

Who Are the Virgin Island Five?

"Virgin Island Five" are group of activists accused of murdering eight people in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The murders took place during a turbulent period of rebellion on the Islands.

During the 1970's, as with much of the world, a movement to resist colonial rule began to grow in the U.S. occupied Virgin Islands. From 1971 to 1973, there was a small scale Mau Mau rebellion taking place on the islands. This activity was downplayed by the media, for fear it would damage the tourist industry, which the island's survival depends on.

Then on September 6th, 1972, eight American tourists were gunned down at the Rockefeller-owned golf course on the island of St.Croix. Quickly the colonial authorities picked up over one hundred blacks for interrogations, and the U.S. colonial troops carried out a series of repressive acts of violence against the black community. The F.B.I. and the United States Army led a 300-man invasion force into the islands and used strong armed tactics to conduct house to house searches of the low income areas.

The island was put under virtual martial law, and eventually five men, Ismael Labeet (Ishmail Ali), Warren Ballantine (Abdul Azeez), Meral (Malik) Smith, Raphael (Kwesi) Joseph, and Beaumont Gereau (Hanif Shabazz Bey) who were apprehended and then charged with the attack. All the men were known supporters of the Virgin Island independence movement.

The five were charged after being subjected to vicious torture, in order to extract confessions. They were beaten, hung from their feet and necks from trees, subject to electric shocks with "cattle prods", had

plastic bags tied over their heads and had water forced up their noses by the "defenders of the law."

According to one report, Labeet was given a pocket knife by a guard and was told to run. Labeet knew that if he took one step he would be shot in his tracks. The guards were trying to find any justification to kill Labeet and his fellow Virgin Island Five political prisoners.

The judge (Warren Young) overlooking the case prior to being placed on the federal bench worked as Rockefeller's private attorney and even handled legal matters for

**“My agitation for the independence for the Virgin Islands was the only crime I was guilty of in the eyes of law enforcement”
- Hanif Bey**

the Fountain Valley Golf Course.

Eventually, the five went to trial in what became known as the "Fountain Valley" murder trial. This was an obvious Kangaroo Court and a mockery of any sense of a fair trial. On August 13, 1973, each of the five men were convicted and sentenced to eight (8) consecutive life terms.

A look at the incredible conduct of the trial will illustrate to anyone why the men were not only found guilty but that it was impossible for the men to receive a fair trial:

- The court refused to excuse juror member Laura Torres, former wife of detective Jorge Torres, one of the arresting officers.
- Nine jurors testified that during the deliberations they were threatened with F.B.I. investigations on themselves and members of their families, and also threats of prosecution.

- The jury deliberated for nine days, and told the judge that they were "hopelessly deadlocked", yet he still refused to dismiss them and call a mistrial which worked to compel a guilty verdict.
- Four jurors, including the jury foreman, signed statements that they had been forced into a guilty verdict by the judge, police, and F.B.I.. One juror who's daughter was charged with bank robbery several years before, was told that those charges could be brought up again if she did not find the accused guilty.
- The court refused to throw out the "fake confessions", even after it was proven that they were obtained through torture.
- Even the Assistant District Attorney Joel Sacks and several police officers testified and admitted that they knew the dependents had been tortured, and that the "confessions" extracted had been obtained by such methods.

Today, Meral (Malik) Smith, and Hanif Shabazz Bey are currently confined in U.S. prisons. Warren (Aziz) Ballantine has been transferred to a prison facility in the Virgin Islands. Malik Smith and Hanif Bey are being held in prisons on the U.S. mainland. Abdul Aziz is being held in a prison in the Virgin Islands.

On New Year's Eve in 1984, Ismael Labeet (Ali) was aboard an American Airlines DC-10 en route from St. Croix to a federal penitentiary in Lewisburg, PA. He got permission from the guard to go to the bathroom and emerged moments later with a gun. He directed the plane to alter the route, landing in Havana, Cuba. He got off the plane in Cuba. There has been no confirmed information about his whereabouts since then.

In September 2007, Labeet was again front page news when his half-brother, Shawn Labeet, shot four police officers in

Miami, Florida. One of the officers was killed in the incident. Shawn Labeet was later killed by police in a shoot-out.

Raphael (Kwesi) Joseph was granted a pardon by the Virgin Island governor in 1992. Six years later Kwesi was mysteriously found dead of poison-laced drug overdose, after it was said that he was about to reveal evidence that would have exonerated at least one or more defendant.

In 2006, the three remaining Virgin Island political prisoners were notified by a team of attorneys from the islands that they were putting together a campaign for clemency. The outgoing governor made it public that he would grant clemency to prisoners before his departure. The governor had been a principal of the high school attended by some of the Virgin Island prisoners.

Sadly, in January 2007, the Virgin Island Five prisoners received news that their clemency request was rejected. This was the closest these comrades came to ever seeing freedom.

Now, Malik Smith and Hanif Bey are trying to transfer to prisons in the Virgin Islands to be closer to their families.

In recent writings, Hanif Bey has indicated that there are other Virgin Island political prisoners being held in Wallensridge-the prison where both Smith and Bey have been housed off and on in recent years. However, there has been little information regarding these prisoners.



Free the Virgin Island Five

Write to the Virgin Island Five at:

Malik Smith* #19-1874

**envelope to Meral Smith*

Hanif Bey* #19-1952

**envelope to Beaumont Gereau*

Abdul Azeez* #19-1878

**envelope to Warren Ballentine*

Citrus County Detention Facility
c/o Securus Digital Mail Center
Post Office Box 20187
Tampa, Florida 33622

Local groups supporting Bill:
NYC Anarchist Black Cross
Post Office Box 110034
Brooklyn, New York 11211
nycabc@riseup.net
nycabc.wordpress.com
facebook.com/nycabc
twitter and instagram @nycabc

New York City Jericho Movement
Post Office Box 670927
Bronx, New York 10467
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jerichony.org

YOU CAN HELP BY GIVING POLITICAL PRISONERS A VOICE AND VISIBILITY.

FREE THE



IMPRISONED AND TORTURED FOR A CRIME THEY DID NOT COMMIT.

SERVING 8 CONSECUTIVE LIFE SENTENCES

