



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for March 19th

2 Mar - Why Chelsea Manning Is Fighting Her Grand Jury Subpoena

Chelsea Manning has been jailed for refusing to cooperate with a federal grand jury. We are including a selection of articles—intentionally leaving out those by the Washington Post, New York Times, and an assortment of explicitly right wing attack pieces, to provide context leading up to and including her refusal to cooperate and subsequent arrest.

MORE:

by Natasha Lennard (*The intercept*)

Chelsea Manning was subpoenaed to appear before a federal grand jury and give testimony on March 5. The whistleblower filed a motion to quash the subpoena. As such, Manning risks incarceration under the coercive operations of the federal grand jury system.

For Manning, the threat of further imprisonment is a particularly brutal one. Beginning in 2010, she was arrested, court-martialed, imprisoned, and tortured for exposing some of the worst crimes and brutalities of the Iraq and Afghan wars. She was released in 2017.

Given the secrecy of federal grand jury procedures, we can't know with any certainty to which potential case the subpoena pertains, or what Manning would be asked. But since it was issued in the Eastern District of Virginia, we can make the informed speculation that it relates to inadvertently disclosed charges filed under seal against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange in that same district.

The *New York Times* reported that “there were multiple reasons to believe that the subpoena is related to the investigation of Mr. Assange,” including the district where the subpoena was issued and the assistant United States attorney that requested the subpoena, who is tied to the Assange prosecution. Another Assange associate, David House, told the *Washington Post* that he testified before the grand jury as well. “It was all related to disclosures around the war logs,” House said, a reference to the Iraq war documents that Manning released and Wikileaks published.

Manning's decision to fight her subpoena, however, is not a question of protecting Assange, nor obstructing valid government investigations into federal crimes. Her challenge is an act of resistance against government repression and in defense of a free press.

It should go without saying that were the grand jury related to the prosecution of Assange for revealing government secrets, this would have profound implications for the First Amendment and the media, which the Trump administration has consistently demonized and threatened.

The decision to subpoena Manning in itself should be seen as a punitive act from a hostile administration. President Donald Trump himself has made clear his desire to see the whistleblower behind bars. Within the first days of his presidency, Trump tweeted that Manning was an “Ungrateful TRAITOR” who “should never have been released from prison.” With a grand jury subpoena, the government has found a way to expose the whistleblower to re-incarceration.

“I object strenuously to this subpoena, and to the grand jury process in general,” said Manning in a brief statement released by her support committee. “We've seen this power abused countless times to target political speech. I have nothing to contribute to this case and I resent being forced to endanger myself by participating in this predatory practice.”

Federal grand juries are some of the blackest boxes in the judicial system. Closed to the press, the public, and even attorneys for those who have been subpoenaed, the process is ripe for nefarious state use. For decades, federal grand juries have been used to investigate and intimidate activist communities — from the late-19th-century labor movements, to the Puerto Rican Independence Movement and black liberationists of the last century, to environmentalists, anarchists, and indigenous-rights fighters more recently.

Prosecutors and other authorities use grand juries to map out political affiliations while sowing paranoia and discord. It is hard to see the subpoenaing of Manning, who gave exhaustive testimony at her court-martial and took full personal responsibility for her leaks, as anything but punitive.

The consequences for grand jury resistance are serious. Individuals who refuse to cooperate can be held in civil contempt by a judge and imprisoned for up to 18 months, the length of the grand jury. It's the sort of incarceration, like lengthy pretrial detentions, that give lie to the notion that our justice system runs on due process and just punishment. Facing no criminal charges, a witness should not, by law, be punitively imprisoned for refusal to comply. Yet that's exactly how resisting a grand jury can play out.

Grand-jury resisters are jailed for contempt on the explicit grounds of coercion: If they agree to talk, they're released; or if it can be evidenced that they will never talk and the coercive grounds for imprisonment are undermined, the jailing is shown to be purely punitive, and a judge can be compelled to order their release.

“While the federal grand jury purports to be a simple mechanism for investigating criminal offenses,” civil rights attorney Moira Meltzer-Cohen, who is representing Manning in her effort to quash the subpoena, told the *Intercept*, “it can be — and historically has been — used by prosecutors to gather intelligence to which they are not entitled, for example about lawful and constitutionally protected political activity.”

There's a grim irony, particularly in Manning's case, that the purported purpose of a federal grand jury is to act as a safeguard from the improper motivations of government. We need not support Assange personally to understand that his prosecution for publishing Manning's leaks would expose news organs who also published the documents — like the *Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Times* — to the same liability. The precedent that could be set for state repression of journalism is beyond troubling.

Manning's challenge to the grand jury subpoena thus suggests that, as shown during her court martial, the whistleblower understands the monumental First Amendment issues at stake in the prosecution of those who would expose government wrongdoing.

“Chelsea gave voluminous testimony during her court martial. She has stood by the truth of her prior statements, and there is no legitimate purpose to having her rehash them before a hostile grand jury,” said Manning's support committee, ChelseaResists, in a statement. “By employing these tactics against her, the government is using a roundabout method to further punish Chelsea for her past actions, adding to the seven years of trauma, imprisonment and torture she has already endured.”

The fact that it is Manning who must once again bear of the weight of the government against her, and risk more jail time, is a stinging injustice for an activist who has already endured so much for exposing vital and damning truths.

March 7th - Chelsea Manning Risks Jail To Fight WikiLeaks Grand Jury

by Kevin Gosztola (*Shadowproof*)

Chelsea Manning will face a closed contempt hearing after she refused to answer questions during proceedings held by a grand jury in Alexandria, Virginia, that is investigating WikiLeaks.

The WikiLeaks grand jury investigation has been ongoing in some form or another in Alexandria since at least December 2010.

It was convened by the Justice Department in response to disclosures Manning made to WikiLeaks in 2010, when she was an intelligence analyst for the United States Army.

What Manning disclosed exposed war crimes, diplomatic misconduct, and other instances of wrongdoing and questionable conduct by U.S. government officials. But she was arrested, subject to a court-martial, and convicted of violating the Espionage Act and other related offenses.

She received a 35-year sentence and was released after six years in military prisons because a grassroots campaign successfully pressured President Barack Obama to commute her sentence.

“A judge will consider the legal grounds for my refusal to answer questions in front of a grand jury. The court may find me in contempt and order me to jail,” Manning stated.

On March 6, Manning appeared before the grand jury after she was granted immunity for her testimony.

“All of the substantive questions pertained to my disclosures of information to the public in 2010—answers I provided in extensive testimony during my court-martial in 2013. I responded to each question with the following statement: ‘I object to the question and refuse to answer on the grounds that the question is in violation of my First, Fourth, and Sixth Amendment, and other statutory rights.’”

Manning added, “In solidarity with many activists facing the odds, I will stand by my principles. I will exhaust every legal remedy available. My legal team continues to challenge the secrecy of these proceedings, and I am prepared to face the consequences of my refusal.”

She could face up to 18 months in jail if she is found “in contempt” of court.

Manning launched a campaign, “Chelsea Resists,” to raise funds for her legal defense as she fights the grand jury subpoena.

A legal attempt to quash the subpoena prior to her appearance before the grand jury was rejected by a federal judge on March 5.

Grand juries can be empaneled for 18 months, or if they are “special” grand juries, they may last up to 36 months. Over the past eight years, the grand jury has presumably gone through multiple iterations, either being renewed or relaunched.

According to a report from the *Washington Post*, the grand jury is interested in whether WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Julian Assange solicited Manning to disclose documents.

Manning testified during her court-martial about accounts linked to WikiLeaks, or WLO, that she communicated with. It is possible she communicated with Assange, but they never exchanged identifying information.

“No one associated with the WLO pressured me into giving more information. The decisions that I made to send documents and information to the WLO and the website were my own decisions, and I take full responsibility for my actions,” Manning asserted.

The grand jury would like to try and poke holes in Manning's testimony to try and build a case against Assange and possibly other staff members of WikiLeaks.

Last year, Manning Support Network co-founder David House was subpoenaed to testify (again). He said he was asked questions that seemed to relate to the Afghanistan or Iraq War Logs.

The fact that President Donald Trump's administration is engaged in this investigation against WikiLeaks over its publications in 2010 is especially alarming, given the fact that President Barack Obama's administration backed off when they recognized there was no way to pursue charges against Assange or any other WikiLeaks staffer without opening U.S. news organizations or journalists up to potential prosecutions.

Margaret Ratner-Kunstler has advised individuals connected to WikiLeaks and the Manning Support Network on how to handle grand jury subpoenas. She outlined the scope of how grand juries are wielded against people by the U.S. government in a conversation for "Law & Disorder" radio recorded in 2010, before the WikiLeaks grand jury was empaneled.

The immunity granted to Manning is a "transactional immunity." It would only cover what Manning said. Prosecutors could still say, "Well, this didn't come from that [person]" or it "came from something else." They could do a kind of parallel construction of evidence. And refusing to testify after being granted this tiny level of immunity would lead to potential imprisonment.

As Ratner-Kunstler described, during a contempt hearing, a judge asks why a person refused to testify. "Generally, people assert the First Amendment claims, which are not deemed sufficient to overcome the immunity issues so the judge then orders you to testify."

"You go back into the grand jury room," Ratner-Kunstler added. "If you testify, that's one thing. If you refuse to testify, you're brought back before the judge, and the judge then holds you in what is known as civil contempt." A person is in jail for the length of the grand jury.

When a person is held in civil contempt, "The keys to the jail are in your pocket. You're in jail for as long as you refuse to testify."

Assange remains in the Ecuadorian embassy in the United Kingdom, where he has asylum protection. Prosecutors apparently have drafted a criminal complaint against him. But in January, a federal judge rejected an effort by the Reporters Committee for the Freedom of the Press to have the charges unsealed.

March 8th - Why Chelsea Manning Decided to Go to Jail in Protest

by Dell Cameron (*Gizmodo*)

Chelsea Manning is not accused of committing any new crime. But she is now a prisoner of the U.S. government once again and may remain one for up to 18 months.

After resisting questions by prosecutors during a secret hearing related to crimes for which she already served seven years in military prison, Manning was ordered into custody on Friday by U.S. District Judge Claude Hilton and told she would remain there "until she purges."

Manning, whose right to remain silent was supplanted as part of the grand jury process, was subpoenaed last month in the U.S. Justice Department's not-so-sealed investigation into Julian Assange. Her defiance of this secret inquisition, however, is not about protecting the WikiLeaks founder at all.

Manning says she is resisting because she, like many other politically minded Americans, believes grand juries are an illegal instrument designed to aide prosecutors on fishing expeditions; a tool for stripping witnesses of their constitutional rights that has been historically used against peaceful political activists by men in power who would have them labelled “terrorists” and “enemies of the state.”

“By resisting this grand jury, Chelsea has made the same sacrifice as dozens of activists before her, who have opposed the grand jury system at the expense of their own freedom,” her support committee said in a statement. “Chelsea has already served prison time for standing up against government secrecy and revealing war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. We know, and so does the government, that she will not turn tail and allow this shadowy grand jury to eclipse her legacy of speaking truth to power.”

Legally speaking, Manning’s imprisonment is not punitive; it is not considered a form of punishment for something she has done. Her incarceration farther is designed to be coercive; it is intended to break her, to force her to submit. By depriving Manning of her freedom, prosecutors hope that she’ll crave its return hard enough to spill her guts.

Ironically, she already has.

Manning’s association with WikiLeaks nearly a decade ago was dissected in exhaustive detail during her 2013 court-martial, in which all manner of evidence about her brief contact with WikiLeaks, including the transcripts of their conversations, was presented. But now she is meant to regurgitate that story based on her own flawed memories while under the threat of prolonged incarceration if she finds any reason to refuse.

“We hope she changes her mind now,” the prosecutor, Tracy McCormick, told the Associated Press.

Although Manning is constitutionally protected from double jeopardy—from being charged twice for the same crime—her political right to silence has effectively been stripped away. Americans’ right to “remain silent” is viewed, in the case of grand jury proceedings, as an obstacle that can be legally overcome. A half-century ago, Congress agreed and provided prosecutors a tool to do just that.

Immunity is not voluntary for Manning. It is thrust upon witnesses like her for one purpose only: to negate their privilege against self-incrimination granted under the Fifth Amendment.

Grand juries, comprised of 16-23 individuals, are not screened for personal biases as they would be during the voir dire process of a normal trial. There is no judge present; there are no defense attorney; there are no rules of evidence. Indictments may be issued with the support of a dozen jurors who’ve been bombarded by hearsay. They can not only issue indictments, but grant prosecutors the power to invade the private lives of citizens, acquire their personal records and communications, and coerce them into cooperating with the government under threat of confinement, whether they’re guilty of a crime or not.

It is for these reasons that Manning, an activist, says she is refusing to submit. “I will not participate in a secret process that I morally object to, particularly one that has been historically used to entrap and persecute activists for protected political speech,” she said in a statement.

“It is no secret that members of the current administration have openly expressed their hatred for Chelsea,” her supporters said. “Donald Trump himself has tweeted about his desire to undo Barack Obama’s commutation and put Chelsea back in jail. We reject the logic that Chelsea should comply and answer

questions regarding events for which she has already provided ample testimony, and we condemn the government's punitive efforts to back her into a corner."

The nature of the charges the government hopes to bring against Assange remain a mystery. Anonymous officials have told reporters the case is unrelated to the 2016 election, and the attempt to compel testimony from Manning would appear to support that, at least in part.

It is likely that the government has considered ways to avoid a messy First Amendment battle that pits their own perception of Assange's publication as a tool for espionage against the passionate feelings jurors may have about freedom of the press. Charges under the Espionage Act, the limits of which have not been fully tested in court, present numerous obstacles in this regard. Notably, the courts have found "specific intent" to be a prerequisite of an espionage conviction.

The government would need to show, in other words, that not only was Assange aware that publishing classified U.S. government documents would do harm to the United States, they'd need to prove that harming the United States—and not merely shedding light on its controversial political practices and military actions—was itself specifically his goal all along.

It is far more likely, given Manning's involvement now, that the government is searching for ways to avoid this espionage dilemma entirely; to not have their prosecutors positioned opposite the First Amendment in a trial that's sure to become a massive public spectacle.

As *Gizmodo* previously reported, there is at least some evidence that Assange has cooperated with convicted criminal hackers in the past in ways that may have left him vulnerable to accessory charges in years-old computer crimes—if only after-the-fact.

Regardless of his case's outcome, Texas journalist Barrett Brown was at least initially charged after merely sharing a hyperlink to data stolen during the 2011 hack of Stratfor, a private intelligence firm. WikiLeaks, on the other hand, shared with those same hackers actual code designed to aide them in riffling through roughly 5 million emails pilfered from Stratfor. What's more, other reports suggest WikiLeaks may have also solicited cyberattacks against a U.S. ally abroad, which was definitely a branch of DOJ's long-running investigation into the organization, as evident by the involvement of FBI agents and informants.

"The court's decision to imprison Chelsea Manning for refusing to comply with a grand jury is pointless, punitive, and cruel," her supporters said Friday.

"Chelsea has clearly stated her moral objection to the secretive and oppressive grand jury process. We are Chelsea's friends and fellow organizers, and we know her as a person who is fully committed to her principles. If Judge Claude M. Hilton and [assistant U.S. attorney] Gordon Kromberg believe that subjecting Chelsea to more punishment will change her mind, they are gravely mistaken."

"To quote Chelsea," they added, "we got this."

March 11th - Chelsea Manning Has Been Imprisoned for Resisting a Grand Jury Investigation. Here's Why She Should Be Freed

by Lucy Diavolo (*Teen Vogue*)

Chelsea Manning, perhaps the United States' most famous whistleblower, has been arrested and detained once again.

The *New York Times* reported on March 8 that Manning had been taken into custody after a federal grand jury, a kind of jury designed to assess whether there is probable cause for criminal prosecution, found her in contempt. That ruling came when Manning refused to testify at a hearing about WikiLeaks, the anti-secrecy organization known for leaking government information — including the hundreds of thousands of documents Manning provided the group in 2010, while she was an intelligence analyst in the U.S. Army, for which she was first imprisoned. Those documents exposed what some have called war crimes committed by the United States military.

Manning, who's now 31, spent a substantial amount of time in solitary confinement before her trial, in addition to years in prison afterward. She publicly came out as transgender just after she was sentenced, and she struggled with mental health while behind bars, resulting at one point in another week of solitary confinement. (Solitary is something faced by many incarcerated trans women — especially trans women of color, who are disproportionately represented in prisons.)

Her first detainment ended seven years into her 35-year prison sentence, when Barack Obama commuted her sentence with just three days left in his tenure as president. Since her release, she has enjoyed pizza once again, become a high-profile and embattled activist, and even run for Senate.

I have followed Manning since she publicly came out in 2010. Though I was still deeply in the closet as a transgender woman and only just starting to be exposed to veins of political thought outside the mainstream, she was a key figure who represented what resistance really meant to my younger self. She was at once standing up to the forces of the U.S. military apparatus (which I had opposed as I was coming of age under then president George W. Bush) and our cultural notions of cisnormativity (which I would only start to challenge years later). To see a woman with such historic impact detained during Women's History Month is a hellish irony, and that's why I'm writing this as she's sitting in a federal detention center in Alexandria, Virginia.

The particulars of Manning's new case are complicated. Her latest imprisonment has nothing to do with the information she revealed in 2010, but instead is due to her unwillingness to cooperate in a federal grand jury investigation into WikiLeaks. Her refusal came not out of allegiance to the leak-publishing site, but on moral grounds. This imprisonment comes because she is standing up for something she believes in: resisting a grand jury.

"Imprisoning me for my refusal to answer questions only subjects me to additional punishment for my repeatedly-stated ethical objections to the grand jury system," Manning wrote in a statement posted to Twitter the day of her arrest. "I will not participate in a secret process that I morally object to, particularly one that has been historically used to entrap and persecute activists for protected political speech."

The issue of grand jury secrecy, as Manning and her supporters point out, has long plagued activist communities. Officially enshrined in the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, the secrecy provisions have been criticized for allowing the government to target activist circles by subpoenaing organizers. Critics like the Grand Jury Resistance Project say that grand juries have been used to target activists including pro-independence Puerto Rican activists, Black liberation activists, anarchist organizers, and Standing Rock water protectors. In some of these cases, activists made their unwillingness to testify known, and the government dropped its subpoenas.

"Chelsea has clearly stated her moral objection to the secretive and oppressive grand jury process," her support committee wrote in a statement shared the day she was taken into custody. "We are Chelsea's friends and fellow organizers, and we know her as a person who is fully committed to her principles."

“By resisting this grand jury, Chelsea has made the same sacrifice as dozens of activists before her, who have opposed the grand jury system at the expense of their own freedom,” the statement continued. “We know, and so does the government, that she will not turn tail and allow this shadowy grand jury to eclipse her legacy of speaking truth to power.”

Manning’s attorney, Moira Meltzer-Cohen, tells *Teen Vogue* that Manning could spend up to 18 months (the term of a grand jury) locked up, explaining, “The theory is that if someone is willing to sit for 18 months, there is no way they’re going to change their mind and give testimony.” She also notes that barring an extension, the grand jury would be over at 18 months anyway.

Manning is the latest visible activist to assert that grand juries are essentially, as *Gizmodo* characterized her viewpoint, “fishing expeditions” for prosecutors seeking information from activists while blocking their legal ability to say no. Others say grand juries are necessary, offering as an example how they have played a role in situations like Robert Mueller’s ongoing investigation into the Trump campaign’s alleged ties to Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

“Educate yourself about grand juries and the history of using secret proceedings to threaten people’s rights,” Meltzer-Cohen advises anyone eager to support Manning, pointing in particular to cases like the Pentagon Papers and Edward Snowden’s National Security Agency leaks. “Share information with each other. And write to Chelsea.”

As explained by a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney of the Eastern District of Virginia, Manning could be released if she agreed “to testify and comply with the valid court order and valid grand jury investigation.”

But a woman with an iron will is not so easily swayed. That Manning is willing to face more jail time because she challenges the validity of the grand jury process is a vital act of resistance that pushes back on decades of government interference in activist communities.

The U.S. District Court for Eastern Virginia is fooling itself if it thinks locking up Manning will compel her to testify. She has made clear that she has no interest in testifying in such a secretive setting. Her only offense is an unwillingness to cooperate with the same government that locked her up for exposing the kinds of horrors its military forces perpetrated in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Incarcerating an activist for their moral opposition to a secretive government practice is a violation of the trust we are supposed to place in our government, a trust that is already difficult to maintain given how people, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Muslim schoolkids in Minnesota, have been wrapped up, intentionally or not, in government operations. I believe the legal procedure that has resulted in her new incarceration is fundamentally unjust, and Manning’s defiant stand is an opportunity to reflect on what resistance means beyond calling out the current occupant of the White House. Long before there was a President Donald Trump, there were government-led efforts to target and impede activists’ work.

My very first piece as a writer for *Teen Vogue*, in May 2017, was about Manning being released. It is with a heavy but steadfast heart that I write now, nearly two years later, about why she needs to be released from federal custody yet again. In a twist of fate, Manning is not just the subject of my writing anymore; she is someone I’ve met. When I think of the woman I once sat next to at a retro diner in Manhattan eating fried food late one night, I think of her sharp eyes and her sharper sense of humor. I think about her intensely principled worldview, which comes through even in the jokes she makes.

But Manning's latest incarceration is no laughing matter. And as supporters like me rally around her, having already raised tens of thousands of dollars for her legal support fund, we might all take courage in the fight to free her as we remember the famous phrase Manning has tweeted so many times: "We got this."

4 Mar - Leonard Peltier Transfer Denied

On Monday March 4th, 2019 Leonard Peltier was advised that his request for a transfer had been unceremoniously denied by the United States Bureau of Prisons.

MORE:

The International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee appreciates and thanks the large number of his supporters who took the time to write, call, email, or fax the BOP in support of Leonard's request for a transfer.

Those of us who have been supporting Leonard's freedom for a number of years are disappointed but resolute to continue pushing for his freedom and until that day, to continue to push for his transfer to be closer to his relatives and the Indigenous Nations who support him.

44 years is too damn long for an innocent man to be locked up. How can his co-defendants be innocent on the grounds of self-defense but Leonard remains in prison? The time is now for all of us to dig deep and do what we can and what we must to secure freedom for Leonard Peltier before it's too late.

We need the support of all of you now, more than ever. The ILPDC plans to appeal this denial of his transfer to be closer to his family. We plan to demand he receive appropriate medical care, and to continue to uncover and utilize every legal mechanism to secure his release. To do these things we need money to support the legal work.

5 Mar - Four Imprisoned Rhode Islanders Punished With Solitary Confinement at the ACI for Possession of IWW Literature

The Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee reports on four men who for ten days have been held in solitary confinement for allegedly possessing IWW literature.

MORE:

by IWOC (*It's Going Down*)

The RI DOC (Department of Corrections) has held four men for over ten days in solitary confinement at the ACI (Adult Correctional Institution) for allegedly possessing union literature, according to a statement provided to the press. The four men — Joseph Shepard, Ryan Callahan, Anthony Meo, and a fourth whose name is unknown — were transferred from the general population of the ACI's John J. Moran Medium 1 Facility into solitary confinement between February 21-22, in an apparent attempt by the DOC to prevent legitimate and legal efforts towards addressing the inhumane conditions at the ACI. As of Friday March 1st, at least two of the four men have yet to even be booked for the alleged violations on which they are being held.

While under solitary confinement — or "disciplinary confinement", as it's referred to by the DOC — all four are being denied access to legal documents, rehabilitative and therapeutic programs, adequate medical care, and contact with their families and supporters is limited to a single ten-minute phone call each day. A lawyer with knowledge of the case said,

"A filing deadline in one of the men's cases against the Department of Corrections has already been missed for lack of access to legal documents, and the restrictions will almost certainly interfere with the individual's ability to show up in court."

In a preliminary statement about the situation, Callahan comments:

"I was [brought] down here without any answers, without any [of my] property. I've been down here for over a week now and have not been booked. [...] I have not been able to speak with the psychiatrist whom I have an appointment with and missed. That appointment has not been rescheduled. The orthotic insole to my shoe has not been provided to me. As far as medicine, I have been receiving just the medicine that I'm prescribed. I have basically been kicked out of all the programs I was attending (Providence Center, 9 Yards, CCRI, College Unbound, and parenting)."

Prior to this current solitary confinement, two of the people being held – Joseph Shepard and Ryan Callahan – had filed separate federal lawsuits against the RIDOC. In one of those lawsuits, among other grievances, Shepard cites prison conditions and disciplinary practices that he argues amount to “cruel and unusual punishment” in violation of rights that are supposed to be protected by the 8th Amendment of the United States Constitution. Shepard also recently sent an extensive 150 page letter to various RIDOC officials with detailed grievances about conditions at the ACI as well as problems with DOC policies such as the official grievance process itself and arbitrary requirements which severely restrict access to core rehabilitative programs that many inmates need for parole – programs which Shepard and the other three people are at risk of losing access to due to their placement in solitary confinement. That 150 page letter also included clear requests and proposals for how to address the problems outlined in the grievances.

When Joseph Shepard asked the the Warden about the letter of grievances, “he said that I wouldn’t be getting a response then he smiled and continued to walk off when I further asked him about the progress of the investigation.” This has led Sheard to view his being placed in solitary as retaliatory in nature “because I continue, in a positive way, to directly address the harsh confinement of prison conditions not only on behalf of myself, but on behalf of the prison population.”

In 2011, The United Nations UN Special Rapporteur on Torture “called on all countries to ban the solitary confinement of prisoners except in very exceptional circumstances and for as short a time as possible ... saying the practice could amount to torture.” The Rhode Island DOC plans to hold the men for up to 90 days while investigating them, where the same UN report recommended an “absolute prohibition” of “solitary confinement in excess of 15 days”, citing scientific evidence for lasting mental damage beyond a few days of social isolation. The 90-day detention policy also flies in the face of RI’s own 2017 legislative commission report recommending that “only those who commit the most serious predatory offenses will be subject to segregation for more than 31 days [...] Non-predatory Class 1 offenses would be limited to 30 days and Class 2 offenses would be capped at 20.”

The four individuals stand accused of attempting to ‘organize a demonstration’ because of their alleged possession of literature produced by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), an NLRB-certified labor union with a significant membership in prisons across the country. Additionally, they are also being accused of ‘signing into an illegal contract’ for filling out union membership forms. Others at the facility report having been threatened with the same “disciplinary confinement” if they are found in possession of IWW or IWOC literature, or caught talking about the union, indicating that the union’s literature is being treated as contraband by the RIDOC.

Shepard expressed further thoughts in his statement to the press:

"I use my words on paper to articulate these harsh conditions of confinement and here I sit in segregation, wasting away. My programs have been taken away from me, my CCRI classes, my phone calls, my rec, my visits. I'm on 23 hour lockdown. I deal with PTSD and anxiety and I feel as the days go by that it's just getting worse. I'm trying to change things for the better but they are specifically trying to deter me and other inmates from filing grievances and from being outspoken about the conditions of confinement."

11 Mar - 5 Years Free from Solitary for Russell Maroon Shoatz

Here are some updates on Russell Maroon Shoatz from his support committee.

MORE:

This month, we're celebrating five years since Maroon's release to prison general population following over two consecutive decades in solitary confinement! While our work to free Maroon from prison continues unabated, we want to take a moment to recognize this important anniversary and acknowledge the hard work so many of you have put into this campaign for so many years. Here's a brief message from Maroon on the occasion of this anniversary:

At 75 and serving Life Without the Option of Parole, an old Frank Sinatra song comes to mind:

That's life
That's what all the people say
Riding high in April
Shot down in May
I've been a puppet, a pauper, a pirate,
A poet, a pawn, and a king
I've been up and down and back again
And I know one thing
When I find myself flat on my face
I pick myself up and get back in the race

I was a puppet a long time ago. That's before I became politically and socially conscious. Without that knowledge I was a mental pauper. After joining The Movement in the 1960s, I was forced to become a pirate in our struggle for freedom; by any means necessary! Writing, speaking, and working toward that goal is poetic in word and deed.

Decades in prison helped me understand the interlocking systems of economic, political, and social deprivations forced on billions around the world. And that I am a pawn in that web.

Still, I felt like a king after "liberating myself" from maximum security lock-ups a couple of times.

Right now I can only say I'm "back in the race."

Pennsylvania Department Of Corrections To Rescind Restrictive Legal Mail Policy

We're happy to share word of a recently announced reversal to the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections' six-month-old policy of interfering with prisoners' mail. As those of you who closely follow Pennsylvania prison issues are no doubt aware, an unprecedented procedure of intercepting, photocopying, and then destroying legal mail sent to prisoners—as well as diverting non-legal mail to a contractor in Florida in order to scan then digitally forward it—has been in place since last September, initiated as part of a dubious effort to prevent the smuggling of "unknown substances" into prisons following a two-week lockdown last summer. Thankfully, as part of a legal settlement expected to be finalized in March, it appears that Pennsylvania state prisons will rescind this deeply invasive policy that violated prisoners' First Amendment rights and attorney-client confidentiality.

As of April, 2018, Maroon and others imprisoned within the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections should be able to receive mail directly. We encourage you to be in contact with Maroon, as he finds great value and meaning in hearing from and interacting with his supporters.

Update On The Maroon Project: Messages to Maroon from YOU!

As we mentioned last summer, on the occasion of Maroon's 75th birthday, we're launching 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. The booklet will be shared directly with Maroon and made available to a general audience. We continue to invite and accept submissions for the project.

Here, again, is Maroon's daughter Sharon, with more info:

To all those who have come in contact with Russell Maroon Shoatz, in Pennsylvania and beyond, my family and I would like to personally thank you for your support over the years. We are in the early stages of producing a booklet filled with messages to Maroon from YOU!

Maroon is considered a father figure to many throughout the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Many prisoners often say how his mentorship changed their lives for the better. We've also heard from many folks on the outside about how much their correspondence with Maroon helped develop their thinking on issues personal and political. In the interest of collecting these perspectives in a single place, and sharing them directly with Maroon, we want to invite his supporters to write brief messages, reflections, or letters of support, and help us make this a meaningful and memorable celebration paying homage to our dad.

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.

Maybe you know a prisoner who is no longer here with us, but who shared with you their experiences of Maroon. Your voice is theirs. Perhaps one or some of Maroon's perspectives, be it from his time with the Panthers, the Black Unity Council, the Black Liberation Army, or from his experiences since being locked up, have influenced your worldview, whether it was spoken to you directly or you read it in Maroon The Implacable.

Please send us your words, share with us your experiences, and express how our father has made a difference in your life or the life of those you know. While we'll consider writings of up to 1,000 words, we're primary looking for notes of 500 words or less. *Messages, not manifestos*. Feel free to address Maroon directly or construct your piece as an open letter to our family and extended support network. We also invite you to share with us any artwork you've created that honors or was inspired by our dad.

To be honest, you all will be educating my siblings and me. Many of you know our father in ways that we don't! So we very much look forward to hearing from you—the sooner, the better!

Please send your correspondence to:

The Maroon Project
Post Office Box 429
Englewood, New Jersey 07631

You can also e-mail us at sshoatz65@gmail.com

16 Mar - Support Imam Jamil Al-Amin/H. Rap Brown, From His Son Kairi Al-Amin

A letter from Kairi Al-Amin Son of Imam Jamil.

MORE:

I begin with the greeting of peace, As-Salaamu Alaikum,

I hope all is well and thank you for your time. As you may know, my father Imam Jamil Al-Amin, formerly civil rights leader and humanitarian H. Rap Brown, was convicted of murder in 2002.

My father's conviction and subsequent exile was a vendetta realized and much like the man himself, the truth about this case and his legacy have been erased from public view...until now.

After years of appeals and protests from us, his friends, family and supporters, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals will hear oral arguments on May 3rd, 2019 in Atlanta, Georgia. This hearing will determine whether we receive a new trial and we would love to see you there.

Leading up to May 3rd, I am raising funds for my father's awareness campaign. The campaign will feature a documentary (end of the year) with distribution (Netflix or Youtube preferred), celebrity endorsers, a social media campaign, interviews, a record and music video, awareness events around the country, radio + print advertising and influencer marketing.

While this is exciting, I know that we cannot fight this fight alone. We were forced to try this case in the dark once...we will not allow that this time. We need the public engaged and we need them to have the whole story if we want fairness. Most importantly, we need your assistance to make this possible.

We have 30 days to Raise \$50,000.00 and with everyone's assistance, we are confident.

That being said, even a small contribution helps.

We have partnered with *Kickstarter* for this campaign. To make a contribution or for more information visit bit.ly/whathappened2rap

Lastly, please share this campaign on your social media channels. We need and appreciate all of the support we can get.

Thanks again for your time and consideration.

16 Mar - Parole Board-Police Benevolent Association Collusion

The exposure of a secret link directly from the Police Benevolent Association website to the NYS Board of Parole is a horrifying confirmation of the unfairness and bias that parole applicants have experienced for years. Below is a statement expressing outrage at this secret arrangement.

MORE:

An article in the *New York Daily News* on March 6th revealed that from 2012 to 2014 a secret agreement between the Police Benevolent Association (PBA) and the Parole Board created what the PBA website describes as a "direct link from the PBA's website to the NY State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) Parole Board that allows the public to register opposition to the release of cop-killers seeking parole." The existence of the link came to light when, in response to inquiries about whether these messages had been received, the Parole Board revealed that the link had been discontinued.

The PBA is a private organization representing the interests of its members. The link provided preferential access to the views of one particular organization and its members in clear violation of the Parole Board's mandate to serve the people of New York State as a whole. It allowed members of a special interest group to click a button and have the ear of the Parole Board, access not available to people with any other point of view or interests.

The Parole Board is mandated to consider a number of factors when making the life-altering decision of whether to release a person from prison – factors such as the person's disciplinary record, risk of re-offending, successful completion of programming, and viable plans for reintegration. However, the Parole Board has become notorious for allowing political factors to skew its decision-making to the disadvantage of prisoner parole applicants who have served their sentence and fulfilled all criteria for release under the law. The revelation of this secret link takes those politicized factors to a new level of collusion.

Beyond the direct impact these secret-channel letters had on the fate of an unknown number of parole applicants, the revelation casts doubt on the fairness of the Parole Board in all its deliberations, including those after the link was discontinued. The people of the State of New York have a right to expect impartiality from government agencies, not obedience to the dictates of a special interest group – even, or maybe especially, if that special interest group is police officers.

Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration, Parole Justice Albany, and the New York State Prisoner Justice Network believe that collusion on this level demands acknowledgement, accountability, and the elimination of this prejudicial relationship. We urge the Governor, the Legislature, and the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to investigate how this illegal deal happened, how it impacted and continues to impact on Parole Board decisions, and how to ensure Parole Board impartiality in the future.

24 Mar - Anarchists Care About Books (ACAB): A Country of Ghosts

WHAT: Book discussion

WHEN: 4:00-6:00pm, Sunday, March 24th

WHERE: Bluestockings - 172 Allen Street, New York, New York

COST: FREE

MORE:

Join us to discuss [A Country of Ghosts](#) by Margaret Killjoy.

27 Mar - Albert Woodfox Book Launch in NYC for "Solitary"

WHAT: Book event

WHEN: 7:30pm, Wednesday, March 27th

WHERE: Brooklyn Public Library–431 Sixth Avenue, Brooklyn

COST: FREE

MORE:

Albert Woodfox of the Angola 3 comes to New York for the book launch of his memoir, "Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement. My Story of Transformation and Hope." The New York Times reviewed it on March 5th under the title 'Solitary' Is an Uncommonly Powerful Memoir About Four Decades in Confinement. This book release will be in conversation with Jelani Cobb.

29 Mar - Punk Rock Karaoke for Anti-Fascist Fund

WHAT: Karaoke Fundraiser

WHEN: 8:30pm-1:30am, Friday, March 29th

WHERE: Pine Box Rock Shop—12 Grattan Street, Brooklyn, New York 11206

COST: \$10 suggested donation | 21+

MORE:

CATALOG: punkrockkaraoke.com/catalog

Join us for another night of punk rock sing-a-longs for a cause. This time we are teaming up with the Action Against Fascism & Xenophobia - for those facing legal & other problems resulting from their activism against fascism & the far right in the five boroughs, and also in neighboring cities. There are currently a number of comrades with legal and medical bills that need help, and along with Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council - MACC anarchx feminist sub-group, we are proud to offer our solidarity to them.

30 Mar - Mutual Aid Self Therapy: An Introduction

WHAT: Workshop

WHEN: 4:00-6:00pm, Saturday, March 30th

WHERE: Woodbine—1882 Woodbine Street, Queens 11385

COST: FREE

MORE:

In collaboration with Woodbine and the Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council - MACC, the Jane Addams Collective is facilitating a 2-hour workshop on the politics of mental health and the practical application of the Mutual Aid Self Therapy (MAST) model. We hope that at the end of this workshop, participants will set up their own MAST group/s and that we can continue to work together to improve the MAST model.

MAST was created because mental health is a problem common in radical circles, and cannot be ignored. In order to support each other in the difficult work we do and strengthen our ability to strike back, it is necessary to build ways of collaboratively and autonomously dealing with the psychological effects of the hierarchies that bind us; MAST is one attempt to meet that need.

What is Mutual Aid Self Therapy (MAST)?

MAST is an open-source and evolving set of cognitive techniques aimed at promoting better emotional health for individuals in a non-hierarchical or medical model.

MAST draws heavily upon the techniques found in Rational Emotive Therapy, Existential Psychology, Cognitive Behavioral Techniques, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy and related systems. Its focus is to teach techniques of thinking that can allow individuals to make positive changes in their emotional lives.

In MAST, small groups called triads alternate between the traditional roles of therapist and patient. Being involved in both the care, and the being cared for deepens ones understanding of both roles. To break the hierarchy inherent in the psychologist/patient relationship, tools for psychological change have to be collectivized, and used together, rather than hidden behind the therapeutic paywall.

What is the Jane Addams Collective?

The Jane Addams Collective is a small anarchist collective made up of professional social workers, psychologists, and others who believe that to have a true and sustainable culture of resistance we must be able to maintain our mental health.

Struggling with emotional issues limits our ability to connect with others and to effectively enact the change we need in the world. Stigmatizing or refusing to deal with mental health issues in ourselves and in our community weakens our struggle.

We know everyone has sustained some emotional damage from this society and that we must find a variety of ways to undo this damage for us to be able to struggle effectively for our revolutionary dreams and passions with others.

30 Mar - Everyday Antifascism: History and Practice

WHAT: Workshops

WHEN: 1:00-4:00pm, Saturday, March 30th

WHERE: Redeemer Episcopal Church Astoria—3014 Crescent Street, Queens 11102

COST: FREE

MORE:

NOTE: For security reasons, please send a quick RSVP email to everydayantifascism@protonmail.com with your name, preferred gender pronouns, and any community affiliations or political organizations that you're part of.

What is fascism -- and how can we collectively practice anti-fascism in everyday life?

Far Right activity is growing in our city: Hate crimes have risen 120% compared to this time last year. White nationalists are actively recruiting in all five boroughs.

Racist, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic violence presents a clear and present danger to all of our communities. Yet it continues to be met with general impunity and indifference. It is more urgent than ever that we stand united and in solidarity with one another in the face of racist terror.

Join us for a day of workshops on histories of antifascist resistance movements around the globe and skills for organizing everyday antifascist action in your community - at ALL skill and experience levels.

Learn about different traditions and strategies of antifascist action from Red Bloom: A Communist Collective, Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council (MACC), Boston DSA, the NYC Socialist Feminists, and more in a panel discussion. Afterwards, two interactive workshops facilitated by Outlive Them NYC and MACC will provide global histories of antifascist resistance, as well as the skills needed to spot fascist activity and defend your community in everyday life.

Fascism cannot be debated - only addressed directly and defeated. Join us and learn the skills we all need to defeat the far-right, neo-Nazis, white nationalists, and fascists of our day.

ADA Accessibility: Yes

Light lunch will be provided.