

Justice in America: The Pelican Bay Prison Hunger Strike, Lynne Stewart, Ramsey Muñiz, Assata Shakur

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In California the 'Pelican Bay' prisoners' hunger strike was suspended Sept. 5th by the prisoners without gaining all its objectives. Among these were the end of long term solitary confinement and group punishments. The movement breaks new ground with its statement of solidarity and no violence between warring gangs and racial groups. This third hunger strike since July 1, 2011 resumed July 8th 2013, with 100,000 California prisoners participating and over 40 at its final week when 10 prisoners per day were collapsing or in need of medical attention.

From the Prisoner Hunger Strike Coalition statement: ...

our peaceful protest of resistance to our continuous subjection to decades of systemic state sanctioned torture via the system's solitary confinement units is far from over. With the public beginning to understand the despair of those in solitary confinement, the prison system as a warehouse for the poor, that more Americans are forced into prison, the political power of a united prisoners movement grows. Society's refusal of the inhumane conditions of solitary confinement moves forward. While some prisoners have been held in solitary for decades, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture says the limit is 15 days.

An attorney known for extending human rights to the poor, Lynne Stewart, was jailed by the Justice Department on a technical error in protocol for representing her client. She remains imprisoned at the Federal Medical Center Carswell Prison, under a ten year sentence, in the final stages of terminal cancer. A request to President Obama, Attorney General Holder, Prisons Director Samuels, for her "compassionate release" has found neither compassion nor release.

The sentencing judge has encouraged any motion by the Bureau of Prisons for compassion. Among groups supporting Lynne Stewart's defence are the National Lawyers Guild, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Islamic Human Rights Commission (London), and Lawyers Rights Watch Canada, which wrote Holder and Samuels on July 23rd informing them of their obligations to Lynne Stewart under international law. This was followed by a stronger letter to Holder and Samuels on August 14, 2013, from Lawyers Rights Watch lawyers, the UN Human Rights Commission's Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, and the Special Rapporteur on Torture: ["Re: International law duty to release Lynne Stewart for medical treatment at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center."](#) A

month later there is no reply.

Another attorney with strong roots in community, Ramsey Muñiz was in the early Seventies a rising star of the Mexicano Civil Rights movement in Texas. After he ran for Governor of Texas in 1972 then again in 1974, with the “La Raza Unida” party, the Party was destroyed and Muniz taken out of politics. The pattern of minority group community group control is familiar from police and government policies toward the Black Panther movement. There is evidence of ‘targeting’ and fabricated drug related charges. Muñiz was convicted of a narcotics charge after a client of the legal firm he worked for asked Muñiz to park his car for him (The client was answerable to the government for drug offences). Now after twenty years in prison (3 in solitary) on charges he continues to deny, Muñiz is seventy and remains loyal to his community. The National Legal Defense Team for Ramsey Muñiz notes that at sentencing, a previous conviction (for conspiring to possess and distribute marijuana) was interpreted as two crimes to apply the “three strikes law” with life in prison and no parole. The team has written U.S. President Obama asking a commutation of sentence. Muñiz’s wife has asked people for help in a YouTube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqoM8Klmn5s> , “Ramsey Muniz Plea of Innocence”.

A call is in progress for demos in Washington D.C. and other cities, November 2nd to celebrate “National Assata Shakur Liberation Day,” as a holiday marking the ongoing freedom of Assata Shakur. Also requested: the 2 million dollar bounty offered for information-leading-to her arrest be lifted, her asylum in Cuba be respected under guarantees of international law, her name be removed from the FBI’s “Top Ten Most Wanted Terrorists” list, and that all the political prisoners be freed. Many of the long term U.S. political prisoners were objects of COINTELPRO actions in the Sixties and Seventies, when community organizers were criminalized and targeted for police murder (On Sept. 11th the mayor of Chicago publicly apologized for some twenty years of police torturing African Americans). Assata Shakur, listed by the FBI as Joanne Chesimard, escaped from a U.S. prison in 1979 with the help of friends. Her account of her shooting by New Jersey police, her understanding of the killing of Zayd Malik Shakur and the false charges against her, is available in [“An Open Letter from Assata.”](#) The letter begins “My name is Assata Shakur, and I am a 20th century escaped slave...”

Now the FBI and New Jersey Police offers of exorbitant bounties are like the bounties offered for escaped slaves before the Civil War. Of her companions suspected of freeing her, imprisoned Marilyn Buck was denied prompt treatment for cancer and died on her ‘presumptive parole’ release in 2010; Sundiata Acoli has been in prison since 1973 despite eligibility for parole; these years later Dr. Mutulu Shakur remains in prison; Sekou Odinga remains in prison; Kuwasi Balagoon died in prison of Aids-related illness, 1986. These people were devoted to improving their communities. The people have already paid the master’s price for her freedom many times over.

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