

CROSSROAD

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Who Say's Hip Hop Is Dead???

This critique is directed towards an article in **CROSSROAD**, May-June, Vol. 9 #1. The article was written by Brotha Lethal Wonder. His opinion was that "Hip Hop is dead". i was very displeased after reading this particular article and saw the need to respond to this brotha's criticism.

First of all, i believe that it is not Hip Hop that is dead, but instead brotha's like Lethal are helping to kill it. There are enough brothas and sistas as well as [North Americans] in society attempting to denounce Hip Hop, and believe me, We don't need anymore. What is needed is not Us criticising this beautiful "art form", but instead We need to be trying to uplift it, or said another way, "transform" it. Hip Hop has done what even the [New Afrikan] nationalists, the schools, the social institutions etc. could not do, and that's galvanize Our people (especially the youth). There is no question that this was done through a lot of "negativity", but that does not negate the fact that 90% of [New Afrikan] youth, and probably 50% of [North American] youth adhere to this art form. So, We can diss it all We want, We can claim that it is dead, but in all actuality the social institutions in this society, some of the methods used by the [New Afrikan] nationalist movement are decadent. Hip Hop lives — it lives in the minds and hearts of the people.

i know that there are some hip hop "villains" but there are also some who definitely help forward the struggle of [New Afrikans] for economic and social empowerment. Listen to the lyrics of Tupac Shakur, Lauren Hill, Queen Latifah, Bone Thugs 'N' Harmony, Wyclef Jean, KRS-1, L.L. Cool J, Rakim, Scarface, etc. Plus, where do you get off dissing the Ghetto Boys? These brothas have for years put out some progressive music. They have supported the transformation of the G.D.'s, they have protested against po'lice brutality, etc. Then what about Tupac

— one of the most influential rappers of the decade. This brotha has helped to reinstate that militant spirit in Our youth; this brotha was not all about selling drugs, pimping hoes, and big wheeling — he put out some of the most powerful messages ever relayed through music, and he was able to infuse these ideas in the minds of Our youth in a way that they could "relate" to it. No doubt an artist like Paris is positive and revolutionary, but We must accept the fact that Paris did not (continues on pg.3)



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NEW AFRIKAN DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

WE, Black People in America, in consequence of arriving at a knowledge of ourselves as a people with dignity, long deprived of that knowledge; as a consequence of revolting with every decimal of our collective and individual beings against the oppression that for three hundred years has destroyed and broken and warped the bodies and minds and spirits of our people in America, in consequence of our raging desire to be free of this oppression, to destroy this oppression wherever it assaults **humankind** in the world, and in consequence of inextinguishable determination to go a different way, to build a new and better world, do hereby declare ourselves forever free and independent of the jurisdiction of the United States of America and the obligations which that country's unilateral decision to make our ancestors and ourselves paper-citizens placed on us.

We claim no rights from the United States of America other than those rights belonging to human beings anywhere in the world, and these include the right to damages, reparations, due us from the grievous injuries sustained by our ancestors and ourselves by reason of United States lawlessness.

Ours is a revolution against oppression—our own oppression and that of all people in the world. And it is a revolution for a better life, a better station for **all**, a surer harmony with the forces of life in the universe. We therefore see these aims as the aims of our revolution:

- To free black people in America from oppression;
- To support and wage the world revolution until all people everywhere are so free;
- To build a new Society that is better than what We now know and as perfect as **We** can make it;
- To assure all people in the New Society maximum opportunity and equal access to that maximum;
- To promote industriousness, responsibility, scholarship, and service;
- To create conditions in which freedom of religion abounds and the pursuit of God and/or destiny, place and purpose of **humankind** in the Universe will be without hindrance;
- To build a Black independent nation where no sect or religious creed subverts or impedes the building of the New Society, the New State Government, or achievement of the Aims of the Revolution as set forth in this Declaration;
- To end exploitation of **human beings** by **each other** or the environment;
- To assure equality of rights for the sexes;
- To end color and class discrimination, while not abolishing salubrious diversity, and to promote self-respect and mutual understanding among all people in the society;
- To protect and promote the personal dignity and integrity of the individual, and **his or her** natural rights;
- To place the major means of production and trade in the trust of the state to assure the benefits of this earth and **our** genius and labor to society and all its members, and
- To encourage and reward the individual for hard work and initiative and insight and devotion to the Revolution.

In mutual trust and great expectation, We the undersigned, for ourselves and for those who look to us but are unable personally to affix their signatures hereto, do join in this solemn Declaration of Independence, and to support this Declaration and to assure the success of the Revolution, We pledge without reservation ourselves, our talents, and all our worldly goods.

galvanize the youth like a Tupac Shakur. Yes, We appreciate his contributions, his sacrifices, but We also appreciate those given to the peoples struggle by Tupac Shakur.

Let's not get caught up in the mindset that because a brotha may curse in his rap or even say bitch or hoe one or two times... that he is no good and cannot be used to forward the cause of the people. What We must understand is the culture and the mindset in which Our youth are in, and when We do this, then We'll find that the best way to reach them is to talk the language in which they understand. No doubt [North American & other capitalists] are capitalizing off of the distributing of hip hop music, but that is because they have monopolized all the "telecommunications" in the world. But should these rappers stop rapping because of this, should they stop making the few dollars they are making? i say nah; they must just rechannel their money into the [New Afrikan] community to help the development of Our downtrodden neighborhoods, schools, social institutions, etc. If you take rap away from them, you surely will hurt more than help the [New Afrikan] community, because you will be putting these former drug dealers, gang-bangers, etc. back into the street to fall back into their self-destructive ways.

Instead of denouncing these youth, let's try to transform them. Let's educate them, not hate on them. We need to reach them and gain their support in the struggle for Reparations and for Nationhood. That's Our only choice. We cannot continue to disconnect Ourselves from them, because by doing so We are disconnecting Ourselves from the vast majority of Our youth. Hip Hop has made some positive contributions to New Afrikan people although the negativity sometimes overshadows the positive deeds. Nevertheless, let's not get stuck on the bad and find the good in Hip Hop. If We want to go around denouncing everyone and everything for the bad things that We can find in them then We'll never get anywhere. Instead of killing Hip Hop, let's help it live and thrive. Let's do that by supporting the rappers who do not negate their historical duties to their communities and people, while at the same time try to uplift those brothas and sistas who continue to attempt to live and glorify the gangsteristic, parasitic aspects of Hip Hop that do exist. If We fail to do this, WE are ultimately turning our backs on Our youth, and thus turning Our backs on Ourselves and Our collective future.

**HIP HOP LIVES
LONG LIVE TUPAC SHAKUR
LONG LIVE HIP HOP**

by Oronde Balagoon

Endnotes

i also want to say that i believe that Master-P and his crew do produce some very positive songs although they also produce some rather unproductive songs too. i would say that i believe the positive outweighs the negative although i hope that they will continue to transform the negative aspects into positive aspects as they continue to thrive in the business.

We sincerely apologize
to our subscribers and
the entire community of
CROSSROAD readers
for the delay in
resuming publication of
CROSSROAD.

Women In Prison

by Bonnie Kerness

Lecture at St. Elizabeth's College

March 6, 2000

I have been working with the *American Friends Service Committee* as a human rights advocate on behalf of prisoners in the United States for the past 23 years. I'd like to share with you some of the voices of the women in prison that I hear during my day.

From New Jersey, "We are forced to sleep on the floor in the middle of winter with bad backs and aching bodies, cold air still blowing from the vents no matter what the temperature was outside. At two o'clock in the morning they wake you up and tell you to clear the room. They go through your personal belongings and then put them in the trash..."

From Texas, "the guard sprayed me with pepper spray because I wouldn't take my clothes off in front of five male guards. Then they carried me to a cell, laid me down on a steel bed and took my clothes off. They left me there in that cell with that pepper spray in my face and nothing to wash my face with. I didn't give them any reason to do that, I just didn't want to take my clothes off."

From Arizona, "the only thing you get in isolation is a peanut butter sandwich in the morning, a cheese sandwich in the afternoon and for supper another peanut butter sandwich. If you want a drink here, you have to drink toilet water..."

From Missouri, "When I refused to move into a double cell, they came into my cell and dragged me out and threw me on my back. I was beaten about my face and head. One of the guards stuck his finger in my eye deliberately. I was then rolled on my stomach and cuffed on my wrists with leg irons on my ankles...I was made to walk a thousand feet with the leg irons. Then they put me in a device called a restraint chair. When they put you in this chair your hands are cuffed behind your back and tucked under your buttocks. They stripped me naked...and kept me there over 9 hours until I fouled myself on my hands which were tucked underneath me through a hole in the chair."

I could go on and on. By 1999, there were about 150,000 women in jails and prisons in the United States. About 60% of those women were mothers. Most are imprisoned for non-violent crimes, largely in violation of the drug laws. Women tend to commit survival crimes to earn money, feed a drug dependent life, or escape brutalizing physical conditions and relationships. The number of women in prison in this country is about 10 times the number of women incarcerated in all the Western European countries together. It goes without saying that most of the women in US prisons are women of color, with [New Afrikan] women being imprisoned more than eight times the rate of imprisonment for [North American] women and Latin women being imprisoned nearly four times the rate of [North American] women. According to a recent US Department of Justice study, almost 40% of the [North American] female state prisoners age 24 or younger were identified as mentally ill. Twenty percent of the [New Afrikan] females and 22% of the Latin females in state prisons were mentally ill. Without any fanfare, the "war on drugs" has become a war on women and it has clearly contributed to the explosion in the women's prison population in this country. Over a third of women serving time for drug offenses in the nation's prisons are serving time

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solely for possession.

These past years for me have been full of hundreds and hundreds of calls and complaints of an increasingly disturbing nature from prisoners and members of their families throughout the United States. The proportion of those complaints coming from women in prison has increased dramatically. Women are describing conditions of confinement which are stomach wrenching. Certainly women in correctional institutions are suffering from sexual abuse by staff, or as one woman put it, "I am tired of being gynecologically examined every time I'm searched". They complain about rape, sexual misconduct by guards and fondling. As one New York prisoner put it, "That was not part of my sentence, to...perform oral sex with officers." When women report such things to authorities, we then get reports of harassment and retaliation from the same guards that they were filing complaints against.

Women are also reporting inappropriate use of restraints on pregnant and sick prisoners. The reports of giving birth while being handcuffed and shackled are horrible, including one report from a woman whose baby was coming at the same time the guard who had shackled her legs was on a break somewhere else in the hospital.

Other abuses include medical care which is often so callous that it is life-threatening. We have received reports about a woman who died of pancreatic disease that went undiagnosed, about a mentally ill woman who was confined naked in a filthy cell where she ingested her own bodily waste, a woman who suffered burns over 54% of her body and gradually lost mobility when she was denied the special bandages which would keep her skin from tightening, from a woman who unsuccessfully begged staff for months to allow her to see a doctor and was finally diagnosed with cancer. Though in enormous pain, she was given no pain medication. She died nine months after the diagnosis.

Couple all of this with the increased use of extended isolation, lack of treatment for substance abuse, lack of counseling services, concerns about the inappropriate use of psychotropic medications and you have an increasingly clear picture of what life is like for our sisters in prison. Add the use of prison labor and your picture of the prison system continues to unfold. If you call to make a reservation at a Marriott Hotel, you are very likely talking to a female prisoner - one who is working for perhaps \$1.00 an hour, with no vacations, union or any way to address working conditions. Perhaps worst of all is that there are far fewer advocates focused on women in prison than the men. Part of the reason for this is that the women themselves don't reach out for help. Women are used to being the helpers, not the helped.

Each and every one of the practices that I've talked about, that the women have testified about are in violation of dozens of international treaties and covenants that the United States has signed with the United Nations. This country violates the United Nations Convention Against Torture, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and a dozen other international and regional laws and standards.

There is no way to look into any aspect of prison or the wider criminal justice system in the US without being slapped in the face with the racism and white supremacy that prisoners of color endure. Prisons are currently one of the

largest growth industries in the United States today. The prison industrial complex now houses more than 2 million in state and federal prisons. That number is not reflective of children's facilities, immigration detention centers or municipal lock downs. Can you imagine how many children are affected by this?

If we dig deeper into the US practices that I've talked about, the political function they serve is inescapable. Police, the courts, the prison system and the death penalty all serve as social control mechanisms. The economic function they serve is equally as chilling. Many people with whom I work believe that prisons are a form of neo-slavery. I believe that in the US criminal justice system, the politics of the police, the politics of the courts, the politics of the prison system and the politics of the death penalty are a manifestation of the racism and classism which seems to govern so much of the lives of all of us in the US. Every part of the criminal justice system falls most heavily on people of color, including the fact that slavery is still permitted in prisons by the 13th amendment of the US Constitution. Although prison labor is not our focus today, involuntary prison slavery is real.

I work with a youth project in Newark, and the young people tell me that the police feel like an occupation army as if inner cities were militarized zones. They feel that the courts are used as a feeder system to filter young [New Afrikans] and Latinos into prisons where those bodies are suddenly worth a fortune. I've heard people say that the criminal justice system doesn't work. I've come to believe exactly the opposite - that it works perfectly as a matter of both economic and political policy. I don't believe that it is an accident that people who are perceived as economic liabilities have suddenly been turned into a major economic asset - for the young male or female of color who is worth nothing to this country's economy suddenly generates between 30 and 60 thousand dollars a year once trapped in the criminal justice system. Nor do I believe that it's an accident that the technological revolution has been accompanied by the largest explosion of building prisons in the history of the world. The expansion of prisons, parole, probation, the court and police systems has resulted in an enormous bureaucracy which has been a boon to everyone from architects, plumbers and electricians to vendors of medical supplies and other goods - all with one thing in common - a pay check earned by keeping human beings in cages. The criminal justice system costs multi-billions of dollars which means there are a lot of people being paid a lot of money for containing mostly folks of color in cages in human warehouses. The criminalization of poverty is a lucrative business and it seems that we've replaced the social safety net with a dragnet. I doubt that this would be tolerated if we were talking about [North American] folks or rich folks.

The women in prisons are mostly poor and working class people who need jobs, education and often drug treatment. Clearly, this country needs to use imprisonment as a last resort for many kinds of non-violent offenses. Prison issues are class issues and until prisoner activists and outside organizers begin opposition on a more serious level, neither prison administrators nor the US government have to respond to our complaints. We need to find ways to reach into women's prisons, just as we are going to have to find ways to further our own social and political consciousness and activism.

The crippling of our poor, young men and women of color in our prisons is expanding in unconscionable ways and none of this is about the rate of crime. It is about capitalism and it is about racism. It is about fighting the poison that drips

from the American culture, which to me is a culture of greed, a culture of no values and a culture which fears the joy of diversity.

I'm not sure what fields each of you may end up in. For myself, I have been part of the struggle against oppression in this country for the past 35 years. I have seen the horror and havoc that US policies can create in people's lives. I have never seen anything like what I am seeing now in US prisons. What is going on in the name of us all needs to be looked at very carefully. I think that [North Americans] have to consciously wash off the racism that infects us daily in a society where we are privileged in relation to peoples of color. I think people of color have to become specifically involved in fighting the bottom line expression of racism and oppression that the prison system represents.

Prejudice rarely survives experience. I hope that one of the things borne of such studies that you are doing now is a far more critical look at yourselves, your families and your society. In a genuinely multi-cultural society, the current criminal justice system would not be tolerated. (end)

**NATIONAL
CAMPAIGN
TO STOP
CONTROL
UNIT
PRISONS**



"The Essence of Capitalism" by J. Treas

Cast Away Illusions Build The N.A.P.A.

A comrad, recently released from prison, said to me, that unlike Malcolm X, who left prison and immediately entered the established environment of the Nation of Islam, he and other Conscious New Afrikans leave prison to return to communities which, for all practical purposes, have no “movement” presence, e.g., no progressive nationalist atmosphere; no revolutionary institutions that provide psychological and material support; no structured political activity and guidance. It was his belief that this void accounts, in large part, for the backsliding that occurs all too often for many would-be cadres upon their release from prison.

There’s more than one side to this issue, and i wanna touch at least two of them here: **1**) The responsibility of those inside and those who are released for the creation of the “environment” in question; **2**) The need for those inside to cast away illusions about the “movement,” about themselves, and about the reality outside the walls.

My immediate response to the comrad was: The environment that Malcolm entered upon leaving prison didn’t fall from the sky — some one(s) had to build it. Initially, it may have been only one person, or less than a handful of persons taking responsibility for the task, using what they had, in order to build what they needed.

Clearly, We don’t have what We need, e.g., the atmosphere, the institutions, etc. In face of this, We can sit around feeling sorry for ourselves, make excuses for our own shortcomings, and curse the “movement” for its shortcomings, or, We can take some responsibility, some risks, and make the effort to build something that We ourselves acknowledge as a need.

Specifically, i have in mind our need for an organization to serve New Afrikans who happen to be in prisons, which would also take the lead in creating the “environment” that will assist us, upon release, as We seek to become stable and productive Conscious Citizens, and cadres.

The movement has understood the need for such an organization for nearly thirty years, and several attempts have been made to build it. Yet, it doesn’t exist. However, it can exist, if the initiative is made by those who most appreciate its need, the reality of prisons and the politics underlying them: those now in prisons, those recently released, and their families, friends, comrades, and other Conscious New Afrikans in the communities.

Imprisoned New Afrikans need to be organized — as New Afrikans, who happen to be in prisons. Because some of us are in prisons, it’s reasonable to be concerned and active around the conditions of imprisonment. However, as New Afrikans, We must also be concerned and active around all issues and needs of the people and the movement, to the best of our ability. In particular, We should be concerned with transforming our “mentalities,” the development of national and class consciousness, and the creation of any institutions which aid the fulfillment of these and other needs.

i propose that imprisoned New Afrikans take the initiative to organize ourselves. i propose that We give the structure a (temporary) name: New Afrikan Prisoner Alliance (NAPA), and build it so that it becomes one of the formations

within the New Afrikan Independence Movement (NAIM).

If you are a Conscious New Afrikan — in prison or not — and you are interested in this task, and want to discuss it, and/or help to build the proposed structure and to realize its aims, contact me, c/o **CROSSROAD** Support Network, 3420 W. 63rd St, Chgo, IL 60629.

Aside from the need to take responsibility for helping to build some of what We need, most of us also need to take responsibility for casting away some of the illusions that contribute to backsliding, e.g., the would-be cadres who become, or are otherwise politically conscious and active while in prison, but who can't maintain the continuity when the prison doors are opened for them.

When my comrad referred to Malcolm's stability outside as resulting (at least in part) from the "structured environment" of the Nation of Islam, was he in fact saying that he required an environment similar to that behind the walls?

Rather than the response that i gave him, i could have given an instructive recounting of the way that Elijah Muhammad used a parable about Job to introduce Malcolm to the Nation [of Islam], shortly after Malcolm was released from prison. Malcolm related the incident in his Autobiography:

When God had bragged about how faithful Job was... the devil said only God's hedge around Job kept Job so faithful. "Remove that protective hedge," the devil told God, "and I will make Job curse you to your face."

The devil could claim that, hedged in prison, I had just used Islam, Mr. Muhammad said. But the devil would say that now, out of prison, I would return to my drinking, smoking, dope, and life of crime."

(The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Ballantine Books, 1981, p. 227.)

Little, if any, of the backsliding among alleged conscious New Afrikans can be blamed on the movement. Some bloods simply have that "protective hedge" removed, and their shortcomings exposed. Some, even while inside, talk the talk, but don't walk the walk — so it's really no surprise that they can't walk the walk when the prison doors are opened. And, to add insult to injury, some of them blame anything and everybody except themselves for their backsliding.

The subject can't be exhausted here, so i hope it's enough to make the point that New Afrikans — on either side of the wall — face the task of undergoing radical self-transformation. For those inside, in particular, if, say, you smoke the weed or drink the hootch in the joint, you'll probably smoke the weed and drink on the streets and, inevitably, it will negatively effect not only your personal survival, but also the work that you'll be doing, and the people you'll be working with.

The majority of people in prison, especially those not active prior to imprisonment, have little accurate sense of the physical and political reality of the movement and the communities. The movement doesn't undertake the measures necessary to help prepare people inside for the literal shock they'll experience once released.

For example, some people have misperceptions of the movement's strengths, and are disillusioned when they discover that this isn't so. And some, who have a sense of how "bad" things are, believe that they can single-handedly change everything, overnight. One becomes frustrated, and withdraws, the other tends to engage in adventurist activities that ultimately lead only backward.

Having to "go slow" ain't necessarily a bad thing; having to do work that seems "petty" is actually the most significant, relative to building solid foundations that will carry us over the long distance that We must travel.

Amilcar Cabral once said that, between the soldier carrying the gun, and the farmer carrying the hoe, the farmer was the most important. This is something that bloods inside, in particular, need to understand. Moreover, it's a lesson that people outside, too, need to understand.

New Afrikans inside need to understand that they can go out and effect change, but it won't be easy, it won't happen overnight, and it won't happen as you now think it will.

Cast away all illusions — about the movement, about your ability to work magic, and about the kind of work that will be required of you, both while inside and when the doors are opened. The people think they are Americans, and they won't fight for independence and socialism until you do the work necessary to help them change their minds about who they are. People won't fight to "free the land" until they feel safe walking outside their front doors. The people won't fight for socialism until they're sufficiently exposed to a critique of capitalism, have come to question its legitimacy, and acquire confidence in an alternative as they unify in struggle against the present order.

Act as if you know nothing, and learn. Act as if no movement exists, and that one must be built — from scratch. Learn how movements are built — with a base in the masses, and not in the "mountains".

The slogan "Re-Build" is still appropriate, and relates to the needs of all left forces inside U.S. borders. To re-build means to 1) re-orientate and 2) re-organize. New Afrikan women and men inside U.S. prisons need to re-build, with particular focus upon political re-orientation and self-transformation. One can participate in re-organizing by joining in the discussions and the effort to build a NAPA — or any other needed institution or campaign.

Write to us. We will respond to all correspondence, even if We don't have what you need, or can't do what you ask — We know what it is to write to people outside and not even get the simple courtesy of a response.

Remember: We, too, are re-building, from scratch. We have little or nothing, but We're working with what We have, to get what We need — top on our list is serious and committed people.

Re-Build!

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CROSSROAD Interviews

Larvester Gaither, the publisher of The Gaither Reporter. Brother Gaither was active in the struggle to stop the execution of Shaka Sankofa; We had this conversation in the aftermath of the execution, which was carried out on June 22.

CR: What was the base of support for Gary Graham/Shaka Sankofa?

The real base of support for Shaka came from the people. The individuals who marched, protested and stood up consistently against the execution were ordinary working people. If you read the mainstream newspapers, you would think Shaka's base of support was coming mainly from celebrities. Individuals like Danny Glover, Ossie Davis, Ed Asner and Kenny Rogers were supportive early on, as early as 1993. There were also religious leaders such as the spiritual leader of the Catholic church, Pope John Paul II, as well as various local religious leaders. Even Pat Robertson, towards the end, wrote a letter urging Governor George Bush to consider intervening in the scheduled execution. There was international support from Detroit to Rome; from Sidney to Amsterdam. But in terms of the most consistent base of support, it came from the people on the ground.

But I think there is a lot to learn from observing and being a part of the development of the movement around his case. I think it's important to note how Shaka's support changed over time. Early on, the base of Shaka's organizational support was his family, members from the church his mother attended, and people who were related in some close way. His father, Willie Graham, and his step-mother, Elnora Graham, were key people in that they stuck with him. Also there was Reverend Jew Don Boney, then the chairperson of Houston's Na-

tional Black United Front. He was also a local radio talk show host who had a radio listening audience. Eventually, Graham had a defense team supported through the Texas Resource Center, a non-profit legal organization. But it wasn't long after, I can't remember specifically, when this organization lost its funding and ceased to exist. Although the lawyers stayed on the case, this seemed to be a major blow. It severely restricted the legal team's resources.

Well, around 1994-95, things started to fall apart organizationally, as so many organizations of resistance do. Around this period Ashanti Chimurenga, an attorney who had previously worked with Amnesty International, began to play a key role. To a large extent, Ashanti became the heart-beat of the movement around Shaka. She worked tirelessly and made tremendous sacrifices. I've never worked with a person so devoted to a cause in my life time. Just about everything you saw, she had a part in making it happen. Anyway, at this point, the more appropriate description of what existed was a closely-knit group of individuals who kind of coalesced around Ashanti's leadership and became what one might call "new abolitionists." It might sound strange, but just five or so years ago, to be against the death penalty in the [New Afrikan] community was to be considered radical. To some extent this is still true. But we saw ourselves apart from the mainstream of the new abolitionist movement because we linked this issue of capital punishment to many other forms of repression in the [New Afrikan] community.

In a sense, in a real sense, Shaka Sankofa emerged as a leader. He continued to carry out and organize various forms of civil disobedience on death row. He continued to study and grow intellectually. He continued to

reach out to individuals around the world. He was, in my estimation, one of the most important anti-death penalty activists in the country. Although his family members were still there, his father's health began to deteriorate and he eventually died in 1997. Boney became an elected politician and at that time he was as silent as he had been outspoken, and even some time before he had taken the oath. This was another major blow. It sent a bad signal to the public when this "personality" all of a sudden turned silent. And because of his leadership style - very dictatorial and undemocratic - there was no chain of command left with his departure. I might be wrong, but the effect of Boney's sudden turnabout, was the death knell in terms of mobilization. It was very difficult to mobilize the public thereafter because they were, and are, so used to being mobilized around personalities. He had anointed himself spokesperson, or maybe he was anointed, but he jumped ship as soon as a profitable opportunity came. In addition, Graham's legal defense team seemed to switch strategies. Their disposition towards the activist component of the struggle was simply too distant. I've been hesitant to say this and I will be the first to acknowledge I could be wrong, but it seemed as though they felt had Graham been less outspoken, the chances of some form of reprieve from the Governor was more likely to occur. In fairness, they were legal minds. Shaka had good appellant lawyers, but they had, or rather they demonstrated, little understanding of the concept of [New Afrikan] self-determination. Their efforts are to be commended, however, because not only were they involved in Shaka's case, and I believe they still are carrying out some form of investigation, they have stood alone in providing legal representation to so many

indigent clients on death row in Texas.

Meanwhile, the forces in favor of his execution began organizing and eventually solidified a base of support within the institutions of judicial power. Some have said - I might have said it - that they were the cheerleading squad for the District Attorney's office. They were holding their breath for the day Shaka would be executed.

So, in a nutshell, this was Shaka's core support. As it dwindled and changed, the forces of opposition grew stronger. But at the same time Shaka's situation served to inspire and garner support from other prisoners. As the years went by, Ashanti, who by this time became the lead organizer, would meet individuals here and there when she'd visit Shaka on death row. It would be a brother here, a sister there; a mother here, a cousin there. In the end, Shaka had a great deal of support from individuals who had family or friends on death row. Shaka and Ashanti Chimurenga's resistance had given hope to others who were on death row and to their families and love ones, and to a few prisoners' families who had some political consciousness. These individuals also formed the base of his support. Looking ahead, I believe these people will form the catalyst of any significant anti-death penalty movement. And the anti-death penalty movement, as Shaka once told me, could very well be the catalyst of a revolutionary movement. But this group needs to get organized and trained in the techniques of revolutionary organization.

At the last moment, in fact too late, Shaka finally had support from elected officials and the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. Amnesty had been there all along in one sense, because of its opposition to the death penalty, and in fact its vicarious support, yet on the local level, they were totally absent.

So, hundreds of individuals around the world were there in one form or another consistently throughout the case. But this group never functioned in any organized way. In a way, this was a development. It was incredibly spontaneous and this was good because bureaucracies inherent in vanguard-type organizations stifle the creative energies of the people. I saw individuals make commendable sacrifices and decisions that couldn't have been learned but through their own unique experiences. So, in a sense, Shaka's core supporters were much stronger in the end as individuals, even though they would decrease in number. With the killing of Shaka Sankofa in spite of all the evidence of his innocence, a chapter has been written and we now have to borrow from this chapter as we develop new methods of organizing. We simply ran out of time. That's the nature of the death penalty.

CR: What was the atmosphere like in the days before his killing? After? After Jesse's arrival?

Leading up to the June 22, 2000 execution date, we were hoping, praying, and putting all the pressure we could on Governor Bush and the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. We're protesting the conventions, there are protests occurring throughout the world for Shaka Sankofa; the eyes of the world are on George Bush. Weeks before the execution, there were signs of hope. There was [New Afrikan] congressional involvement, celebrity involvement, involvement from the influential Senator Rodney Ellis, Congressperson Sheila Jackson-Lee - at one point, all the major media was covering Shaka's story.

Jesse Jackson arrived the day of the execution. Actually he was in town earlier, I'm sorry. As a matter of fact, he gave at least one press conference. He visited Shaka, he comforted the family

and friends. He also gave the keynote address at the National Baptist Convention, which was incidentally being held in Houston the week of the execution. I'm not sure if he used this opportunity to get this organization, the largest [New Afrikan] organization in the world, to take a stand. I don't think he did. He had been attempting to arrange a meeting with Governor Bush, but this was to no avail. For many this was an ominous sign, but for me, I thought, well, maybe it's a good sign. Why would Bush not meet with Jackson on an issue as sensitive as this? You mean a man who has rescued and freed American POWs couldn't at least get a meeting with a governor Bush? Maybe he's going to make a decision that would allow Graham some time and doesn't want Jackson, who is clearly a Democratic Party functionary, to take credit. On the surface, it seemed as though Bush had plenty of room to maneuver but as it turned out those of us who believed that underestimated the political realities.

But Jackson is really not a major character in this story unless you're talking about the last seven days or so. This struggle existed for a much longer period of time. Jackson is good at public relations, but public relations had already been carried out as best it could by the time he arrived.

On my way to Huntsville on June 22, I wasn't sure which way it would turn out. But when I arrived, there seemed to be an eerie feeling in the air. It wasn't a good feeling. The military, state law enforcement agencies, black helicopters, SWAT teams - you name it, they were there in full force. So the setting was something perhaps unprecedented. I've seen photos of lynchings or executions take place with thousands of white spectators, but I've never seen one take place with the state government standing between the executed and the thousands of people protesting the execution. You

had all of these people, thousands, and as many law enforcement agents.

After Shaka's funeral, the following Thursday, there was another execution. There were maybe 25 people protesting outside the prison. This for me was as painful to see. Bush will oversee another 10 executions on his way to the White House. Two were executed just yesterday.

CR: What are some of the things you wish you had done more of? Less of?

In this struggle, when you lose a battle such as this, you accept the fact that you will forever be asking yourself this question. It's very haunting. And even when you're not asking yourself this question, there will be moments when the thought just comes out of nowhere. I wish I had been much more aggressive in terms of providing leadership. Too often I got bogged down "troubleshooting" when in fact I should have really been offsetting some of the problems by taking more responsibility up front. Too often, I would say, "Okay, if this is what you want," knowing very well, I should've been doing something else. But organization is where our people, the left, is really hurting. So the obvious thing is to get better organized. And we, in the left, need to realize that without numbers, we're fighting a losing battle. Without organization, we fighting a losing battle. We need to get organized and mobilized. So this experience has been bitter fruit for many who were involved. What's important to me is that I ask myself: What is to be done?

What we need now, more than anything, are organizers who have a faith in the people, but who also understand the limitations as well as the strengths. This can only be done by being with the people. There was too much time spent trying to reach out

to celebrities. Poor people have personalities too!

CR: What is your assessment of the New Afrikan left?

I think there are those who boldly claim and write like they're a part of the left, but when you observe their actions, you see that their aims are the same as the reactionaries. They envision the same society: the status quo. There is a lot of what they used to call "Cultural Decor" taking place among academic intellectuals.

We have to learn intellectual methods of anticipating what lies ahead. We're moving - we have moved much closer - away from a society with prisons to a prison society. What does this mean? We can anticipate more than 20 million Americans being under correctional supervision within the next decade. We can anticipate more than 6 million people being held in prisons. Slavery is merely reinventing itself for the twenty-first century. So I hope the so-called middle class understands that it will be affected by this trend in one way or another. We can't let these repressive conditions divide us as they have in the past. That is, we can't allow ourselves to think that our problems will go away when those young [New Afrikan] criminals stop acting crazy. We have to anticipate that young [New Afrikan] criminal will more likely be your [New Afrikan] child, your poor [North American] child, or your child of color if the trend continues, if the conditions under the present economic arrangements continue. But we have to also anticipate, based on our history, that what I'm saying now isn't going to occur: The so-called middle class isn't going to wake up one day and see it this way. So it's also a moral issue. There are some individuals who are doing good work in terms of activism.

CR: Tell us a little about shaka sankofa — what was his upbringing like & his living conditions? Was he a good example of grassroots potential?

This, to me, is the significance of Shaka's life. Youth - not just [New Afrikan] youth, but youth in general - can learn a great deal from looking at the evolution of Shaka Sankofa. First of all, the [New Afrikan] philosopher Cornel West is right: Race Matters. And yes, there is this disturbing sense of nihilism among [New Afrikan] youth, and there is this same sense of nihilism among [North American], Hispanic and Asian youth - youth culture in general. But particularly [New Afrikan] youth. Or I should say that the nihilism of [New Afrikan] youth departs from the other in that it is largely a response to institutionalized racism. They really, at a certain point, begin to say and ask themselves, "There's no hope, so why try, why kid myself?" They learn early on that racism will be a determining factor in much of what they seek to accomplish in life. But while there are millions of Shakas in America, few can say they had it worse than he did. His life was pure unadulterated H.E.L.L. When Gary was born, his father was in prison. He was a seventh grade drop out, already having fathered two children at 15, addicted to cough syrup, already having served time in and out of detention centers - He was a child who was marginalized, alienated, unwanted, neglected. His father was an alcoholic and his mother had suffered emotional illness because of the pressures put on her by various welfare agencies. He was sentenced to death at age 17 on the testimony of a single and very questionable eyewitness. When his son, little Gary, was born, Shaka was essentially in prison. Little Gary is now in prison and his

child was born not long ago. So this is an example of the cycle of oppression that continues to plague families, even a hundred or so years after chattel slavery.

So if they can learn about the changes that 17-year-old Gary Graham made in his life, if they can somehow learn of this remarkable story, to me, it would be awesome. I believe Shaka achieved so much in his short life that really matters. Shaka had a deep love for his people. How many of us can really say this? I mean, given what his life was like? You could sense this from some of the decisions he'd make, not from him merely saying it. A lot of people will say, "Well, he was just fighting for his life. So a lot of what he was doing was about him." But if you study the testimonies and diaries of individuals who have lived and died on death row, you'll notice a big difference in Shaka's personality. He resisted until the end. There are only three recorded instances of such resistance. So there is something about death row that kills the spirit. Shaka's spirit wasn't killed. I think on the practical level Shaka came to realize his potential as a leader, as a revolutionary leader. And I think the government recognized him as such. So, just as we make choices out here in free society, Shaka made choices. He spoke out against injustices. He was preparing himself to walk out of prison and dedicate his life to serving humanity. He chose to fight until the end so that he could be an example of what one is obliged to do when confronting evil. So, in essence, his decision to resist until the end; to not be unprincipled; was not for himself. He wanted to live by any means, but he didn't want to regress to what the system had set him up to be. This is an extraordinary example for youth, for people. Of course, this is why it's so incomprehensible what happened to him. To make

this change, then to have his life taken away in such a manner. I think young people were watching Graham's case closely. Particularly if you lived in Texas. If you lived in Texas you knew about Graham's case. Who knows what impact his life will have on those young people who traveled to Huntsville on June 22, 2000? Or from the young person who heard it on television news, or who read it in the paper the next day. Some will lose hope. Some will be inspired by his resistance to the end. So he was an incredibly good example of the potential we all have. I mean, he turned his life around like no one I've ever had the opportunity to know.

One of the key mistakes we've made historically, and Shaka's case was no exception, is to not have faith in the capacity of the masses. Shaka had much to say, from his experience and studying, that would have helped not only himself, but the community in general. He had at a point in his life decided that he was going to be a leader. I don't think he was really ever truly recognized as a leader by the established [New Afrikan] leadership, or even by some of those who were among his supporters. It's a new model, so to speak, when you have the victim as the leader. That's not the model we're accustomed to. We're not accustomed to following the people. Maybe after he was killed his value as a leader was realized, or rather recognized. But while few will ever get the opportunity to learn who Shaka was, a candle was lit; and the forces of reaction know this. They won this battle, but there's the old saying that battles ending in defeat have often been decisive for securing victory in the war.

CR: We're doing some study of the concept of class suicide. How does it feel to be making the attempt?

The class dynamic within the [New Afrikan] community has changed

considerably. You now have a [New Afrikan] middle-class, although its core is relatively small. This is a new phenomena, but it is really the highest stage of a particular development in the history of American capitalism. Garvey challenged this with the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Many historians who today identify themselves as leftist have thoroughly misread Garveyism. But there really hasn't been a mass-based organization to influence the political and economic direction of [New Afrika] since then. Perhaps the Panthers. No, not even them. Because by the time the Panthers became a massive organization; by the time revolutionary individuals like Fred Hampton were surfacing to the leadership, the organization was in decline due to COINTELPRO repression, as well as internal contradictions within the [New Afrikan] community. So what we've had, with the exception of Garvey, since slavery, has been a middle-class, supposed talented tenth leadership. Even during the sixties and seventies, if you look at most of that leadership - most of our leadership today was our leadership then - you get a clearer sense of where they were headed with their [New Afrikan] capitalism, etcetera. But in truth, the majority of [New Afrikans] could never commit class suicide because most of us aren't part of any middle class or so-called talented tenth. It isn't really about your class origins as much as your class aspirations because most of us are the descendants of slaves, sharecroppers and quasi-free Africans. Most whites aren't a part of the ruling class. So we should be struggling for a system which supports the majority of [New Afrikan] folk, which supports the majority of workers; not one that supports the few. So these students have to understand what class they exist within and ask the question: Is my class or group organized? And are we leading the way?

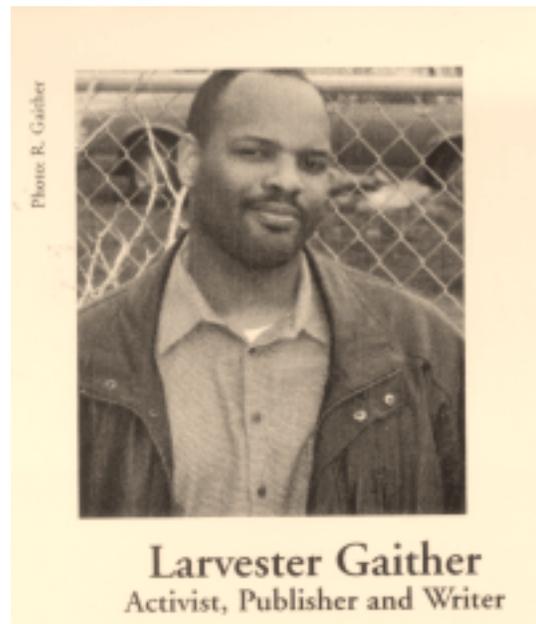
CR: How does your work around shaka sankofa reconcile/connect with *The Gaither Reporter*?

Our first issue featured an interview with Reverend Jew Don Boney, who was then the principle organizer and spokesperson for the Gary Graham Justice Coalition. He had also been a prominent spokesperson for Clarence Brandely, who had been freed from death row by a people's movement. From the beginning, I made a commitment to focus continually on Graham's case. At other times, we'd make sure that the people we were interviewing were asked questions about capital punishment. In some instances, like with Chokwe Lumumba and Gil Scott Heron, we would focus the entire interview mainly around Graham's case. A couple times, I wrote essays on the case. I've written a lot about civil liberties in other magazines. So, I think anyone who has subscribed to the Gaither Reporter since 1993, is and was aware of Shaka Sankofa. They're also aware of political prisoners and have some awareness of prison issues. We've also interviewed Dhoruba Bin Wahad, a former political prisoner. We tried to infuse the issues of capital punishment and prisons into the discourse taking shape within the "[New Afrikan] left." Of course we have learned a lot over the years. And we're still learning.

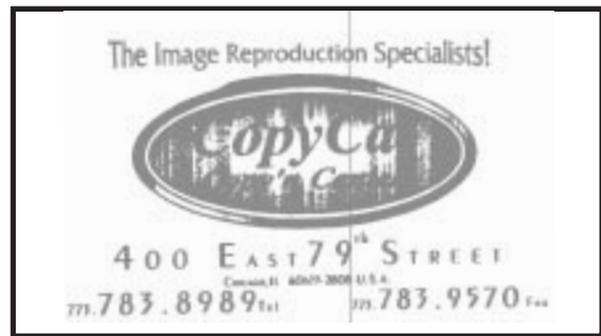
I view the Gaither Reporter as an abolitionist publication, just as you had Douglass's Monthly and the Liberator a century and a half ago. But we see the abolition struggle in much the same way as some in the first abolitionist struggle: a struggle for human dignity, human rights and self-determination.

(Comrade-Brother Gaither's interview with *Shaka Sankofa* appeared earlier this year in **The Gaither Reporter** Write to: The Gaither Reporter, P.O. Box 262364, Houston TX 77207-2364; call 713-491-3526; GaitherRep@aol.com.)

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Prisons, Social Control and Political Prisoners**Marilyn Buck¹**

Increasingly, the globalization of markets and profit-seeking has pressed U.S. prisons to become profit-generating enterprises - the prison-industrial complex. Nevertheless, prisons continue to serve their main purpose as well: to warehouse and disappear the “unacceptable.” Prisons exist to deprive their captives of their liberties, their human agency, and to punish. These institutions stigmatize prisoners through moralistic denunciations and indictments based on bad genes - skin color as a crime. The law - a political institution in itself - provides the framework for the war of social control against oppressed nations, working classes and non-compliant women.

The vast majority of prisoners are not imprisoned because they are “criminals,” but because they’ve been accused of breaking one of an ever-increasing number of laws designed to exert tighter social control and State repression. They have been scapegoated and criminalized. This can be seen in the increased number of [New Afrikan], Latino, Native American and Asian youth detained under you-crime acts and “anti-gang” laws; the number of foreign nationals (excluding most Europeans) imprisoned under hate-mongering immigration laws; and of course, the “drug” war in which hundreds of thousands have been kidnapped from their communities, even from other countries. These sweeping laws embody and embolden U.S. capitalist policies to criminalize and decimate targeted populations and to sustain a hostage [multi-national] wage-labor force behind prison walls. Most prisoners, by virtue of their [nationality] and class, are victims of [genocidal] policies - death deferred to incarceration.

There are other “undesirables” as well: those who have consciously, politically resisted, opposed - even attacked - the injustices, inequalities of this State system of social control. These prisoners are political prisoners, historically among the most feared and despised by those who wield State power. In the 1950’s, *COINTELPRO* (the **F**ederal **C**ounter **I**ntelligence **P**ROgram) was created.² It employed dirty tricks, disinformation, militarized police agencies and assassination in its political war against the national liberation, anti-imperialist and pro-socialist forces. Imprisonment was also, and continues to be, one of its weapons against political activists.

The State shows little mercy to its political enemies. The case of Mumia Abu-Jamal is a current well-known example. He was denied even a modicum of a fair trial, under more “liberal” standards than exist in this period. Geronimo ji-jaga (Pratt) and Leonard Peltier were both framed for murders by Federal and local *COINTELPRO* forces. Geronimo was freed after much struggle and 27 years. Leonard is still in prison. Assata Shakur was convicted of a police killing she could not have done and is only free in exile. More than a few political prisoners remain imprisoned for nearly two decades and some for nearly three decades - the Angola Three, the New York Three, Black Panthers and New Afrikan militants, Puerto Rican independentistas and North American and anti-imperialist solidarity figures and other comrades. To be a political prisoner is neither a comfortable or privileged situation. To remain committed to one’s beliefs and principles exacts a heavy price. Political prisoners in New York state prisons are rarely held in the same prison. Many have spent years, even a decade,

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in isolation control units for no other reason than their political association and “political crimes.” Many have been denied health care for security reasons. Nuh Washington passed away earlier this year after struggling to stay alive in the face of metastasized liver cancer for lack of care. Enemies of the state are deliberately targeted, subject to continual surveillance. The State is determined to destroy us. On purpose. Not merely because the prison system is a vehicle of equal-opportunity punishment and casual cruelty that is by its very nature crushing with its iron heel, the life and breath from its victims and hostages.

To be a political prisoner is not a matter of standing higher in a “hierarchy” of prisoners. Where one stands is a matter of consciousness, not of social status or privilege. It is a placement based in political practice and international law. A U.S. court has even noted that “crimes” must be looked at differently when carried out in furtherance of a political struggle against a State. There are both pure political offenses (like sedition) and relative political offenses. These include “otherwise common crimes committed in connection with a political act,” or common crimes committed for political motives or in a political context³. The court goes on to say in relation to political status and international law:

It is the fact that the insurgents are seeking to change their governments that makes the political offense exception applicable, not the reasons for wishing to do so or the nature of the acts by which they hope to accomplish that goal.⁴

As well there are some social prisoners sucked into the prison machine who have become politically conscious through the daily punishing repression brutality, racism, and injustice. These comrades, men like George Jackson, Ruchell Magee, Hugo Pinell and many others, stepped beyond their social offenses and kidnapping-victimization, beyond the individualism demanded by the prison system to challenge the system consciously, as self-determining protagonists. They became enemies of the State, subject to that specific jacket and treatment for political prisoners. Comrades such as these are murdered by the prison or languish in control unit prisons for decades as well.

Political prisoners come from their communities, became conscious. Part of that consciousness is understanding that we are from the community of oppressed and exploited. Many political prisoners were active in opposing the prison system long before we ever imagined that we would end up prisoners. Many continue to work against concentration kamp USA once released. The injustice and inhumanity of the prison system are only logical extensions or conclusions of the overall inequalities of the entire system. We oppose cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity in the system and in our communities.

There will be more political prisoners as it becomes more imperative to resist the rapacious, human-eating system. As our social and political movements grow stronger and challenge more directly globalization, capitalism, and the increasingly militarized police state. After all, the State is more invested in social control than ever. (It was caught off guard in Seattle at the anti-WTO demonstrations but reacted in a predictable manner.) What will be the desti-

nation of the 60 people still being charged there in Seattle? What about the young activist given a seven-year sentence in Oregon for throwing a rock in an anti-WTO demonstration last summer? Or Khalil Fantuzzi, a Puerto Rican comrade who is the only person to face trial after demonstrations against corporate seizure of KPFA radio in Berkeley last summer? Khalil is an anti-prison activist and played a leading organizing role in the campaign to free the Puerto Rican Prisoners of War and political prisoners.

Many social and political activists have escalated their work in support of prisoners and to challenge the brutal slave labor prison establishment. This growth was reflected in the timely, qualitative conference of the Critical Resistance in fall 1998. The work of activists contributed in creating the conditions in which Amnesty International at last issued a report on human rights in the U.S. in the face of U.S. power and imperial pronouncements that it is the godfather of democracy and human rights. Prisoners in even the deepest of holes are feeling some hope despite the downward spiral of human treatment and increasing demonization.

Yet in the midst of this rise of activism, there seems to be a reticence to support political prisoners and Prisoners of War, or to say that there are no differences in consciousness, or roles of prisoners, for example, “all prisoners are political prisoners” since imprisonment is a political policy. Some pamphlets about prison support work include “support for political prisoners and POWs,” but little about who we are or why we should be supported as part of prison activism. Surely supporting political prisoners is not an impediment to the real work of opposing the prison establishment or fighting for more humane conditions. We, too, experience the full range of repression. We are here because we have challenged that social repression!

At times it seems that we are hesitantly supported precisely because of our politics, our political consciousness and actions. Perhaps the conscious, relative political “crimes” we have been charged with committing conflict with some people’s own political strategies. But should we as a movement not encourage consciousness, and self-determining, creative and collective protagonists in the struggle for human dignity and rights?

There is always the room to debate politics, points of view, strategies and tactics. To confront differences and questions is a good thing. Any struggle for liberation demands free and open debate of ideas and practice. At the same time, active struggles need to support those who act consciously, politically. To do so is a part of asserting the right to struggle as well as to defend activism and promote stronger resistance to a military financial and political apparatus that denies our society and the whole world true equality and justice.

¹ Marilyn Buck is an anti-imperialist political prisoner in the Federal Correctional Institute at Dublin, California. She has been imprisoned 19 years for her internationalism — acting in solidarity with the [New Afrikan] Liberation movement and with other liberation and socialist struggles worldwide.

² See Ward Churchill, *Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (South End Press, 1988) and Ward Churchill, Jim Vander Wall, *COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI’s Secret Wars Against Domestic Dissent* (South End Press, 1990).

³ *Quinn v. Robinson*, 783 F. 2d at 793-4.

⁴ *Quinn v. Robinson*, *supra* at 805.

The People Must Be Politically Armed

A recent airing of the BET program Lead Story featured discussion of a U.S. government-sponsored program to exchange cash for guns. The program is underway in over twenty cities, and ostensibly aimed toward the “criminal elements” among poor and oppressed peoples.

Few of us would oppose righteous efforts to rid our communities of armed criminals, but We should also know that the underlying purpose of the U.S. government is to literally and politically disarm all poor and oppressed peoples. Consequently, We should oppose all programs seeking to literally disarm the people, and We should propose programs designed to arm the people with political consciousness.

The BET program brought to mind a Nation Time article (“The 2nd Amendment: Is The Issue Guns or [New Afrikan] Hands on Guns?”, Fall, 1999, p. 16) written by attorneys Roger Wareham and Jomo Thomas. They discuss their opposition to the decision of the NAACP to sue gun manufacturers, which they consider a diversion “from the systemic crisis that permeates the body politic and denies them basic human rights and privileges such as an education, jobs that pay a living wage, decent health care and protection from a genocidal criminal justice system.”

Wareham and Thomas join the NAACP, however, in looking favorably upon the provisions in the 2nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution on the right of the people to keep and bear arms: “The 2nd Amendment is relevant to [New Afrikans] in the United States because throughout [our] history here [We] were denied the right to possess arms by every state in the Union. Today, more than ever before, [New Afrikans] need to be armed...”

Why do New Afrikans and other oppressed peoples in the U.S. need to be armed? Because the right to self-defense is also a human/democratic right, and We are under attack by the forces of the oppressive state, and We need the ability to defend ourselves. Moreover, We are an oppressed people, and the right of oppressed peoples to use armed force as one of the means used to end their oppression is a principle of international humanitarian law.

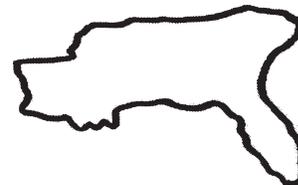
The reasons that We were historically denied the right to possess arms remain operable today, because the fundamental problem between oppressed and oppressor has yet to be resolved. Oppression is maintained, ultimately, by force — and force will, ultimately, be required to end it.

Force alone, however, is neither enough to safeguard the oppressive system, nor enough to end it. All socio-cultural, political, economic and judicial means are brought to bear upon us, and We must wage battles on all these fronts, as We seek to overthrow oppression and build a new socio-economic order.

The ability to struggle, to become a truly free and self-determining people, requires our getting rid of what Frantz Fanon calls ideas and behaviors which “mystify” and arrest the development of fully conscious and responsible persons. We must be armed with a new social/political consciousness.

Wareham and Thomas speak throughout the New York and New Jersey area on the right to keep and bear arms. Discussion on this subject is necessary and should take place wherever there are people. However, there’s also a need to relate the discussion of this subject to all other issues, and to help create a comprehensive revolutionary perspective. If We are to re-build, and to win, the people must be politically armed.

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SSC Associate Membership

We've gotten letters from people inside who want to join the Spear and Shield Collective. We have previously accepted imprisoned people into the ranks as full members. However, our experience has forced us to abandon that practice and adopt a new procedure.

Our new policy, relative to people inside, is to offer positions as "Associate Members" — a status to be maintained throughout one's imprisonment. Upon release, Associate Members can apply for Candidate Membership. If that application is accepted, one would then begin the normal one year probationary period.

If accepted as an SSC Associate Member, one will be required to function within the CROSSROAD Support Network, and fully adhere to three Main Rules of Conduct:

- 1) No use of drugs or alcoholic beverages of any kind;
- 2) No verbal or physical abuse of women or children;
- 3) No expression of racist or homophobic views or practice.

If interested in becoming an SSC Associate Member, write to SSC, 3420 W. 63rd St., Chgo, IL 60629.

Words That Guide Us

Frantz Fanon: "The army is not always a school of war; more often, it is a school of civic and political education. The soldier of an adult nation is not a simple mercenary but a citizen who by means of arms defends the nation." (The Wretched of the Earth)

In Toward The African Revolution, Fanon reminds us that the "armed combatant" is one who embodies "a new, positive, efficient personality, whose richness is provided less by the trial of strength that he engages in than by his certainty that he embodies a decisive moment of the national consciousness," and that "the liberation of the individual does not follow national liberation. An authentic national liberation exists only to the precise degree to which the individual has irreversibly begun his own liberation... the Algerian combatant is not only up in arms against the torturing parachutists. Most of the time he has to face problems of building, or organizing, of inventing the new society that must come into being."

Kwame Nkrumah came to the conclusion that there are "...two worlds only, the revolutionary and the counter-revolutionary — the socialist world trending towards communism, and the capitalist world with its extensions of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

"Today, then, the 'Third World' is neither a practical political concept nor a reality. It is merely a misused expression which has come to mean everything and nothing. It has been used with equal looseness both by those committed to the revolutionary struggle and by those who are its deadly enemies. The western press has gladly made use of it to serve its own ends by associating it with racism, and by equating it with concepts such as non-alignment,

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neutralism and co-existence. It has thus helped to prevent the full weight of the so-called 'Third World' being identified openly and decisively as part of the socialist world.

"If we are to achieve revolutionary socialism then we must avoid any suggestion that will imply that there is any separation between the socialist world and a 'Third World'...

"I do not deny the existence of the struggling 'wretched of the earth,' but maintain that they do not exist in isolation, as the 'Third World'. They are an integral part of the revolutionary world, and are committed to the hilt in the struggle against capitalism to end the exploitation of man by man."

Amilcar Cabral, on individual and collective identity: "The identity of an individual or a particular group of people is a bio-sociological factor outside the will of that individual or group, but which is meaningful only when it is expressed in relation to other individuals or other groups..."

"The definition of an identity, individual or collective, is at the same time the affirmation and denial of a certain number of characteristics which define the individuals or groups, through historical (biological and sociological) factors at a moment of their development. In fact, identity is not a constant, precisely because the biological and sociological factors which define it are in constant change. Biologically and sociologically, there are no two beings (individual or collective) completely the same or completely different, for it is always possible to find in them common or distinguishing characteristics. Therefore the identity of a being is always a relative quality, even circumstantial, for defining it demands a selection, more or less rigid and strict, of the biological and sociological characteristics of the being in question. One must point out that in the fundamental binomial in the definition of identity, the sociological factors are more determining than the biological. In fact, if it is correct that the biological element (inherited genetic patrimony) is the inescapable physical basis of the existence and continuing growth of identity, it is no less correct that the sociological element is the factor which gives it objective substance by giving content and form, and allowing confrontation and comparison between individuals and between groups. To make a total definition of identity, the inclusion of the biological element is indispensable, but does not imply a sociological similarity, whereas two beings who are sociologically exactly the same must necessarily have similar biological identities.

"This shows on the one hand the supremacy of the social over the individual condition, for society... is a higher form of life. It shows on the other hand the need not to confuse the original identity, of which the biological element is the main determinant, and the actual identity, of which the main determinant is the sociological element. Clearly, the identity of which one must take account at a given moment of the growth of a being (individual or collective) is the actual identity, and awareness of that being reached only on the basis of his original identity is incomplete, partial and false, for it leaves out or does not comprehend the decisive influence of social conditions on the content and form of identity...."

Q's and A's

Q: What is your definition of “Political Prisoner”?

A: We have to define Prisoners of War (POWs) as well as Political Prisoners (PPs), because the U.S. imprisons both categories of political activists; and, the politics underlying the struggles of POWs and PPs, while similar, are also distinct.

POWs are members of armed organizations/movements, whose imprisonment was a consequence of their beliefs or actions taken in the course of the struggle against U.S. oppression of their people (e.g., Leonard Peltier/Native Nation peoples; Oscar Lopez-Rivera/the Puerto Rican people; Sundiata Acoli/New Afrikan people). And, someone usually considered a non-national (e.g., Marilyn Buck) could also be a POW if they were members of armed groups under the command of a movement fighting for national liberation (e.g., the New Afrikan Independence Movement/NAIM).

In other words: “A POW is a sanctioned national combatant or ally of an international armed conflict who is held in confinement for acts in support of a people struggling for freedom, self-determination, or independence from an oppressive, colonial, alien-dominated, or racist governmental regime or its policies.”

Political Prisoners are people who were imprisoned for their beliefs or actions in opposition to U.S. imperialism and domestic capitalist oppression (e.g., Ray Luc Levasseur, Tom Manning, Linda Evans, Debbie “Sims” Africa). Some (POWs and) PPs become politically conscious and active, and join organizations and/or movements, after their incarceration. In other words: “A PP is a person, sanctioned by the Movement, evolved in character and deeds, who is held in confinement for support of, or identity with, a people struggling for freedom from an oppressive government or against its oppressive policies.”

Q: Is the U.S. government racist against PPs and POWs?

A: In our perspective, “race,” per se, doesn't underly the persecution of PPs and POWs — rather, the politics and actions of PPs and POWs, on behalf of oppressed peoples, and against the interest of the U.S.

However, if We look to factors other than politics (narrowly defined), We'd say that the nationality (of POWs, in particular), is more a factor than “race”. The U.S. is an oppressor and exploiter of peoples and nations, most of which are “non-white”.

Because the U.S. racializes (rationalizes) its oppression, We don't dismiss the reality of “race-based” discrimination in its pursuit and treatment of PPs and POWs. However, keep in mind that the PPs and POWs held by the U.S. are of various nationalities (“races”), and that the common and determining features shared by the captured comrades are their anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and pro-socialist, politics.

Q: Are PPs and POWs treated different from mere criminals? If so, how, and why?

A: Yes, even though the U.S. policy is to criminalize PPs and POWs in the public mind, they are not treated as mere criminals. They are usually isolated in pris-

ons upon their arrival, permanently or temporarily. They are usually placed in prisons located long distances from family and supporters, and regularly moved from prison to prison, which disrupts communication (visits, phone, mail), which even under “normal” circumstances is monitored, kept to a minimum, and sometimes curtailed altogether. They receive longer sentences than mere criminals, and they’re regularly denied parole on the basis of their political beliefs and affiliations.

At bottom, PPs and POWs receive different treatment precisely because of their political beliefs and affiliations. The U.S. sometimes offers better treatment — even release, in some cases — if the prisoners renounce their beliefs and affiliations. Underlying such tactics is the U.S. effort to break the will of PPs and POWs; to prevent their influence among other prisoners, and to minimize their symbolic and practical influence upon the outside forces.

* * *

Q: i recently attended a conference and heard Angela Davis say that the campaign to stop violence against women had become a “social service issue,” and that women must become more militant. i’ve heard others use phrases like “social service” or “public service” in relation to issues that they considered to be reformist, and not worthy of their attention. What’s the difference between a reformist issue and a revolutionary issue, or, the difference between “social/public service” and serving the people?

A: No issue, standing alone or objectively, can be characterized as reformist or as revolutionary. What determines the character of an issue is the political perspective that people bring to it; the class that leads the struggle around it; the class interest that the issue ultimately serves; whether the people become politically educated, develop revolutionary consciousness, and create revolutionary unity and institutions as they pursue the issue. This is probably why Angela Davis didn’t urge the people at the conference to abandon the effort to stop violence against women, but rather to become more “militant” in their engagement.

To us, “social” refers to society — to the people — thus “social service” or “public service” means, to us, serving the people. However, some people may use phrases like “social service” or “public service” with reference to state initiated “social reform,” where particular issues have been co-opted to serve the status quo. “Social reform” is a form of struggle (tactic) used by the state to give the appearance of resolving problems, to pacify the people w/out making fundamental change in the oppressive system, and to stifle and misdirect the revolutionary initiative of oppressed peoples and their movements.

“Reformism,” strictly speaking, differs from “social reformism” in that the former is a trend that exists inside people’s movements and organizations, promoting “integration” or “improvement” or other euphemistic characterizations of (class) collaboration with the enemy, the undermining of national and class consciousness, and the liquidation of revolutionary initiative. Reformism fundamentally denies and works against the need to overthrow capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy, and to transfer all power to the people.

So, in one sense, the difference between a “reformist” issue and a revolutionary issue lies simply in the way that We approach it — or, whether We approach it at all, since some among us label issues as “social/public service” simply to rationalize their failure to engage. Clearly, there’s no reason why the

people and their “leaders” shouldn’t initiate struggles for “reforms” or, as We prefer to call them, struggles for democratic/human rights — revolutionary democratic struggles — necessary components of any & all rev. processes.

Many of our military-minded comrades have been surprised and bewildered upon learning that Che Guevara once said that, “the guerrilla is a social reformer.” This has been interpreted to mean (by Regis Debray) that attention must be given to “a local and gradual improvement in the material living conditions of the masses in the area where the guerrillas are working.” (We’d add that such attention is required not only in the initial stages, but throughout the rev. process, and the ever-upward development of society.) Debray also suggested that revs not disregard the comparative “pettiness” of local conditions and issues for the dizzying glitter of grand schemes, and to remember that ‘cadres are the leaders and organizers of the life of the masses.’

Of course, We don’t have to take a lead from Guevara, when We have our own experience, and our own voices: “In order to develop revolutionary consciousness, we must learn how [it] can be raised to the highest point by stimuli from the vanguard elements... We must create new impetus and greater intellectual and physical energy...” (George Jackson)

Now, the “stimuli,” the “new impetus and greater intellectual and physical energy” is really about finding ways to serve the people: “...’Going among the people, learning from the people, and serving the people’ is really stating that we must find out exactly what the people need and organize them around these needs.... taking realistic, day-to-day issues like hunger, the need for clothing and housing, joblessness....”

The principal task is universal; the application differs only in the form of the practice based on the concrete conditions of a people’s unique situation.

* * *

Q: What is a “New Afrikan” and, can a white person become a “New Afrikan”?

A: The Spear and Shield Collective recognizes “New Afrikan” as the term that specifies our national identity, or, our nationality.

We believe that our national identity has two elements: **1**) a biological element (“original identity”) and, **2**) a sociological element (“actual identity”), and that the sociological element is the primary determinant of our national identity, or, of our nationality. (See the passage from Amilcar Cabral, on *Identity*, in this issue, p. 23)

For these reasons, and others, We also believe that “white” people, or, people who have other national origins, can become New Afrikans — can embrace New Afrikan national identity — and their New Afrikan nationality can be formally recognized through the process of naturalization.

In the propaganda of the NAIM, We say that all people of Afrikan descent in the U.S. are “New Afrikans,” but in the real world We know this ain’t the case. Being and becoming a New Afrikan is a matter of choice — a matter of consciousness, practice, and political allegiance. This is why We distinguish “Conscious New Afrikans” from those with no allegiance to the NAIM, and who don’t actively participate in its activities.

Moreover, from our perspective, We believe that a Conscious New Afrikan should: **1**) be a “revolutionary nationalist,” i.e., have a socialist orientation; **2**) be anti-racist; **3**) be anti-homophobic, and, **4**) be anti-patriarchal.

* * *

Q: i don't agree with homosexuality, and i can't see how it fits into our struggle, or what role homosexuals would play in our struggle.

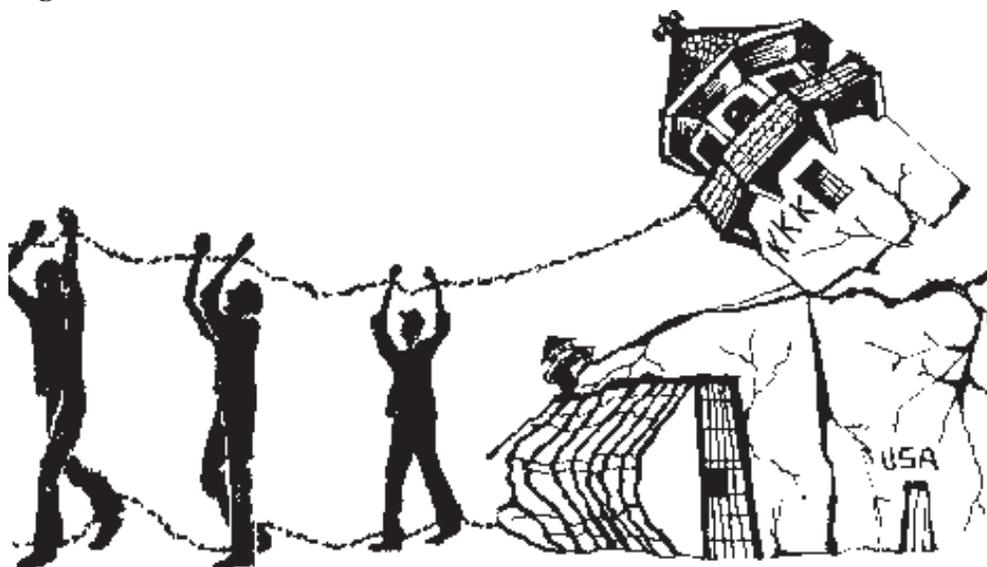
A: We wish that We could give this question more time and space, here, but We can't. We can, though, commit to giving this and related issues more space in future issues of **CR**, because they are critical, and don't get the attention they deserve from any sector of the movement.

One's sexual orientation is not among the criteria that SSC uses in determining one's right to be considered a legitimate and full member of our organization, our family, our community or society. When We say, "We," it includes all of our people. We can't speak for the entire NAIM on this issue, because despite stated principles (e.g., the New Afrikan Declaration of Independence) homophobia and sexism run rampant w/in the NAIM, effect its ability to recruit and retain righteous activists, and its ability to serve the people.

We won't say that you have to "agree with" homosexuality, but We will say that you have a duty to combat homophobia, within your self, and wherever you confront its expression in other individuals and institutions. We believe that you have the responsibility to treat other people as people, and to respect their right to their sexual orientation, free from any form of discrimination, oppression and exploitation. Moreover, We think that you have an obligation to investigate and study this issue, on which you are clearly misguided and misinformed.

Combatting homophobia 'fits into our struggle' because We struggle to end all forms of oppression and exploitation. Our perspective (SSC) connects all forms of sexual repression and patriarchy, and the struggles of all peoples to liberate themselves from capitalism and imperialism. Homophobia is really about (male) dominance — and the dominance is about the creation and maintenance of a set of social relations that serve the ideological and material needs of patriarchal hegemony and capitalist exploitation.

Heterosexuality as a norm is an imposition of the social order that oppresses and exploits us, and that We struggle to overthrow. The only "roles" We're concerned with are those that can be practiced by any and all persons committed to social revolution. Homosexuals are men and women that are capable of doing anything you think you're capable of doing, in the revolutionary process, and as a social being.



Books of Interest

- **For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer**

Chana Kai Lee, U. of Illinois Press, 2000
\$14.95pb

- **Rosa Parks**, Douglas Brinkley, Penguin Lives

- **Feminism Is For Everybody**, bell hooks, South End Press 2000 \$12

- **Free Enterprise**, Michelle Cliff, Plume Publishers (novel, tells "untold story" of 19th century activist Mary Ellen Pleasant & her struggle to create an independent state for Afrikan people)

- **The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender and Freedom**, Barbara Smith, Rutgers 1998

- **Race Men**, Hazel V. Carby, Howard U. Press, 1999

- **To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells**

Linda O. Mc Murray, Oxford U. Press, 1999

- **Into the Fire: African Americans Since 1970**, Robin D.G. Kelly, 1996

- **Black Power, White Blood: The Life of Johnny Spain**

Lori Andrews, Temple U. Press

- **States of Confinement: Policing, Detention, and Prisons**

Joy James, St. Martin's Press, 2000

- **Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power**

Timothy B. Tyson, U of North Carolina Press, 1999

- **Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics**

Joy James (On Ida B. Wells, Ella Baker, Angela Davis & Assata Shakur)

St. Martin's Press, 1999

- **Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition**

Beverly Clark (ed.), Routledge

- **Gender Trouble**, Judith Butler, Routledge — critique of heteronormativity

- **The Two Sexes: Growing Up Apart, Coming Together**

Eleanor E. Maccoby, Howard U. Press (how boys & girls are reared as different, when real differences are slight)

- **Homophobia: How We All Pay The Price**

Warren Blumenfield (ed.), Beacon Press

- **AfroCuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics and Culture**, Jean Stubbs & Pedro Perez Sanduy,

Ocean Press

- **Fertile Prison: Fidel Castro in Batista's Prisons**

Mario Mencia, Ocean Press

- **I Was Never Alone: Prison Diary from El Salvador**

Nidia Diaz, Ocean Press

- **Harsh Punishment: International Experiences of Women's Imprisonment**, ed. by Sandy Cook & Susanne

Davis, Northeastern Univ. Press

- **Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture**, Siobhan B.

Somerville

- **From A Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii**

Haunani-Kay Trask, University of Hawaii Press

- **Maoist Economics and the Revolutionary Road to Communism: The Shanghai Textbook**,

Raymond Lotta (ed.), Banner Press

- **Arm The Spirit**, Winter 1999-2000

Special issue on P/POWs and "re-building"



Fannie Lou Hamer

The Mission of The Jericho Movement

The issue of whether or not Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War exist inside the borders of the U.S. is one that the government of the U.S. has successfully been able to refute, because We have not taken the battle to them and forced them to address this issue. Over the last thirty years the number of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War has increased, as the struggles for liberation and independence have intensified.

While We have consistently contended that We are involved in a liberation struggle, our approach to winning the freedom of our Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War has not supported our claim. It has also enabled the U.S. government to criminalize these captured comrades, try them in its courts, and impose mammoth sentences upon them. It is the mission of the Jericho Movement to raise this issue to the height where the U.S. will no longer be able to deny the existence of our Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War, and by so doing, change the playing field.

We have vacillated too long, and We now need to forge a comprehensive approach to freeing all Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War. The mission of the Jericho Movement is to bring this issue into the open and push for the public recognition of the existence of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War inside the United States. The U.S. knows that to acknowledge the existence of PPs and POWs is at the same time to implicitly acknowledge the existence of liberation struggles and a process of social revolution going on inside this country. Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War don't come out of a vacuum, but arise out of political struggles.

There are four (4) principal issues that the Jericho Movement has decided to address:

- 1) Building the Amnesty Campaign: A big part of this work is locating PPs and POWs, compiling dossiers on them, and building the case for amnesty.
- 2) Continuing the Educational Campaign about the existence of PPs and POWs inside the U.S.
- 3) The Jericho Legal Defense Fund, establishing it and organizing lawyers and law students to provide legal defense for PPs and POWs.
- 4) The Jericho Medical Project, to fight for adequate and quality medical care for PPs and POWs.

People can help by doing one or more of the following:

- 1) Organize speaking engagements on PPs and POWs in your church, school, community.
- 2) Volunteer to work on one of the projects of the Jericho Movement.
- 3) Organize a Jericho Committee in your area, or get in touch with one of these existing committees:

- NYC Jericho Movement, P.O. Box 650, New York, NY 10009; 212-475-9180
- Bay Area Jericho Movement, P.O. Box 3585, Oakland, CA 94609; JerichoSFBA@hotmail; 510-667-9293 and 510-595-1652
- The Jericho Movement, c/o Coalition Against Police Abuse, 2924 S. Western Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90018-3032; part2001@usa.net; 310-495-0299
- The Jericho Movement, c/o Linda Carr, 2209 Timberwood, Carrollton, TX 75006
- The Jericho Movement, P.O. Box 80547, Lincoln, NE 68501; 402-435-3465

- 4) Make a financial contribution to Jericho. Make all checks or money orders payable to: Jericho/IFCO, and mail them to: Jericho Movement, P.O. Box 650, New York, NY 10009



The Indiana Supreme denied **Zolo Agona Azania's** appeal and set a date of October 25 (!) for his execution. We are asking all comrades, friends, supporters and all who love justice to write letters to the court to call for a fair hearing. There is much evidence of jury-tampering, incompetent counsel, and malicious prosecution because of Zolo's stance as a citizen of the Republic of New Afrika. Please write to: **Randall T. Shepard, Chief Justice Indiana Supreme Court, 313 Indiana State House, Indianapolis, IN 46204.** Sign & send a letter to the Indiana court today. Earlier this summer, We participated in an art festival where We displayed many of our comrad-brother's paintings. As We gave many who were impressed with his artwork information about his plight on Indiana's *death row*, We got petitions signed calling for a national moratorium on the death penalty. We are deeply grateful for his talent. Join the fight to save his life! We also have many of his other pamphlets and writings available.

Randall Shepard, Chief Justice
 Indiana Supreme Court
 200 W. Washington Street
 Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Justice,

I am writing to you today on behalf of Zolo Agona Azania, currently a prisoner on Indiana's death row. I understand that he has recently been given an October 25th date by the Indiana Supreme Court. I also understand that his attorneys are petitioning the court to allow them to file a post-conviction petition. I respectfully urge you allow Zolo's lawyers to file a post-conviction petition.

I am sure that you are aware of the gross incompetence of his trial counsel who put forward no evidence in mitigation at his death penalty trial. In addition, I am sure that you are aware that 70% of the Black jurors were erased from the jury pool at the time of his trial in Allen County Indiana.

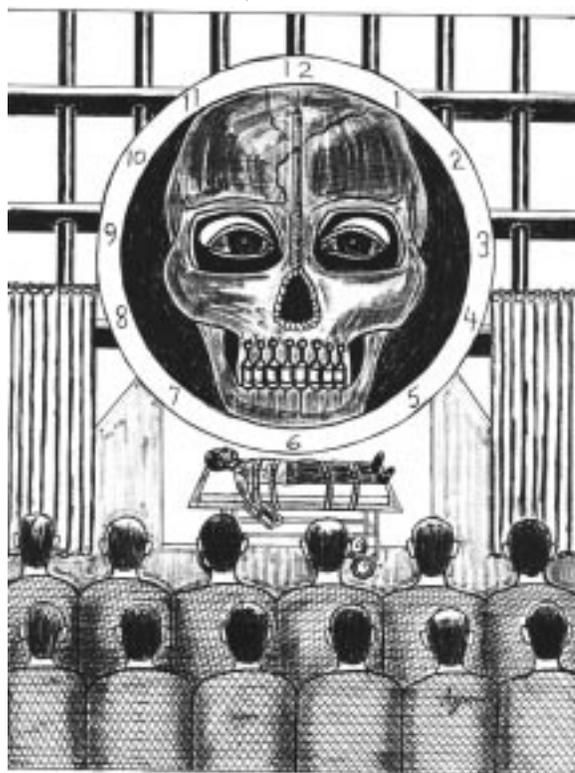
These facts are among many which raise questions about Zolo's conviction and sentence. I believe that Zolo has the right to raise these issues in a post-conviction petition.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

SSP 3420 W. 63rd Street Chicago IL 60629; 7737378679; crsn@aol.com

**STOP
 THE
 DEATH
 PENALTY**



New Afrikan Creed

1. i believe in the spirituality, humanity and genius of Black people, and in our new pursuit of these values.
2. i believe in the family and the community, and in the community as a family, and i will work to make this concept live.
3. i believe in the community as more important than the individual.
4. i believe in constant struggle for freedom, to end oppression and build a better world. i believe in collective struggle; in fashioning victory in concert with my brothers and sisters.
5. i believe that the fundamental reason our oppression continues is that We, as a people, lack the power to control our lives.
6. i believe that fundamental way to gain that power, and end oppression, is to build a sovereign Black nation.
7. i believe that all the land in America, upon which We have lived for a long time, which We have worked and built upon, and which We have fought to stay on, is land that belongs to us as a people.
8. i believe in the Malcolm X Doctrine: that We must organize upon this land, and hold a plebiscite, to tell the world by a vote that We are free and our land independent, and that, after the vote, We must stand ready to defend ourselves, establishing the nation beyond contradiction.
9. Therefore, i pledge to struggle without cease, until We have won sovereignty. i pledge to struggle without fail until We have built a better condition than the world has yet known.
10. i will give my life, if that is necessary; i will give my time, my mind, my strength, and my wealth because this **IS** necessary.
11. i will follow my chosen leaders and help them.
12. i will love my brothers and sisters as myself.
13. i will steal nothing from a brother or sister, cheat no brother or sister, misuse no brother or sister, inform on no brother or sister, and spread no gossip.
14. i will keep myself clean in body, dress and speech, knowing that i am a light set on a hill, a true representative of what We are building.
15. i will be patient and uplifting with the deaf, dumb and blind, and i will seek by word and deed to heal the Black family, to bring into the Movement and into the Community mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters left by the wayside.

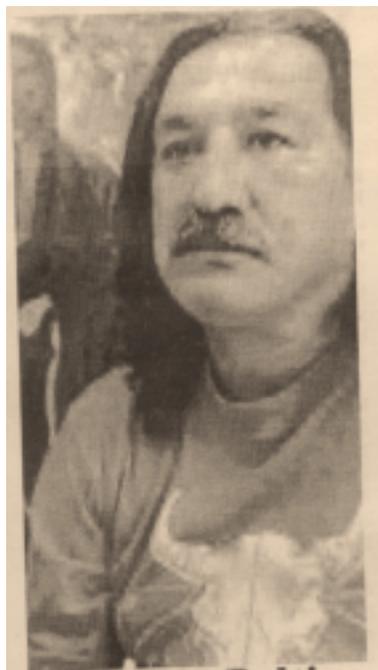
Now, freely and of my own will, i pledge this **Creed**, for the sake of freedom for my people and a better world, on pain of disgrace and banishment if i prove false. For, i am no longer deaf, dumb or blind. i am, by inspiration of the ancestors and grace of the Creator — a **New Afrikan**.

CROSSROAD Support Network, 3420 W. 63rd St, Chicago IL 60629
news & notes



• The *Hands Off Assata Campaign* went to rapper **Common's** concert earlier this summer. We were able to get out quite a bit of information about the sister, as well as sell a few t-shirts; in his second show, Common sported the shirt as he rocked the mike. His 'Song For Assata' is a classic on his new album, 'Like Water for Chocolate', with a soulful vocal by **Cee-Lo** of *Goodie Mob*. • There has been a new development in Sundiata Acoli's struggle to win parole; one of the members of the new jersey parole board has been under fire for having certain ties to mobsters, whom he consistently supported for parole while many New Afrikans who have appeared before the parole

board have been denied even though they were more worthy of parole • The ongoing struggle for fair parole hearings for 'C#' prisoners in the Illinois system got a boost earlier this fall when We had hearings before a state legislative panel. The **Prison Action Committee** provided many resources and leadership in this effort. PAC can be reached at: 661 E. 79th Street, Chicago IL 60619; 773-874-7390. This struggle for fair & equitable parole is taking shape all over the empire - New Jersey, California, Virginia, New York (**Robert 'Seth' Hayes** was recently denied parole there, despite 27 years of incarceration & a diabetic condition) are examples • **Leonard Peltier** was recently reviewed for parole after a 1993 denial. Again, despite health issues, family needs, 10,000 letters of support, and programmatic achievements during incarceration, as well as eight different parole



Peltier

plans, he was denied • We send condolences to **Richard 'Mafundi' Lake & Larry Giddings** on the losses of their mothers; We also send our condolences to the family, friends & comrades of **Albert 'Nuh' Washington** • The *Prison Phone Project* says that the phone companies and the state governments are making scandalous profits from high phone rates. Write to the Project at P.O. Box 578172, Chicago IL 60657; or call 773.235.0070 (ext. 6) or prisonphone@hotmail.com to help spread the word • Some of us went out to the Westside recently for **Poetry In the Street**, bringing the noise to a busy corner. All who participated or spectated enjoyed the exchange and the poets were invited to some back soon • CRSN now meets regularly in Chicago; call 773-737-8679 for more information.



'Nuh'