

Fact Sheet on Geronimo ji Jaga Pratt

I. Personal Background

- A. Elmer "Geronimo" ji Jaga Pratt was born on September 13, 1947 in Morgan City, Louisiana.
- B. He joined the U.S. Army in 1965, and served in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. He was awarded two Bronze Stars, two Purple Hearts, and the Soldier's Medal for saving the lives of men in his unit on two different occasions.
- C. Upon being honorably discharged from the U.S. Army, he attended U.C.L.A. He became a student government leader and joined the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. He quickly became leader of the Los Angeles Panthers.

II. COINTELPRO and Mr. Pratt's Leadership in the Black Panther Party

- A. In the mid-1960s, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover initiated the illegal covert "Counter Intelligence Program" (COINTELPRO) against the civil rights movement. The FBI sought to discredit and destroy members of the civil rights movement, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Elijah Muhammed, and Stokely Carmichael. Also targetted was the Black Panther Party. The existence of COINTELPRO was not revealed until 1976 by Sen. Frank Church's Committee.
- B. On November 25, 1968, Hoover issued a directive to recipient FBI offices instructing them to "submit imaginative and hardhitting counterintelligence measures aimed at crippling the BPP [Black Panther Party]." Measures undertaken to achieve this end involved burglary, mail fraud, obstruction of justice, defamation, false arrests, false charges, fabrication of evidence, illegal wiretaps, and possibly murder in the case of Fred Hampton. As FBI documents candidly put it, the purpose of counterintelligence action is to disrupt the BPP, and it is immaterial whether facts exist to substantiate the charge. (emphasis added). "All counterintelligence actions [were to] be approved at the Bureau prior to taking steps to implement them," and local law enforcement agencies were to be enlisted.
- C. The Los Angeles FBI office established that "Operation Number One" was to neutralize Mr. Pratt because of his leadership in the Panthers.
- D. In 1970, Mr. Pratt was charged with a 1968 murder of woman and the attempted murder of her husband in Santa Monica.

- E. He was convicted in 1972 on the basis of testimony by a former Black Panther, Julius Butler. Butler claims that Mr. Pratt confessed to him of the murder. Butler then wrote a letter which he had released to the Los Angeles Police Department relating the false confession.
- F. Mr. Pratt received a life sentence.
- G. Mr. Pratt has always maintained his innocence.
- H. When this murder took place in Santa Monica, Mr. Pratt was over 400 miles away in the San Francisco Bay area attending a national Black Panther conference.
- I. Upon the Church Committee's disclosures about COINTELPRO, Mr. Pratt began legal attempts to discover what involvement the FBI had in his false conviction.
- J. What has been established through his F.O.I.A. suit, prison conditions suit, and state and federal habeas corpus actions is the following:
 - 1. The prosecution's main witness, Julius Butler, committed perjury by falsely testifying that he was not a FBI informant. In fact, according to FBI documents Butler was "probationary racial informant" attached to the the FBI's Los Angeles Squad Two that was responsible for COINTELPRO operations against the Black Panther Party and Mr. Pratt.
 - 2. Butler worked for FBI Special Agent Richard W. Held. (Held was also the FBI agent responsible for fabricating the false letter about actress Jean Seberg's pregnancy by a black man. Ms. Seberg subsequently committed suicide. Held is presently in charge of the FBI's San Francisco office.)
 - 3. Butler met with the FBI on over 33 occasions prior to Mr. Pratt's trial.
 - 4. The FBI closely monitored Mr. Pratt's trial, yet never disclosed Butler's FBI informant status to Mr. Pratt's attorneys or the court. The FBI let the perjured testimony of Butler go unchallenged.
 - 5. The FBI has claimed no involvement in Mr. Pratt's murder case and has always stated that it was simply a state prosecution. However, besides having Butler as one of its informants, the FBI was present when Butler delivered his letter in 1969 to a Los Angeles police officer. At trial, this police officer lied

about the FBI's presence.

6. The FBI placed at least three informants on Mr. Pratt's legal defense team. Prior to and during Mr. Pratt's trial, these informants reported to the FBI regarding trial strategy and attorney-client privileged material.
7. The FBI discovered the identity of another suspect for the murder but did not disclose this evidence to Mr. Pratt's attorneys.
8. The wounded husband made a positive identification of another person--other than the defendant--a year prior to the identification of Mr. Pratt. This prior and conflicting identification was suppressed by the prosecution.
9. In 1981, a member of the Los Angeles FBI's Squad Two, Special Agent Wesley Swearingen, testified that Mr. Pratt had been framed. Mr. Swearingen further testified that upon making a search of FBI wiretap records on Oakland Black Panther Headquarters during the period in which Mr. Pratt had claimed that he was in the San Francisco Bay area, he discovered these records to be mysteriously missing.
- K. During an investigation by former U.S. Representative Paul "Pete" McCloskey into Mr. Pratt's case, former FBI Director William Webster falsely stated in a letter to Mr. McCloskey that Butler was not an FBI informant.
- L. Former Director Webster had also suppressed former FBI Special Agent Swearingen's statement made during an FBI internal investigation that the FBI had framed Mr. Pratt.
- M. Because of these disclosures, Amnesty International recognized Mr. Pratt as a political prisoner in 1981.
- N. After leaving Congress, Mr. Paul "Pete" McCloskey became one of Mr. Pratt's attorneys.
- O. The FBI has admitted to having over 10,000 pages of documents on Mr. Pratt, but they have turned over only a small portion of them.
- P. At every level of Mr. Pratt's state and federal habeas corpus proceedings, the FBI has lied to the courts about its role in Mr. Pratt's case and suppressed evidence. The FBI has refused to honor subpoenas issued by the courts. Those documents which the FBI has released have, in almost all cases, been censored.

- Q. Also, during Mr. Pratt's habeas proceedings in U.S. District Court, a California State Deputy Attorney General was cited for contempt because he attempted to suppress FBI evidence.
- R. For over five years, the U.S. District Court sat on Mr. Pratt's habeas corpus petition. In 1986, it finally ruled. However, the court made some very puzzling findings that were in direct opposition to what these FBI documents had disclosed during a partial evidentiary hearing in 1981. The most disturbing was that the court found that Julio Butler was not an informant.
- S. In June 1989, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals refused to reach the merits of Mr. Pratt's appeal because his attorneys did not meet the deadline in notifying the court of their intention to appeal.
- T. Mr. Pratt is respected by prison staff and fellow inmates. In 1976, he saved a prison guard's life with risk to his own life. He has a reputation as a "peace maker." He also has founded a Vietnam veterans support group.
- U. Mr. Pratt has continuously been denied parole. The parole board has explicitly used his political beliefs and false allegations concerning illegal drug use as bases for denying him parole. Presently, the parole board is being sued for these actions.
- V. In the spring of 1988, Mr. Pratt was called as an expert witness on COINTELPRO on behalf of Dr. Mutulu Shakur and Ms. Marilyn Buck, two supporters of the Black Liberation Movement standing trial in New York. During Mr. Pratt's transfer to New York, federal marshals falsely branded him a two-time attempted escapee. Pursuant to a successful suit, these false allegations were ordered removed by a federal district court.
- W. In the summer of 1989, Mr. Pratt was again called as an expert witness to testify about COINTELPRO by Mr. Filiberto Ojeda-Rios, a Puerto Rican nationalist on trial. During his transfer to San Juan, Puerto Rico, Mr. Pratt was, this time, falsely labelled a "cop-killer." Mr. Pratt has never killed a police officer nor has he been convicted of such charges.
- X. Upon returning to San Quentin State Prison from Puerto Rico, the warden transferred him to Folsom Prison in retaliation for Mr. Pratt's high public visibility. Mr. Pratt's attorneys successfully obtained a court order

requiring that Mr. Pratt be transferred back to San Quentin because false allegations concerning his attempt to murder Folsom prison guards and kidnap their children had been disseminated by prison officials years earlier.

Y. Mr. Pratt was subsequently transferred to Tehachapi State Prison in California. A suit seeking his return to San Quentin is presently pending.

Z. Mr. Pratt has been falsely imprisoned for 20 years.

III. Legal and Political Implications of Mr. Pratt's Case

A. The violation of Mr. Pratt's civil rights was not the result of renegade FBI agents. The Church Committee established that COINTELPRO's illegal and extensive operations were approved by FBI Directors Hoover and Sullivan. The coverup of COINTELPRO operations against Mr. Pratt has continued through the Webster and Sessions' tenures.

B. The individuals directly responsible for Mr. Pratt's false imprisonment and coverup of COINTELPRO operations against Mr. Pratt remain in high positions of law enforcement and intelligence. FBI Agent Held was promoted to Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's San Francisco Office. Mr. Webster is now CIA director.

C. As recently investigated by Congress, the FBI has continued to use COINTELPRO-type activities against domestic organizations opposed to U.S. foreign policy in Central America.

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