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Updates for February 17<sup>th</sup>

## **6 Feb - Is the State of Texas Trying to Kill This Chicano Activist?**

*Excellent article on political prisoner Xinachtli fighting for his life in Texas prisons.*

### **MORE:**

by Sam Russek (*The New Republic*)

Early last November, as Alvaro Luna Hernandez, age 73, awoke from uneasy sleep, numbness radiated from his hands and feet, and he realized he could no longer walk. He tried hoisting himself up within the confines of his six-by-eight-foot solitary prison cell, and fell to the ground. This was neither his first nor his last fall; the worst occurred in the shower, on November 17. There was nothing to hold onto—no “handicapped elder-accessible shower,” if you prefer lawyer-speak—even though 16 percent of Texas’s prison population is 55 or older. And so, when he fell, he hit his head.

The accident capped off roughly two years of creeping bodily deterioration. Hernandez—better known as Xinachtli (pronounced Shin-atch-tee), Nahuatl for “germinating seed”—is a renowned Chicano activist who has been held in solitary confinement for 23 years, most of which he has spent in the notorious William G. McConnell Unit in South Texas. The facility isn’t fully air-conditioned, even though summer temperatures can reach upward of 100 degrees. When it rains, Xinachtli recently told a Texas court, his cell floods. He stores his important belongings—paper documents, snacks—in peanut butter jars to keep the rats from chewing through them.

These conditions, especially for a man in the twilight of his life, have only compounded his health problems, Xinachtli and his supporters have argued. Despite multiple requests for care throughout 2025, court records show, “These requests have been ignored, delayed, or obfuscated by [McConnell Unit] officials.” By early January 2026, Texas Department of Criminal Justice officials had still yet to communicate a complete diagnosis, leaving Xinachtli and those who care for him entirely in the dark about his health—and how long he has to live.

Xinachtli’s case dates back to the doldrums of left-wing politics in Texas, when the hegemony of the Texas Democratic Party reached a screeching dead end and far-right politics began its rapid ascent. From the late 1960s onward, Black and Chicano groups sought new forms of political protagonism, challenging the white Democratic establishment and combating the system of racist policing that defined Texas from its frontier days to its transition to petrostate-within-a-state.

By 1994, three years before Xinachtli was sentenced to 50 years in prison for the alleged aggravated assault of a sheriff (Xinachtli and his supporters maintain he merely disarmed the officer, fearing for his life), Texas liberalism was in free fall. The state’s Democratic Party was unable to maintain its winning coalition of white liberals, organized labor, Black and brown activists, and “Jeffersonian” conservatives who had dominated local politics since Reconstruction. Its institutional heavyweights mutated into Republicans proper or the “tough-on-crime” blue dogs we know today.

Now, a coterie of activists has rallied behind Xinachtli’s cause, citing his history of advocacy against police violence as reason for the state of Texas’s negligent treatment. For them, Xinachtli’s case, and his status as a “political prisoner” and well-known jailhouse lawyer, stands for a legacy much greater than the sum of its parts, and by linking themselves to it, they’re reconnecting to a lineage of left-wing activism long presumed dead—even nonexistent—within the state. “Sometimes you hear a story and you just know it’s part of you,” said Maria Salazar, age 25, a member of Xinachtli’s support committee. “Xinachtli’s struggle just seemed like part of me.”

At times, Xinachtli's life sounds like something out of a storybook—even a “ballad,” as *CounterPunch* referred to it in 2011. Here's an all too brief summary: In 1968, at age 15, Xinachtli witnessed the police killing of his friend Henry Ramos, who was 16 years old at the time; the case was noted in a 1970 United States Commission on Civil Rights report, “Mexican-Americans and the Administration of Justice in the Southwest.” At age 22, he was accused of a murder he didn't commit and briefly escaped from jail before being sentenced. At age 26, he was party to the historic Ruiz v. Estelle civil rights case, which ruled that Texas prisons violated the Eighth Amendment and constituted “cruel and unusual punishment,” and also helped to lead a strike from within prison walls to coincide with the trial.

Finally, in 1991, he was released on parole, though his co-defendant's conviction on the same evidence was fully reversed and dismissed in 1979. Five years later, Xinachtli was rearrested by the sheriff back in his hometown, the small railroad water stop of Alpine, in far West Texas, but not before he helped organize a historic support campaign in Houston to free the death row inmate Ricardo Aldape Guerra, an undocumented immigrant wrongly accused of murdering a police officer.

Guerra was successfully exonerated mere months before Xinachtli's conviction, the activist's hair already greying at the time of his second arrest. There's a sick irony to the fact that others have had to create the same support structure for him. His life has been defined by run-ins with the law—and critical civil rights victories over the Texas government, breaking decades of entrenched precedent. It's perhaps of little surprise that prison officials saw fit to segregate him from McConnell's general population for the past 23 years, at first alleging ties to gang activity, and later an apparent “mental health security designation,” both of which also impacted his ability to make parole or receive a medical release.

In December 2025, Amnesty International published a statement demanding the state of Texas “ensure that all of his human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled as required of the Texas government under international law.” It's a race against the clock—and prison authorities—to avoid what Sandra Freeman called “death by incarceration.”

In a typical civil rights court case, “There is an injury, an event that ends, and then a court case is filed,” Freeman told *The New Republic*. But “in this particular case, the injury is ongoing, the retaliation is ongoing,” which makes the arguments for and against Xinachtli far more slippery.

For example, back in December, he was briefly transferred to a hospital in Galveston following a weeks-long pressure campaign led by his support committee, and his condition slowly but surely improved. To keep a transfer back to solitary confinement off the table, Freeman attempted to file for a restraining order, essentially locking him into his hospital bed. Yet, because he was already in a hospital bed, Assistant Attorney General Vishal Iyer was able to argue in a court hearing that the lawsuit was needless; it was “quite speculative” that Xinachtli would be transferred back to McConnell at all, he said.

Iyer's second line of argument contradicted the first: There were a “limited supply of these medically available beds,” and “prison authorities should have the ability to assign an inmate” where they saw fit. On Christmas Eve, Xinachtli was transferred to a disciplinary cell at McConnell. Around a week later, they had to transfer him back to McConnell's infirmary. After yet another pressure campaign, Xinachtli was transferred to yet another hospital, the Carole Young Medical Facility in Dickinson. Iyer will now likely argue for his clients' qualified immunity, a common method for prison officials to escape accountability. Multiple requests to Iyer and the state Attorney General's office for comment went unreturned.

Whether by the banal workings of an indifferent bureaucracy or by outright medical neglect, the result feels to Xinachtli and his supporters like a morbid game of cat and mouse. In February, March, and June of last year, various medical staff reported Xinachtli was a “no show” to his medical appointments because there was “no escort” available, according to court records. Meanwhile, in February and September, the official excuse was that Xinachtli “refused” to travel to the clinic. But in a March request for medical care, Xinachtli made the stakes clear: “I am not refusing your care. I cannot walk the mile to the clinic without

feeling exhausted and out of breath. I need ‘wheelchair’ aid for my disability.” He cited pain in his kidneys. He began to suffer from incontinence. Between October 2024 and December 2025, he lost almost 100 pounds.

Salazar recalls that, in the latter half of 2025, she began to notice Xinachtli’s usual energetic disposition was muted, as if his mind had caught up to his 73-year-old body and was beginning to slow down. In November, around the time of his fall, Freeman became the first of his supporters to see him in a wheelchair. “It’s just a shocking experience, seeing someone age and decline really rapidly,” she said. Just a few months prior, he had been active and engaged in his case. Now, he had slurred speech; it was clear to her that he was experiencing some kind of cognitive decline.

Dr. Dona Kim Murphey, a third-party medical specialist, conducted several limited examinations of Xinachtli. In a late November phone interview, Murphey reported that he exhibited short-term memory problems, meandering and disorganized speech, and an inability to recall his own age, stating he was 53 instead of 73. On December 2, at an in-person session, Dr. Murphey performed a neurological examination of Xinachtli with limited equipment, imploring prison officials to conduct an “urgent brain and spinal MRI” and lab tests, adding that—in the best-case scenario—Xinachtli may be able to walk again after “months of inpatient physical therapy.”

Finally, after months of delay, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice provided Freeman with Xinachtli’s complete medical records. What those documents revealed was stark: It was as if his entire body was failing at once. Xinachtli had suffered a stroke and a heart attack, and appeared to have a lesion on his liver, possibly cancerous; this was in addition to spinal degeneration, heart and kidney damage, prostate damage, and a hernia. This came as a surprise to Xinachtli, who had no idea he’d suffered from a stroke or heart attack.

“We had to have a very hard conversation with Xinachtli about what these medical records show,” Freeman told me. For years, he’d been left in the dark. The news cast Xinachtli’s Christmas Eve transfer in another light: Doctors with access to his medical records knew of these conditions and still transferred him back to solitary confinement. “I don’t understand how they’re keeping him confined like they are unless there’s some other agenda,” Dr. Murphey told me. It only “makes sense if he is actually being politically persecuted. They’re denying him care systematically because of who he is.”

On January 19, Dr. Murphey sent an open letter to medical staff at the Carole Young Medical Facility calling for expedited blood and gastrointestinal tests, given “the chronic medical neglect” Xinachtli had suffered up to this point. If expedited treatment and “more intense level of rehabilitation, and careful dementia risk factor management is not available,” she concluded, “my recommendation is that [he] be urgently released for care in the community.”

It’s difficult to square who Xinachtli appears to be in the eyes of Texas—Iyer referred to him at the December court hearing as having a “long history” of violence and an “association to organized crime”—with the white-haired man in a wheelchair who seemed to shrink in his seat during the court hearings I attended on Zoom. He spoke slowly, clasping his hands together as if for warmth. “A lot of times, revolutionary elders will die, and we will not tell their stories until they die,” Salazar told me. But their memories are all the more precious when they’re alive.

## **7 Feb - Paxton launches probe of Houston-based anti-fascist group he says encouraged terrorism**

*Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton is investigating a Houston-based anti-fascist group, claiming it has encouraged terrorism.*

**MORE:**

by Ashley Soebroto (*Houston Chronicle*)

In a Friday news release, Paxton said he was taking legal action to acquire documents from the Screwston Anti-Fascist Committee, accusing it of "illegally" identifying Texans and aiding in the commission of terrorism. He said the organization was self-admittedly affiliated with Antifa, which President Donald Trump designated as a terrorist group in September.

"Radical leftists have engaged in coordinated efforts to militantly attack our nation and undermine the rule of law. Screwston and related groups have illegally doxed Texans and encouraged violent terrorism against fellow citizens," Paxton said in the news release. "These deranged traitors will face the full force of law. No stone will be left unturned, and no tool will be left unused."

Paxton provided no evidence for the accusations in the news release, and his office did not immediately respond to a request for further information.

In addition, Paxton said, merchandise sold by the group "promotes the death of ICE agents and encourages violence by mentally ill "transgender" individuals."

The Screwston Anti-Fascist Committee, formed in 2016, describes itself on its website as a group dedicated to "building resistance to fascism and the far-right in Houston." The organization's website, using what it says are social media posts, identifies people it claims are "local fascists," alleging they are associated with far-right and neo-Nazi groups in Texas.

The organization did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Paxton also accused members of Screwston of participating in a recent armed assault on an Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Alvarado, southwest of Dallas. The U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement Prairieland Detention Center came under gunfire during an attack by more than a dozen people on July 4. The shooting that day injured an Alvarado police officer.

## **8 Feb - The Process is the Punishment**

*Please read the latest from our comrade, Priscilla Grim.*

### **MORE:**

What can be said in a world filled with so much present sadness and rage? The silver lining? The people are winning the hearts and minds of each other, even as the screws of repression are tightened. After thousands of people in Minneapolis took to the streets, on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, ICE agents of the Department of Homeland Security murdered another person, Alex Pretti, on January 24<sup>th</sup>. Public outrage culminated in the softest of apologies from the federal government in an agreement to scale back the number of ICE agents in Minnesota.

Do not be fooled, as in Palestine, the border patrol and ICE in the United States insist on policies grounded in harm, death, and detention camps, brutalizing society every day.

I say the people are winning, because the federal government tried to smear murder victims Renee Good, Alex Pretti, and attempted murder victim Marimar Martinez, and it seems nearly anyone opposing ICE is being labeled as the unthinkable, while the public is soundly rejecting this notion.

Why?

Because all the mobile videos available, filmed by many residents, from every angle, plainly show the truth of every situation. Truth in the face of many lies of those in power, trying to manipulate us into disbelieving what we are witnessing with our own eyes.

The only video available of my 2023 arrest in the pitch-black Weelaunee Forest night is that of the body cam of the arresting officer. He taunted me about having "yu-gi-oh" cards in my bag (they were tarot cards) shortly before asking me if I spoke English.

Unlike Martinez, whose charges were dismissed quickly, I have languished for three years, healing from pre-trial incarceration, trying to find work, under surveillance, and dodging the many complications that arise when the most odious and political labels are applied.

The process is the punishment.

After another month of preparing job application packages, interviewing, and waiting in hope that the next chapter can start, with financial stability, healthcare, and a future roadmap, I sit here again, without a real idea of when the page will turn.

My lawyer, Xavier T. de Janon, of the People's Law Collective, reached out again to Georgia's DeKalb County in an attempt to have my many motions for dismissal and a speedy trial heard. We had hoped to have a date in January, but it did not happen. We now hope February will be the time for our day in court. One month before the three-year mark of my arrest.

If the state of Georgia would like, they can delay until five years after my arrest, 2028, at which point the charge is automatically dropped.

Unindicted for three (and possibly five) years on possibly the most damaging modern criminal charge is quite a punishment for camping in the woods in demand that the local community be heard on rejection of a militarized police center not be built in the neighborhood and that accountability be brought in the ending of Stop Cop City activist Tortugueta's life, shot fifty-seven times while sitting crosslegged in a tent with their hands up.

I am very lucky today to have been approached by a donor who has offered a matching grant to help pay my rent this month. I am only working one contract job presently. This one contract does not satisfy what I need for rent and all the other things I need to live, food, electricity, internet, a working mobile phone, among other things, like toiletries, medicines, and cleaning supplies. Please consider joining her in helping myself and the kid preserve our house.

I have updated my LinkedIn profile with a new recommendation from one of my most recent clients. Please consider connecting me with anyone looking for a contractor or staff member skilled in digital media production and promotion. This full recommendation is on LinkedIn.

In between hunting for positions and preparing application packages, I have channeled my depression and frustration into creative projects, and protecting my leg with stationary bike riding and dumbbell lifting. Kid cuddling and bonding with the greatest doggo ever remain at the core of my emotional life. I reread Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and am watching YouTube lectures as a self-directed study. The last section of the book always takes my breath away with Fanon linking mental illness in both the colonized and the colonizers.

One week before Alex Pretti was fatally shot, I worked with the artist D Wang Zhao to create an Instagram slide series unpacking and acknowledging the overwhelming feeling surrounding all of us as we witness our government further unraveling humanity.

Next month, I will have a co-authored story with October Krausch and micah herskind. The three of us connected over Twitter jubilation in 2024 when a plan to build a \$2 billion jail in Fulton County, Georgia, fell apart. Speaking with my daughter about this project, I admitted that I worked on the story because I wanted a piece that could be shown to city council members across the United States, warning about corporations working nationally who show up when questions arise about possibly building a new

municipal jail. They spin themselves as the "infrastructure experts" when their only expertise is on how to cage humans, not build humanity.

### **9 Feb - Action Alert re Mumia Abu-Jamal's Vision**

*As of February 2025, Mumia has yet to receive treatment for the diabetic retinopathy or aggressive glaucoma.*

#### **MORE:**

Although vision has been restored to some degree – despite the secondary cataracts being removed the underlying issues does not address his concerning eye diseases, which could rob him of the sight he has. We need the PA DOC and Wellpath to obtain ophthalmologists to treat the above eye conditions.

We ask the public to resume calls, emails and letters to SCI Mahanoy and the Secretary of the PA DOC this week. Operation hours are Monday thru Friday 9:00am to 4:00pm EST:

SCI Mahanoy Superintendent (Bernadette Mason) (570) 773-2158

- PA Department of Corrections Secretary (Dr. Laurel Harry) (717) 728-4109 or (717) 728-2573  
PA DOC Secretary – ra-crpdocsecretary@pa.gov
- Bernadette Mason SCI Mahanoy, 301 Grey Line Drive, Frackville PA 17931

*Basic Script: Hello, my name is ————— and I'm calling to request that Mumia Abu-Jamal DIN # 8335 needs to be seen and treated by specialists, who treat diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma. He also needs to be examined for new glasses, a heart healthy diet, filtered water and regular exercise, indoors and out.*

### **9 February- Prairieland Updates**

*Just Days Before the Federal Trial Begins, Defense Motions Seek to Suppress Evidence, Exclude Codefendant Statements at Trial*

#### **MORE:**

Days before a widely watched federal trial is set to begin in the Prairieland ICE protest case, U.S. District Court Judge Mark Pittman ordered pretrial motions hearings for Tuesday, February 10 and Thursday, February 12. Nine defendants—Savanna Batten, Zachary Evetts, Autumn Hill, Meagan Morris, Maricela Rueda, Daniel “Des” Rolando Sanchez Estrada, Benjamin “Champagne” Song, Elizabeth Soto, and Ines Soto—who were indicted in November on a variety of charges including riot, discharging a firearm, attempted murder, material support for terrorism, and conspiracy to conceal documents will start their federal trial next week with jury selection on Tuesday, February 17.

The Prairieland case stems from a July 4, 2025 noise demonstration in support of detained immigrants at the Prairieland ICE Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas.

On Tuesday, February 10 at 10am, Judge Pittman will hear arguments on a motion to suppress evidence against Prairieland defendant Elizabeth Soto, and a motion filed by Prairieland defendant Autumn Hill to exclude statements of codefendant Meagan Morris. A third motion filed on behalf of Daniel Rolando Sanchez Estrada, which is currently being withheld from the public record, will be heard on Thursday, February 12 at 2pm.

The motion to suppress argues that all physical and digital evidence, as well as any testimonies or statements, obtained as a result of the search of Elizabeth Soto's vehicle and residence in July and September should be excluded from trial. Elizabeth Soto's attorneys argue that evidence was seized and obtained from their client's residence and vehicle “without a valid search warrant and without probable cause or reasonable suspicion of criminal activity in violation of the Defendant's constitutional rights under the Fourth Amendment.”

The motion to exclude codefendant statements argues that Autumn Hill's Sixth Amendment rights would be violated if post-arrest statements made by her codefendant Meagan Morris are allowed to be admitted in the trial. The arguments are based in part on the Bruton rule, stemming from the 1968 case, *Bruton v. United States*, which guards against a non-testifying codefendant's confession that directly implicates the defendant being admitted at their joint trial.

Another pretrial motion filed in January, which has not been scheduled for hearing, aims to challenge the 'objection' procedure defined by Judge Pittman at a January 14 status conference. Judge Pittman issued an order limiting defense objections at trial to the single attorney questioning a government witness, thereby greatly limiting other defendants' abilities to appeal. The motion filed by Prairieland Defendant Ines Soto, on behalf of all nine defendants, asks the court to modify its order to "allow any defense counsel to lodge an objection with the proviso that other defense counsel not make duplicate objections," which would be more consistent with the federal rules of criminal procedure, according to Ines Soto's lawyers.

Prejudicial statements related to these cases have been made repeatedly by officials at the highest levels of government, undermining the defendants' ability to get a fair trial. The Trump administration has publicly claimed that the Prairieland case is the first legal case against Antifa, while Trump declared Antifa a domestic terrorist organization. On September 25, the White House released the National Security Presidential Memorandum-7 (NSPM-7), which ordered all federal law enforcement agencies to prioritize combating Antifa as a domestic terrorism threat. FBI director Kash Patel has called the Prairieland defendants "Antifa-aligned anarchist violent extremists," sharing Fox News coverage of the case on X.

Exorbitant bonds of up to \$15 million are being used in the State cases to imprison people who do not represent a flight risk or a danger to the community. Supporters believe that pretrial detention is being used by the government to hinder the defense and to maintain the dominant narrative in the media.

The Prairieland cases, involving both state and federal charges, stem from a noise demonstration in solidarity with detainees at the Prairieland ICE Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas, on July 4, 2025. After the protest, an officer with the Alvarado Police Department allegedly became involved in an exchange of gunfire soon after arrival. The officer allegedly sustained minor injuries, and was reportedly released from the hospital shortly afterwards. Authorities have still not provided hospital records to justify these claims, six months later. Alvarado police arrested ten people in the area, and a manhunt ensued in the subsequent days for another defendant. Eight more defendants were arrested in the days and weeks following the protest.

### **February 11<sup>th</sup> - Texas "Antifa" Terror Trial Takes On Tough Questions About Guns At Protests**

by Matt Sledge (*The Intercept*)

A group of activists gathered outside the Prairieland Detention Center near Dallas last July 4 with fireworks and plans to mount more than a polite protest.

They were there for less than an hour before things took a turn: A police officer was wounded by a gunshot.

Only one member of the group is accused of pulling a trigger, but 19 people went to jail on state and federal charges. Attorney General Pam Bondi labeled the defendants terrorists, and FBI Director Kash Patel bragged that it was the first time alleged antifa activists had been hit with terror charges.

Months later, the Trump administration recycled the label to smear Renee Good and Alex Pretti, Minneapolis residents who were shot and killed by federal immigration agents. They were supposedly dangerous left-wing agitators, in Pretti's case legally carrying what the government said was a "dangerous gun." The videos of Good and Pretti's killings disproved the administration's lies.

Unlike the Minneapolis shootings, the full events at Prairieland were not caught on video. Instead, a jury in federal court will hear evidence against nine defendants at a trial starting next week, which will serve as the

first major courtroom test of the Trump administration's push to label left-wing activists as domestic terrorists.

Court hearings in the case have taken place under heavy security, with police caravans whisking defendants to and from an art deco courthouse in downtown Fort Worth, Texas. Inside the courtroom, straight-backed officers maintain a perimeter.

The odds once looked long for the Prairieland group given the conservative jury pool and the seven defendants who pleaded guilty before trial, including several who are cooperating with the prosecution. The protests, crackdowns, and killings in Minneapolis, however, may have shifted perceptions of what happened seven months earlier in Texas.

"When they were crafting this indictment, they came up with that there is such a thing as a 'north Texas antifa cell,'" said Xavier de Janon, a lawyer representing one defendant in state court. "I wonder how they are going to make it stick when their attempts at framing Alex Pretti didn't work, fell flat on its face."

Jurors in the Prairieland case will be faced with key questions about protest in the Trump era. Are guns at protests a precaution or a provocation? Can the government succeed in using First Amendment-protected literature, such as anarchist zines, to win convictions? And how far can activists go when they believe their country is sliding into fascism?

## **Making Noise**

Federal investigators and a support committee for the defendants offered starkly different takes on the purpose of the late-night gathering at the Prairieland Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas.

For the feds, it was a planned ambush of law enforcement staged with guns, black garb, and bad intentions. Prosecutors described the defendants as "nine North Texas Antifa Cell operatives." Supporters of the defendants say the protest was an attempt to conduct a noise demonstration, of the sort that have since become common outside U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement buildings in places like Chicago and Minneapolis.

The Prairieland facility, which was built to hold 700 people, housed over 1,000 by the spring of 2025. The privately operated detention center was in the news again this week, when the family of a Palestinian woman detained there since last year on alleged visa violations said she had been hospitalized after weeks of deteriorating health.

On July 4 last year, a larger group of protesters had staged a traditional demonstration of the conditions inside the lockup. That night, a group of people who had conferred on an encrypted chat app arrived outside the detention center.

Around 10:37 p.m., the fireworks started flying, according to the testimony of an FBI agent at a pretrial hearing. Some of the group of a dozen or so slashed tires on cars in the parking lot near the detention center and sprayed "ICE Pig" on one car.

Guards called 911. Local police showed up. Within minutes, an Alvarado police officer who answered the call had been shot in the neck.

The U.S. attorney's office alleges that the shooter was Benjamin Song, a former Marine Corps reservist who was a fixture in local left-wing organizations such as the Socialist Rifle Association and Food Not Bombs.

At a preliminary hearing in September, prosecutors painted a dramatic picture of the shooting: Minutes after police arrived, Song allegedly shouted “get to the rifles” and let loose with an AR-15 that had a modified, binary trigger designed to fire at a fast rate.

At the same hearing, however, defense attorneys poked holes in the government’s narrative that the shooting had been planned.

Prosecutors’ case that the group wanted to commit violence depends heavily on messages that members of the group allegedly sent through the encrypted messaging app, Signal, or at an in-person “gear check” before the action.

“I’m not getting arrested,” Song allegedly said at one point.

Defense attorneys objected to the idea that such ominous-sounding statements were proof that the group planned an attack.

Under questioning from a defense attorney, an FBI agent acknowledged that no one had talked about killing police that night in the Signal group. Meanwhile, in addition to guns and black clothes, the protesters brought bullhorns.

One defense attorney asked an FBI agent on the case whether the group’s members might have thought they needed guns for self-defense from police.

“A person peacefully protesting, I would say there’s no risk to be killed by law enforcement,” said the agent, Clark Wiethorn.

When asked whether he would acknowledge that at least some of the protesters had no plans to commit violence, the agent pushed back.

“I would say every person out there had the knowledge of the risk of violence,” Wiethorn said.

While the government has portrayed the group as a disciplined team of antifa attackers, the messages show members of the group squabbling.

“All this stuff was kind of ad hoc,” said Patrick McLain, the attorney for defendant Zachary Evetts. “When I’m reading these texts, they were just all over the place, and they’re getting into stupid arguments with each other.”

### **Casting a Wide Dragnet**

Song, the former Marine accused of shooting the officer, managed to escape a massive police response that night. According to testimony at a pretrial hearing, they hid in brush for 24 hours before supporters whisked them away.

Shawn Smith, an assistant U.S. attorney, said at the hearing that the fact that so many people were willing to help Song “speaks to the kind of personality of Mr. Song and what he can motivate.” At another point, he likened Song to a cult leader.

In the weeks that followed, investigators arrested and charged people with far looser connections to the action at Prairieland.

One of them was Dario Sanchez, a soft-spoken teacher who lives in a Dallas suburb. He was at home on the morning of July 15 when officers ripped open his door and tossed flashbangs to gain entrance.

In an interview with *The Intercept*, Sanchez said he was taken away in handcuffs. Law enforcement attempted to question him in a car, warning him that he faced decades in prison if he did not cooperate. Sanchez said he told his interrogators that he knew nothing about the July 4 protest — but that did not stop them from arresting him.

The allegations, Sanchez would later learn, centered on the claim that he purposefully booted a defendant accused of helping Song out of a Discord group chat operated by the Socialist Rifle Association.

Sanchez was arrested twice more, once when he was rearrested on a new charge, and another time on an alleged probation violation.

He faces only state charges in Johnson County, Texas, and he plans to take his case to a trial that has been set for April, after the federal proceeding is over.

Law enforcement has delved deep into messages among the protesters that night that appear to show allegiance to antifascism.

To boost their case against the defendants, the government has secured the services of a witness who works at a right-wing think tank, the Center for Security Policy, that was founded by Islamophobic conspiracy theorist Frank Gaffney.

Prosecutors also highlighted the pamphlets and zines that two of the defendants were publishing from a garage printing press, and the membership of some defendants in a local leftist reading group, the Emma Goldman Book Club.

The titles the government spotlighted at the September hearing include “Safer in the Front,” “Our Enemies in Yellow,” and “Why Anarchy.”

One defendant faces charges solely for ferrying such materials from one residence to another at the request of his wife, which advocates say essentially criminalizes the possession of materials protected by free speech.

“I think what they’re going to be poring through in those things is any writings in there that advocate violence or harm, and somehow they are going to try to stretch that out,” McLain said. “They are really stretching.”

Judging by the Signal messages obtained by the government, many of the Prairieland defendants self-consciously distanced themselves from more mainstream protesters. Still, the case could have implications beyond the Dallas-Fort Worth anarchist and socialist scenes — even though at the September court hearing, a prosecutor appeared to express surprise at schisms on the left.

“They actually don’t like these liberal protesters who are out there just holding signs?” Shawn Smith, the prosecutor, asked the FBI agent, who agreed with him.

The Trump administration cited Prairieland as part of a supposed wave of antifascist terrorism backed or encouraged by nonprofits and Democrats. In his National Security Presidential Memorandum-7, or NSPM-7, issued in September, Trump cited both the assassination of Charlie Kirk and the Prairieland action as proof of a wave of organized political violence from the left.

“A new law enforcement strategy that investigates all participants in these criminal and terroristic conspiracies — including the organized structures, networks, entities, organizations, funding sources, and predicate actions behind them — is required,” Trump said.

Although many of the Prairieland defendants had already been arrested by the time NSPM-7 was issued, it was only in October that the government obtained its first indictment charging some of them with material support of terrorism.

Sanchez believes prosecutors have pursued the case so aggressively because of a “weird antifa delusion.”

“These people can’t imagine that someone would care about someone else, really,” Sanchez said. “Why the hell would a bunch of people show up to protest outside an ICE detention center? Why would anyone care about these people? They can’t fathom that people would have that amount of empathy, and so in their minds, they have to cook up the idea that this has to be some kind of weird conspiracy.”

### **February 12<sup>th</sup> - Nine Defendants Proceed to Federal Trial Next Week in Widely Watched Prairieland ICE Detention Center Protest Case**

Nine defendants will proceed to federal trial next week in a widely watched case that stems from a July 4, 2025 noise demonstration in support of detained immigrants at the Prairieland ICE Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas. Jury selection is scheduled to begin on Tuesday, February 17, followed by the trial which is expected to last at least three weeks. Defendants Savanna Batten, Zachary Evetts, Autumn Hill, Meagan Morris, Maricela Rueda, Daniel “Des” Rolando Sanchez Estrada, Benjamin “Champagne” Song, Elizabeth Soto, and Ines Soto were indicted in November on a variety of charges including riot, discharging a firearm, attempted murder, material support for terrorism, and conspiracy to conceal documents.

A press conference will be held at the southeast corner of Burke Burnett Park, across the street from the courthouse, on Tuesday, February 17 at 8:30am.

Given the level of public interest in the Prairieland case, supporters are alarmed at how restricted public access to the trial will be, in addition to a ban on recording the proceedings. Electronic devices, including phones, computers, and any audio-visual equipment, are expressly prohibited from the Fort Worth courthouse in the Northern District of Texas. In addition, presiding U.S. District Court Judge Mark Pittman said at a status conference held in January that there would be no courtroom overflow area or any accommodations made for members of the public beyond the limited space inside the courtroom. There is also no indication that the trial will be livestreamed for public viewing.

“Given the national significance of the Prairieland case, media and public access to the trial is of utmost importance and foundational to democratic justice,” said Suzanne Adely, President of the National Lawyers Guild. “Barring such access not only limits transparency, but also impugns the court’s accountability and the integrity of the judicial system more broadly.” The DFW Support Committee issued a statement in January underscoring the significance of ensuring a fair trial. “The fate of the defendants—and the result of this trial—will have enormous impacts on the legal terrain for those resisting ICE terror and the course of the rising authoritarianism in the U.S.,” read the statement. “As such, the fairness of this trial should be an acute concern for all.”

All nine trial defendants were recently moved into Tarrant County Jail, where they are being held up to and during trial. Tarrant County Jail is notorious for its neglect and abuse of prisoners held there, with more than 70 deaths since 2017, and at least five last year alone. “Our loved ones have been moved to Tarrant County Jail, put in ‘solitary confinement,’ and had their legal paperwork confiscated a week before trial,” said Cynthia Lokey, the mother of Prairieland defendant Savanna Batten. “The state has also designated the defendants as aggressive and dangerous, which has meant they are restrained and confined in wheelchairs when being transported, brought to court in shackles, with a federal agent placed behind each defendant,” continued Lokey. “It’s all aimed at breaking the defendants and making it appear they are far more dangerous than they actually are, as they approach the trial of their lives.”

Prejudicial statements related to these cases have been made repeatedly by officials at the highest levels of government, undermining the defendants’ ability to get a fair trial. The Trump administration has publicly claimed that the Prairieland case is the first legal case against Antifa, while Trump declared Antifa a

domestic terrorist organization. On September 25, the White House released the National Security Presidential Memorandum-7 (NSPM-7), which ordered all federal law enforcement agencies to prioritize combating Antifa as a domestic terrorism threat. FBI director Kash Patel has called the Prairieland defendants “Antifa-aligned anarchist violent extremists,” sharing Fox News coverage of the case on X.

Yet, supporters are refuting the claims of terrorism and planned violence. “The Prairieland case is a protest case involving people expressing solidarity with detained immigrants,” said Amber Lowrey, sister of defendant Savanna Batten. “The federal government is trying to reframe protest activity as terrorism, and we’re seeing this attempted across the country, in Chicago, Minneapolis, Portland, and now here in Dallas-Fort Worth.”

The nine federal defendants are also charged in a State case, along with eight additional defendants, forcing them to fight their State and federal charges concurrently. Seven federal defendants pleaded guilty to federal charges in November 2025 and are awaiting sentencing.

Exorbitant bonds of up to \$15 million are being used in the State cases to imprison people who do not represent a flight risk or a danger to the community. Supporters believe that pretrial detention is being used by the government to hinder the defense and to maintain the dominant narrative in the media.

The Prairieland cases, involving both state and federal charges, stem from a noise demonstration in solidarity with detainees at the Prairieland ICE Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas, on July 4, 2025. After the protest, an officer with the Alvarado Police Department allegedly became involved in an exchange of gunfire soon after arrival. The officer allegedly sustained minor injuries, and was reportedly released from the hospital shortly afterwards. Authorities have still not provided hospital records to justify these claims, seven months later. Alvarado police arrested ten people in the area, and a manhunt ensued in the subsequent days for another defendant. Eight more defendants were arrested in the days and weeks following the protest.

### **10 Feb - The government-sanctioned persecution of Leqaa Kordia**

*The last Columbia University protester's hospitalization and subsequent disappearance are just the latest bad omens amid worsening conditions in confinement.*

#### **MORE:**

by Sam Judy (*Mondoweiss*)

As her time in confinement approaches a full year, Columbia protester and Palestinian human rights advocate Leqaa Kordia, 33, was missing in ICE custody for over 72 hours following a medical episode last Friday.

On February 6, Kordia was hospitalized following a seizure, potentially caused by head trauma in the detention center bathroom. It took over 24 hours for Kordia's team to confirm she was hospitalized. Another two days later, her location was disclosed to a Dallas Morning News reporter without condition, despite DHS citing "security risks" in sharing the location of the hospital with lawyers and family.

"ICE refused to provide insight into where she was being held, what the underlying condition was, what the prognosis was, and they similarly, didn't tell the family anything either. So you can imagine getting a message that your loved one just had a seizure in ICE custody, and the terror and panic that you would feel as a result of that. And so it was an incredibly stressful and scary 72 hours for her family," Travis Fife of Texas Civil Rights Project and Kordia's team said to *Mondoweiss* following her return to detention.

*"This was not a one-time freak medical accident. This was the culmination of 11 months of daily deprivation while Leqaa has been unconstitutionally confined in ICE custody."*

Travis Fife, Texas Civil Rights Project

Prior to her hospitalization, Kordia reported several symptoms, including a fever, dizziness, and brain fog, likely due to malnutrition. Hamzah Abushaban, Kordia's cousin visiting Dallas from his home in Miami, Florida, met with Kordia alone on the prior Sunday and described her as "malnourished" and looking "extremely sick."

In an interview with *Mondoweiss*, Abushaban said that his cousin's outspoken nature and advocacy for others have led to worse treatment over time.

"She's a very selfless person," Abushaban said. "Whenever there's an injustice, she would say 'this is wrong,' whether it's food-related, access to the [computer] tablets, she would speak up, even if it's not on herself and for someone else. It's almost like the very next day, there's something negative that happens to her specifically...I do think there's a bit of retaliation going on there."

Prairieland Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas, where Kordia has been since shortly after DHS arrested her on March 13, 2025, has reportedly been over capacity with plumbing issues and unsanitary food. She has suffered skin rashes, sickness, and is experiencing symptoms of malnourishment while inside. Kordia has additionally been refused her religious accommodations as a Muslim woman and has stated that roaches are infesting dormitory areas.

DHS/ICE did not respond to requests for comment.

### **Increasing isolation**

Prior to her disappearance, Kordia was refused a visitation with a state representative when Abushaban, accompanied Rep. Salam Bhojani, D-Texas 92, to Prairieland Detention Center on Friday, January 30. Upon arrival, Alvarado police, including its chief, were waiting to greet them with up to eight vehicles in the parking lot. After questioning the two, the police stated that visits to the detention center were indefinitely cancelled, with no explanation. Kordia, who was sick with the flu, was told at the same time that visits were cancelled, though she says some visits were still occurring. Detention staff told Kordia that there was a lockdown due to "over 200 protesters outside" at the time. In reality, there were fewer than ten people outside, all of whom were family or members of Kordia's or Bhojani's teams.

Kordia has been in confinement for over 330 days. She currently awaits a decision on a habeas petition filed in mid-September, as well as a final decision on her bond, which a judge already ordered prior to a DHS appeal. Kordia's team, which is jointly led by Texas Civil Rights Project, Muslim Advocates, and CLEAR, held a press conference following the denial of her visitation.

*"It's like the Japanese internment camps, people from one country being targeted. Leqaa's religion and [her connection to] Palestine... it's why she's being targeted. So that's obviously not fair, and that's not something that we should accept. If one person is targeted, any one of us can be targeted."*

Texas State Representative Salman Bhojani to *Mondoweiss* on the U.S. government's targeting of Leqaa Kordia.

Rep. Bhojani is one of many lawmakers across the state and federal levels calling for Kordia's release, as more than thirty others have spoken out against her continued detention in letters authored by Rep. Cory Booker and Rep. Bhojani himself.

In Kordia's absence, her family has experienced greater challenges, including those related to care taking duties for her disabled brother and the financial support she provided through her job as a waitress.

"We take our friends and family sometimes for granted," Abushaban said. "But you remove such a quiet individual in society like Leqaa just out of the equation, and it's a huge impact."

### **Targeted by the U.S. government**

Abushaban emphasized the government's targeting of Kordia through recounting the brief nationwide manhunt last March when police came to his family's residence in Miami looking for her.

"I'm in the car with my manager, and a 201 number keeps calling. I decline, literally. Decline, decline, decline. And my manager is like, 'Dude, I don't think that's a spam call. You should answer it,' so I answer it. No, 'Hi, this is so and so.' It's like, 'Do you know a Leckay Carda?' And I'm like, 'You got the wrong number, dude.' He just hangs up," Abushaban said.

"After, I get the notification that someone's at my door. And I look at the camera, and there's just a bunch of guys in regular clothes, kind of like tactical clothes, jeans, nothing that says 'police,' except for these really big dog tags. My dad's not a criminal, I'm not a criminal, my mom's not a criminal. I live with my little brother, and my little sister was in med school. We're all like, under the radar, nothing, nothing crazy. I'm like, why are there four guys knocking on my door at eight o'clock at night? So it was a nationwide manhunt."

While agents were visiting Kordia's mother in New Jersey as well, DHS officers were dispatched locally in Miami to determine whether the family was harboring Kordia or was aware of her location. After Kordia's arrest, the family's bank account was briefly frozen due to payments for family members in Palestine. Abushaban says that only the threat of legal action allowed him renewed access to the accounts.

*"She just wants to fight for her own freedom alongside Palestine's freedom. And to this day, there's that symbiotic fight. She knows that her small win of getting out or bringing attention to this case is also a win for Palestine's freedom eventually. I think that's what's kind of keeping her a little sane, and that's top of mind for her... She never really saw herself as an activist. She just wants us to have the same basic human rights everyone in the world deserves."*

Hamzah Abushaban, Leqaa Kordia's cousin, on her status as a political prisoner.

When officers stated that "New York" was "looking for her," Abushaban assumed Kordia missed a court date for a minor crime related to protesting. Then the family found out it was about her immigration status. "And that's when it was very evident, very clear, that the only crime she committed was being Palestinian and speaking of Palestine," said Abushaban.

Fife says that the government is "absolutely and unequivocally" targeting Kordia and has pointed to state utilization of Zionist doxxing sites as part of a concerted effort to track individuals supportive of Palestine, including Kordia specifically.

"Not only did DHS tweet about her and say that she was anti-American, they also admitted that – like top level DHS officials specified in a case in Massachusetts – they rely on websites like Betar and other Zionist propaganda sites to identify people who were sympathetic to the Palestinian cause." "It's never been more urgent to call for her release"

Kordia's family and legal team have leveraged their outrage over her recent health scare and disappearance for a renewed and continued call for her release. In a statement released on February 9 following Kordia's return to detention, Abushaban emphasizes the critical state that Kordia's case is in.

"While we are relieved that Leqaa is out of the hospital, we still have no idea what her medical condition is and what happened to her for the last 3 days. Now she is forced back to the nightmarish conditions of ICE detention that put her in the hospital. It has never been more urgent to call for her release," Abushaban said on behalf of the family.

Sadaf Hasan, another member of Kordia's legal team, said her disappearance was "straight from ICE's playbook" to "isolate, conceal, and punish whomever it disfavors." Fife said it "reflects both the inhumanity of Leqaa's experience in detention, but also the emotional trauma of family separation in custody."

Concerns for Kordia's health remain as pressing as ever. Even in an interview days before Kordia's hospitalization, Fife described her health as his principal concern. Though Fife anticipated challenges coming later with the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan, which is expected to start around February 18.

"One of my fears is that, you know, is that as we enter Ramadan, she's already suffering from malnutrition. How is she gonna exercise her faith," Fife told *Mondoweiss*. "Even without keeping to the more regimented fasting schedule Ramadan requires, she's struggling so intensely."

Despite bond rulings to free Kordia still shackled by DHS appeals, Kordia's habeas case remains in play as her team states the judge could still order Leqaa's release at any time.

"Answering phone calls, answering press requests for comment. You know, dealing with the public pressure, that is an added layer," Fife said. "The intensity with which immigration enforcement has increased has obviously been alarming and scary. But this huge public opposition to it, I think, has really made people question some foundational assumptions about the amount of power we've given DHS and ICE specifically as a sub-agency of DHS."

## **12 Feb - FBI Counterterrorism Investigating Environmental Non-Profit**

*The visit suggests a possible FBI probe into Extinction Rebellion NYC as the Trump administration increases surveillance of activist groups.*

### **MORE:**

by Jacqueline Sweet (*The Intercept*)

Federal Bureau of Investigation agents, at least one of whom works on counterterrorism, went to the home of a former member of a climate activism group for questioning last week, potentially signaling a new escalation in the Trump administration's promise to criminalize nonprofits and activist groups as domestic terrorists.

Two FBI agents, one from New York's Joint Terrorism Task Force, told a former member of Extinction Rebellion NYC they wanted to ask him about the group at his home upstate on Friday, an attorney for the group told *The Intercept*. The visit followed a prior attempt to reach him at his old address.

The FBI's apparent probe of Extinction Rebellion NYC comes as the Justice Department ramps up its surveillance of activists protesting immigration enforcement and the Trump administration creates secret lists of domestic enemies under Trump's National Security Presidential Memorandum 7, or NSPM-7.

"I believe this to be a significant escalation of the criminal legal system against XR and find it very troubling," said Ron Kuby, the Extinction Rebellion attorney. "This is usually the way we find out an actual investigation is underway and is often followed by other visits and other actions."

The former Extinction Rebellion member, who asked to remain anonymous out of fear for his safety, said that the visit came after a phone call in January from a special agent that he assumed was a scam.

"I was skeptical the phone call was really from the FBI, but after I declined to speak with the agent, she said that she was standing outside my door," he said. She was actually at the activist's former address, which he said made him additionally dubious. But last week, when the agents showed up at his current address, he said he saw the agent's business card through his door.

Kuby confirmed that the agent's business card information corresponded to a current member of the FBI's New York Joint Terrorism Task Force. A text message from the agent, reviewed by *The Intercept*, shows she identified herself and stated that she was at the former member's house to question him about Extinction Rebellion. Her name, title, and phone number match a known special agent on the task force, according to court records.

Reached by *The Intercept*, a public affairs officer for the New York FBI field office said, “Per longstanding DOJ policy, we cannot confirm or deny the existence or nonexistence of any investigation.”

The DOJ did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Extinction Rebellion NYC is a chapter of a loose international climate justice movement that does highly public direct actions, like an April Earth Day spray-painting over the presidential seal inside Trump Tower in Manhattan. Kuby said none of the group’s actions are violent or rise above the level of misdemeanors, and would not typically be of interest to federal counterterrorism investigators.

The former member said he had not been involved in any Extinction Rebellion actions in two years and hadn’t participated in anything that he thought would send the FBI to his door.

“All of our actions are incredibly public,” he said. He recalled that the agent said she had some questions about Extinction Rebellion NYC, and that he wasn’t in any trouble, before the activist declined to speak and closed his door.

Why the FBI’s counterterrorism task force would investigate Extinction Rebellion is unknown, Kuby said.

“Often, the FBI starts with former members of a group, or less central people, to begin investigations,” Kuby said. “The fact that they repeatedly pursued this member, and traveled hundreds of miles from his old address in NYC – this suggests a real investigative effort.”

Trump’s September presidential memorandum, dubbed NSPM-7, called for the National Joint Terrorism Task Force and its local offices to investigate a broad spectrum of progressive groups and donors for “anti-fascism” beliefs.

A November FBI internal report obtained by *The Guardian* revealed that there were multiple active FBI investigations related to NSPM-7 in 27 locations, including New York, where the agent investigating Extinction Rebellion works. Trump’s directive instructed Joint Terrorism Task Forces to proactively investigate groups and activists with vague language that civil liberty watchdogs say could easily criminalize protected speech and protest.

FBI agents also visited several activists affiliated with Extinction Rebellion and other climate groups in the Boston area last March, according to a local news report. The reasons for those visits remain unclear, and the activists involved said nothing came of them. The FBI’s Boston Division declined to comment to the press at the time.

After Extinction Rebellion NYC members protested New York Democratic Rep. Tom Suozzi’s town hall at a Long Island synagogue last month, objecting to his vote to increase ICE funding, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Harmeet Dhillon posted on X that she would be investigating the protest to see “whether federal law has been broken.”

None of the activists involved in the Suozzi protest have been contacted by federal investigators, representatives for the group told *The Intercept*. Suozzi did not reply to messages.

In 2023, then-Florida Senator and current Secretary of State Marco Rubio wrote a letter to then-FBI Director Christopher Wray and DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas asking them to bar members of Extinction Rebellion in the U.K. from the U.S. in response to a report that the group planned to protest at federal properties.

“Among other things, the group will allegedly block highways and disrupt federal properties, but violence and terrorist acts cannot be discounted given the group’s past threats,” Rubio wrote in the 2023 letter. He also used similar language in proposed legislation against “antifa” protests in 2022.

Nate Smith, an Extinction Rebellion activist who took part in the Suozzi protest, objected to characterizations of the group’s activism as terrorism.

“Is petitioning an elected official at a public event what makes America great, or a federal offense?” Smith said. “I get if you don’t like it. That’s half the point, but ‘terrorism’?”

There have also been scattered reports of FBI agents visiting anti-ICE protesters around the country. While the FBI’s interest in Extinction Rebellion remains unclear, the group pointed to Trump’s NSPM-7 directive.

“We did not anticipate that we would be among the first groups of those who speak inconveniently to be targeted,” Extinction Rebellion NYC said in a public statement. “We did not anticipate the level of capitulation from our country’s hallowed institutions and political opposition.”

## **12 Feb - ICE Masks Up in More Ways Than One**

*Feds could be in your group chat*

### **MORE:**

by Ken Klippenstein

Homeland security is increasing the use of undercover techniques to infiltrate and interact with social media users in order to collect intelligence and target individuals, documents leaked to me reveal.

The new program, called “masked engagement,” allows homeland security officers to assume false identities and interact with users—friending them, joining closed groups, and gaining access to otherwise private postings, photographs, friend lists and more.

A senior Department of Homeland Security official tells me that over 6,500 field agents and intelligence operatives can use the new tool, a significant increase explicitly linked to more intense monitoring of American citizens.

For years, homeland security has been conducting what it calls “Open Source Intelligence” (OSINT) collection, using social media to enhance general “operational awareness” and for investigating targets in a criminal, civil, or administrative context. Each DHS component defines the level of use, which were previously limited to the following practices (defined below):

“overt engagement”

“overt research,”

“overt monitoring,”

“masked monitoring,”

“undercover engagement”

Masked monitoring allows officers at agencies like ICE and Border Patrol to use alias accounts to passively observe public online activity. Crucially, this level of monitoring bars DHS representatives from interacting with other users directly. Under masked monitoring, officers are not allowed to ask an admin for entry into a private group or to “friend” a target to see non-public posts.

But with masked engagement (separate from masked monitoring), that firewall has now been dismantled. The only restriction imposed on masked engagement is that DHS officers not the threshold of “substantive engagement”—a term the rules leave conveniently ill-defined.

The new practice of masked engagement allows for operations where a federal government employee or contractor uses fake identities or credentials that conceal their official affiliation. It is a step down from “undercover engagement,” a highly controlled status that is only allowed on a limited and intermittent basis.

A Customs and Border Protection document I obtained, titled “Component Plan for Operational Use of Social Media,” defines the shift:

*“The Operational Use of Social Media using identities or credentials that...conceal a government affiliation, to engage with other users on a limited basis for the purpose of accessing Publicly Available Information...For example, Masked Engagement would include logging in to social media and joining a group, or friending, liking, or following an individual.”*

By labeling this a “middle ground” between monitoring and full-blown undercover work, the DHS allows agents to infiltrate private digital spaces without the rigorous internal approvals and legal checks required for a formal undercover “sting.”

“CBP’s expansion into what they’re calling ‘masked engagement’ is cause for real concern, Rachel Levinson-Waldman, Director of the Brennan Center’s Liberty and National Security Program, told me when reached for comment.

She added: “this new capability is being shoehorned in one step below undercover engagement (which already allows for a lot of overreach), it appears CBP believes that friending someone, following them, or joining a group is not as invasive as directly engaging or interacting with individuals.”

Levinson-Waldman called the policy is “insidious” because it might seem to the federal government that it is not particularly invasive, but could yield huge amounts of information about one’s social network and preferences. And all of this would be happening imperceptibly to anyone in a group chat, unaware that the information is even being shared.

“In addition, doing so through an alias account—an account that doesn’t reveal the user’s CBP affiliation, and pretends to be someone else—will weaken trust in government and weaken the trust that is critical to building community both online and off,” she added.

When I pressed the DHS’s spokesperson for specifics like when masked engagement was first adopted and how it defines the restriction on “substantive engagement,” they retreated into the administration’s usual swaggering non-response.

“DHS has utilized its Congressionally directed undercover authorities to root out child molesters and predators for years,” the DHS spokesperson (no name included—fitting, I suppose, for a story about masking) told me in an email. “We will continue using every tool at our disposal to protect the American people as our agents and officers Make America Safe Again.”

The “tools” they’re referring to are increasingly sophisticated. The document that first flagged “masked engagement” for me was produced by Silo, a cloud-based web isolation platform created by Authentic8.

Silo is like a digital mask for federal agents operating on social media. It allows them to browse the web from an “air-gapped” remote server, masking their government IP addresses and spoofing their hardware profiles. To a Facebook admin or a Signal group moderator, the federal agent appears as a local user with a standard smartphone. This technical capability, called “managed attribution,” ensures that while the agent is “engaging” with you, the government’s digital footprint is completely invisible.

According to documents I’ve reviewed, homeland security is using other commercial and proprietary apps and software to conduct managed attribution monitoring, with codenames like GOST, Shadow Dragon, Gecko, Jemini, Axis, and Creepy, which has to be my favorite.

Creepy!

Sources tell me that DHS has already used masked engagement to infiltrate pro-Palestinian groups in the U.S. and to building databases of potential transnational criminals amongst Mexican and Mexican-American communities.

“Open source monitoring has become so ubiquitous that we even have databases of identities used by the department to track our own online engagements,” the senior DHS official also told me.

“Yes, we have safeguards against violating people’s privacy, but masked engagement is just the first step in breaching people’s privacy settings in ways that they are not even aware of.”

### **18 Feb - Eyes on the Prize III: We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest 1977 – 2015**

**WHAT:** Film screening

**WHEN:** 6:30pm, Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup>

**WHERE:** May Day Space - 176 Saint Nicholas Avenue, Brooklyn

**COST:** FREE

**MORE:**

Join us, in part of RAPP’s Black History Month Series, for a very special screening of Eyes on the Prize III: Those Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest 1977-2015 – Episode 2, TRAPPED (2025), directed by Samantha Knowles. Following the screening will be a conversation with Samantha and RAPP’s Director Jose Saldana, moderated by Christina Knowles.

Together, we’ll explore the history of incarceration and its devastating and enduring impact on Black communities—particularly in New York State. The discussion will connect the film to the broader legacy of racialized punishment, RESISTANCE, survival, and how incarceration as well as the system that oppresses Black communities has shaped Black life, families, and movements for liberation.

The screening and conversation is free, but we always accept donations to keep our work going. If you are not Black and coming to learn, consider donating. Wine, snacks, and MERCH will be available! All are welcome.

Eyes On The Prize III: We Who Believe In Freedom Cannot Rest 1977-2015 is inspired by Henry Hampton’s documentary Eyes On The Prize: America’s Civil Rights Movement. It illuminates the stories of people and communities who continue to work for equity and racial justice since the birth of the American Civil Rights Movement. Episode 2, TRAPPED, takes a look into the history of how public defenders and grassroots organizers raise sound the alarm, to expose how the criminal legal system has systematically targeted, destabilized, and devastated Black communities—while fighting to interrupt its violence and demand accountability.

### **19 Feb - Common Threads: A Solidarity Craft Circle**

**WHAT:** Mending workshop / DIY craft night

**WHEN:** 6:00pm, Thursday, February 19<sup>th</sup>

**WHERE:** Ridgewood Commons, 585 Woodward Avenue, Queens

**COST:** FREE (Donations appreciated)

**MORE:**

Bring your own materials (some scrap fabrics available). Machines available for use

Knit-Mend-Crochet-Sew-Quilt-Embroidery-Cross Stitch-Needle Felt-Sashiko-Lace

All crafts and skill levels welcome. Ridgewood Commons events are donation based, no one turned away for lack of funds.

### **21 Feb - Saxapahaw Prison Books Packing Party**

**WHAT:** Book packing

**WHEN:** 4:00pm, Saturday, February 21<sup>st</sup> (and every other Saturday)

**WHERE:** P.I.T. - 411 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Brooklyn

**COST:** FREE

**MORE:**

Join Saxapahaw Prison Books to get packages of books loaded up and sent out to prisoners.

### **28 Feb - Honoring Warriors and Political Prisoners of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army**

**WHAT:** Panel discussion

**WHEN:** 5:00pm, Saturday, February 28<sup>th</sup>

**WHERE:** Medgar Evers college - 1650 Bedford Avenue (Room C13), Brooklyn

**COST:** FREE

**MORE:**

Black History Month: Honoring Warriors and Political Prisoners of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army will be a panel discussion with current and former BPP/BLA Political Prisoners and their allies, including Mumia Abu-Jamal, Jalil Muntaqim, and Kwame “Beans” Shakur. Join NYC Jericho for an important conversation on resistance to racism and fascism.