

Torture of U.S. Political Prisoners. A Review

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The sentences for long term political prisoners are extreme. And cruel, revenge for the prisoner's challenge to the system rather than appropriate punishment for alleged crimes of self defence or for the unplanned tragedies of political actions. Because many here were provably targeted by law enforcement programs to silence them and are likely to be innocent, the length of prison terms falls into a pattern of racist and political oppression.

The prisoners are consistently from Black or left wing resistance groups after moderate leaders within the system were assassinated. The arrests and sentencing come from a time when police actions against Black Panthers were overtly criminal (Fred Hampton) and covertly part of a military and law enforcement war against the left, anti war resistance, the poor. Allegations against leaders of Black communities couldn't be relied on as factual. While "life imprisonment" is better than death who will tell us that it's bearable? Beyond sentencing, some cases show repetitive patterns of withholding medical care to the point of extrajudicial punishment, particularly where the prisoner was accused of crimes against police (ref. [Oct. 13, 2013](#)). The additional extra-judicial punishment of holding a prisoner for years in solitary confinement is finally being recognized as a crime. It's torture. Political prisoners targeted for their convictions, their organizing, their truths, suffered more than most of us can sustain, and some have survived. Their lives weren't allowed to be lived. Their suffering was caused and intended to scare everyone else. We remember political prisoners because they keep alive our hope that there will always be people who say no to what is unacceptable.

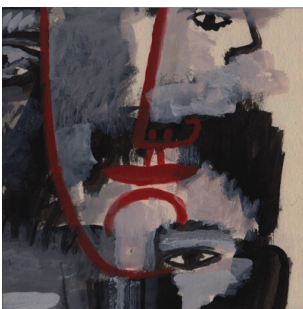


[Thomas William Manning](#) of the [Ohio Seven](#): according to *Medical Justice* of the Jericho Movement Manning remains at FMC Butner where he was transferred in 2010: his knee replacement surgery was performed in 2012 but kept him in a wheelchair since his damaged shoulder didn't allow him to progress with physiotherapy. Shoulder surgery, for an injury which [by my understanding](#) was caused by police (on arrest he was picked up and dropped until something broke), continues to be denied him as 'not medically necessary.' Appropriate private medical treatment was effectively denied with his parole, November 2014. He's expected to be freed August 20, 2020. Tom Manning became an artist in prison and there's an art book of his paintings out – *For Love and Liberty: Artist Tom Manning*,

[Albert Woodfox, of the Angola 3](#) was finally released February 19, 2016. The State of Louisiana appealed three former judicial attempts to free him, and kept him in solitary confinement. At the final trial the prisoner pleaded nolo contendere in a plea bargain which gains his freedom without admission of guilt but lets him plead to lesser charges for which he has already served the time. This time he can't be placed back in a cell. The extreme injustice remains that as an innocent, Albert Woodfox served 43 years in solitary confinement. His lawyer is bringing legal action against the State of Louisiana for its policies of solitary confinement. [2]



[Russell Maroon Shoatz](#): in 2013 counsel for Russell Maroon Shoatz sued Pennsylvania's State Corrections Secretary, John Wetzel, and the Greene Correctional Institution Superintendent, Louis Folino, for cruel and unusual punishment without recourse to remedy. This directly attacked the solitary confinement policies of the State's Department of Corrections. The case protests the cruelty of solitary confinement as applied to Shoatz for over 22 years. It may help other Pennsylvania prisoners. On February 15, 2016 the federal court judge ruled that Shoatz's case should be decided by a jury trial. At the hearing Shoatz's lawyer was able to provide a report by Juan Mendez, the U.N.'s *Special Rapporteur on Torture* who found the conditions of Shoatz's imprisonment beyond the current norm of civilized nations. [3]



[Mumia Abu Jamal](#): his case has allowed a challenge to a Pennsylvania Department of Corrections policy on treatment of patients with Hepatitis C. There is a known treatment for the disease. It costs about eighty-four thousand dollars in the U.S.. If not treated Hep C may develop into cirrhosis of the liver which is lethal. Even when diagnosed with Hep C U.S. prisoners are not usually treated for the disease because of the expense. Abu-Jamal's lawyers are challenging the DFOCV policy of triage which waits to give expensive treatment until there is a Hepatitis C caused medical emergency which is possibly fatal. The hope is to gain Abu-Jamal among other prisoners the life-saving treatment. The effects on Abu-Jamal through lack of appropriate medical treatment as revealed through trial testimony, are awful, similar to the effects of torture, and these were unrefuted. [4]

[Leonard Peltier](#): the International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee (ILPDC) has confirmed that a preliminary diagnosis of the prisoner's condition by an MRI shows an abdominal aortic aneurism. Aware of Peltier's illness before June 2015, initial results were available about January 10th, 2016. Consistently, prison authorities have moved very slowly to address Peltier's medical difficulties to the point of endangering his life for the forty years of his imprisonment so far. Treatment of a potentially fatal aneurism requires an exception - it was to be operated on before mid-January. Peltier notes in an article of Feb. 23rd that no operation was forthcoming since he's in a maximum security prison and inmates don't get treatment until the problem is terminal. There was always serious doubt of the validity of Peltier's conviction. There is strong doubt he's being held legally now. He needs and deserves the clemency students across the country will be demanding February 27th. [5]



[Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin](#): one of the most important alternative voices in America, Al-Amin remains without pardon in prison serving a life sentence. I believe he's innocent of the charges against him. At Butner Federal Medical Center a bone marrow biopsy on Jan. 23, 2014 revealed the presence of myeloma cells. The condition was to be monitored every several months. Then he was returned to the remote ADX Florence Colorado, an over-controlled maximum security prison for the most dangerous prisoners. It's considered one of America's worst. On Sept. 3, 2015 a prisoner was able to contact the Prison Movement with the news that Al-Amin was in a medical emergency. [6]



[Robert Seth Hayes](#): in July 2015, *Medical Justice* noted that Seth Hayes was beginning to receive some treatment for his Hepatitis C and diabetes but none for "chronic bleeding and abdominal growths." Despite previous emergency alerts and notices he continues without adequate health care at Sullivan Correctional Facility in New York. Medical Justice claims his diabetes is not under control and as of November 2015 he was having trouble breathing. *Medical Justice* has asked he be taken to a pulmonary and heart specialist immediately. Medical treatment so far is inadequate to the point of intentional harm. Hayes is a Vietnam war veteran and Black Panther sentenced back in 1973 to from 25 years to life. It's 2016 now. He's denied his freedom and his health. [7]

[Sekou Odinga](#): imprisoned for his part in the 1979 freeing of Assata Shakur and his part in the Brinks robbery of 1981, with a mandatory release date of 2009, Sekou Abdullah Odinga

(Nathaniel Burns) left prison on parole Nov. 25, 2014. He passed about half his 34 years time in solitary confinement. [8]



[Dr. Mutulu Shakur](#): under laws no longer in effect Dr. Shakur won his release date of Feb. 10, 2016, after serving 30 years of a sixty year sentence. On Feb. 4th he received notice of a scheduled parole hearing on April 4th and so remains in Victorville U.S. Penitentiary (California). He is being held illegally. Authorities hold against him the planning of the Brinks robbery of 1981 where two policemen and two guards were killed, and attribute to him the successful escape of Assata Shakur (Joanne D. Chesimard) from a New Jersey prison to Cuba. A doctor, healer and teacher he should be allowed to continue his work of wholeness, caring for people in New York. [9]



[Judith Clark](#) has served 35 years of a minimum 75 year sentence; she'll be eligible for parole at the age of 107. She drove a getaway car for the 1981 Brinks robbery which Dr. Shakur is said to have planned. She was not accused of any violent act and the intolerable length of her sentence reflected the court's judgement of her political thinking and expression rather than her degree of guilt. She refused a lawyer as did [David Gilbert](#) still in prison, and Kuwasi Balagoon who has died in prison. Her statements to the court were honest but radical. Of the same group Kathy Boudin plead guilty which brought her a twenty year sentence and she left prison on parole in 2003. *The New York Times* reports that former presidents of the New York Bar association have joined in a plea of clemency for Judith Clark. Under current law an appeal to the governor is the only means of finding her a release from prison. The length of the sentence is so clearly unjust it reflects poorly on the sanity of the legal system. [10]

Under the norms of civilization, each of these prisoners would be freed. But each of these cases is abnormal, contravening any international expectation of justice. The length of the sentences is consistently skewed from the norm. The sentences are primitive, scented with revenge and racist hatred. These prisoners among all the public doesn't know about had their lives taken away because of what they believed and who they cared for. From a time when law enforcement was corrupt, racist, and as programmed to right wing extremism as it is today, the charges against the prisoners do not match up with the prisoners' histories, writings, concerns, deeds over the years, whom they've proved themselves to be. So the allegations are either hard to believe, or within a logic of self defence. The courts' astounding long sentences were intended to wipe out the left wing. In a United States that

promises freedom who would have the outrageous ignorance to deny any of these a pardon.

Gouache drawings by Julie Maas

Notes:

1. "Tom Manning," current, *Medical Justice*; "Tom Manning (prisoner) explained," current, *Explained Today*; "Tom Manning," current, *Wikipedia*.
2. "Albert Woodfox of the Angola 3 released from prison in Louisiana," Steve Almasy, Feb. 19, 2016, *CNN*; "Albert Woodfox released from jail after 43 years in solitary confinement," Ed Pilkington, Feb. 19, 2016, *theguardian*.
3. "22 Years in Solitary May Be Cruel & Unusual, Federal Judge Says," Rose Bouboushian, Feb. 18, 2016, *Courthouse News Service*; "How a Former Black Panther Could Change the Rules of Solitary Confinement," Victoria Law, Feb. 22, 2016, *The Nation*.
4. "Mumia Abu-Jamal vs John Kerestes et al," #15cv967, Dec. 18, 2015, *The United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania* [access:< <http://www.prisonradio.org/sites/default/files/letters/pdf/Abu-Jamal%20v%20Kerestes%20PreliminInjunctionTranscript%2012-15%20%281%29.pdf> >].
5. "New Health Emergency for Leonard Peltier," Jan. 6, 2016, *International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee*; "Leonard Peltier's MRI Confirms Abdominal Aortic Aneurism Diagnosis," Levi Rickert, Jan. 10, 2016, *Native News Online.net*; "Call for National Student Day of Action: Demand Obama Grant Clemency to Leonard Peltier!" current, *peltierstudentnationalaction.wordpress.com*; "What Can I Say?" Leonard Peltier, Feb.23, 2016, *NetNewsLedger*.
6. "Stop the execution of Imam Jamil, the former H. Rap Brown, by medical neglect in federal prison", the Imam Jamil Action Network, Sept. 6, 2015, *BayView*; Biopsy results released for Imam Jamil Al-Amin (H. Rap Brown)", Karima Al-Amin, Aug. 8, 2014, *BayView*; "Jamil Al-Amin (H. Rap Brown)," current, *Medical Justice*
7. "July update on Seth Hayes: Call for support," July 5, 2015, *Medical Justice*; "Robert Seth Hayes Urgent Medical Update," Nov. 16, 2015, *Medical Justice*.
8. "UC-Irvine welcomes 'political prisoner' involved in cop killings," Dave Huber, Feb. 10, 2016, *The College Fix*; "Free 'Em All: 50 Years Later, Black Panthers Are Still Fighting for Freedom," Asha Bandele, Feb. 18, 2016 *Huffington Post*, *Alternet*.
9. "Mutulu Shakur," current, *Family & Friends of Dr. Mutulu Shakur*; "Mutulu Shakur has not been released from Prison ," Pologod, Feb. 12, 2016, *The source*; "Dr. Mutulu Shakur: More than Tupac's stepfather!" Feb.18, 2016, *BayView*.
10. "As Ringleader in '81 Brink's Robbery Goes Free, a Plea for Its Getaway Driver," Jim Dwyer, Feb. 9, 2016, *The New York Times*; "Judith Clark's Radical Transformation," Tom Robbins, Jan. 12, 2012, *The New York Times Magazine*.

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