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Updates for August 14th

27 Jul - Ellen Gerhart Arrested Because of ETP's Lies

Ellen Gerhart, a retired special education teacher from central Pennsylvania, is in jail tonight.

MORE:

by Karen Feridun (*Daily KOS*)

This afternoon, four officers with the Huntingdon County sheriff's department arrived on the Gerhart's property to make the arrest acting in response to a motion filed by Energy Transfer Partners, the pipeline company notorious for the Dakota Access pipeline. The company is claiming that the 63-year old grandmother was baiting bears and mountain lions onto a pipeline easement the company established using eminent domain to take the family's land. There have been no sightings of mountain lions in Pennsylvania for 130 years.

The Gerhart's property is on the path of the company's controversial Mariner East 2 pipeline, a 350-mile hazardous liquids pipeline that would carry natural gas liquids (NGLs) like ethane and propane. The project has been receiving a lot of attention for sinkholes that have opened up in backyards in Chester County and more than 180 drilling mud spills caused by horizontal directional drilling to lay the pipeline. The spills have fouled private water supplies and punctured an aquifer.

"Energy Transfer Partners is yet again fabricating charges against my mom in attempt to silence her," said Ellen's daughter Elise. "Claims of wild animal baiting are ludicrous. There aren't even mountain lions anymore in Pennsylvania. ETP are the ones doing the baiting, goading our local authorities with lies to intimidate and abuse my family. Look at who has actually inflicted damage here: ETP has poisoned dozens of families' wells across the state, spilled over 100 times, and harassed and intimidated anyone who opposes them."

A press statement from the StopETP coalition says, "Since pipeline construction began on the Gerhart property, Ellen has spent countless hours monitoring and documenting construction activity. Given that ETP has recorded well over 100 spills and contaminated well water of over a dozen families since construction began, Ellen and her family did not trust state regulators to protect their land and water. Ellen has documented dozens of instances of environmental damage to her property during construction thus far. Evidence of sedimentation, spills, improper erosion controls, and more are all available."

The Stop ETP coalition is made up of communities and organizations fighting Energy Transfer Partners' projects across the country. Tree sits are currently happening in Louisiana in an attempt to stop the Bayou Bridge pipeline. In Ohio, communities are fighting the Rover pipeline where drilling mud spills have been wreaking havoc.

Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Louisiana are among several states that have introduced bills to quash pipeline protest. Framed as measures to protect "critical infrastructure", they are all fashioned after a model bill from the American Legislative Exchange Council, better known by its acronym ALEC. Earlier this week, Greenpeace issued a report on Energy Transfer Partners that showed that the company had worked to promote the bill in at least one state.

Donations to the legal fund can be made via Paypal to whitepineresist@riseup.net.

August 5th - Grandmother, Retired Teacher Jailed Up to 6 Months for Protecting PA

by Ethan Buckner (*Earth First! Journal*)

On Friday, August 3, Huntingdon County Judge George Zanic sentenced 63-year-old grandmother, retired teacher, and landowner Ellen Sue Gerhart to two to six months in jail and a \$2,000 fine for indirect criminal contempt of court.

Judge Zanic's decision was based on accusations from lawyers for Texas-based oil and gas giant Energy Transfer Partners (ETP), the developer of the pipeline project through Gerhart's land. The company alleged that Gerhart had baited a bear onto the pipeline easement on her wooded 27-acre property.

Elise Gerhart, daughter of Ellen, said, "If you build a pipeline through the woods, you should expect to see bears and other wildlife. Judge Zanic gave this \$50 billion company the power of eminent domain over my family's property and our governor gave them the permits. My mom's protest on her own property is not the injustice here."

In an interview prior to her arrest, Ellen Gerhart said, "We've had no choice but to take a stand and defend what our government officials are unwilling to protect. Our right to peacefully object to an unjust and dangerous pipeline should be protected over the profit margin of these foreign corporations."

Rich Raiders, attorney for the Gerhart family, said "The eminent domain condemnation case filed by Sunoco against the Gerharts remains ongoing. The Gerharts have also appealed Sunoco's environmental permits granted by the Department of Environmental Protection concerning the wetlands permits issued to Sunoco on this project. The trial before the Environmental Hearing Board is scheduled for August 29th.

Raiders continued, "Their are still charges of harassment and unlawful taking alleged against Mrs. Gerhart pending. Mrs. Gerhart believes that these charges are a distraction from Sunoco's ongoing litany of permit suspensions, failed horizontal directional drilling, and various project delays. We believe that the company did not present evidence to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Mrs. Gerhart's protests were criminal. Mrs. Gerhart disagrees with Judge Zanic's decision today and is reviewing her options and will pursue her rights to the fullest extent."

Ellen Gerhart is an outspoken advocate, not only to protect her own land but also to protect the hundreds of waterways impacted across Pennsylvania by ETP's Mariner East 2 pipeline project. The Gerharts have never given ETP permission to build through their family land.

Since construction began, ETP has reported an astounding 111 spills and has been issued over 65 violations by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. On May 23, ETP spilled 4,000 gallons of drilling fluid on the Gerhart property, threatening the family's well water.

Ellen and her family's ongoing opposition to the project has led to significant intimidation and harassment on the part of ETP, their private security contractor TigerSwan, and local authorities. The Gerharts are involved in numerous cases against state agencies and ETP over use of eminent domain, deficient environmental permits, and violations of federal civil rights laws.

27 Jul - Support Baltimore Rebel Allen Bullock

In 2015, after Baltimore police officers murdered Freddie Gray, Allen was arrested for breaking some car windows and the Baltimore court system set his bail at \$500,000.

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This was more than the amount set for the police officers who killed Freddie Gray, who are all, every one of them, doing just fine now.

After spending half a year in prison, Allen was released and given five years probation.

In 2017, Allen's probation officer said he missed two meetings and didn't report a change of address. The Baltimore prosecuting attorney assigned to his case then asked the judge to send him to prison for 11.5 years for "not taking his probation seriously". The judge sentenced him to jail for four years, which sets his release date at somewhere around summer of 2021 — he got four years in prison for breaking some windows and missing some meetings.

Let's show Allen that people didn't forget about him as soon as his picture left the news cycle.

All money raised here will be deposited into Allen's commissary fund. Please contribute and make the next few years he'll be spending in prison slightly less shitty.

Prisoners use funds from their inmate accounts to purchase necessities such as clothing, food, and personal hygiene products.

You can help by either contributing whatever financial support you can or sharing this page with your networks, or both. Donate at gofundme.com/allen-bullock-commissary-fund

30 Jul - The Black Panthers still in prison: after 46 years, will they ever be set free?

Over two years, Ed Pilkington has interviewed eight people imprisoned since the 1970s black liberation struggle that rocked the US. As they near 50 years inside, will America's black radicals ever be freed?

MORE:

by Ed Pilkington (*The Guardian*)

Antoinette Russell vividly recalls the first time she was led to believe she would finally meet her father as a free man. He called her up on a prison phone, his voice shaking with excitement, and told her: "I'm coming home!"

That was 17 years ago. Since then, every two years, she's been put through the same agonizing drill. "He'd call saying the same thing: 'I'm coming home,'" she said, speaking at her home in Montgomery, Alabama.

"It got to the point where I said, 'Daddy, I don't want to hear that any more. I get my hopes up thinking you're going to be released and then you're not. It kills me every time.'"

A thousand miles away in Deer Park, Long Island, Diane Piagentini is trapped in exactly the same traumatic cycle, connected to the same man. "Every two years the Band-Aid gets ripped off your heart and you have to recall everything that happened and play it over and over again," she said.

The unbearable pain felt by these two women may bear comparison, but there the similarities end: they have nothing in common when it comes to their desires about what should happen to him.

Russell hopes her father will be given his freedom. Piagentini prays he rots in his cell until the end of time.

"He needs to stay in prison for the rest of his life. When you commit a heinous crime like that, you deserve only the death penalty."

The focus of both women's attention is Antoinette Russell's father, Jalil Muntaqim, who is known in maximum security prison by his birth name, Anthony Bottom, and ID number, 77A4283.

A former member of the Black Panther party and its underground wing the Black Liberation Army, he has spent almost 47 years in prison for his part in the 1971 murders of two New York city police officers. One of those officers was Joseph Piagentini, Diane's husband.

Muntaqim is one of 19 black radicals, including two women, who are still imprisoned 40 or more years after they were arrested for violent acts related to the black liberation struggle. Next year the longest-serving inmate, Romaine “Chip” Fitzgerald, will have been locked up for half a century. The oldest, Sundiata Acoli, is 81.

Since 2000, a further 10 black radicals have succumbed to ill health and died in prison.

The 19 incarcerated militants were all part of the 1970s black revolutionary movement. They fought for black power, they were convicted of killing for it – though many profess their innocence – and today they are still imprisoned for it.

As they grow older, and the length of their incarceration ticks up, the ethical battle over what to do with these men and women grows ever more intense. Just last week there was a stunning development, reported here for the first time: Robert Seth Hayes, like Muntaqim a former member of the Black Panthers and Black Liberation Army was released last Tuesday, aged 69, from the same New York maximum security prison.

Hayes had been imprisoned for 45 years for the murder of a New York city transit officer, Sidney Thompson, during an encounter at a Bronx station in 1973. He was convicted and sentenced to 25 years to life.

He became eligible for parole in 1998, but every two years he was told the same thing: despite a clean prison record, he remained a threat to society in the eyes of the parole board. It was only on his 11th attempt, 20 years later and with his health rapidly failing, that he convinced them he was worthy of rehabilitation.

Hayes’ freedom further ups the ante, forcing authorities in New York and across the country to consider fundamental questions: is there such a thing as rehabilitation for those found guilty of killing police officers in the cause of black revolution? Do they have to renounce their politics to merit release? Or is the US criminal justice system singling them out for especially harsh treatment and never-ending captivity as political prisoners, as the men and women themselves contend?

Over the past two years I have interviewed eight black liberationists who have all experienced prolonged prison time. Through prison visits, letters and emails, the militants told surprisingly similar stories of how they had coped spending almost their entire adult lives in cells and of the long road to an elusive freedom. Six are among the 19 who remain incarcerated to this day.

One of the most striking aspects of their stories is the enduring passion they all express for the cause of black liberation. Their belief in the nobility of the struggle against injustice is undiluted and undulled.

Take Jalil Muntaqim, 66. Under the terms of his sentence for double homicide he has been entitled to be considered for parole every two years since 2002. This August the cycle comes round again: he will go before a parole board for the ninth time to plead for his release.

He will tell the panel of his remorse towards the families of the police officers who died. He will tell them of the remorse he feels too towards his own family, whom he has deprived of his company for 46 years.

But he will not renounce his politics.

As he put it during a two-hour interview in Sullivan correctional facility in upstate New York: “If you understand the oppression that black people have suffered in this country, no one should have any regrets for having been identified as a revolutionary. I have no regrets about that.”

The Black Panthers, who officially ceased to exist in 1982, seem to have become posthumously fashionable in the past couple of years. The opening sequence of the smash-hit movie *Black Panther* is set in a public basketball court in downtown Oakland, in a strong allusion to the foundation of the party in the same location in 1966. Beyoncé stunned the nation with her 2016 Super Bowl homage replete with black leather jackets, berets and raised fists.

Behind this veneer of popular flirtation with the Panthers, there is very little public discussion about the 1970s upheaval and its aftermath. Popular understanding is scanty about how the Panthers spread from its Oakland beginnings, spawning 70 chapters across the States; how it openly challenged the brutality shown by police forces towards African Americans in the inner cities; how it developed a sophisticated social program that included food banks and even elementary schools; and how in turn it provoked a furious response from the federal government and FBI that led to numerous gunfights, raids, deep surveillance, dirty tricks and the eventual disbandment of the party in 1982. Even less is known about the many Panther activists who were imprisoned.

In short, the Black Panther uniform in black leather might now be *de rigueur*, but there is precious little interest shown in the prison uniforms of the former Panthers behind bars.

The journey that led me to dive into the lives of incarcerated former Black Panthers began in 2015 with Albert Woodfox, a member of the so-called Angola Three who had the distinction at that time of being America's longest-standing solitary confinement prisoner. He had been locked up in a cell alone almost without a break for 43 years.

Together with a fellow inmate, Herman Wallace, Woodfox had set up a branch of the Black Panthers in Angola, the notorious maximum-security penitentiary in Louisiana built upon the grounds of an old cotton-picking plantation. Its name was derived from the African country where the plantation owners obtained their slaves.

When Woodfox was sent to Angola in 1971 for robbery, the prison was entirely segregated, with a wing for white prisoners and a separate wing for African American prisoners. The guards were exclusively white.

In one of the sharpest examples of the unbroken thread between slavery and modern mass incarceration, black prisoners were used as a cheap supply of farm labor. Every day the black inmates were assembled into chain gangs, taken into the fields around the penitentiary – the same fields that had belonged to the plantation – and made to work under the blazing sun.

Picking cotton.

Woodfox and Wallace began organizing other black inmates through the Black Panther chapter to protest against this modern form of slavery. It didn't sit well with the prison authorities.

A year later, they were both accused of murdering a prison guard named Brent Miller, who had been stabbed to death amid a prison riot. Considerable forensic evidence was gathered at the murder scene, but none of it matched either of them, including a bloody fingerprint found on a wall.

Yet they were still found guilty by all-white juries and sentenced to life without parole. Immediately upon sentencing, Woodfox and Wallace were placed in isolation cells, there to remain for the next four decades.

Comments made by top Angola officials over the years made plain the reason for such exceptionally harsh treatment. The then warden of Angola, Burl Cain, said in 1995 that he wanted Woodfox held solitarily because he was "still trying to practice Black Pantherism". Cain added that he didn't want the prisoner fraternizing with others "because he would organize the young new inmates".

In November 2015, shortly before Woodfox was finally allowed to walk a free man aged 69, he wrote to me. He described in his letter his experiences of living for 43 years in a 6ft-by-9ft box containing only a concrete bunk, toilet and sink, and with a slot in the metal door for food to be passed.

He wrote about how he survived regular bouts of claustrophobia inside his cell: “For me it’s a matter of recognizing when an attack is coming. I become very aware of space and time. My clothes start to feel very constraining. I start to sweat and it’s hard to breathe. It’s like the atmosphere is pressing down on me, closing in all around me.”

While Woodfox and Wallace were sweating out the years in solitary in Angola, thousands of other young African Americans were being drawn to the Black Panther party in Oakland, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and across the US. Though the party was set up by two men, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, and had a military aesthetic that could be described as macho, women also came to occupy senior positions within it.

They included Afeni Shakur, mother of the rapper Tupac Shakur; Elaine Brown, who rose to be chairman of the party after Newton fled to Cuba; and Assata Shakur, AKA Joanne Chesimard, a leader of the Black Liberation Army who also fled to Cuba, where she lives in exile today, still listed by the FBI as one of its most wanted terrorists.

The movement, in contrast to its violent reputation, devoted much of its time to community work. It provided free breakfasts for children in low-income black neighborhoods, set up schools and medical centers treating the uninsured, and published its own newspaper, the Black Panther, selling for 10 cents with a peak weekly circulation of 250,000.

In contrast to the measured tone of Martin Luther King’s civil rights movement, the Panthers saw themselves as being aligned with international revolutionary groups in Angola, Mozambique or Vietnam. New recruits, known as PITs, for “Panthers-in-Training”, were made to study Mao’s “little red book” and *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon.

In October 1966, Newton crystallized the goals of the party into a 10-point program. It was a cross between a call for an end to police brutality not dissimilar to today’s Black Lives Matter, criminal justice reform that would sit comfortably with the American Civil Liberties Union, and a demand for full employment, decent housing and good education that might have come from the lips of Bernie Sanders.

On top of such relatively mainstream demands, it threw in a strong dash of black militancy quite in contrast to King’s approach or to the established progressive politics of today. “We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our Black Community,” read point number three, going on to demand reparations for slavery equivalent to 40 acres and two mules – a nod to the as yet unfulfilled promise made by Gen William Sherman to freed slaves at the end of the civil war.

Then there was the emphasis on militarism and armed struggle. Even the structure of the organization was a provocation, setting the party up as a state within a state.

As Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former Black Panther who has been incarcerated for 37 years for the murder of a Philadelphia police officer, puts it: “The Black Panther party performed in the role of a shadow state – with its Ministries, its uniformed personnel, and its soldiers in sharp opposition to the US government.”

One of the party’s earliest activities was “cop watch”, in which members monitored police activities on the streets of Oakland at a time when police assaults on black people were rampant. It’s hard to imagine this happening today, but where officers were seen to stop and search African American youths, Black Panthers would approach them and stand there as observers, pointedly brandishing handguns at their hips.

Newton had studied California's gun laws and knew that carrying loaded weapons openly in public was legal in the late 1960s. State legislators responded in 1967 by banning "open carry", and to mark the occasion more than 20 Panthers entered the state capitol during the debate, waving guns.

The threat of armed insurrection by black revolutionaries inspired a powerful retaliation from the US government. The then director of the FBI, J Edgar Hoover, vowed to crush the Black Panther party, which he called "the greatest threat to internal security of the country".

The surveillance program Cointelpro placed its spotlight on the Panthers, and vast FBI resources were mobilized against them. Before long, the party was riddled with informants and agent provocateurs, spreading disinformation and sewing dissent within the ranks.

Violent clashes with police became frequent: "shoot outs", law enforcement and the media called them. "Shoot-ins", said the Panthers, insisting the confrontations were instigated by the authorities as part of Cointelpro dirty tricks.

The Panthers themselves estimated that between 1968 and 1970 there were 28 armed clashes with local police or FBI agents, in which 19 of their own were killed. In return, police unions hold the Black Liberation Army, the clandestine offshoot of the party formed in 1970, responsible for the murders of at least 13 police officers.

It was into this environment that Jalil Muntaqim, then going by the name Anthony Bottom, threw himself when he was 15. He was an unlikely candidate for a black revolutionary, coming from a comfortable home in San Jose with working parents and a swimming pool in the yard.

His mother used to teach the children African dance and emphasize their African descent. Muntaqim took a close interest in King and the civil rights movement, but he was soon looking for a more radical stance. A friend at school had become a Black Panther and he was drawn in.

"The idea that black men armed and prepared can fight for the rights of black people was exciting, intriguing. It went beyond the civil rights movement of Dr King. It was the difference between Dr King and Malcolm X, who put our struggle into an international perspective," he told me.

Muntaqim began by selling the Black Panther newspaper and helping with free-food programs. From there he was promoted to security details for high-profile leaders visiting Oakland.

In 1970, the Black Liberation Army (BLA) was formed as the armed phalanx of the movement. Between then and the formal disbanding of the Black Panther party in 1982, it carried out a wave of bank robberies, bombings, prison breakouts and shootings of police officers.

Muntaqim signed up when he was 18 and went clandestine. "I continued to have a public life as a social worker in the California unemployment department," he explained in the interview. "But there was another side to my life – being underground with the Black Liberation Army."

On 21 May 1971, two New York police officers, Joseph Piagentini, who was white, and Waverly Jones, who was black, were on foot patrol in 159th Street in Harlem. They had been called to what they thought was a domestic dispute.

Diane Piagentini described Joseph as "a great husband and father who loved our two young daughters. He was tall, almost six feet, with dark hair, dark eyes. He had a great smile, a little crooked, and a cleft in his chin. He was the love of my life. I loved him from the minute I saw him."

She recalled how the news was broken to her that night. “I had made him pasta fagioli, keeping it warm as I waited for him to come home. There was a knock on the door. I looked out and it was raining. I could see the police lights going around and around. No sirens, just lights. It was like you were in a dream.”

Joseph Piagentini and Jones had been returning to their police cruiser at about 10pm when they were set upon by three armed men from behind. Jones died instantly from a shot to the back of the head; Piagentini was shot 13 times, according to prosecutors.

Within days, three members of the BLA – Muntaqim, Herman Bell and Albert “Nuh” Washington – were arrested. Muntaqim and Bell were both sentenced to 25 years to life; Washington died in prison in 2000.

Three months ago, a very rare event occurred. Herman Bell, now 70, was released. It was his eighth time before the panel, after 45 years behind bars.

Bell had impressed the parole board as someone who over almost half a century had become a rule-abiding inmate with genuine feelings of remorse about the killings. Part of the board’s thinking was that when they interrogated Bell in March, he expressed his revulsion for what he did in 1971.

“There was nothing political about the act, as much as I thought at the time. It was murder and horribly wrong,” Bell told them.

The parole board’s decision kicked up a storm with local police unions, tabloid newspapers and elected politicians. The New York Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association said it was “disgusted, offended and extremely angry” and called Bell a “domestic terrorist”.

Such a backlash to the parole of his co-defendant underlines the huge challenge facing Muntaqim as he goes before the parole board in August.

In his favor is the clean prison record he has held for years. So too is the mellowing of his character since the heady days of his black liberationist activism as a teenager.

“I’ve matured. I now take the ‘r’ off the word and make it ‘evolutionary’. Revolution for me is the evolutionary process of building a higher level of consciousness in society at large. I’m an evolutionary revolutionary.”

He also said that his views on armed struggle had evolved. He said the priority now was not insurrection but to build a “mass popular movement. I prefer to say we are armed with ideas, and compassion and love for our people.”

Like most of the 19 remaining black radicals behind bars, he sees himself as a political prisoner, arguing that his participation with the Black Panthers was undertaken for no personal self-aggrandizement or profit. In 1998, he formed the Jericho movement, which campaigns for those it calls “political prisoners and prisoners of war”.

“My engagement in the struggle was self-sacrifice because of my love of my people and humanity. Because of that I was targeted by the government and that indicates that my incarceration is of a political nature.”

Muntaqim’s conflict – his burning desire for freedom rubbing against his determination not to renounce his politics which he sees as noble – is shared by most of the 19 remaining black radicals behind bars.

Of the 19, all but three were convicted of murdering police or other uniformed officers. Many profess their innocence, and most argue they have been selectively subjected to the full wrath of the American state.

How does their treatment compare with that of other convicted murderers who killed officers in the course of committing common crimes such as robberies? Firm comparisons are impossible given the devolved nature of America's criminal justice system. As the Sentencing Project points out, "the 50 states vary on sentencing. As there are relatively few political cases, it's hard to form any concrete conclusions."

International comparisons, however, are instructive. Compared with the penal treatment of armed revolutionaries who were carrying out violent acts in Europe in the 1970s, the US appears far less open to concepts of rehabilitation.

Take the Baader-Meinhof Gang in then West Germany, the far-left militant group founded in 1970 also known as the Red Army Faction. One of its militants, Irmgard Möller, was arrested in 1972 for bombings that wounded several police officers and killed three soldiers – she was released in 1995. Brigitte Mohnhaupt was captured in 1982 and sentenced to five life terms for her role in numerous assassinations – she too was released in 2007 after 24 years in prison and since then has lived anonymously with no further engagement with law enforcement.

Criminal justice reformers argue the long sentences of the black radicals have to be seen in the context of America's uniquely severe approach to punishment, especially for black men. The US has 5% of the world's population, but 25% of world's prisoners, with more than 2 million in confinement. Black people in America are almost six times as likely to be imprisoned per capita than white people. In 2016, according to the Pew Research Center, black people represented 12% of the US adult population but 33% of the prison population. White people, by contrast, accounted for 64% of adults but 30% of prisoners.

The vast pool of captive Americans is also ageing fast. By 2030, people aged 50 or older are projected to account for a third of the US incarcerated population.

"The issue is one of justice and rehabilitation," said Robert Boyle, who has represented six former Black Panthers in parole proceedings, including Herman Bell's. He declined to discuss the Bell case but said in general terms: "It's a discussion that we need to have in this country and around the world. Is the only justice for the murder of a police officer or other serious crime that the person is executed or dies in jail, even when they are no longer any danger to the public?"

The writer and activist Angela Davis, who was herself branded by President Richard Nixon a "dangerous terrorist" after she was accused but later acquitted of involvement in a courtroom kidnapping, told me that the remaining imprisoned black liberationists were caught in a double-bind. Either they repent of crimes they may not have committed, or they die in their cells.

"Many of the people in prison, I believe, are not actually guilty of the charges. They would have to confess to engaging in acts which they hadn't engaged in."

Davis said that there was also pressure on the militants to betray their politics. "They have to denounce a party that was the forerunner of movements like Black Lives Matter today."

When Jalil Muntaqim stands before the parole board in a few days' time, he is almost certain to be asked what happened on the night of 21 May 1971. When I met him in prison, I asked the same question.

He still believes that his case was unjustly handled. He has obtained documents under freedom of information laws that show that Nixon and Hoover took close personal interest in the hunt for the killers of the New York police officers, which they codenamed "Newkill", short for New York killings. That unusual collaboration between the White House, FBI and local detectives had not been disclosed to Muntaqim's defense team at trial as it should have been.

Muntaqim also believes the documents point to glaring discrepancies in evidence put to the jury about the gun used in the murders.

Is he saying that there was a desire at highest level to pin the killings of Piagentini and Jones on him?

“I am saying that emphatically. This case was a frame-up. It is important that people understand we did not receive a fair trial. Nixon and the FBI intended to make sure Black Panther party members were convicted of this crime.”

Despite the injustices he insists he suffered, Muntaqim is not making a claim of innocence. Since 2006, he has been telling the parole board every two years that he takes responsibility for the shootings and that “I deeply regret my involvement in these tragic deaths”.

He said to us: “I have admitted to committing this act and have accepted responsibility. I have also expressed remorse for the loss of life. I understand the devastation for anyone losing their loved one. Both families – the Jones family and the Piagentini – have lost somebody very precious to them.”

Were he to be allowed to walk free, he said, his focus would be “to re-establish my relationship with my family. I haven’t spent a single day with my daughter on the streets. I’m a great-grandfather and I haven’t spent any time with any of my kids.”

He had a direct message for Diane Piagentini: “I understand her anguish. She lost the love of her life and her children’s father. That’s devastating. I understand her hurt and pain, I truly do.”

Piagentini is having none of that. Muntaqim, she said, “has never admitted to killing my husband. He has never shown any remorse. All he is trying to do is get out of prison.”

Of the death of her husband almost 47 years ago, she said: “The hurt never goes away. To know that he will never come home again – I don’t feel it any less. He didn’t want to leave me that night, and therefore he has never left me.”

She scoffed at the idea that Muntaqim and his peers were political prisoners. “These men are not political prisoners, that is a figment of their imagination. They did not have to do what they did to be in politics. There is no war. This was murder. They are murderers.”

Down in Alabama, Antoinette Russell cannot help but be on tenterhooks before her father’s imminent parole hearing, despite her best efforts to remain detached from the process. She was born as his only child six months after his arrest. She guesses she has only seen him physically about 10 times in her life, only ever behind electrified barbed-wire fences.

She looks back on her life and wonders how different it might have been had he not joined the Panthers. “Growing up without my dad had a lot of ups and downs, more downs than ups,” she said.

“When I was younger, I was really upset with my dad. I felt he put the cause before me, before his family.”

She’s forgiven him over the years. But the desire to have him home has only grown.

“Aren’t prisons there to rehabilitate?” she asked with a tearful laugh. “He’s been there for 46 years. How much time does it take to be rehabilitated?”

1 Aug - Valve Turner Michael Foster Has Been Released from Prison!

Michael Foster has been granted early release from prison, arriving back in Seattle Wednesday, August 1!

MORE:

from Support Michael Foster

Michael wants to thank you for helping him replenish the MRCC prison library. He has received over 100 books. Because he will be home soon, letter writing and the book drive has ended. All the cards, letters and books you sent have made Michael's time in Bismarck much easier. Thank you, friends!

We don't yet know what help Michael will need on his return, but we'll post it here when we do know.

We are throwing a combination welcome home party for Michael and Seattle screening of the Lindsey Graysel film, *The Reluctant Radical* (in which Michael and many in our community appear, but which admittedly features Ken :). This shindig will be held on August 15 at Seattle's Central Cinema.

Earth First! Newswire Editor's Note: Valve Turner Michael Foster was convicted of felony conspiracy to commit criminal mischief and misdemeanor conspiracy trespass in October of 2016 when he entered a valve site of the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota and shut the valve off after notifying Keystone that he was doing so and giving them an option to shut it off remotely. This act of climate disobedience, coordinated with other activists who faced lesser charges, shut down 15% of US crude oil imports for nearly a day – a display of the sorts of shifts that are necessary to avoid complete cataclysm. In February 2018, he was sentenced to 3 years (2 deferred) and his projected released date was December 5, 2018. He was released on August 1, 2018.

1 Aug - Born in a cell: the extraordinary tale of the black liberation orphan

Mike Africa Jr has spent 40 years of his life with both parents behind bars. Then one day in June, his life changed.

MORE:

by Ed Pilkington (*The Guardian*)

The placenta was the trickiest part. How to dispose of it without it making a mess that would alert the guards that a child had just been born in a prison cell?

There was no medical equipment, no painkillers, no sterilized wipes or hygienic materials of any sort. When it came to cutting the umbilical cord in the absence of scissors, well, that was the easy part: just use your teeth.

But Debbie Sims Africa was more stressed about the placenta. It was 1978, she was 22 years old and five weeks into what would turn out to be a 40-year prison sentence.

She was determined to give birth on her own without any involvement of the jail officers so she could spend some precious time with the baby. In the end, a co-defendant helped her out, scooping up the placenta in her hands and secreting it to the shower room where she flushed it down the prison toilet.

The plan worked. Debbie Africa got to spend three wonderful days with her baby son. She hid him under a sheet and when he cried, other jailed women would stand outside the cell and sing or cough to obscure the noise.

She knew it couldn't last, as jail rules prohibited mothers being with their children. At the end of the three days she informed the jailers of the baby's existence and, once they had got over their astonishment, they arranged for the mother and son to be separated and for the child to be taken to the outside world.

So begins the extraordinary life of Mike Africa Jr, a man born in a prison cell, and his incarcerated parents. As he approaches his 40th birthday in September, he reflects on what a crazy ride it's been.

He was born to a mother accused and later convicted of third-degree murder in one of the most dramatic confrontations with law enforcement of the 1970s black liberation struggle. Not only was Debbie Africa

sentenced to 30 years to life for the death of a police officer, so too was her husband, Mike Africa Sr, father to Mike Jr, who was caught up in the same confrontation and given the same punishment.

Which makes Mike Jr a penal orphan of the black power movement. For almost 40 years, he visited both his parents in separate penitentiaries but never saw either of them outside prison walls. Last month Debbie was finally released from prison on parole, but his father remains in captivity and to this day he has never seen the two of them together.

Debbie and Mike Sr, both now 62, are two of the Move Nine, the group of black radicals who were collectively held responsible for the death of Officer James Ramp during a massive police shoot-out at their communal home in Powelton Village, Philadelphia on 8 August 1978. The group, whose members take “Africa” as their last name as a political badge, were resisting eviction.

Move was one of the more extraordinary elements of the 1970s black liberation struggle. Deeply committed to fighting police brutality in African American communities, they were also devoted to caring for animals and the environment.

They were like the Black Panthers crossed with nature-loving hippies. Black power meets flower power.

They lived in a communal house along with dozens of stray dogs and cats where they would preach their political beliefs day and night at high volume through bullhorns, driving their neighbors to despair. Over time they came to be seen as dangerous non-conformists by the Philadelphia police and city government, leading to a drawn-out confrontation that culminated in the 1978 siege and gunfight involving hundreds of police that saw the death of Officer Ramp and sent nine of the black radicals to prison, potentially for life.

The Move Nine were accused of firing the first shot and of killing Ramp. Yet they have always claimed innocence. They deny that they shot at anybody and blame the officer’s death on accidental “friendly fire” from other armed police.

Ramp, 52, was a former marine who had served with the Philadelphia police department for 23 years. He was killed by a single bullet. Yet all nine Move members were convicted of his murder.

I met Debbie Africa and her son as part of research into incarcerated black radicals that began more than two years ago. The starting point was the Angola Three, former Black Panthers who had endured unprecedented stretches in solitary confinement in Louisiana’s notorious Angola prison.

That began a journey that would bring me to interview several members of the Move Nine as well as former Black Panthers and members of the Black Liberation Army who remain incarcerated in some cases half a century after their arrests. It would culminate with a day spent with Debbie and Mike Jr, mother and son, as they celebrated their first time together beyond prison walls.

Debbie Africa was eight months pregnant during the 1978 siege. During the shoot-out she was holed out in the basement of the Move house, where she was bombarded by water cannons and tear gas and had to fumble her way out in the dark carrying her first child, her two-year-old daughter Michelle.

No evidence was presented at trial that she pulled the trigger or ever touched a gun. But she was convicted nonetheless as a murderer and conspirator.

Mike Sr remains behind bars in Graterford correctional institution in Pennsylvania. But last June, Debbie Africa became one of very few black liberationists convicted of violent acts from the 1970s to be released on parole having convinced the board she was no threat to society.

Debbie and Mike Jr talked to me at his home in a small town outside Philadelphia just two weeks after she had been released on parole from Cambridge Springs prison. They were both still clearly awestruck to be in

each other's company after so long – Mike's sporadic prison visits to both his parents were nothing like this.

It's the little things that have dumbfounded Mike Jr most. The first morning after they got back to his house, they were sitting at breakfast wearing no shoes.

"It was the first time I've ever seen her feet, and it was the first time she'd ever seen my feet since I was three days old in her cell," he said.

Debbie Africa described waves of overpowering emotion. "I can't believe this is happening," she said. "I'll just start hugging him in the supermarket and people will be giving us strange looks."

She talked about the wrench of letting her son go when he was three days old. "It was a hard, hard decision. I wanted what was best for him and I knew that was not to get close to me at any level. So I had to break the bond."

Mike Jr was raised during his childhood by his grandmother and by a succession of different female members of the Move organization as part of its communal ethic. "I was a community kid, I had many mothers," Mike Jr said in a deadpan voice, as though describing the weather.

Every Mother's Day he makes the rounds of his "mothers". He drives around bearing cards and flowers which he drops off at the homes of at least six women. He rattled off their names: Bert, Sue, Romana, Pam, Mary, Teresa.

Now he'll be able to put flowers in the hands of his true birth mother. He had no idea who she was, nor who his father was, until he was about six or seven when their relationship to him was made clear to him.

"I didn't know she was in prison, I didn't know any of it. I thought that the person caring for me was my mother."

He looks back on his childhood and recognizes that some aspects of his upbringing were less than ideal. "Who teaches a kid how to brush his teeth or take a bath but his parents. I didn't know how to wash my hair 'til I was 15."

Through his childhood he was taken to visit both parents in separate prisons, maybe once or twice a year. But for years he had no idea why they were locked up. When friends at school asked about him about them, he would demur or make up stories because he was embarrassed to reveal his ignorance.

It was only when he was 14 and sitting with his father in Graterford that the penny dropped. He asked Mike Sr whether there was anybody held in the prison who had done something really bad, like killing somebody.

"Yeah," Mike Sr replied, "me".

"He didn't go on to explain," Mike Jr recalled. "I was frightened. Was he going to be in here forever? I was crying my eyes out trying to figure it out, but I couldn't explain to him why I was crying. I couldn't put it into words."

Mike Jr said it took him years to put the pieces together. "I was left to figure it out for myself, to fend for myself."

But neither son nor mother are ones to dwell on the wounds of the past. I asked Debbie Africa whether she regretted that by her actions as a black liberationist and Move member she had put her son through so much pain.

“There are always going to be things in my life that I wish didn’t happen,” she said. “I do truly wish that what happened to my son hadn’t happened, I do truly. But I look at the man he is now, and I love it.”

Having spent two days in the company of Mike Africa Jr outside Philadelphia, I can see what she means. He has turned out remarkably poised for someone with his chaotic childhood résumé.

He runs his own small business as a landscape gardener, is married and has four children of his own. He is a proud member of Move, has never owned or even held a gun, and his house is comfortable and full of light, though it was notable how much neater it was the second time I visited following Debbie’s release. At last she has begun fulfilling that ritual of parents everywhere: tidying up after their child’s mess.

On Mike Jr’s part he’s similarly delighted his mother has turned out as well-balanced, sociable and positive as she is, given 40 years in correctional institutions. “I feel relief. Big relief. I never knew she would come out alive. When people come out of prison they can be sick in the head, but this transition of her coming to my house has been the smoothest major transformation of my life.”

Now the challenge is to help Mike Africa Sr secure parole, and so complete the family. His next appearance before the parole board is in September, and they are all already on tenterhooks.

A paradox of Debbie Africa’s release is that under her parole terms she is not able to communicate in any form with her husband because he is classified as a co-defendant and thus is out of bounds. The last time they saw each other in the flesh was in 1986. Since then they had been allowed to write to each other from their cells, and in that way managed to keep their bond alive.

Now that the letter-writing has been stopped all they have in terms of connection is Mike Jr acting as a go-between. He lets each parent know how the other is doing. He also acted as my go-between, putting questions to his father which Mike Sr answered in a phone call to him.

How confident is Mike Sr, I asked, as he heads into the parole hearing?

“I’m confident that I’m going to tell the truth. I’m confident that I deserve parole. I’m confident I would never be considered a danger to the community ever again. We never intended for anyone to get hurt, and regret that anyone did get hurt.”

Then he added: “What I’m not confident about is what they’re going to do, I have no control over that.”

He said the knowledge that his wife was now at home with his son and daughter was a great comfort to him. But it also heightened his desire to be with them all.

“Forty years of wanting, anticipating. It’s like Double Dutch. You’re always on the edge of that jump rope, hopping up and down, waiting to get in, waiting for your turn.”

2 Aug - How Can We Assure Our Future?

Please read the latest from anarchist political prisoner Casey Brezik.

MORE:

Well, I’ve been trying unsuccessfully to write “the perfect” essay for the past few months now. I’ve also been putting it off in favor of easier, quicker endeavors. But, tonight I’ve run across something that dictates I take my head out of my ass and write you now. I have no illusions that this essay will be “perfect” by any means. I’m only human.

Anyway, I was working on my calculus and ran across this problem:

“Agronomists use the assumption that a quarter acre of land is required to provide food for one person and estimate that there are 10 billion acres of tillable land in the world. Hence a maximum population of 40 billion people can be sustained if no other food source is available. The world population at the beginning of 1980 was approximately 4.5 billion. Assuming that the population increases at a rate of 2% per year and the rate of increase is proportional to the number of people, when will the maximum population be reached?”

The answer is 2089! I ran the math on what the population should’ve been in 2010 according to the said rate and came up with 8.2 billion. I think that estimate was a little high and we should also factor in that we also use seafood as a food source. Irregardless, the point remains that we’ll be lucky to have another 100 years before the world reaches maximum occupancy. Surely, the struggles faced with overcrowding will begin to creep up well before that and indeed already are. They know this better than any of us. I’m certain the government scientists have been keeping a close eye on it. In fact, when considering that this important point in our near future may very well act as a determining factor in their decision making process, many of their actions take on a new perspective. Immediately North Korea’s quest for nuclear weapons as the quickest means of becoming an “important” nation at the negotiating tables comes to mind. But also the fact that at least NASA, Space X, and Mars One all have plans for colonizing Mars beginning in the 2030s. I mean they fucking know time is running short.

So, I’ve been reading two books in particular: *The Case for Mars*—Robert Zubrin and *The New Digital Age*—Jared Cohen and Eric Schmidt. The first is written by a man who was at the time working for what’s now Lockheed Martin, and the second is written by two Google executives. One is a very detailed vision for humans in space which transformed the way we looked at what exactly a mission to Mars would require and was touted by NASA at one point. The other is a vision of technology creeping into every aspect of our lives here on Earth. The most disturbing part of both of these books is that their utopias leave no place for the anarchist. There’s zero space for us in either of their futures. Not here on Earth and not out there in space. If left up to them, we have no future.

This raises the question, “How will we assure our place in the future if we can no longer take it for granted?” I don’t think this is a question we can afford to ponder over for the next decade or so. Both of their futures are gradually becoming our reality. They have an end game in sight and a means of achieving it. What’s ours? I mean, how probable is revolution really? The way I see it, revolution can only come in one of two ways and probably both: 1. Social awakening, and 2. armed struggle.

The first presumes people are “sleeping” which I think is a false presumption. People just don’t care unless it’s made real easy for them to. Re-imagining the power/social structures of the world isn’t an easy task for most. Anyone really.

I don’t think anyone wants everything that comes with the latter. Though it’s true sometimes armed struggle is necessary. But our police-state has already advanced so far technologically that they’ve pretty much assured that it’s now essentially impossible for us to even imagine how to go about starting such a grand undertaking.

Then what? What is left for us to do? How do we assure the survival of the anarchist philosophy through the coming generations? I believe venturing out into space is at least one of the answers. Maybe it seems like fantasy but I do believe it’s more practical than the alternatives. It may not be without its challenges, obstacles and sacrifices, but I do believe it’s achievable. I’m working on some of my own ideas now, and once I’m released, I can begin putting some of these plans into motion. I’ll have access to more information, so I can run all the figures. For now, I’ll spare you the details until I can be more sure of them. Instead I’ll end by posing the question again: “How can we assure our future?” We are working on invisible timelines. Just because they’re not in our faces counting down doesn’t mean they aren’t real. How seriously we should take this issue should be directly proportionate to how seriously we think they’re taking it.

Take care of each other comrades. Hope you're all well.

2 Aug - Red Fawn Fallis Transferred to Federal Prison

On July 11, 2018, Red Fawn was sentenced to 57 months in prison under the terms of a non-cooperating plea agreement.

MORE:

After short stays at Stutsman County Correctional Center (Jamestown, North Dakota) and the Federal Transfer Center in Oklahoma City, Red Fawn has arrived at FMC Carswell, in Fort Worth, Texas. This is apparently where she will be imprisoned, at least for now.

In the near future we'll provide more information on how you can support Red Fawn while she's at FMC Carswell.

3 Aug - How Companies Like JPay Are Making Millions Charging Prisoners to Send An Email

You better believe that if there's a way to make a buck off of imprisoning folks, some capitalist is taking full advantage.

MORE:

by Victoria Law (*WIRED*)

Last July, as she has for the past 10 years, Dianne Jones spent 45 minutes on a city bus heading to the local WalMart.

There, under fluorescent lights, she scanned rows of brightly colored birthday cards to pick out the perfect greeting for her son—let's call him Tim—who is imprisoned more than 100 miles from his mother's home just outside New Orleans. The card she settled on was dark brown with trees and a birthday message that read, "For the best son in the world."

Tim was in his 10th year of a 30-year prison sentence for an armed robbery he committed at age 17; he would not be able to see, let alone sit under or touch, a tree for the next 20 years. (Citing safety concerns, Jones asked that her son's name not be used.) After Jones, her daughter, and her three grandchildren signed the card, she mailed it off, happy that Tim would know that his family was thinking of him.

Days later, the card was returned. Puzzled, she called the prison where she learned the facility had instituted a prohibition on greeting cards. If she wanted to send a card, a prison official told her, Jones would have to pass along her greeting electronically using JPay, a company bringing email into prison systems across the nation.

Prisons are notoriously low-tech places. But urged on by privately owned companies, like JPay, facilities across the country are adding e-messaging, a rudimentary form of email that remains disconnected from the larger web. Nearly half of all state prison systems now have some form of e-messaging: JPay's services are available to prisoners in 20 states, including Louisiana.

On the surface, e-messaging seems like an easy and efficient way for families to keep in touch—a quicker 21st century version of pen-and-paper mail. Companies like JPay cover the price of installing the systems; prisons pay nothing. And, the argument goes, closer family connections are a win-win for prisons and inmates. "Maintaining a positive network of support is really important to their future success when they rejoin the community," says Holly Kramer, a communications representative for the Michigan Department of Corrections, which has contracted with JPay since February 2009. "Electronic messaging can help facilitate that."

In the outside world there are numerous companies offering free email accounts—Gmail, Yahoo Mail, Mail.com—but inside prisons companies charge a fee, a token JPay calls a “stamp,” to send each message. Each “stamp” covers only one page of writing. Want to send photos of a nephew’s graduation, a niece’s prom dress or a new baby? Each picture costs an additional stamp. A short video clip? That’ll be three stamps. With the postal service, stamp prices are fixed, but JPay’s stamp prices fluctuate. Shortly before Mother’s Day, for instance, a stamp cost 35 cents; the price rose to 47 cents the following week. For a few hundred dollars, prisoners can skip kiosk lines by buying a tablet—a relatively expensive purchase that tends to lock them into JPay’s services.

Inside prisons, e-messaging companies are quietly building a money-making machine virtually unhindered by competition—a monopoly that would be intolerable in the outside world. It’s based in a simple formula: Whatever it costs to send a message, prisoners and their loved ones will find a way to pay it. And, the more ways prisoners are cut off from communicating with their families, the better it is for business. Which means that stamp by stamp, companies like JPay—and the prisons that accept a commission with each message—are profiting from isolation of one of the most vulnerable groups in the country. And, with prisoners typically earning 20 cents to 95 cents an hour in jobs behind bars, the cost of keeping in touch most likely falls to family members and friends.

This year, Jones decided against choosing from the 24 electronic birthday card designs that JPay offers. Instead, she waited for her son to call, paying 21 cents a minute to JPay’s parent company Securus, which provides phone services to Louisiana’s prisons. “I just talked to him on the phone and cried,” she says.

JPay began in 2002 as a prison money-wiring service, offering a quicker alternative for families who wanted to mail a money order to incarcerated loved ones. The expediency came with a price: The fees for each transaction could be as high as \$11.95. When JPay launched its e-messaging services in 2004, it pitched it as a way of fostering closer relationships between prisoners and the outside world. “Part of JPay’s mission is to provide technology...[that] empowers those individuals with access to educational tools and assists in their overall rehabilitation process,” says Jade Trombetta, JPay’s senior manager of brand marketing and social media. She declined to explain the reasoning behind JPay’s prices or price fluctuations. “We have nothing more to say on the matter,” she told WIRED.

In 2011, JPay pitched its services to the National Association of State Procurement Officials and the Multi-State Corrections Procurement Alliance, associations that secure contracts for state government, including prison systems, presenting itself as a state-of-the-art start-up with an unusual business plan. “JPay is not a commissary company nor is it an inmate telephone company,” the proposal read. “We are a software company focused on building and delivering innovative inmate service-applications.”

At the time, the company boasted contracts with 21 state correctional agencies, along with “numerous jails and private prisons.” It already served more than 1.2 million people behind bars. That year, according to a document obtained by the Huffington Post, JPay reported a revenue of \$30.4 million; three years later, its revenue had more than doubled to \$70.4 million.

On the screen, however, JPay’s technology hardly evokes a sleek startup. Instead, it seems more like a flashback to the mid-1990s. To send a message, incarcerated people stand in line for one of several kiosks dedicated to e-messaging and use a rudimentary form of plain text to compose their messages. Once logged in, a sidebar offers the options of composing a new message, clicking on a message to read its contents, and scanning already-sent messages. The sidebar also contains a count of how many more messages a person is able to send—based on the number of credits they’ve purchased—and an option to purchase more.

Prison commissaries have always turned a small profit by selling paper, envelopes, and stamps. But with few recurring costs, e-messaging is a much more lucrative enterprise—and not just for JPay. In 2014, more than 14.2 million e-messages were sent over the service. With many prisons reaping a roughly 5-cent commission per message, prison systems that use JPay stand to collect \$710,000 on e-messages alone. As

use of e-messaging increases, these numbers stand to balloon. In Michigan, for example, imprisoned users send 800,000 to one million messages through JPay each month.

There is precedent for corporations looking to turn prison communications into an easy money-making enterprise. For many years, phone calls from jails and prisons were unregulated, allowing private telecommunications providers to charge as much as \$1 a minute for a call. After years of organizing by prisoner rights advocates, the Federal Communications Commission voted in 2013 to cap the costs of interstate phone calls, calling it a first step toward ending the exorbitant costs of staying in contact. Two years later, the commission extended the cap to intrastate calls. But after five prison phone providers, including Securus, filed separate petitions challenging the FCC's decision, the ruling was overturned—leaving pricing entirely in the hands of private companies, with charges ranging from 96 cents to as much as \$18 for a 20-minute call.

Prisoner advocates say that services providing email services to correctional facilities are simply following the same price-gouging formula. “It doesn’t cost that much to send an email,” says Peter Wagner, director of the Prison Policy Initiative. Though e-messaging companies compare their business to postage stamps, in reality traditional mail—in which a person can send several photos or five pieces of paper for a single set price—is a much better deal. “This is a company that is not transparent about its pricing,” Wagner says. “Because facilities are not paying the bill, they have no incentive to worry about it.” In fact, because they share in the revenue, the facilities have an incentive to maximize the use of such services. (In some states, such as Michigan, these commissions go to a prisoner benefit fund, which pays for items such as recreation equipment.)

In some states, JPay is sweetening the deal by offering free tablets that allow prisoners to skip kiosk lines—and encourage the use of its product. In Missouri, the company is scheduled to give each of the state's more than 33,000 prisoners their own tablet. In February, it announced it will do the same for New York state's 51,000 prisoners. “The vendor charges fees to inmate and inmate family/friends for using the services,” reads the contract between the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and JPay. From the New York partnership alone, the company expects to reap \$8.8 million over the next five years.

And, while all prisons still allow some form of written correspondence, in several states, the advent of e-messaging has been coupled with greater restrictions on regular mail.

In April 2017, Indiana's Department of Corrections passed new regulations making not only greeting cards, but also colorful envelopes, computer printouts, and even typed sheets of paper verboten. The reasoning, Basinger says, is an uptick in narcotics and synthetic narcotics, such as fentanyl, which can be soaked into colorful paper. To prevent drugs coming through the mail, prisons now allow only handwritten letters on white lined paper, “like every student in the country uses,” Basinger says, which are easy to monitor and scan for illicit materials.

While Indiana has the most draconian mail regulations, others are following suit. In October 2017, the Michigan prison system passed its own set of restrictions prohibiting envelopes that are not white, letters written in inks other than blue or black, and greeting cards that are larger than 6 x 8 inches. Idaho's prisons have had similar restrictions for the past year.

But the side effect of these new restrictions is a greater reliance on JPay. For Nicole, who was recently paroled from an Indiana prison and asked that her last name not be used, these restrictions effectively cut off communication with her aunt. In previous years, her aunt sent her cards and letters on colorful stationery for her birthday, Christmas, and any time Nicole completed a prison program. Nicole kept each and every one them.

With the new mail restrictions, communication dwindled. Nicole's aunt, who is 87, doesn't own a computer. And in Indiana, where Nicole is incarcerated, JPay kiosks are in the prison's dayrooms—the

communal area of each housing unit where women use the microwave, watch one of two televisions, stand in line for the telephones, and socialize. Often, Nicole explains, the prison dayroom is like “trying to get in and out of a mall at Christmastime.” You also have people behind you interrupting to see who’s next,” she says. “You’ll be interrupted multiple times.” Arguments and fights often broke out about whose turn was next or if someone allowed a friend to cut the line.

In 13 states—including, soon, Indiana—an imprisoned person can avoid the headaches of the communal kiosk by buying a tablet, but again, there’s a price, which varies state by state. In California, for instance, where hourly prison wages range from 8 to 95 cents, a tablet costs \$160. That price does not include music, games, podcasts, or e-books, all of which must be bought separately. In Michigan, the newly introduced JP5 costs \$40 (with \$10 going to the prisoner benefit fund). Currently, just under 27,000 of the state’s nearly 40,000 prisoners have these players.

In some states, the rise of JPay has brought a wave of activism, designed to block increasingly restrictive mail policies. In 2017, Charles Sweeney and Anthony Delarosa, currently imprisoned in Indiana, filed a lawsuit against the state’s Department of Corrections challenging mail restrictions as violations of their First and Fourteenth Amendment rights. In May 2018, a federal judge ruled that they could not only proceed but certified their suit as a class-action, meaning that they are now suing on behalf of the state’s nearly 26,000 prisoners.

These actions can’t come quickly enough for Jones. In February, Jones went to her mother’s house in New Orleans for her family’s annual Mardi Gras barbecue. As they do at every get-together, they snapped picture after picture, but Jones could only afford to send her son a few. ‘Where are the rest of the kids at?’ Tim asked her after receiving her message. But Jones, who spends about \$40 a month on JPay stamps, could not afford to send photos of her cousins’ children.

Still, she’s grateful for what she can afford. To buy her son a tablet, Jones, who works part-time and earns \$600 every two weeks, put off paying that month’s electric bill. She wonders what other, less fortunate families do.

6 Aug - Court Case Can Move Forward for Political Prisoner Leonard Peltier & Son

On August 6th, a federal judge in Tacoma, Washington ruled that case brought by political prisoner Leonard Peltier (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians) and his son, Chauncey, can move to trial.

MORE:

by Levi Rickert (*Native News Online*)

The Peltiers claim their First Admmendment rights were violated when Leonard Peltier's paintings were removed from a public exhibition were removed after former FBI agents complained to officials at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries.

Peltier, who is a considered a political prisoner from people such as Bishop Desmond Tutu, American Indians and Amnesty International, was convicted of killing two FBI agents in 1975 on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation at Oglala, South Dakota. Notable legal experts, including former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark who says Peltier was not given a fair trial by the U.S. government.

Peltier is currently incarcerated at the U.S. Penitentiary in Coleman, Florida.

Monday's ruling involves the removal of four paintings from a state building in Washington state. Peltier, who took up painting as a prisoner, had the four paintings on display at a public exhibition the Labor & Industries headquarters in Olympia, Washington during Native American Heritage Month in November 2015. The paintings after being on display for two weeks were removed after two ex-FBI agents complained to State of Washington officials.

After the paintings were removed the elder Peltier told his son his rights were violated. Chauncey Peltier told Native News Online that he began receiving calls from attorneys who said the Peltiers should file a lawsuit.

In Monday's federal district court ruling, U.S. District Judge Ronald Leighton said that the Department of Labor & Industries failed to show a "compelling government interest" when it took down the four paintings.

"Freedom of speech, though not absolute, is protected against censorship or punishment, unless shown likely to produce a clear and present danger of a serious substantive evil that rises far above public inconvenience, annoyance or unrest," Leighton writes in response the State of Washington's motion to have the lawsuit dismissed.

The judge's decision was met with excitement from Chauncey Peltier. Leonard Peltier has yet to react publicly to Monday's ruling:

"This is the first time in 43 years of my father's incarceration that any court has ruled in his favor of his rights," Chauncey Peltier told Native News Online on Wednesday afternoon. "This is a big deal because a court has finally recognizes the rights of my father. This comes from a known conservative judge who recognized the rights of my father were violated."

Chauncey Peltier does not know when the case will go to trial.

9 Aug - Happy 75th Birthday Maroon!

The latest Russell Maroon Shoatz support newsletter is out. While it is too long to include in full, we have put some in below.

MORE:

We hope this message finds you in healthy and hopeful spirits. We also want to extend a joyful "Welcome Home!" to Herman Bell, Debbie Africa, and Seth Hayes, all movement elders who were released from lengthy prison terms over the past few months. Our longstanding work to raise awareness of and advocate for our political prisoners is showing signs of success, and we encourage you to continue speaking up and out for those still locked down.

On August 23rd, 2018, our beloved father, grandfather, mentor, comrade, and friend Russell Maroon Shoatz turns 75!

In light of his coming birthday, we've decided to launch The Maroon Project, a booklet filled with messages to Maroon from supporters old and new, highlighting what you've learned from Maroon's writings and/or interactions with him over the years. Messages can focus on prison issues, aspects of the contemporary political landscape, insights on activism work, and/or any mentoring or support you may have experienced as a direct or indirect result of your interaction with Maroon. We don't yet have a hard deadline for submissions, but the sooner you can send us something, the better.

Please send your correspondence to sshoatz65@gmail.com or:
The Maroon Project
Post Office Box 429
Englewood, New Jersey 07631

9 Aug - Philadelphia Running Down the Walls 2018 Report Back

Report from Philadelphia Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) about the recent and massively successful Running Down the Walls event.

MORE:

On August 5, 2018, around 90 people ran, jogged or walked 5K to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the incarceration of the Move 9. The route chosen for this event started in Fairmount Park and went past the zoo that members of the Move organization protested in 1973 and 1974 in support of animal rights. The route continued down 33rd street to the intersection of 33rd and Pearl, where the former Move headquarters was before it was bulldozed by the city within 24 hours of the arrest of the Move 9.

Photographs of the Move 9, flowers, and candles as well as a board to write messages was available for supporters to stop and pay their respects at the halfway point. People passing by who knew members of the Move 9 also stopped to pay their respects.

While the national Running Down the Walls event was held in June this year, the Philadelphia event was set in August in order to coincide with the Move 40th anniversary. For this reason, all of the incarcerated people who ran on August 5th are in Pennsylvania or surrounding regions. Many runners on the outside ran with signs displaying the names of either recipients of the Warchest or other US held political prisoners. Including both runners on the inside and outside, the event totaled around 90 participants.

Yoga began promptly at 9:30 am “to warm up our breath, mind and bodies” as yoga instructor Sheena Sood put it. The group then took off in three sections: walkers followed by joggers and finally by runners. This enabled a lot of interaction along the route as people encountered each other frequently. The route was shady to set off the warmth of the day, and refreshments were provided by Solidarity Food Not Bombs.

Together we raised almost \$2000 that will be split between Move 9 legal defense and the ABCF Warchest. To close, we squeezed together for a group photo chanting “Free the Move 9, Free All Political Prisoners!”

9 Aug - Mumia Abu-Jamal's Next Court Hearing is August 30

Below are things you can do whether you're in Philadelphia or anywhere.

MORE:

Call District Attorney Larry Krasner at 215.686.8000

- Tell him former DA Ron Castille violated Mumia's constitutional rights and Krasner should cease opposing Mumia's legal petition
- Tell the DA to release Mumia because he's factually innocent

For information on the event and transportation from outside Philly:

FreeMumia.com, info@freemumia.com, New York: 212.330.8029, Philadelphia: 215.724.1618;
facebook/mobilization4mumia, Mobilization4mumia@gmail.com

10 Aug - Green Scare Target Joseph Dibbe Arrested

On August 10th, the US Department of Justice announced that it had “apprehended” Green Scare defendant Joseph Dibbe after indicting him 12 years ago.

MORE:

via Civil Liberties Defense Center

Dibbe was allegedly arrested in Cuba. In 2006, a federal grand jury in Oregon indicted Dibbe and 12 coconspirators for acts of economic sabotage by the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front. The groups caused more than \$45 million in damages to horse slaughterhouses and federal horse capture facilities, old-growth timber companies and a ski resort encroaching on Canadian Lynx habitat, to name a few of the operations targeted between 1995 and 2001. One of the co-conspirators, Jacob Ferguson, from Eugene, Oregon, volunteered himself to become an informant for the FBI and agreed to wear a wire and travel around the country attempting to entrap his co-conspirators. Without Ferguson's cooperation with the State, it was unlikely the FBI would have solved any of these cases.

As the cases proceeded over the years, the codefendants broke into two groups: those who chose not to cooperate with the state and received approximately 18 additional months of prison time, including Jonathan Paul, Daniel McGowan, Joyanna Zacher, Nathan Block (and since the original case other non-cooperating Green Scare defendants include Marius Mason, Rebecca Rubin, and Justin Solondz). Those who became informants for the State included Jacob Ferguson, Kevin Tubbs, Stanislas Meyerhoff, Chelsea Gerlach, Darren Thurston, Lacey Philabaum, Suzanne Savoie, Jennifer Kolar, Briana Waters (at her 2nd trial after being snitched on by Philabaum and Kolar at her 1st trial), and Frank Ambrose.

There were two individuals who were indicted but were not found within the U.S to be prosecuted, Joseph Dibee and another person. Now, 12 years later, and under the authoritarian Trump regime, Mr. Dibee faces prosecution in the District of Oregon, the Western District of Washington and the Eastern District of California.

As usual, the State is using terrorism rhetoric to attempt to bias the judicial process against individuals accused of property damage crimes that were not intended and did not cause harm to any humans or animals. In fact, according to their websites, the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Animal Liberation Front (ALF) credos state that they are "a nonviolent campaign with activists taking all precautions not to harm any animal (human or otherwise)." Their intentions are to cause economic damage to those who profit from misery and exploitation of animals as well as the destruction of the environment.

12 Aug - Last Year They Came with Torches—This Year They Come with Badges

A Report from Charlottesville, August 11, 2018.

MORE:

via CrimethInc

A year after fascists with torches marched through the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, anarchists and other anti-racists who traveled there to shut down their rally returned to support locals in observing the anniversary of those events. Defying a massive police mobilization aimed at completely suppressing all freedom to demonstrate, hundreds marched around downtown for hours. The following hasty report was submitted by some of the out-of-town participants.

When we arrived in Charlottesville, the atmosphere felt different than it had a year ago when we came here to oppose the Unite the Right demonstration. Then, the city felt tense, but it was also full of people who were heading into a fight they believed in. The mood wasn't festive, exactly, but our shared desire to protect and support each another and to stand up to fascists created a lively energy.

This year, as I walked onto the University of Virginia (UVA) campus where the vigil for Heather Heyer was to be held, it seemed that the energy we had shared was nowhere to be found. The police and the state authorities had done everything in their power to dominate the environment and shape the entire weekend of events according to their own agenda.

On Wednesday, the governor and the city manager declared a state of emergency in Virginia as a whole and Charlottesville in particular. They brought over 1000 officers to the city and housed them in dorms paid for by student tuition, drawing censure from several student groups. The police set up checkpoints around the city at which to search people for a long list of items they declared forbidden. They created a "security perimeter" blocking roads and access to parking. They erected metal detectors and banned additional items at the UVA student rally on Saturday night, against students' wishes. They did all this despite the fact that only anti-racist activists were expected to come to the city this weekend.

Fortunately, UVA students and other protesters were determined not to permit the police to control their event or dictate the proper way of remembering Heather Heyer, Nia Wilson, and all the other people who have been killed or harmed by fascist and racist violence.

We waited at the Rotunda, by the statue of Thomas Jefferson where fascists with torches had surrounded and attacked UVA students last year.

And then, finally, life broke out once more in Charlottesville.

Student organizers, many of whom were people of color, stood forth on the top steps, separated from the crowd by the metal detectors we were supposed to walk through in order to attend the rally. Raising their voices, they fiercely decried the absurdity of the massive police presence and the institution of police itself, highlighting the connection between fascists and cops by means of a powerful call and response speech and a banner.

The students led the crowd to the left side of the exterior of the Rotunda, a place the police were not controlling, and used the steps as an impromptu stage. The first speaker had only been speaking for a couple of minutes when we started hearing people shouting that riot cops were on our left. Much of the crowd migrated towards the cops and began chanting at them. The chant I heard most was, “We don’t see no riot here, why are you in riot gear?”

After twenty minutes or so, student-aged individuals began weaving through the crowd and telling people to come back towards where the speakers had been. No one I talked to knew why we were being called back, although there were murmurs that the police were going to declare an unlawful assembly. Eventually, we made our way back. As we got closer, we saw that the speakers had stopped and a march was beginning so we joined in. The crowd was at least a few hundred strong. We quickly took the street.

It was clear from the beginning that the march had a radical character. We chanted against the state, capitalism, cops, white supremacy, fascists... all the different manifestations of hierarchy and oppression. It was a relief to be in this environment after the police had attempted to force an oppressive and controlled atmosphere on the rally.

Student organizers led the march to Lambeth Field, which state troopers had been using as a staging area. Students spoke while police officers lined up on the other side of the field.

The energy lagged a bit in the amphitheater. We felt powerful when we were marching in the streets, forcing cars to turn around and yelling together our refusal to stand for oppression. In the amphitheater, we were passive audience members once more. There is a time for speeches and listening, but what I wanted, and I think what many of us wanted, was to be in the streets together. We were also getting antsy about being in a location vulnerable to police control. At the sound of a siren, the crowd decided collectively and spontaneously to leave the stadium and start marching again.

This second phase of the march was more leaderless. There were advantages and disadvantages to this. It was not always clear what direction we were going; we had to stop a few times to confer about our path. Yet despite these logistical challenges, we marched through the streets of Charlottesville for two hours, passing through downtown and finally arriving at the park where the fascists had gathered during last year’s Unite the Right demonstration—the park where the statue of Robert E. Lee is located.

A considerable police presence was concentrated here to protect the statue—reportedly over 100 officers. Despite chants demanding to tear the statue down, several voices in the march announced that the march was over and that we should go home. I guessed that these were the voices of student organizers, as I don’t think anyone else felt such a degree of ownership over the event that they would have felt they could call for its conclusion.

During the time we were marching, we saw very few cops and experienced very little repression or attempts to control the march. As far as I know, no arrests were made, although there are rumors that one person was de-arrested, and two videos show scuffles in which police apparently attack people in the march as the crowd arrives at Water Street and moves onto the Downtown Mall after 9 pm.

In retrospect, whether intentional or not, it was strategic to plan to hold the rally at the Rotunda and then instead to march repeatedly from one location to another. This forced the police to keep mobilizing and deploying with the consequence that they had to draw some of their numbers out of downtown—making it possible for the march to arrive there after all, despite all their attempts to control the area.

Even though Virginia deployed over 1000 cops to Charlottesville this weekend, the police knew that attacking students and other anti-racist activists on the anniversary of the Unite the Right rally and Heather Heyer's murder would be bad publicity. Because of this, they were forced to allow us to march mostly unimpeded. We were not searched or controlled as the authorities had promised we would be. Some people wore masks, which the authorities had declared would not be permitted. Once again, we learned that the state can only control us to the extent that we collectively accept the myth of its power.

When we band together against police and the state, even when our numbers are not as great as theirs, we can win—just as we succeeded in shutting down the fascist rally in Charlottesville last year, even though we were outnumbered. In contrast to last weekend's demonstrations in Portland and Berkeley, this time there were no fascists in Charlottesville for the police to protect. The optics become worse for the police when they attack anti-fascist activists without the excuse that they are “defending other citizens.” Especially after the brutal police repression in Berkeley and Portland last week, it felt good that in Charlottesville, the police were afraid to touch us. This enabled us to be together to celebrate Heather and hold the state accountable on our own terms in a way that the authorities would never permit, were it up to them.

16 Aug - Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Committee General Assembly

WHAT: General Assembly

WHEN: 6:30pm, Thursday, August 16th

WHERE: Verso Books - 20 Jay Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201

COST: FREE

MORE:

The assembly will begin @ 7:00 PM, orientation for newcomers begins 6:30 PM.

MACC assemblies are open to all anarchists, antifascists, anti-authoritarians and those interested in anarchist ideas and organizing so please invite your friends and share widely!

If you haven't attended before, these assemblies are an opportunity to get plugged in with MACC, its various committees and working groups, and other NYC based anarchist projects.

There is an orientation before the assembly starting at 6:30 PM for those interested in familiarizing themselves with MACC, the history, process and politics that underskirt general assemblies, and anarchist ideas.

As with all assemblies, we encourage everyone to come with ideas about what they would like to see for future campaigns or actions and what direction they'd like MACC to take in terms of building a more powerful, militant anarchist movement.

For more information contact us at info@macc.nyc.

19 Aug - Towards a Culture of Transformative Justice

WHAT: Transformative Justice Workshop

WHEN: 3pm, Sunday, August 19th

WHERE: The Base – 1302 Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn, New York 11221 (directions below)

NOTE: The Base is on the ground floor, is wheelchair accessible, and has a gender neutral toilet.

COST: FREE!

MORE:

Hot on the heels of NYC ABC's letter-writing dinner in observance of Black August, we are excited to host an event to help all folks engaged in revolutionary struggle. While our organizing is primarily focused on support for political prisoners and prisoners of war, we understand the need for developing and sharing skills to build a world without prisons. To that end, we are excited to host a restorative justice workshop.

Folks are facilitating restorative justice trainings across the country, sharing knowledge about alternatives and resistance to the carceral state's so-called "justice."

In this workshop we will discuss the principles of transformative justice and how to apply them in order to destabilize abuse culture and make our communities safer, without cops or the state.

Strong movements and interdependent relationships make attempts to shut down our struggle obsolete. Let's build our capacity for defending our communities and movements together!

This workshop will be lead by one of our comrades, an anti-capitalist and feminist activist and survivor of gendered trauma, who has been learning about transformative justice in radical spaces both through literature and trial & error in order to strengthen her community and organizing spaces in Denver.

21 Aug - #NatTurnerDay Noise Demo

WHAT: Noise Demo

WHEN: 7:00-10:00pm, Tuesday, August 21st, 2018

WHERE: Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC, the federal prison in Brooklyn); meeting at the corner of 2nd Avenue and 30th Street, Brooklyn, New York 11232 (D/N/R to 36th Street or R to 25th Street)

COST: Free

MORE:

In solidarity with the national prison strike, Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement NYC (RAM-NYC) and NYC ABC will be outside MDC making noise in support of those behind the walls. Come kick off the prison strike with us in NYC as we begin solidarity actions here and around the country.

About the National Prison Strike (21 Aug through 9 Sept):

People incarcerated in the United States, suffering some of the worst abuses in the world, are calling for a nationwide prison strike on August 21st. We at the Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement stand with these brave individuals and support their demands for better conditions and revolutionary action as they risk their lives and health, not only for themselves but for the millions incarcerated nationwide.

The impetus for this call arose from the shameful and egregious loss of life recently at Lee Correctional Institution in South Carolina. The problem, prison organizers argue, stems from greed and "...a lack of respect for human life that is embedded in our nation's penal ideology." From racist policing practices, harassment of families, and routine methods of torture, we have a system that is one of the most barbaric in the world. While reforms are desirable, we all are aware, that total abolition of this system is necessary.

Since the civil war, the US government has been committed to ensuring the system of slavery continued. Black people remain policed, surveilled, controlled, and held captive. The struggle for black liberation reached unparalleled heights with the Black Panthers, and the state's response was to make the largest prison population in the world, criminalize the black populace, and destroy the social programs. Slavery in the US was never primarily about free labor, but about controlling, owning and ultimately denying black humanity. The plantations of the past, like Angola plantation in Louisiana, transformed into Louisiana State Penitentiary. The same modes of control on the plantation exist in the prison. The prison system, like the slave system of the past, is not a social phenomenon to debate, but to totally destroy.