

## Who is Romaine Fitzgerald?

Romaine 'Chip' Fitzgerald is a former member of the Southern California chapter of the Black Panther Party. He is currently serving 2 life sentences for the murder of a security guard and attempted murder of a CHP officer.

### Childhood

Romaine Fitzgerald was raised in Compton, CA. With his parents away at work, trying to make ends meet, Chip began to spend his days hustling on the streets at an early age. By age 13, he began to follow in the footsteps of those hanging out on the corners and soon found himself in in and out of the juvenile prison system, including a stay at the Junior Camp in Malibu Canyon. In 1967, he was accused of stealing a TV set and was sent to Deuel Vocational Institution (DVI) in Tracy, CA.

While at Tracy, he was introduced to revolutionary politics. He soon found himself harassed by prison authorities because he spoke out on prison conditions, treatment of prisoners and the institutional racism that ran rampant at the facility. He spent over half of his time (a total of one year) in the hole. Despite this, he developed political education classes and made a pact with four other prisoners that they would all join the Black Panthers when they were released.



Pratt, Fitzgerald & Warren Wells

As promised, when released they all joined the Southern California chapter of the Black Panthers.. Chip began to work in the Watts section and soon became section leader on the Westside.

### Shoot-Out

On September 7th, 1969, California Highway Patrol pulled over a Volkswagen with Romaine 'Chip' Fitzgerald and two other members of the Black Panther Party (Robert Williams and Luxey Irvin). According to the Los Angeles Times, the men were stopped on the corner of Compton Blvd and Van Ness Ave in Gardena, CA for a faulty taillight.

During the traffic stop a shooting broke out, leaving one officer and Chip Fitzgerald injured. The three Black Panthers managed to escape from the scene, leaving the injured officer in possession of Fitzgerald's driver's license.

The next day, Chip escaped another shootout with police as he and the others attempted to flee from the house where they were held up at. The two other men were arrested during the altercation with one of the men shot in the leg. Fitzgerald, still suffering from a gunshot wound to the head, managed to escape to the Panther headquarters in South-Central Los Angeles. There, Fitzgerald was able to receive treatment, but was informed on by a police informant. Police raided the headquarters only to find a blood-soaked jacket. Chip managed to escape arrest for a third time.

Chip avoided being arrested until October 9th, when he was detained without incident. After being taken custody, he was informed that he was not only charge with the attempted murder of the CHP officer, but was also charged with the murder of a private security guard, Barge Miller.

### Barge Miller

On September 29, 1969 at 1:42 am, Barge Miller a security guard at Vons Shopping Center located at El Segundo and Avalon Boulevards in Los Angeles was shot and robbed while sitting in his car. Two men were seen fleeing from the scene by a witness, James Coleman.

Coleman identified Romaine Fitzgerald in court as one of the men fleeing from the scene. While



Romaine Chip Fitzgerald in 1998

Coleman claims he did not get a good look at the shooter due to the fluorescent lighting of parking lot, he was sure it was Chip. Despite his confidence, he admitted Chip looked different in court than when he had seen him during the early morning hours of September 29, 1969. He claimed Fitzgerald's hair was now shorter.

During the investigation, Coleman was shown several photographs of suspects, including one of Romaine Fitzgerald. However, Coleman could not identify Chip as the one who committed the crime. Later, he denied ever stating that he couldn't identify Fitzgerald.

During cross-examination, the Coleman was not even able to describe the judge in the case, when asked to describe him without looking.

According to Chip's defense, because of the gunshot wound to his head, Chip kept a two-inch wide gauze bandage on the wound for about three or four weeks. He had removed the bandage about three to five days prior to his arrest on October 9, 1969. Coleman stated nothing about a gauze bandage, something that is hard to miss.

Chip denied being in the vicinity of the Vons parking lot during the early morning hours of September 29, 1969, and denied participating in any way in the shooting or robbing of Barge Miller. He testified that he never went outside at night before October 9, 1969, because he did not want to infect his head injury.

Chip had witnesses that he was not at the Vons Shopping center during the murder. Doris

Haughton and her sister, Janice Sadler shared an apartment with Romaine Fitzgerald and stated that he had not left the apartment on the evening of September 28, 1969.

Despite his witnesses, he was convicted of first-degree murder in the case of Barge Miller. He was sentenced to death in 1970.

Chip was also tried for the attempted murder of the CHP officer Leslie Clapp. During the trial, the officer admitted that he had orders to shoot members of the Black Panther Party. Despite this admission, the judge in the case ordered the jury to ignore the statement. Chip was subsequently found guilty and was sentenced to life for his involvement in the shootout.

Chip and his supporters, believe the murder of Barge Miller was pinned on him because of his membership in the Black Panther Party and because of his previous altercations with the police. In both trials, the prosecutor referred to the other cases to create fear and hysteria in the hearts of the juries. Despite the conviction, he has maintained his innocence in the death of Barge Miller.

When the Supreme Court outlawed capital punishment in 1972, Fitzgerald and others on California's Death Row had their sentences commuted to life in prison with the possibility of parole.

Chip has now spent more time in prison than on the streets, coming up on 40 years of imprisonment. Over the years, he has witnessed his family pass away and his mother fall ill.

In recent years there has been a new mobilization on behalf of Chip, consisting of organizations like the Brown Berets, NAACP and the Anarchist Black Cross Federation. A new organization-known as the 'Committee to Free Chip Fitzgerald'- has been formed by representatives of some of these groups, along with former members of the Black Panther Party – like Elaine Brown. The new committee has focused on Chip's parole hearings and legal appeals. In 2008 Chip was denied parole but there is a campaign currently mobilizing for his next hearing.

## Free 'Chip' Fitzgerald

Write to Chip at:

**Chip Fitzgerald\* #B27527**  
California State Prison - LAC  
Post Office Box 4490  
Lancaster, California 93539  
*\*Address envelope to Romaine.*

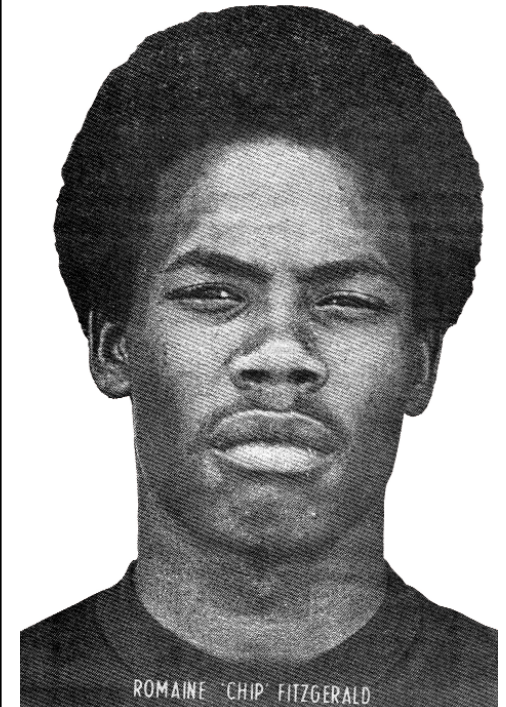
### Local groups supporting Chip:

**NYC Anarchist Black Cross**  
**Post Office 110034**  
**Brooklyn, New York 11211**  
**electronic mail: [nycabc@riseup.net](mailto:nycabc@riseup.net)**  
**[nycabc.wordpress.com](http://nycabc.wordpress.com)**  
**[facebook/nycabc](https://www.facebook.com/nycabc)**  
**twitter and instagram @nycabc**

### NYC Jericho Movement

**Post Office Box 670927**  
**Bronx, New York 10467**  
**electronic mail: [nycjericho@gmail.com](mailto:nycjericho@gmail.com)**  
**[jerichony.org](http://jerichony.org)**  
**twitter @Jericho4PPs**

## Romaine 'Chip' Fitzgerald



**Black Panther  
Political Prisoner  
Serving life Sentence**

