A Special Black Panther Political Prisoners Issue

Journal of Prisoners on Prisons

... allowing our experiences and analysis to be added to the forum that will constitute public opinion could help halt the disastrous trend toward building more fortresses of fear which will become in the 21st century this generation's monuments to failure.

Jo-Ann Mayhew

15th Anniversary Issue

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SUBMISSIONS: Prisoners and former prisoners are encouraged to submit papers, collaborative essays, discussions transcribed from tape, book reviews, and photo or graphic essays. The Journal does not usually publish fiction or poetry. The Journal will publish articles in either French or English. Articles should be no longer than 20 pages typed and double spaced or legibly handwritten. Electronic submissions are gratefully received. Writers may elect to write anonymously or under a pseudonym. For references cited in an article, the writer should attempt to provide the necessary bibliographic information. Refer to the references cited in this issue for examples. Submissions are reviewed by editorial board members. Selected articles are corrected for composition and returned to the authors for their approval before publication. Papers not selected are returned with editor’s comments. Revised papers may be resubmitted. Please submit biographical and contact information, to be published alongside articles unless otherwise indicated.

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On May 26, 2006, this issue of the Journal of Prisoners on Prisons was initiated through the circulation of this letter:

*Journal of Prisoners on Prisons: A Special Black Panther Political Prisoners Issue*

Greeting Good People! This is a special invitation, from Ashanti Alston and Viviane Saleh-Hanna asking you to help us produce this Special Issue of the Journal of Prisoners on Prisons. It is dedicated to the Political Prisoners of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. In the same spirit of this journal, this issue will be the words of the political prisoners themselves, along with those in exile and former political prisoners. For many, it has been over three decades of imprisonment in the face of mountainous files of Counter-Intelligence Program operations (federal/state/local) and present “Criminal-Justice” intransigence in setting these black revolutionary servants of the people free. Several of these servants have already “died” in prison—needlessly. How many more? Let this Special Issue contribute to highlighting Criminal-Justice in the United States of America and renewing our passion in fighting for the freedom of the political prisoners and for the completion of the revolutionary project of creating new world humanities.

The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons (JPP) has worked for 15 years to bring forth the voices of prisoners, and has done a political prisoners issue in the past with revolutionaries in Ireland. Their 15th anniversary issue (published by the University of Ottawa Press) will be dedicated to the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. Because the JPP is published in Canada it will provide us with an international audience. It is distributed to universities, activist communities and prisoners around the globe.

We want you to tell your story. We are hoping you will focus on the prison experience but also contextualize it so folks as readers will know who you are and why you have been able to “overcome” the day by day hell of prison. Where are you now? Whether you are still in a maximum security prison or out here back in the minimum we know as “society” let your reader get insight into your experiences, struggles and triumphs. Write about the things that are most important to you. Imagine your readers coming to the realization of why you manifest, in Huey’s words, “Prison, where is thy victory?” and why, even today after 30, 40 years in prison,
the powerful, intoxicating dream of freedom is what keeps your hope alive. Share your wisdom, your insights, your thoughts and your experiences. It can be personal, or it can be commentary—choose the style you are most comfortable with.

We know that you have written your stories before, and some of you are tired of writing them over and over again when they seem to fall on deaf ears. We hope this publication with its unique distribution list—prisoners, (ex)prisoners, activists, university professors and students—can reach out to a larger audience and spread the word about our struggles. We also hope that the young people who read this publication can learn about the struggle and get some hope through your experiences. If YOU still believe, after all that you have been through and still go through, then you are the hope for tomorrow. You are the carriers of our freedom dreams, our dream-catchers of the Elder Clans. It ain’t ovah!

We would like this issue to show the on-going work for the freedom of the political prisoners and upcoming proposed campaigns. And lastly, we would like to propose a special dedication to Yuri Kochiyama for her continuing years of work for the freedom of political prisoners, especially Black Panthers and Black Liberation Army members, who enjoy her unwavering support no matter how hostile and conservative the political U.S. government and criminal justice system agenda. Power to the people!

Ashanti Omowali Alston, Former member or the Black Panther Party, Black Liberation Army, Political Prisoner, 14 years, Co-Chair, National Jericho Movement

Viviane Saleh-Hanna, Penal Abolitionist, ICOPA

Assistant Professor, University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth

The people who received this letter are former members of the Black Panther Party and/or the Black Liberation Army and their supporters. More specifically, the majority of the people who received this letter are those who continue to sacrifice and involuntarily pay a price for the black revolutionary struggles of the 1960s and 1970s: they are political prisoners that the United States government continues to hold in captivity, and they are political activists and freedom fighters that the United States government continues to force into political exile. African blood, sweat, and tears built this nation through slavery and racial apartheid. Descendant African blood,
sweat and tears continue to be sacrificed on the same soil in the continuing struggle for total and absolute freedom from white supremacy in the United States and in the Diaspora.

Unfortunately, the invitation to record and write about these struggles did not reach all intended recipients:
Despite the criminal justice system’s attempts to thwart the content of this publication, submissions were collected, experiences were recorded, and events, experiences and thoughts occurring over the 40 years that have passed since the forming of the Black Panther Party have been addressed in this issue of the JPP. We continue to threaten and destabilize white supremacy and we continue to struggle against European and descendant European institutions and people that control and exploit non-European people, land and resources. *All power through the people!*