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Interview with Donald Cox, former Field Marshall, Black Panther Party

By Safiya Bukhari (3/31/92)

Q: Would you tell us a little about your background, and why u joined the BPP?

A: Well, i was born and grew up in Missouri and all those cornfields and whatnot. So, i was really just a 'country nigga', u know? Not intellectual, not knowing anything, really. i arrived in California 17 years old in '53. Of course, like all Black people who grew up in the United States at that time, i was aware of the oppression of Black folks and all of the lynchings that We were hearing about every now & then at that time.

And, the Supreme Court in '54, i was sitting at the table with an uncle & aunt that i was living with. And he was saying that was a very historical decision that We were witnessing. Of course, at the time i wasn't capable of understanding the implications of what that meant.

Soon after, Little Rock & all those events began. Now, out there in California i wasn't feeling directly touched personally, but feeling touched as a Black person in America. And really understanding that that was part of me too. But it didn't go much further than that.

Then you have incidents such as the Emmett Till lynching – i felt very sensitive about that because We weren't very far different in age. Then there were the Montgomery Bus Boycotts and then the Freedom Rides - all these things going on – it just looked to me like things were really really beginning to move, but in the south. And then the Church bombings and the civil rights demonstrations that began. i had a little problem dealing with the philosophy of non-violence. i just at that time couldn't imagine myself being spit on or abused physically without doing anything.

So, for me personally at that time, i wasn't attracted to dealing with any non-violent actions. Although the fever of the Civil Rights movement actually arrived there in San Francisco. And with all the bombings & brutality of the demonstrations was such, that finally i reached the point i wanted to do something. So i joined the group that seemed to me like to be the most militant thing in San Francisco, which was CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality. And We began to prepare & make demonstrations against real estate agents that discriminated against Blacks and whatnot. First, We would send a Black person in to ask for a particular place that was for rent or for sale. Naturally, they would be refused and then a white member of the organization would go in and naturally, it would be available to them. So, We began to boycott & picket those places. And the cadillac dealer, where in San Francisco at that time, 75% of all the El Dorados that were sold were bought by Blacks, but there were no Black salesmen. So, finally with those demonstrations We began to get some token advances. But i noticed right away, even with my lack of political maturity, that whenever – like at the cadillac place – whenever finally they broke down & started giving jobs to people, it was always jobs for people in the community that was already kinda well off in the sense that they were – bourgy! In other words, it wasn't the people that were really down & out

that were benefiting from the advances. So, i really didn't understand too much politically what was going on but i just didn't feel satisfied; so i just started leaning back. That was around '63.

After the Civil Rights March on Washington and - the thing that really broke my back, two weeks later - the response in Birmingham when those 4 little Black girls were killed in Sunday School [during] that church bombing. That just blew my mind. i just felt a total impotence. i felt impotent & frustrated; wanted to do something, but not knowing anything. Really, i wasn't an intellectual, i hadn't done any reading, i didn't even know what revolution meant at that time.

But anyhow on my job, i worked my way up, & finally i became the boss. As soon as i became the manager where i worked (the owner owned several corporations, We were only one), i had meetings with him once a week to go over the books. The rest of the time i was on my own. So once i got to be the boss, director of the place, i knew i was gonna correct all the injustices with my other people i had been working all these years. To get them raises everybody deserved & whatnot. But as soon as i started talking about that, he starts talkin' 'bout, "Whoa, whoa; hold up! Keep the prices down, pay the minimum amount of wages & charge the maximum for the products."



So, through this process on my job, i became conscious & aware that it was the system that was wrong. But like i said, not having done any reading, not knowing what revolution was about, i didn't know what to do about it. But i understood fundamentally through my work, that it was the system that was all wrong.

And by that time, '65 had rolled around, i was hearing Malcolm X & people on the street corner like Don Warden in Oakland at the time, talking about 'Black' & all that and all the things that i had never heard of before. And, it sure made sense to me, so i used to go down to the park every weekend to hear him talk. Then the mosque opened up there in San Francisco so i used to go down there every once in a while to hear what they were saying, go by the restaurant. And this Black consciousness slowly began to take root in my head, but still i didn't know what to do or anything like that.

Well, finally the Long Hot Summer started. Seeing Watts going up in flame on television [and] that really stirred up some positive emotions: "Finally, finally! niggas are striking out!" It was based strictly on emotion, not based on any kind of political analysis or understanding really what all those implications were. But i felt good seeing people striking out.

Then the next year, a policeman killed a young Black on Hunters Point, who was only about 11 years old, he shot him in the back. So the youth up there started going out on riot too, and it finally spread into my neighborhood there in fillmore. Well, i was going to work everyday in my shirt & tie, a halfway bourgie nigga at the time. So, i wasn't really participating, but i was just out on my stoop watching the little youngbloods running through the neighborhood gettin' away from the policemen.

And then i began to hear about a group over in Oakland, called the Black Panthers. With guns - i didn't know anything about 'em, didn't know what they were talking about, but the word started going around a bit. And finally there was an article in the San Francisco Examiner - at the time they showed a picture of Huey Newton standing up there with a gun. That was mind blowing, seeing that. So, i started asking around, but nobody knew anything about 'em, didn't know what they was. Finally, one day i walked in to the job and somebody gave me a copy of the San Francisco Chronicle and there on the front page was a photograph of all them niggas at the state capitol with guns! Well, i didn't know what i was gon' do, but i wanted to find them dudes with them guns! 'Cause to me, with all the violence that Blacks had been suffering from all this time, the idea of standing up and saying "We don't want no more of that. If you shoot at us, We gon' shoot back" - that appealed to me. But i still didn't know anybody.

Finally i ran across a couple of youngbloods that knew one person that was there in San Francisco that was part of the Panther party – that was Emory Douglass. So We found somebody that knew him to get him to come and talk to us and whatnot. We started buying the Panther paper and studying that. It so happened that the first issue We got our hands on, there was an essay by Huey Newton talking about the correct handling of a revolution.

For us there in San Francisco, not knowing anybody, not really being into it, We didn't feel worthy of being in their company! We put them in such high esteem; so We worked, started trying to organize and learn a little bit amongst ourselves to what was going on. By that time, Newark was breaking out, Detroit – We felt like the revolution was on, and We were behind time, so We were working to catch up. We wasn't going over there to meet with those people in Oakland, 'til We felt like We deserved to be in their company! But in the meantime, through our relationship with Emory, We got Huey to come talk to our group. And We really held him in high esteem and everything because of all the stuff they were doing in the street, you know facing off the pigs with the guns & whatnot. So it was a little funny meeting him, and seeing that little prettyboy with that little high-pitched voice. He didn't fit the image of this bad nigga We had. And he talked so intellectual that We didn't half understand stuff he was saying, but still that didn't change anything. But he saw how We was organized amongst ourselves with our guns and giving training courses to people on how to use them & whatnot. So, at that time there in the summer of '67, he started asking us to deal with anything that came up there in San Francisco where people wanted Panthers. At that time there wasn't the Panther Party as it became known; over there in Oakland, you could get maybe a handful of people together that called themselves Panthers, nothing more.



So, some people in Hunters Point asked him to come over & talk to them, so he called us & told us to go deal with it. So We went over & rapped; took our guns, showed people a few basic things, how to break 'em down, and talking about safety rules & all like that. And, We started doing that all around the different Black communities. San Francisco was small, but the Black ghettoes were all divided up – there was no one central one – they were divided up into about five: there was Hunters Point, Fillmore, and a couple more i can't recall the names of. So, We started going around to one of these neighborhoods every weekend with our guns, giving demonstrations & whatnot.

Finally, We reached a point where a few of us that felt like, "Ok, talkin' is enough, We gotta get down to business". About three of us, We found each other, and We planned a little operation. It was successful. And, not having any propaganda machinery around, We chose the anniversary of the date that the policeman had killed that young dude up on Hunters Point the year before. So, if the people didn't really make the connection, at least the pigs knew what it was about. So We did our first action on that anniversary, September 27, 1967.

Well, it was successful, so then We felt like, "Now, We can go over there and talk to them people in Oakland. So, the next day We went straight to Oakland. We went to Huey's house and David Hilliard was there and a couple of other people, but they were laying back, they weren't talking much. We went to the restaurant, just sitting down talking. Naturally, We let him know what We had done and he had seen the news and he knew about it. But to my surprise, he asked me "well, u know don't you think that it's better; rather than start moving", isn't it better to work first to get the means to get organized and to get to moving?" Well, i didn't expect that kind of a question, so all i could think of to say was "as far as We're

concerned, you got to use what you got to get what you need.” But anyhow, that was the beginning of our relationship with the Black Panther Party. That was in September of 1967.

Q: How old were you then?

A: 31

Q: How did you become the field marshal of the BPP?

A: Well, We didn’t stop there. That was in September 27th when We did that first action. Then, Huey went down & got wounded & arrested. That was in October, and We had decided that, like the Panthers there in Oakland, We wouldn’t accept that anymore. We wouldn’t let them move with impunity on people that We considered our leaders. So, We planned an action to retaliate for that. It was also a successful action. Because of the things that We were doing there in San Francisco, one night a car came with Bobby Seale, David Hilliard, and i think George Murray. They came down to the neighborhood where We hung out, and Bobby said he wanted us to join the Party, and he wanted to make me a member of the central committee. So, i said “Well, We as a group, We don’t have any hierarchical structures; every time there’s something that needs to be done, the one that knows the most about it does it. He’s the one that tells us how to deal with it, so i’ll have to talk to everybody and let u know.” Well, We got our heads together right then & there, and everybody said, “deal with it”. So i told him, “Ok”. That’s when our formal alliance began with the Party.

Because of my background with arms - i’m from Missouri, hunting, one meal a year coming from hunting, i had my first rifle when i was 8! – so when the thing started i had an arsenal at the house. So, being able to train people, and knowing all the gun laws – them people didn’t even know that you could legally go down and buy all these guns & whatnot – i started dealing with that. So i didn’t have a title yet.

Then they had a meeting to get a little bit better organized, around the time We were going to have the rally for Huey’s birthday in 1968. That’s when Stokely, Rob Brown, James Forman, and all those people came out. And the merger with the Panthers & SNCC went down. Now, as far as SNCC was concerned, they needed to get some more legitimacy because We had taken the thing to a higher level than them; for us, the Panthers, We needed to get ahold of a national network, so that served our interests on that level. So We had a meeting and We defined more precisely the central committee at that time, which was naturally Huey, Eldridge, Bobby, David, Kathleen, George Murray, Emory Douglass, Masai Hewitt & myself. At that time was when i received the title of Field Marshall. But because i was still going to work in my tie & suits & whatnot during the day and doing those other activities at night, i said that to continue to be effective, i don’t want that to be known publicly. So, if you find any of those old Panther newspapers you’ll see that in the beginning, every time you saw field marshal, it was written ‘underground’.

Q: What were some of your responsibilities as field marshal?

A: Well frankly, it was strictly on a military level; procuring guns, and teaching people how to use them. And, because a lot of people are still out there today, i don’t want to go into any more details like that. But, it was strictly on a military level.

To buy handguns in California, you had to go through the police and wait two weeks, & get a report. So, because almost everybody had been busted and didn’t have a right to handguns, i used to go to Nevada & buy them. Because there, you could buy ‘em over the counter like cigarettes. So, i’d collect money & go there and come back with trunkloads of guns. That worked alright until Bunchy Carter’s brother got caught in an ambush in Los Angeles, Arthur was his name; he was the one who introduced that phrase, “Right On” in the party. All the time, Arthur was sayin’ “right on, right on!”, and everybody picked up on that. But anyhow, he got killed; he got a full blast from a twelve-gauge shotgun, but before he died, he offed the two people that ambushed him, and the pistol that he had was one of those that i had been buying. So, when they traced it, and saw the store records of all the guns that i had been buying, they made scary headlines there in the Bay Area, talking about Panthers stockpiling guns. And there was even a Black congressman in the State Assembly at the time that was a bootlicker at the time - i don’t know how he evolved – his name was Mervyn Dymally. He stood up in the congressional house and read into the record all the numbers of all the guns that i had bought, as if it was a crime for Black people to arm themselves to defend themselves against all that police violence. So, my activities at that time really were dealing with things on a military level.

Q: We often hear of the BPP referred to as a paramilitary organization; is this a correct description and if it is a correct description, what was it's structure & chain of command?

A: You see, in the beginning, because of all the police violence when Huey & Bobby & Lil' Bobby took to the streets with their guns, they concentrated on point #7: ending police brutality & whatnot, in the community. The program had ten points, but that was the priority for us because of all the violence that was going on. So, that gave it a more military appearance; and the fact that the gun laws in California permitted us - it was legal for us to be out there with those guns like that. That gave us an image of being a little bit more adventurous than We really were. We'd go in the police station with our guns and it was legal, and they couldn't do anything about it. But, when they started working on that gun law, to stop you walking around with the gun loaded, that's when the Panthers went to the capitol with the guns in California. So, in that sense, it was because of the military situation of all the repression & violence against Black people. The chain of command of the Panther Party and the titles were more or less, like a military organization. Or, like a lot of revolutionary governments in the world: Huey - minister of defense, i was the field marshal, David Hilliard was the chief of staff; but also, there was a minister of culture: Emory Douglass, minister of education: George Murray, communications secretary: Kathleen Cleaver, minister of information: Eldridge Cleaver.

So, in the beginning, emphasis was placed on point #7, with the police patrols and all like that. In practice, even though the organization was not a paramilitary organization, in fact, it really had that appearance - initially.

But then, after Huey had gotten busted, the few of us that were there in the Bay Area got together the next day and We know that with one policeman dead and another wounded, they're gonna try to put Huey in the gas chamber. We don't know what to do, but We gotta do something to keep them from sending Huey to the gas chamber. Immediately, the Huey Newton Defense Committee was created, and Eldridge Cleaver (despite what he became later) went to work. And that - the pressure group to keep them from sending Huey to the gas chamber - became the Black Panther Party as it became known around the world.

We started organizing, trying to get as many Blacks together as possible. Getting guns; it wasn't a real well-disciplined organization at the time, 'cause some people started doing all kinds of crazy stuff - cheap, nickel & dime robberies, intimidating people & whatnot, but still it was growing like wildfire.

By April, when they assassinated Martin Luther King, and those 150 cities burned overnight, [Because] our level was a little bit higher at that point, We kept people from going out and just doing spontaneous things, but there were still a few little things that went down. We more or less managed to keep things under control.

But, Eldridge Cleaver felt the need to move, and he really didn't have any military experience, you see; he was the minister of information. So, he just gathered up a whole bunch of people and everybody was armed and they went out in the streets, riding around in cars. i don't know the details, all i know is some police cars showed up. Shooting started, niggas was runnin' in all different directions, and Eldridge and Little Bobby got cornered off into a house. We all know that history - they stayed in there for about an hour, hour and a half with all that teargas & everything - they couldn't get 'em out, because Lil' Bobby had a M-14, and there was a little alleyway, they were on the ground floor. To get to them, anybody that comes in that little alleyway, they gonna get blown away; so finally, they just set the house on fire. At that point, well they had to give it up - they had to come on out. But Eldridge, knowing how the pigs was, he stripped down naked. See, he had been wounded in the foot, he told Lil' Bobby to do the same thing, but Bobby only took off his shirt. So, with all that gas, for an hour and a half with no gas mask, you can imagine the shape they were in; plus Eldridge being wounded. So they went stumbling out of there, and Eldridge being wounded on the foot, he fell and Lil' Bobby stumbling, and one of those racist police yelled, "He's got a gun!", and they opened fire on him. i don't know how many times he was shot, maybe fifty times; it was really terrible. It was just out-and-out murder, as everybody knows. And the house looked like swiss cheese, all the bullet holes that were in it, it was one of those old wooden houses where bullets was just goin' right through it. Since they was down on the ground floor in the house, they really hadn't gotten touched. But they blew Lil' Bobby away outside.

Q: You left the U.S. and went into exile in 1970. Can you tell us what the conditions were in the streets and within the Black Panther Party at this time?

A: Ah, things had really evolved by that time! More or less, the struggle had left the streets and gone into the courts. Because frankly, after the campaign to free Huey finally reached the trial and they didn't

send Huey to the gas chamber, and Charles Garry (who was the lawyer) said that he would be out in two years. All of a sudden, you got all this machinery that's moving across the country for the sole purpose of freeing Huey & keeping him from going to the gas chamber, and We didn't know what to do with it! We were passed by the events, because people just overnight was moving all across the country in the name of the Black Panther.

So, We decided to go into retreat, and started going into political education trying to find a tool to help us deal with organizing all of that. And i've never known to this day where it came from, but the first thing that came out for us to study was "The Foundations of Leninism", by Josef Stalin. And as far as i'm concerned, that was the beginning of the end, because that was the book that was used to turn the emphasis from the struggle to the party. Instead of the struggle for the liberation of Black people becoming the most important thing, it was the party that became the most important thing. Then the democratic centralism, and all that marxist-leninist paraphernalia that most of the organizations calling themselves communist was based on. But the so-called central committee, and i'm gonna tell the truth, was David Hilliard at that time. Because Eldridge had already had to go into exile in December, Huey was in jail, and Bobby had charges against him. But they were making decisions by themselves. We didn't really have those central committee meetings, with the democratic centralism where things were voted and then passed on down. Personally, myself, i didn't know what to do, i was going along with that, 'cause i felt that the party was the only means to deal with that situation at that time.

But slowly, in April, that's when the New York 21 got busted, and i made a trip back there with david hilliard and whatnot. i saw that the party had just fallen apart. Because of the repression back there, david hilliard wanted out; he wanted to get back to oakland the next day after We dealt with what had to be dealt with. But, i saw what the situation was like, and i decided to stay there and try to re-organize and get the party put back together. The bust had just gone down in New Haven; that's why We had met there in New York. The party in New Haven didn't even exist anymore. So, i stayed, and they got on the first thing smokin'. Robert Bey was so scared, he sat up in the house all night with a pistol in his hand until it was time to go to the airport to catch the plane. They wanted to get out of New York, as far as they were concerned, it was too dangerous. So, they went back to California, and i stayed in New York.

So, i started moving to get the party re-organized. The fascism conference was coming up in Oakland, and We were working, organizing people around that, and using that as an mobilizing tool. So, the party started coming back together there on the east coast. Philadelphia, New York, New Jersey, and then finally when We got enough cadre where i could take people from different chapters and We went to New Haven, printed up some leaflets and passed them out, held a rally and opened up a new party overnight. Because those people up there had been abandoned. It was necessary to work and start getting attention to their case & getting them out. We just took people from all over & put Doug Miranda in charge, and they started with that.

Now how things evolved, structurally, i don't really know, because finally the police figured out a way to get rid of me & cut my wings. i had gotten busted in Richmond CA back in the summer of '68 because they had a riot, and i had gone over there to observe. Now actually, i never moved without my guns, you know. So, the curfew was at 9 o'clock, and they had been watching me all day, the California Highway Patrol. So, when it was time for curfew, me & a couple of other dudes were gonna go into the house; as soon as We got to the house they came from everywhere and vamped on me, and actually they found my piece. So i got busted for having a gun and then they put charges on me being an ex-felon in possession of a firearm. That was another felony. i had been busted when i worked for the post office because i ripped off a little money from the mail. i had gotten probation for that, but anything dealing with the post office at that time was a federal charge. It wasn't considered a misdemeanor, so i was considered an ex-felon, even though i had only got probation – it was very minor, something like \$50, but that was on the record. So they used that as a technicality, to vamp on me there in New York, being an ex-felon in possession of a firearm to test some new law they had made there in congress. i was confined, i couldn't move anymore around the country. Because i was living in New York at the time, i could only go to New York but the charges were put in California, so i had to go to CA for court. i could only go to New York & California. So, when i went back to California for the court trial, that gave David Hilliard & his clique to take over back on the east coast. Because by then, things were organized, you see. In the beginning, they was afraid to even go there, but by then with things being organized, they sent their people in to take over.

i'm going to trial and whatnot, things were dragging out, but then the Baltimore case came down. They had found a police informer, the police had sent him in to the party, but he showed his hand two or three days after he had gotten there. They dealt with him. But, because i was responsible for the east coast

at the time, when they came out with the list of the people they were gonna vamp on, my name was at the top of the list. i received the word on April 16, 1970 which was my 34th birthday, so i got hat. i disappeared that day. Now, i stayed there, not knowing really when things were going to go down, but i went underground immediately. But two weeks later around the 31st of April, they started kicking down doors looking for me, so it was at that time that i split.

i had already been working trying to get people to go to Algiers to help out to set up the international section. Sekou Odinga and Larry Mack had been underground for sometime, over a year, and they needed breathing room because there was no underground apparatus at that time. So instead of taking people off the street that We needed for street work, it was decided that Sekou & Larry would go there. My thing came down in the meantime, so We all went there; Sekou, Larry & myself. Now, We didn't have no travel arrangements at that time, We weren't proficient in producing false papers at that time, so Sekou & Larry had to take a plane. They landed in Cuba; it took us a couple of months to get them there. It was a coincidence; they took the plane the same day i left the states. i arrived in Algiers on the 5th, and they arrived in Cuba about the same time. i think it took Eldridge & i almost two months to get them out of there. It was almost July before We got them to Algiers.

But anyhow, We all finally got together, but in the meantime, the government had given us an embassy. The revolutionaries in Vietnam became a provisional government, so they gave them a normal governmental embassy, and they gave us their old embassy that they had when they were the National Liberation Front.

In the meantime, Eldridge was leading a delegation of anti-imperialist forces to Korea, so he left. Sekou, Larry, myself, Bill Stephens, & Connie Matthews were left there in Algiers, and We remodeled the villa to create an embassy with plaques out front and everything. Fortunately, We were able to get it together just in time for their return. They came back on Friday, September 13th, and We had the official opening on the 15th on September of the International Section of the Black Panther Party.

So my exile was really a continuation of work. i didn't feel like i was losing anything because as far as i was concerned personally i was at war – it didn't matter if i was in or out – work was gonna continue.

Q: What kinds of thoughts were going through your mind when you made the decision to leave the United States?

A: The only thing, frankly, that i was thinking about was keeping them from catching up on me. i wasn't gonna give them a day for anything. My whole thing was to get away from their grasp; they was kickin' in doors all over the place. So, it was funny, you know, because i went into disguise and i had to go into the federal building to get a passport. Now, they're out there kicking down doors, the passport office is on one floor and the FBI was on the next floor and i'm right in there gettin' my false passport! i managed to get it within 24 hours, and i got hat. My only thing was to get away from them.

Now, i'm gonna tell you also, i felt a little relief, because the Panther situation internally, had become untenable with David Hilliard and his clique. i didn't agree with the way they were taking things. The old emphasis of armed defense & whatnot was just totally squashed, and they were not wanting to deal with anything anymore that would attract attention of the police, and as far as i was concerned that was not what the Panthers represented. i wanted to resign; i had written a letter of resignation for Huey, but i hadn't given it to him yet. Sister Barbara had the copy, and when that thing came down on me, frankly i was relieved. Because that allowed me to get out of there without being branded a traitor or renegade as they would have done in that newspaper as they did with anybody that didn't agree with them. So i was able to get out of that hell there without them smearing me across the country with that newspaper saying i was a renegade & whatnot and that allowed me to continue to work outside, so really on one level, it was a relief for me.

Q: Did you know what to expect, and did you know where you were going?

A: Oh yeah, i knew i was going to Algiers. What to expect? No, 'cause i was full of illusions. After all the times i had seen the film, "Battle of Algiers", i thought i was going to a revolutionary country, where everybody was revolutionary & whatnot. So, really it was a contradiction, 'cause when i got there and started seeing graffiti written on the walls and seeing the name 'Elvis', i didn't really understand what that was really all about! But, the atmosphere was very good, because the OAU had a liberation committee where they supported liberation movements and Algeria was the host country. So, at that time in 1970, there were representatives of struggles of people from over 90 countries there. Being within that diplomatic atmosphere, revolutionary atmosphere, that was very good & very positive. But contradictions in terms of

the Algerian society being revolutionary in the beginning – i didn't understand what was going on. People loving the French & whatnot; i couldn't understand that, after all they had been through.

Q: When was the International Section of the Black Panther Party established, and how did it come about?

A: Well, like i say, the official opening was September 15, 1970, and it came about because the Panther Party had international recognition at that time. Really, there were some inequalities because of that, because We were considered the favorites of everybody. There was no liberation movement in Algiers at that time that had an embassy, except us. Even the people that were waging armed struggle – all the Portuguese colonies, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau – even those people didn't have an embassy. They were working out of apartments & whatnot. So, that caused some resentment. We weren't aware of it at the time, but the privileges that We were being given were because people respected us for dealing with the beast from the interior. We were considered heroes, maybe much more than what We deserved, and We didn't really realize it at the time. So, We created a lot of resentment without really knowing about it.

Like, We're just niggas off the street, [and] We're lookin' for a place to have an embassy because they hadn't given us one yet. So, We're lookin' around with real estate agents, they show us a place, it was big enough to put an office upstairs, We could live downstairs, so We rented it and paid a years rent in advance. Well, We didn't know, but it turned out to be in one of the most bourgie neighborhoods in Algiers! But for us, with our standards from the United States, it didn't seem like that way to us, but We found out later that it was. We needed cars. Well, if u see old French cars – the R16, and things like that – they were the kinds of cars that in the 'States, We wouldn't be caught in! You know, i was driving a GTO, with a 450 cubic centimeter inch engine in there, with 4-on-the-floor when i left the states. So, driving an R16, for me it was almost like a Model T. So, We rented two of them to have enough transportation. But it turns out, that was a car that everybody down there dreamed of having! It was one of the leading cars that you could have.

So, a lot of mistakes were made on that level, from our part from being just totally ignorant, but We needed transportation, and that was the biggest car that We could find. Even though it didn't meet our American standards, it got us around. We didn't realize the resentment that created in other people's minds. Like having these two R16s, having a villa in Hidra, then by that time, they had given us the Vietnamese embassy, so We had an embassy of our own. Later, i found out that people were saying, "oh, they're not revolutionaries, they're bourgeois – they're bourgeois people." Can you imagine calling Sekou Odinga, Larry Mack, Eldridge Cleaver & myself bourgeois people? (laughing) But those were mistakes We made for not understanding the situation.

But then, too, We weren't like other people from the other liberation movements. They just sat around waiting for handouts. The OAU gave every 2,000 dinars a month to live on. You can't live on that! It was symbolic as far as We were concerned; We dealt with our own needs. Eldridge used a lot of the money from the book he got; plus there were support committees working in Europe. So, We dealt with ourselves without asking anybody for anything, and they wasn't used to people moving like that, and that created resentment too. We dealt with whatever We felt like had to be dealt with at the time. We're not in no struggle for people to tell us what to do. So on that level We made a lot of mistakes on the cultural level, not taking into account the cultural differences – We were ignorant to all that. We were just being ourselves.

Q: What were the functions of the International Section?

A: To disseminate information about the Party all over the world, doing as much as We could. Being really the embassy, We were treated as the official representatives of the american movement. No americans came to Algiers or could leave without our authorization. If someone wanted to come, they would contact us, and then if We accepted them, We would give clearance to the FLN. The people who were in charge of us would give the clearance at the airport. We were the official american representatives in Algiers at the time, because the embassy was closed since the war in 1967.

Now, We didn't know it at the time, but We were also being used by the Algerians because they were in secret negotiations for oil contracts with the american oil companies for the billions of dollars that they were going to use to build the future of their country. So, i'm sure that We were used as a little pressure in their negotiations, but We weren't aware of that at that time.

Q: Tell us about the split in the Black Panther Party as it developed from the view of the International Section?

A: Well, as i said, before i left i didn't agree with the way Hilliard had taken the thing; really using repression and creating an internal police force to vamp on anybody in the organization that didn't agree with their line, or didn't agree with them. He just put himself as a "little-foot Stalin"; he became the Stalin of the Black Panther Party.

But, us out there, even before i left, our hopes was in Huey. "When Huey gets out, he's gonna put things back on the line." So, here We are in 1970 – i think he got out in August – even a month before the International Section opened up. You have to keep in mind: when Huey got shot and got busted and went to jail, you could only get a handful of people together there in the Bay Area that called themselves Panthers. The Panthers were unknown on a national level. So, when he comes out of prison, there's not only a national organization, it's on an international basis with international recognition with hundreds and thousands of people outside the prison waiting on him! Oh, the nigga just flipped out. It just went to his head with that megalomania being [of] Huey Newton, you see?

So, in the beginning, everybody was just elated. It was just like when Nelson Mandela when he got released. "Finally, Huey's out; He's gon' put things back on the line." But not only didn't he put things back on the line, he took the things further than David did! Nigga gets a penthouse up there in Oakland, cadillac, they started buying clothes, they got off into that cocaine, i heard they even put sistas out on the street! Them niggas just went crazy; started dressin' like Al Capone and a bunch of gangsters - moving on people, using brutality against people - just became bandits.

So, We're out there, gettin' little vibes of what's goin' on here & there, not really understanding everything, but We're not going along with that. We got a order that, from now on, when you talk to international representatives or put out anything, Huey Newton is to be called 'The Supreme Commander'. Well, for us, "that nigga done gon' crazy, calling himself the supreme commander, We ain't goin' for that". So naturally, We didn't do that, We didn't follow those orders, We continued the thing as it always was: 'minister of defense' if We had to talk about him. Then, a week or two later, We got an order changing the other order saying, "No, he's no longer the Supreme Commander. Say 'The Supreme Servant of the People'." We knew that he had just gone out there in left field, and We started having meetings trying to figure out what We were going to do, discussing all the contradictions & whatnot. We were about 25 at that time in Algiers.

We didn't really know when or how We were gonna deal with it, but what happened was Huey had completely isolated us. Anybody caught communicating with us, i think maybe some of them were actually moved on, i don't know, but total communication was stopped. The only person who had a right to communicate with us was Huey, but We didn't really know what was going on.

Finally, Huey called one night and told Eldridge, "Look, word's going around that maybe We're not seeing things eye to eye. Now, i'm gonna be on this live television show tomorrow morning, and We're gonna call you, and We're gonna talk on this live show, and We're gonna show people that everything is alright between us." So they hung up, and when he hung up, that's when We decided, "Well, this is it." We prepared a statement, and the next day they called, and Huey's on live tv and after the formalities, the speaker asked Eldridge, "Well, is there anything you want to say?" That's when Eldridge read the statement where We denounced the direction that Huey was taking the Party and all the things they were doing. On live tv! Huey was sitting there. That nigga went crazy! That's what broke the split out into the open. We couldn't allow that to continue, We didn't want people to think that We were going along with those things.

So, about an hour later, Huey called me. He asked me, "What side you on, D.C.?" i said, "i'm against you." He laughed, "Hahaha. OK, i'm gonna crush you." About three days later, i got a phone call from Zayd in a panic, telling me that Robert Webb just got shot in the head up there on 125th & 7th avenue. Well, i went into a depression for about five days. i couldn't even talk, so really, when he said he was gonna crush me, he really got to me when he offed Robert Webb. Robert Webb was a wonderful brother. And Huey knew it, because he was such a nice brother, that at one time, he was Huey's personal bodyguard.

Q: There are certain events that happened involving the International Section that also made news in the United States. Let's talk about some of them for a moment. Could you tell us a little about the two airplane hijackings, the one involving the \$500,000 ransom. Can you tell us a little about that one?

A: Yeah, Roger Holder was his name, ex-Vietnam veteran – he had flown helicopters over there, he really wasn't affiliated with any organization or anything – but his personal conscience told him to deal with that; hijack a plane. He wasn't very political, so his demands weren't real clear in the beginning. He was asking for the release of Angela Davis and a few other demands that appeared to be progressive. Finally, he got a plane to come on over to Algiers and join us. His girlfriend at the time, Katherine Holder, was with him. When he arrived, he was received as a hero in Algiers. Everybody was around him; i went to talk to his girlfriend. So, i asked her, "hey, what group you with?" She said, "Oh, i ain't with no group, i just came along for a ride." So that shows you what level that was on!

As i said before, We didn't know that Algerians were in negotiations for these oil contracts. Naturally, they let the people in their country and they became part of the group, but they gave the airplane back, and they confiscated the ransom money. But, because Blacks didn't have confidence in the news media, there were people there in Detroit that didn't believe that they had given the plane back and the money. So they decided to do the same thing. They took a plane and came over with a million dollars ransom. But by that time, the Algerians wanted to put a stop to that, so in the beginning, they kept us separate from them. That was the McNairs, George Brown, George Tillotson, and another one called Knott. Finally, they let them get in contact with us, but naturally, they gave the money back and they gave the airplane back. The Algerians didn't want that kind of pressure; they wanted to put a stop to that. So, they created a very uncomfortable situation for everybody, and We knew by then that because the split had gone down and things were very tense there amongst us there in Algiers, that it was time to get out of there.

Now after the split, the people on the east coast, including Sekou & Larry that were there in Algiers, decided that they didn't want to have anything to do with the Central Committee. Being a Central Committee member, that meant me too. Even though they knew that i was not part of all that stuff that was going on, they didn't want to make an exception. They cut me loose also. That hurt me pretty bad, so what i did was i resigned, and i was living out there in the suburbs of Algiers. But because We were there as a group, i didn't want to cause any political problems with the government or anybody, so i didn't make it public that i was resigned. So, i had been living out there since January. Roger didn't come until June; the other hijackers didn't come until September, so i really hadn't been participating in any of the decisions. But, by the time that last plane came, everybody just saw dollar signs. When i say 'everybody', i mean the others, not me because i knew they were gonna give that back too.

Q: When the takeover at Attica state prison occurred in September 1971, one of the prisoners demands was asylum in a non-imperialistic country. How did the International Section respond to this demand?

A: Well, We were very favorable toward it. We personally didn't do anything because Bobby Seale was on the scene there, and We didn't have communications with anybody directly on the thing. But, if We had been contacted and anybody had been released, We could have welcomed them in Algiers. We still had our diplomatic status with the FLN, and We could have welcomed anyone there. That wouldn't have been a problem.

Q: What were the events leading up to the dismantlement of the International Section of the Black Panther Party?

A: Well, all those internal dissensions that i was talking about. You see, after that last plane came over, everybody just wanted out of there, and i'll explain why.

They decided that they were gonna make some kind of move and put pressure on the government to give up that million dollars! Well, i came out from my suburbs where i was living to be at the meeting, and right away i told them they was crazy. The government is not going to risk the future of their country for a handful of niggas and a million dollars. So, they just told me to shut up, they didn't want to hear anything i had to say. i said, "OK, y'all keep my part." Pete O'Neal jumped up and said, "Anybody else feel like that?" i went on back home, 'cause i knew that if they did anything, they was gonna be in trouble.

i had a listening post set up. Where i had radios tuned in on all the stations, even local stations in the states, and tape recorders & whatnot. So, i'm sitting there listening to the BBC news at one o'clock in the afternoon, and i hear a statement that Eldridge & the hijackers done put out condemning Boumedienne & the Algerian government. i knew he's done blown it. Within five minutes, i get a phone call from Larry Mack, "Call New York! Call New York! They got us surrounded by machine guns!" But i had a woman friend there at the house; before i did anything, i got my guns, my ammunition, my stash, and i gave it to her and said, "Get out of here, quick!" The bus stop was right across the street. While she's still standing at

the bus stop, the police show up at my house. Because they didn't know that i had resigned, you see. But they saw that i was there by myself. They searched that house for everything, naturally they didn't find anything, 'cause my woman was standing there at the bus stop with everything in her bag & she managed to get away with it. So, they put everybody at the office under house arrest, and that night i hear sirens come again, and they brought all the hijackers and put them out there at my house to get them out of sight, and put us under house arrest with two policemen on the door. i could only go out to do shopping with a policeman accompanying me. Well, political interventions with the president and everything managed to calm down his anger for what they had done. Everybody was released from house arrest after the weekend was over. For all technical purposes, that was the end, it was just a question now of people getting out of there.

Unfortunately, that coincided with the time that i had planned to leave. So all the plans i had put together to get out of there were blown away by all this house arrest & having police on the door. So, i had to choose alternative means and i managed to get out of there at the end of September. Really, i was not there when everybody managed to get away & go their own different ways. i went back in the beginning of '74. When i got back, everybody had already gone. i went back as a political refugee, and because the authorities there had confidence in me; they had known me, they had seen how i worked, naturally they gave me political asylum. They even helped me get an apartment & a job. i stayed there 'til 1977, all by myself as a political refugee.

Q: When you left the United States and went into exile, the BPP was a flourishing organization with national and international support; less than six years later it no longer existed. How did it feel, and how did this affect you?

A: It was hard accepting and realizing the fact that instead of Huey straightening things out and getting the party back on the road, that he had just taken it downhill. That hurt real bad. As far as i was concerned personally, when the split went down in February of '71, the party was over. The party as it had become known, was finished. They did all kind of little things trying to become a legitimate political party to get the support of the people, but really a lot of it was just to disguise all their criminal activities. They had become hoodlums & racketeering people. It had just become Huey's personal tool. It was over in February '71 with the split, and that hurt really bad. Because all of the comrades that had died & were in prison for the principles we had learned from Huey & Eldridge at the time – that was a hard blow. Really, it was like becoming an orphan. Like a lot of people with the communist parties disappearing all over the world, it's being like an orphan not knowing what to do; knowing that there's still stuff to be done, but not knowing what to do.

So i had decided to continue the activities that i had been doing when i became the field marshal. i just cut off all communication with everybody, and i worked to leave Algiers and go back in and join up with the people i had been associated with. But unfortunately, you have this problem of survival. And everybody i know, everybody i know, got busted sooner or later, dealing with survival problems! i arrived there in the end of '72, by the summer of '73 i was all by myself. But i didn't want to live there just to be living there; i was only back to continue the struggle. i mean, going to the store to buy food or buy a pack of cigarettes and wondering every time i see a policeman if this is gonna to be it, if i gotta go down, well i didn't wanna go down just for personal survival. Going down for a struggle is one thing, i was there for that; but going down for personal survival? i didn't relate to that, so i left out again and that's when i went back to Algiers as a political refugee.

Q: How have you been able to cope?

A: Well, it hasn't been easy. There's two things i've learned: when War did that record "The World is a Ghetto", i don't know if they knew the depths of what they sang. But really, it's true, the world is a ghetto, and Black people are considered on the bottom everywhere, and there's no exceptions! Another thing, Che Guevara said, "Whenever you're in exile, consider yourselves in enemy territory."

Now, like i said, in Algiers the government was very helpful. Helped me get a job, helped me get an apartment, and i was very very well treated. But you got the problem of cultural differences, which were very very strong. i lived seven years in Algiers, and the last day was like the first; whenever i went out of the house into the streets, "There goes the american! There goes the american!" It just wasn't possible to integrate, because i'm not a religious person especially; i wasn't going to become a muslim. i had been told several times by certain officials responsible for liberation movement people, "You become a muslim, all the doors will be opened." Well i'm not an opportunist on that level; i wouldn't make those kinds of

compromises with my principles, so i was just isolated out there by myself. The cultural differences became so strong; the pressure became so great, that i had to get out of there.

Now, i'll recount a little anecdote; it's funny, but it's tragic also: The Africa Cup – Football in 1977. The only thing standing between Algeria & the Africa Cup was Guinea, the team from Conakry. The first match was in Conakry, and the Guineans beat the Algerians 2-0. There were some Algerians that attacked Black people in the street in Algiers, as a result of that football game. The doorkeeper at the job where i worked, who was a Black man, people came to work the next day talking about, "You don't come to the stadium for the return match." And talking about me, (now these were supposed to be progressive people who had been to the school of fine art) "If he hadn't done something wrong, he wouldn't have had to leave his country." i left work; i quit work right then & there. That was in February; i started moving to get out of Algiers. i wasn't ready to accept that kind of atmosphere from a country that had suffered so much from racism as they had from the French. i preferred to find some reactionary western culture (because i'm from a western culture myself) where don't nobody care about what i do. Well, the only other culture i had learned, being in Algiers, was the French culture. All the other foreigners that i had met, Algerians and French alike, were living in France so i decided to leave Algiers & come to France. That was in April 1977.

Q: How many Panthers would you say are in exile in various countries around the world?

A: Well, i don't really have an exact figure, you know. i know of about twelve personally, but i'm sure that there are others because it just wasn't possible for me to know everybody.

Q: What does being an exile mean in terms of the impact on your life?

A: Well, it means being cut off completely from everything you know, everything you love. All your references are completely blown away. Everything is new; you have to learn new rules all over again everywhere you go. Every culture is different.

Frankly, everybody has the same problems all over the world – survival: food, clothing, and shelter. And really, basically the only thing that changes is the culture & the language. But, some of the rules really (coming from the america that i knew, that doesn't seem to exist anymore!) are hard sometimes. France, for example: here, you have to have a national identity card; you always have to have your identity card on you. If you don't have your identity card, and if you're controlled, you can go to jail for four days automatically. Well, coming from the united states where there was no national identity card, that's like big brother for me. Here, you can't do anything without first having authorization or registering somewhere. i remember when i opened up a photographic studio in San Francisco in '64, all i had to do was go down to city hall, pay a dollar & a half, and register the name & pay my taxes. That's all i had to do. Here in France, it takes like three months to create a company. Three months of paperwork. And because they have so many social programs – social security, medical care, retirement, old age pension & things like that – the charges are terrible! For example, me working as a contractor; whether you work or not, every three months you have to pay something like \$5,000 in charges to the retirement fund, the health plan, and things like that. So really, it's hard here. It's very, very, very difficult; on the survival level, that's the most difficult thing. Being outside of my element, i find survival on an economic level the most difficult thing.

Because my attitude has never changed all these 22 years i've been in exile in terms of the struggle, i feel no different about the united states on that level. i'm just disturbed by the fact that i see things have deteriorated to the point that things are thousands of times worse today than it was when i was active with the rest of the comrades back in the '70s.

Q: What are some of the lessons that you have learned from the last 22 years of struggle & exile?

A: Well, for me the most fundamental thing that i've learned is the problem is the men & the megalomania. Every time you look at organizations that try to get started and they fall apart, it's always because of the men struggling over power, and trying to get over their own program, no matter what it is. And, even when you look at history, history is nothing but that; struggles of men wanting to impose their way of seeing the world or protecting their power and oppressing other people. History is full of that. That's one of the things that i really try to get deep off into, studying history, pre-history, the evolution of man, trying to understand that phenomenon, to see what can be done to change that. Because the objective conditions today are a hundred times worse than they were when we were active; what's the reason that there's not people out there dealing with the problem? Because the men – every time people get their heads

together trying to get an organization you start having those megalomaniac struggles for power. That's the most fundamental thing that i've learned out here. As far as i'm concerned, that's the thing that We have to guard ourselves against. Anybody that wants to get organized, to get something moving again, they've got to create some means to controlling this tendency of men to struggle for power and their own personal aggrandizement.



Q: What are some of the concerns that you have now?

A: My concerns that i have now is that terrible situation that We find ourselves in in the united states and really, the recognition and the understanding that it's no longer just a national problem. All the countries of the world treat their problems as internal & national, but really it's an international octopus that's calling all the shots. International finance capital; We have to recognize the situation like it is. People in London are deciding the prices of the cocoa and the precious metals that people all over the third world are producing; people in Chicago are deciding the price of grains, the wheat & everything that people are producing; here at the stock exchange in Paris, they're deciding the price of sugar. It's out of control; it's out of control of government hands. There is no national solution to the problem, it's really an international phenomena. Of course, much can be done on an internal level. i mean, it's a crying shame that inside a country that's so-called leading the western world like the united states, you have all those people living out there in the streets, whole families, 'cause they don't have the means to have shelter. There has to be shelter, the basic necessities of life for everybody. Any movement that starts out has to deal with those questions. Everybody has to have a shelter, everybody has to have a means to survive on a physical level. Then, when We get those things accomplished, then We can take things to a higher level. Those are my concerns right now.

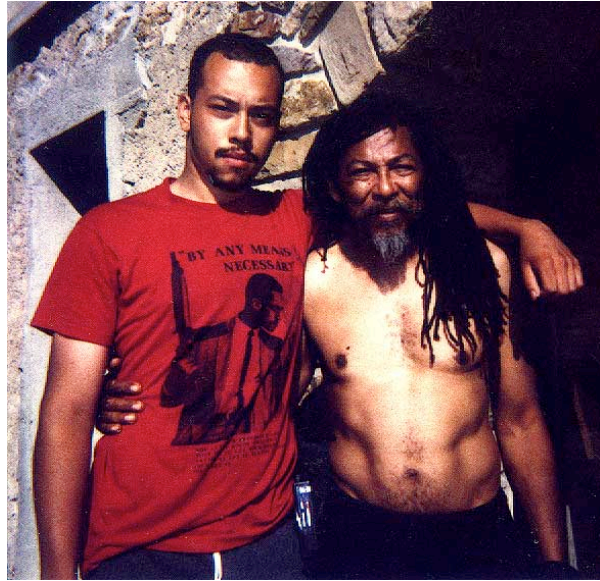
Q: If you had one gift to give to the youth of today, who are becoming politically aware, what would it be?

A: Knowledge of what went on before, so people don't fall back & make the same mistakes again. That's one of the one of the biggest problems i see today, the lack of continuity. People don't even know what happened last week, let alone 20 years ago. So, any young organizations, people coming out there today, that don't know about all the mistakes that We made, they're gonna make the same mistakes again. A lot of people don't believe that you can learn from past mistakes, but i don't believe that. If We could pass on the knowledge on a mass level of what went on before, that would help those that are in a position to analyze and make decisions, see some of the things that shouldn't be done.

Now, nobody has any answers to how to deal with this stuff today. Nobody's had to deal with it

before, and you can see all the models that We had before, in the so-called progressive communist world, have just fallen by the wayside because it was trying to be imposed from the top. The people stayed where they were at. As soon as all those repressive measures by all the different regimes fell aside, all those ethnic struggles that were taking place 75 years ago sprung out all over again in all those eastern countries.

The whole thing We have to do, We have to write the whole thing all over again. We have to start by coming up with something to deal with the economic problems of all those millions of people out there suffering from not having any shelter, not having means to eat, and no healthcare. i feel that personally, one of the solutions – one of the solutions – is that there needs to be a real true party in the united states that represents the needs of the people. Another party that really addresses itself to the needs of the people has to come into being. There's just too many people out there suffering that wouldn't support it. i feel that if it came along, anything that's really effectively dealing with the people's needs, the people are going to get behind it, 'cause the situation is terrible.



Q: There are Panthers that are still in prison: the New York 3, David Rice, Robert 'Seth' Hayes, Romaine 'Chip' Fitzgerald, there's a Panther on death row: Mumia Abu-Jamal; there's Panthers still in exile: Michael Cetewayo Tabor, Pete O'Neal, Assata Shakur, George Brown, etc. Would you say there's a lot of unfinished business? Do you have any thoughts on what must be done?

A: Yeah, well there's definitely unfinished business. The reason that all these people are still in prison, and having such a difficult time getting out is because of all these problems. Because the authorities know that people that already have experience, that have knowledge, if they can keep them off the streets, that's gonna leave the people out there floundering around. They can't bring that experience and leadership to the struggle. So, i feel that the maximum number of people that can be gotten together, that have consciousness of what is the actual situation, should get themselves together. The answers are not gonna just fall out of the sky; We've got to get our heads together and have a brainstorming session and see what We can come up with to start dealing with that situation. i feel that's the first step, people have to get themselves together. Put all those ideologies & ideological struggle and who has the best line with words out of the way. The people are suffering. That has to be dealt with; all those ideological struggles that just be wasting time, people be runnin' their mouths trying to prove who has the best line just with words, that has to be thrown in the garbage can. And all those megalomaniac men, struggling for power trying to get off their program, they gotta be put into a museum of history. People have to get their heads together, that have some kind of political consciousness, to try to come up with some solutions and put 'em into action and see if We can start moving to get something going to get some relief to the people. The people are suffering!

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to say?

A: Everybody, that's got any ideas to get some kind of relief to all those suffering people, move on it! Don't waste your time, criticizing the others; if you got an idea, move on what you think is right! Stop spending your time knocking down the others 'cause you don't agree with what they're doing. What's ending up, ain't nobody doin' nothin'!

Q: Thank You

A: Right On!

Twenty First Century Political Prisoners: Real and Potential
by Russell Shoatz

Ever since the mid 1960's, there has been a struggle in this country over whether or not it holds Political Prisoners (PP's). In particular, whether or not Blacks fighting against racism should be looked on as PP's when jailed for related offenses. Moreover, that struggle intensified after it was later learned that the federal, state and local governments and their agencies conspired and carried out it's counter-intelligence programs known as COINTELPRO. Furthermore, it was discovered that COINTELPRO not only targeted Blacks, but also Native Americans, Whites and many groups and individuals who had absolutely no idea that this was taking place... even suffering from it's suppression, repression, jailings and deaths.

Nevertheless, in time, it became accepted amongst a sizeable segment of people that there were, in fact, PP's jailed in this country: former Black Panthers, white anti-imperialists, American Indian Movement members, MOVE members, Black Liberation Army fighters, Puerto Rican nationalists and Chicano/Mexicano fighters; as well as all of their offshoots and supporters.

Furthermore, the struggles surrounding these groups and the fight against racism and this country's aggression in Vietnam caused many otherwise politically unconscious prisoners to join the fight, which created a new segment of PP's, who, after going to prison for committing social crimes, became politically active there. George Jackson remains a model of that type of PP.

By and large, however, those PP's struggles have been kept on the margins for over 30 years. Although they still remain strongly supported by those aware of them, outside of the government's (suppression) forces. Ironically, it is the ongoing government suppression that is causing many to examine the whole subject of PP's and how it should be viewed and dealt with. In that regard, what's becoming clearer every day is that in addition to the above "Real Political Prisoners," there's literally hundreds of thousands of other "Potential Political Prisoners" being held in prisons in this country! Some fall in the following categories: Death Row Convictions, 3 Strike and Mandatory Sentences, Life Without Parole, Juveniles Sentenced as Adults, Immigration laws, Environmental/Ecological Defense, Muslims and "Suspected" Foreign Terrorists, Gang Members, Right-Wingers, 1980's Mariel Cuban Immigrants (boat people). *Note: Some of the "Real Political Prisoners" are also Prisoners of War (POW's): namely those jailed for fighting to gain independence or self-determination for their peoples.*

Since the catastrophic events on "9-11", it's roundly agreed that this country jails and holds PP's suspected of being "terrorists," or in league with them. Indeed, the government goes out of it's way to "terrorize" the general public with warnings of what the (other) Muslim "terrorists" will do if the government is not given more power to imprison and ruthlessly suppress anyone they choose.

On the other hand, hardly a day goes by without the public being bombarded with images of the rounding up and jailing of migrants from Mexico, Central America or Haiti. Joining them, moreover, are sensational shots of police with guns drawn trying to identify, catalog and arrest (so-called) dangerous gang members. And, of course, the ongoing battles over the death penalty, "3 strikes" and mandatory sentencing law cannot escape the consciousness of the majority of this country's citizens.

In fact, the only categories within the aforementioned 10 that are not widely known and debated are life without parole, juveniles sentenced as adults, environmental/ecological defense, the 1980's Mariel Cuban migrants and right-wingers, although the Oklahoma City bombing is an exception.

Regrettably, We cannot reach a consensus on a definition as to just what makes one a PP, the above notwithstanding, which leaves this author to adamantly insist on viewing all of his 10 categories as "Potential Political Prisoners"! Simply because clear (to some), "political" considerations overshadow the actual alleged criminal acts that landed them in prison. Let's examine them:

- 1) Death Penalty: Against 90% of the world's laws and only kept so that politicians can appear "tough on crime"
- 2) Three Strikes and Mandatory Sentences: Instituted by "tough on crime politicians" after their failure to address the underlying causes of the crimes.
- 3) Life Without Parole: Only practiced in a few states and should be outlawed because it violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution, but "tough on crime politicians" protect it.
- 4) Juveniles Sentenced as Adults: Only applies to certain states and is against international law altogether! Again, "tough on crime politicians" protect this violation of the Constitution and International Law.
- 5) Immigration Law Violators: Migrants commit no crime in crossing artificial borders seeking to better their lives! The government recognizes that when it allows certain immigrants, (like "regular" Cubans), to stay in the country.

- 6) Environmental-Ecological Defenders: They almost never harm any people, but instead concentrate on disrupting the work of people who themselves are attacking everyone by destroying the environment and ecology that sustains us. They too must be suppressed by our “tough on crime,” clueless politicians.
- 7) Muslims and Suspected Foreign Terrorists: Since 9-11 thousands of Muslims and “suspected foreign terrorists” have been jailed, but less than a handful have been convicted of anything! The overwhelming majority are victims of a ruthless bunch of status-climbing public bureaucrats, politicians, conflict profiteers and plain old racists!
- 8) Gang Members: This group is very, very rarely offered any comprehensive programs designed to channel their energies into anything productive! Why? Because most of our educators and politicians, having already failed them before they joined gangs, choose to abandon them to the police, courts and jail system.
- 9) Right-Wingers: They’re usually close to the government, (as far as immediate aims go), and are allowed to do pretty much as they choose. They, however, are targeted for suppression whenever their “political and law enforcement allies” think they’re becoming too independent.
- 10) 1980’s Mariel, Cuban Immigrants (boat people): In the past, the government tried to return them to Cuba, with no success. So, to cover the politicians total lack of ideas about what to do about them, they’re just kept beyond the law’s ability to anything but keep them locked up.

Finally, there’s another little understood and/or accepted factor, that, although not touching all 10 categories, still accounts for more of the hundreds of thousands of 21st Century “Potential Political Prisoners” than any other, the so-called “War on Drugs”. i will not go into this in depth, except to state that this “War” accounts for 4 of our categories containing astronomical numbers due to the conscious, illegal, immoral, racist, shortsighted and (ultimately) genocidal decisions taken by this country’s former and present top politicians, it’s major bankers, political and military allies in foreign governments, and the domestic police, courts and prison administrators.

On the other hand, all of those jailed as a result of the parts they played in the “drug game,” although conscious actors, did not know that they were truly (unconscious) “pawns” in an international, high stakes game of “Drugs, Money, Racism, Political Corruption and Prisons = Genocide!” The real criminals all got away!!! Clearly then, when the “player/pawns” really wake up to the fact that they were played, and they’re no more guilty than those who continue to make, enforce and get rich off of their misery, then maybe they will join the “Drug War” victims and the “Real Political Prisoners” in fighting for justice!

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