixcloud.com/TucsonAntiRepressionCrew/loren-reeds-emo-prison-playlist](https://mixcloud.com/TucsonAntiRepressionCrew/loren-reeds-emo-prison-playlist)

**Patrick O'Neill** of the Kings Bay Plowshares 7 began his prison sentence on January 14, one of seven Catholic defendants bearing witness to the destructiveness of nuclear weapons. Defendant **Clare Grady** is to report to prison in the coming weeks, and defendant **Mark Colville** has a sentencing hearing scheduled for this month.

Longtime political prisoner **Jaan Laaman** recently contracted Covid-19, and was also recently denied compassionate release, though he has been imprisoned since the mid-1980s.

After claims of sexual assault went uninvestigated for months, imprisoned whistleblower **Reality Winner** is hoping to be released by the new president. Scientist and Covid-19 whistleblower **Rebekah Jones** turned herself in to authorities on January 17<sup>th</sup> as state pressure continues to rise.

It has been almost a year since the wave of blockades in solidarity with **Wet'suwet'en land defenders** began. #ShutDownCanada continues to go strong, and there are over 60 activists still facing serious charges for their solidarity actions.

## **2 Feb - Watch ‘Dope is Death’ - documentary about Dr. Mutulu Shakur for FREE!**

*Check out the brand new documentary for free online.*

### **MORE:**

Its the story of how Dr. Mutulu Shakur, stepfather of Tupac Shakur, along with the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, combined community health with radical politics to create the first acupuncture detoxification program in America in 1973 — a visionary project eventually deemed too dangerous to exist in America: [vice.com/en/article/y3gxy5/the-shortlist-with-suroosh-alvi](https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3gxy5/the-shortlist-with-suroosh-alvi)

## **2 Feb - After Ignoring Reality Winner’s Case, MSNBC Uses Her To Attack Snowden**

*Three and a half years after NSA whistleblower Reality Winner was arrested and charged under the Espionage Act, MSNBC finally invited her mother Billie Winner-Davis on the network on January 29.*

### **MORE:**

by Kevin Gosztola (*Shadowproof*)

Billie was able to share her message on why Reality Winner deserves compassionate release from federal prison during a pandemic.

The segment on “The ReidOut,” hosted by Joy Reid, was a worthwhile opportunity to speak to a national audience and potentially reach staff in President Joe Biden’s administration. However, to justify giving Winner-Davis air time, the segment was crafted in a partisan and warped manner that demonized anyone who supports NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden over Reality Winner.

It depicted Snowden as a “traitor” while suggesting, even though Reality Winner also leaked classified information, that what she did was patriotic and possible to forgive.

Last September, Snowden appeared on MSNBC’s “11<sup>th</sup> Hour,” which is hosted by Brian Williams. Snowden urged President Donald Trump or any future president to end the war on whistleblowers.

“[Trump] should pardon Reality Winner for trying to expose election interference. He should pardon Daniel Hale for revealing abuses in the drone program, or Terry Albury for trying to expose systematic racism within the FBI. And these are all people who are deserving of pardon,” Snowden declared.

Snowden put clemency for Reality Winner and other whistleblowers before clemency for himself. In fact, he has always supported Reality Winner. He published an op-ed that condemned her pretrial detention immediately after she was arrested and charged with violating the Espionage Act.

“Winner is languishing in prison, while figures like Edward Snowden have become the darlings of civil libertarians,” Reid stated. “Her petition for clemency was overlooked by the former president, who went on to pardon his cronies convicted in the Russia probe.”

### **Uninformed MSNBC Guest: ‘What She Did Was Wrong’**

For many, many months, supporters of Reality Winner appealed to Malcolm Nance, who is a former naval cryptologist known for weaving unverifiable conspiracies about Trump and Russia that stray extremely far from the truth. They did so because they believed Nance might use his platform as an MSNBC analyst and a Twitter user with nearly a half-million followers to help free Reality Winner.

But Nance ignored Reality Winner and her supporters up until January 29, when he appeared during the same segment as Billie Winner-Davis.

“When [Reality Winner] became a civilian contractor, you could understand the allure of wanting to go out there and make a significant impact on a very important, you know, story of the day,” Nance said. “On the other hand, what she did was wrong. She released classified information.”

“And there’s a way to do this. Take a look at [Lieutenant] Colonel Alexander Vindman and others. That’s water under the bridge.”

Apparently, it is not “water under the bridge” otherwise Nance would have stuck to the script, attacked Snowden, and allowed MSNBC to boost her as a whistleblower worthy of support.

Nance showed he possesses no grasp of the two-tiered system for whistleblowers. Reality Winner’s case is not analogous to the case of Vindman, whose disclosures were a key basis of the first Trump impeachment.

Vindman was a high-ranking official, who could easily turn to Congress. In contrast, Reality Winner was a low-ranking contractor. She could go to her supervisor, but the political nature of what she said would have likely turned her into someone monitored as a potential insider threat.

Reality Winner could have disclosed information to the inspector general’s office that oversees the NSA, but her complaint might have been ignored. Worse, the inspector general might have forwarded her name to the Justice Department for a leak investigation, as happened in the cases of the NSA Four—Bill Binney, Thomas Drake, Ed Loomis, and Kirk Wiebe.

Also, it is common for people like Nance to attack whistleblowers for being egotistical and out to enrich themselves. Talk of the “allure” of making an impact on a significant news story evokes this banality.

“There is a way for Ms. Winter [sic] to get a pardon,” Nance added. “She needs to show remorse. Come out and expose what she did. We all know what that is, and to show that, in comparison, General Michael Flynn, the former director of Defense Intelligence Agency, was—I mean, was committing crimes that he admitted to the FBI.”

Nance knows so little about Winner’s case that he mixed up her last name. If he’d known any of the basics, he would not have said she needed to “show remorse” to get a commutation or compassionate release.

Reality Winner did not go to trial. She accepted a plea agreement. To do so, she was required to take responsibility for her actions, and she apologized.

### **“A Straight-Up Traitor”**

Joy Reid brought Nance into the conversation by asking him about “purist” civil libertarians who see him as a “cause celebre.”

“But the House Intelligence report in 2016 found that the vast majority of the documents that Mr. Snowden stole really had nothing to do with programs impacting individual privacy interests. They instead pertained to the military, defense and intelligence programs of great interest to America’s adversaries,” Reid stated.

“And he is now in Russia...And yet you have seen Republican lawmakers pushing the former president to pardon him. There’s been a lot of people on other sides of the aisle also pushing for a pardon.”

Reid asked, “Why do you suppose that Reality’s story has not become the kind of cause celebre for those who care about information getting out that could help the public? This [helped] expose our voting systems were targeted.”

Biden was directly involved in contacting world leaders in June 2013 to discourage them from offering Snowden asylum. He ended up in Russia because the State Department revoked his passport, and he was trapped in a Moscow airport. It’s the fault of United States government officials that he is living in a country deemed to be one of America’s top adversaries.

The House Intelligence Committee report cited by Reid was described by Barton Gellman as an “aggressively dishonest.” (Gellman worked on Snowden documents for the *Washington Post*.)

Opponents of Snowden with roots in the national security establishment frequently utter this talking point about the vast majority pertaining to military and intelligence programs of “great interest to America’s adversaries.” However, this “shrill brigade” of critics, as the *New York Times* referred to them, has never “presented the slightest proof that his disclosures really hurt the nation’s security.”

“Many of the mass collection programs Mr. Snowden exposed would work just as well if they were reduced in scope and brought under strict outside oversight, as [President Barack Obama’s panel recommended,” the Times editorial board further insisted.

Nance’s answer to Reid was boring and uninspired. “Why the right-wing has Edward Snowden as a cause celebre? That man’s a straight-up traitor. I mean, he literally exposed programs I swore to die before I would ever release in the hands of our enemies. And he did it with such blithe spiritedness. He joined the CIA and the NSA with the intent to release this information.”

There is zero evidence to support this assertion that Snowden joined the CIA and the NSA with plans to disclose information to journalists. Even the CIA doesn’t subscribe to this conspiracy theory.

“The CIA did not file any report on Snowden indicating that it suspected he was trying to break into classified computer files to which he did not have authorized access while he was employed at the CIA, nor was he returned home from an overseas assignment because of such concerns,” Todd Ebitz, CIA spokesperson, stated in October 2013.

### **Blaming Trump and The Justice Department For What Happened**

Fortunately, the broadcast glitched and marvelously scrambled up Nance’s words so viewers were unable to hear all of Nance’s delirious message endorsing much of the war on whistleblowers.

Reid asked Billie Winner-Davis if she thought Reality Winner went to *The Intercept* because it had published documents from Snowden. “Did she think that that was a sympathetic outlet for her? And what do you make of what happened as a result of that same news outlet not really concealing her identity?”

The problems with *The Intercept*’s handling of Reality Winner and the document she disclosed were numerous. But to ask Billie Winner-Davis to rehash these issues on national television when her chief concern is bringing her daughter back home is vain news entertainment. It is elite hosts and producers at MSNBC posturing as more rational and responsible gatekeepers than the so-called fringe media, which is *The Intercept* in this case.

Nevertheless, Billie Winner-Davis nailed the response. “I do realize that mistakes were made. Mistakes were made both by *The Intercept* and by my daughter that led the FBI straight to her door. But I can’t blame *The Intercept* for what’s happened to my daughter.”

“I blame Trump, and I blame Trump’s DOJ for what’s happened to my daughter. They’re the ones who arrested her, who denied her bail, who have persecuted her under the Espionage Act, who have denied her compassionate release, and who have made sure that she got the longest-ever sentence for a crime of this nature in the United States.”

The segment concluded with Winner-Davis clearly stating her demand for Biden’s Justice Department.

“Reality has a petition for clemency on file, and that’s pretty much what we’re pushing right now,” Winner-Davis said. “Just commute her sentence. Let her out. She is suffering in a maximum-security prison infected with COVID. And also they’re in lockdown conditions.”

“I just want her home. I want her out. We can look at the idea of a pardon later on. But what I want right now is I want Joe Biden to look at her. She’s no threat at all to society. There is no reason to keep her locked away in prison at this time,” Billie Winner-Davis added.

Coverage of whistleblower stories rarely happens on cable news networks. As this example shows, when there is coverage they almost always filter it through a partisan lens. That almost always does a disservice to the whistleblowers in need of support from the public.

Neither Malcolm Nance, Joy Reid, nor any other person at MSNBC really cares about the impact of the Espionage Act on journalism, freedom of speech, and truth-tellers who risk their livelihoods to inform the public. Yet, regardless of what was said about Snowden, MSNBC could not manipulate Billie Winner-Davis into reinforcing attacks that intensify divisions.

And at least Billie Winner-Davis had the last word, and she gained the satisfaction of knowing there were hundreds if not thousands of more people who would search for information on Reality Winner’s case and see what they could do to help her daughter.

### **5 Feb - Steve Martinez taken into custody in North Dakota**

*We recently found out that #NoDAPL Water Protector Steve Martinez was arrested for contempt of court for resisting a grand jury in North Dakota.*

#### **MORE:**

Steve was originally subpoenaed in the winter of 2017 and refused to cooperate, but at the time contempt proceedings did not happen.

He’s been re-subpoenaed, four years later, and is being held for (again) refusing to cooperate. We expect more info soon, including publicity materials. He’s being held in the Burleigh-Morton County Detention Center in Bismarck North Dakota. To support Steve with commissary money while being held, donate via the Burleigh County Sheriff’s Department Detention Center: [burleighco.com/departments/sheriff/faq](https://burleighco.com/departments/sheriff/faq)

### **7 Feb - Political Prisoner Bill Dunne has COVID-19**

*Our comrade, anti-authoritarian political prisoner Bill Dunne, has tested positive for COVID-19.*

#### **MORE:**

Forced into a petri dish, prisoners have no means by which to effectively protect themselves from a highly contagious and deadly virus. The state, exclusively, is responsible for Bill's sickness, along with that of all other folks who are in prison and have tested positive. This serves as one more reason to FREE 'EM ALL!

### **12 Feb - The Unjust Imprisonment of Imam Jamil al-Amin**

**WHAT:** Webinar

**WHEN:** 2:30pm, EST, Friday, February 12<sup>th</sup>

**WHERE:** Zoom or Facebook Live (registration information below)

**COST:** FREE

**MORE:**

To commemorate Black History Month, we will examine the unjust case of Imam Jamil Al-Amin, formerly known as H. Rap Brown, who was targeted by the government on fabricated charges and sentenced to life without parole plus an additional 35 years in a federal supermax prison. Register for the zoom call at [tiny.cc/JamilZoom2021](https://tiny.cc/JamilZoom2021) or watch live at [facebook.com/civilfreedoms](https://facebook.com/civilfreedoms)

### **12 Feb - Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council (MACC) General Assembly**

**WHAT:** General Assembly

**WHEN:** 6:30pm, Friday, February 12<sup>th</sup>

**WHERE:** Zoom (details below)

**COST:** FREE

**MORE:**

We will be hosting another "Virtual" General Assembly for February - Call Details: **Meeting ID:** 815 2486 1153 **Passcode:** 450963 **Phone:** 929.205.6099

General Assemblies are the most ideal place for new folks to plug-in to MACC, learn about our projects and ongoing efforts, and connect to organizers. We encourage everyone to come with ideas about what they would like to see for future campaigns or actions and what direction they'd like MACC to take to build a more powerful anarchist movement. Especially in our current context, when renewed attention has mixed repression with struggles for racial justice, abolition, and a humane economy. There will be a 6:30-7PM orientation for new folks that would like to get connected and learn more about MACC's structure and history. The orientation is the same meeting ID and you do not need to attend a separate conference call.

Please review these documents before coming: [macc.nyc/organizing](https://macc.nyc/organizing) [macc.nyc/safer-spaces](https://macc.nyc/safer-spaces)

### **21 Feb - Anarchists Care About Books: "Snow Crash" by Neal Stephenson**

**WHAT:** Book club

**WHEN:** 4:30pm Sunday, February 21<sup>st</sup>

**WHERE:** YOUR HOME/Zoom

**COST:** FREE

**MORE:**

Join Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council (MACC) to discuss "Snow Crash" by Neal Stephenson.

Zoom info TBA. Join our listserv to stay in the loop [gaggle.email/join/acabooks@gaggle.email](mailto:gaggle.email/join/acabooks@gaggle.email)

MACC events are open to all anarchists, antifascists, anti-authoritarians and those interested in anarchist ideas and organizing.