

“Once Upon a time, they called me a Terrorist too”

Tortured Black Panthers speak out against police repression and intimidation and their current struggle with San Francisco police department, sharing that the torture methods of repression and coercion used in US prisons in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay were used on them in 1973. Ron Daniels, Danny Glover and the leadership of TransAfrica Forum join them on the panel.

Torture similar to methods used in US prisons in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib used against members of The Black Panther Party

On Thursday, December 8, 2005, TransAfrica Forum hosted a press conference to give voice to three former Black Panther Party members. Hank Jones, John Bowman, and Ray Boudreaux came to Washington, DC to discuss their current struggle with the San Francisco Police Department. They were joined on the panel by Danny Glover, famous actor and Chairman of the Board-TransAfrica Forum, Prof. Charles Ogletree-Founder and Executive Director of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School, Ron Daniels, Executive Director-Center for Constitutional Rights, and Bill Fletcher, President-TransAfrica Forum.

Over the past few months, several former members of the Black Panther Party were held in contempt and jailed for refusing to testify before a San Francisco grand jury investigating a police shooting that took place in 1971. The 34-year-old case evolves from an incident in which two men armed with shotguns attacked the Ingleside Police Station resulting in the death of Sgt. John V. Young, 45, and injuring a civilian clerk. Law enforcement authorities have always assumed that black radical groups were involved.

In 1973 when 13 alleged “Black militants” were arrested in New Orleans, some of them: John Bowman, Ruben Scott and Harold Taylor were tortured for several days by law enforcement authorities in striking similarity to the methods used on detainees in US prisons at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. San Francisco Police Department Inspectors Frank McCoy and Ed Erdelatz were on site at the New Orleans police department for the interrogation and torture of the arrested men. Some of the torture methods used included:

- Stripping them naked and beating them with blunt objects
- Blind folding them and throwing wool blankets soaked with boiling water over their bodies
- Placing electric probes on their genitals and other body parts
- Inserting an electric cattle prod in their anus
- Punching and kicking
- Slamming them into walls while blindfolded

This process lasted for several days until the detectives got the confessions they wanted.

In 1974, a court in Los Angeles ruled that the San Francisco and New Orleans police had engaged in what amounted to torture to extract a confession from one of the men and threw out the tortured statement. In 1975, a San Francisco grand jury indicted three suspects, all of who had been tortured in New Orleans, in connection with the 1971 shooting. However, in 1976, a San Francisco judge dismissed the indictments finding that the prosecution had failed to tell the grand jury that the men's confessions had been coerced.

Defense sources state that while these confessions were suppressed, it appears that this is the basis for the previous and current grand jury investigations. Inspectors McCoy and Erdelatz have returned from retirement and have been deputized as federal agents for the current investigation.

Speaking about McCoy and Erdalatz, John Bowman says, *"The same people who tried to kill me in 1973 are the same people who are here today, in 2005, trying to destroy me. I mean it literally. I mean there were people from the forces of the San Francisco Police Department who participated in harassment, torture, and my interrogation in 1973. [It is] these same people I have to come in contact with, I have to go before courts in front of, [those] who are asking me the same questions that they interrogated and tortured me for. I have to be confronted with these people and none of these people have ever been brought to trial. None of these people have ever been charged with anything. None of these people have ever been questioned about that!"*

The former Black Panthers have determined that though they remained silent about the interrogation and torture 34 years ago, they will not make the same mistake twice. With the counsel of Jill Soffiyah Elijah-Harvard University Law professor, they have formed the "Committee for Defense of Human Rights". Among other things, they want to tell the world how torture has been used often by the US administration to oppress and repress opposition and dissent, as well as coerce information. They say that what allowed such torture to happen was the lack of transparency and accountability the government had under Hoover, which is exactly the secrecy that the USA PATRIOT Act calls for today.

"This is a broad general investigation going on under the current CoIntelPro grown up into the USA PATRIOT Act, [...] an extension of what was going on back then," says Hank Jones. *"The same violations of our human and constitutional rights, totally unjust, done in secret and quietly. We've chosen not to be quiet about this."* The broader implication of this case they say, is that other organizations will be targeted as potential terrorists, so they want to educate as many people as soon as possible as to what happened with them and the Black Panthers. *"They are destroying democracy with this PATRIOT ACT activity,"* adds Jones, *"It's not just confined to us, and its other activist organizations as well. And it was back then, under CoIntelPro, [that] all the major civil rights organizations were under surveillance. The Black Panther Party became a target under J. Edgar Hoover and designated 'The Greatest Threat of National Security to the Nation.'" (For more info on CoIntelPro see:*

<http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/cointelpro/churchfinalreportIIIc.htm>)

*“When I watched on TV the Twin Towers come down, deep in my heart, I knew that someone will come by and visit me as soon as they can get it organized, and they did,” says Ray Boudreaux, “because **Once Upon a time, they called me a Terrorist too.**” To expedite something in the system, they put ‘Terror’ tag on it and it gets done” adds Boudreaux, “**Terror means money.** These people have a budget and they are working it”*

*“What we hope to accomplish with the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights’ is to **educate, inform, and try to move** people to action against the policies that are in effect in the country today,” concludes Hank Jones. “The same fear climate, the same tactics that were going on in the 60s are prevalent today. [...] We claim that we don’t torture in this country. I bring some of our slaves ancestors here today, they can tell you things that would curl your hair about torture, [...] not just physical, but psychological. What’s happening to us today is akin to that. Dr King described Black Folks existence in this country as tiptoed stance, always on-guard. I want to see this does not happen again, to me, or us or anybody. This is why we are speaking out and addressing this today.”*

“It is ironic” said Bill Fletcher “that instead of having a press conference in which apologies are being offered to torture to the individuals here and to many many others who were victims of CoIntelPro, that instead we are to call attention to the prosecution of people who were freedom fighters and continue to be.”

According to Ron Daniels, the President of the center for Constitutional Rights, *“The anti-war movement and the civil rights movement had effectively checked the national security state in relationship to surveillance, intrusive...it had blunted it. And many of the forces particularly on the extreme right had been bristling and eager for an opportunity to impose new measures. The USA PATRIOT ACT had already been on the drawing board. The terrorist attacks provided an opportunity for them to impose them.”* Daniels adds that *‘Former Attorney General Ashcroft before he left issued a broad ranging edict that all the cases that involved any incident where a police officer had been killed and the case had been closed be re-opened...And if these men and women can be indicted or harassed, it sends a chilling effect. It’s the Lynne Stewart effect: if you engage in this, this is what can happen to your life,’* referring to the guilty verdict given to the “radical” human rights attorney Lynne Stewart who represented Sheikh Abdel-Rahman accused of bombing the World Trade Center in 1993.

These men have spent their lives trying to help others like you and I, we all now have an opportunity to reciprocate their efforts. In so doing we may help to prevent a similar fate from befalling others or even ourselves. *“These gentlemen, Ray Boudreaux, Hank Jones and others have been victims of the most vicious forms of American terrorism and torture,”* says Professor Ogletree. *“It takes a village to protect its Elders, [...]and] whether on the West Coast through the support of someone like Danny Glover, and on the East Coast through people like Ron Daniels in NY, and myself and Soffiya Elija in Boston, we tell them today, through our presence here and through our commitment that*

we will provide a protective blanket over them. They will not come in this village and take these elders, except over our dead bodies.”

The three former Black Panthers are available for speaking invitations. For more information, contact Claude Marks at 415-863-9977, Jill Soffiyah Elijah at 617-496-8144, or the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights at CDHR_Right@hotmail.com.

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Dec. 9, 2005