

dealing with this lawsuit, LaBeet was being transported on an American Airline flight back to the federal penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pa. During this transport, he came out of the jet's lavatory with a gun. He disarmed three Virgin Island Corrections Bureau guards who were escorting him and diverted the DC-10 to Havana, Cuba, where he has remained free.

The other four men remained in federal custody until 1992, when Raphael (Kwesi) Joseph was granted a pardon by the Virgin Island governor. 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 - Malik Smith, Abdul Azeez and Haneef Shabazz Bey - were notified by a team of attorneys from the islands that they were putting together a campaign for clemency. The outgoing governor made it known 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 prisoners received news that their clemency request was rejected. This was the closest the prisoners came to ever seeing freedom.

If you wish to write to the remaining Virgin Island 5 members, you can send letters to:

**Abdul Azeez\*** #16-047  
Citrus County Detention Facility  
c/o Securus Digital Mail Center  
Post Office Box 20187  
Tampa, Florida 33622  
\*Address to Warren Ballentine.

**Hanif Bey\*** #16-001  
Citrus County Detention Facility  
c/o Securus Digital Mail Center  
Post Office Box 20187  
Tampa, Florida 33622  
\*Address to Beaumont Gereau.

**Malik Smith\*** #16-024  
Citrus County Detention Facility  
c/o Securus Digital Mail Center  
Post Office Box 20187  
Tampa, Florida 33622  
\*Address to Meral Smith.

# Virgin Island Five

**Abdul Azeez, Hanif Bey and Malik Smith**

## **Five Anti-Colonial Activists Sentenced to Eight Life-Sentences for a Tragic Crime They Did Not Commit.**

"Virgin Island Five" are group of activists accused of murdering eight people on a golf course in the U.S. occupied Virgin Islands. The men who were accused were part of the independence movement taking place throughout the Caribbean region at that time.

During the early 1970s, a movement against U.S. colonial rule was spreading through out occupied regions, such as Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. As part of this movement, young men of these occupied territories began robbing White tourists, who they felt represented the colonial-rule. Despite the growing epidemic, the media downplayed this activity, 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. Over one hundred Blacks men were brought in 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 troops led a 300-man invasion force into the islands to conduct house-to-house searches of the low-income areas.

A few days after the incident, police picked up Meral (Malik) Smith and Beaumont Gereau (later known as Haneef Shabazz Bey.) After eight day of searching, a local informant provided information that lead to the arrest of Warren Ballan-

tine (Later known as Abdul Azeez), Ismail Labeet and Raphael (Kwesi) Joseph

All the men were known supporters of the Virgin Island independence movement. However, the police were quick to dismiss any recognition of an independence movement on the Virgin Islands. Police made this dismissal despite a steady rise of independence activity, including the development of an independence political party, which formed four years prior to the incident. The public denial was an attempt to relieve fears that may influence tourism.

The five were charged with eight counts of murder. The charges were filed after the men were subjected to vicious torture in order to extract confessions. They were beaten, hung from their feet and necks from trees, subjected to electric shocks with cattle prods, had plastic bags tied over their heads and water forced up their noses by the "defenders of the law." In the end, three of the five men (Labeet, Ballantine and

Gereau) confessed to the killings, all while under duress and the threat of continued torture. The statements would eventually be used as evidence in the trial.

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. The judge (Warren Young) overlooking the case had a clear conflict of interest. Prior to being placed on the federal bench, he worked as Rockefeller's private attorney and even handled legal matters for the Fountain Valley Golf Course. Despite the fact attorney for the Virgin Island 5, William Kunstler, highlighted the conflicts of Judge Young, stating that the judge did not have the ability to "separate himself from this island," the judge refused to recuse himself from the case.

The loyalties of Judge Young were quickly made apparent, when the court refused to throw out the "fake confessions", even after it was proven that they were ob-

tained through torture. Even the Assistant District Attorney Joel Sacks and several police officers testified and admitted that they knew the defendants had been tortured, and that the "confessions" extracted had been obtained by such methods.

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***"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

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During the trial, other aspects of corruption became apparent. The court refused to excuse juror member Laura Torres, who was the former wife of detective Jorge Torres, one of the arresting officers. Nine other jurors testified that during the deliberations, they were threatened with F.B.I. investigations and prosecution of themselves and members of their families. 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.

When the jury deliberated for nine days, and informed the judge that they were "hopelessly deadlocked", he still refused to dismiss them and call a mistrial, which worked to compel a guilty verdict. Eventually, on August 13, 1973, each of the five men were convicted and sentenced to eight consecutive life terms.

The men were sent to serve the rest of their lives in federal prisons, serving time in both the Virgin Islands and on the mainland. LaBeet developed a reputation of being uncontrollable and was sent to some of the worst penitentiaries in the federal prison system. During one of his stays in a federal prison in Virgin Islands, LaBeet spent 90-days in prison. In response to this, he filed a lawsuit and eventually won a \$12,000 award from a U.S. District Court jury in a civil rights suit. On December 31, 1984, while