

## ONGOING FIGHT

### LEGACY OF TORTURE: THE WAR AGAINST THE BLACK LIBERATION MOVEMENT

BY ANDRES ALEGRIA, CLAUDE MARKS AND THE FREEDOM ARCHIVES, 2006

*Legacy of Torture* is the newest video from the San Francisco-based Freedom Archives. It's politically and emotionally dense 28 minutes highlights the case of 5 men—Ray Boudreaux, John Bowman, Richard Brown, Hank Jones, and Harold Taylor—who were targeted for Grand Jury persecution in connection with an alleged San Francisco police homicide that occurred in 1971. We meet these 5 community activists and hear what first drew them to organizing for racial and economic justice in the late 1960's.

The trouble begins in 1973 when 13 men were arrested in New Orleans and labeled as "Black militants." The film centers on the graphic descriptions of the torture these men endured at the hands of the New Orleans, San Francisco, New York, and other police departments. Spliced into these straightforward narratives are some seriously unnerving re-enactments. It's scary and sad and enraging.

The "confessions" obtained through torture were thrown out two years later by a Federal Court in San Francisco, and we hear the men describe the lives they rebuilt in the aftermath of imprisonment, brutalization, and sometimes ongoing political persecution.

The story picks back up again in 2005 for the last act of *Legacy*. Boudreaux, Bowman, Brown, Jones, and Taylor were dragged before a San Francisco Grand Jury still investigating the 1971 murder case, an investigation led by the same SFPD who participated in the torture in New Orleans. We hear why these men chose imprisonment for contempt of court, rather than going through these abusive proceedings. Released when the Grand Jury term expired, just weeks ago they were re-arrested and formally charged with involvement in the police homicide that took place 35 years ago.

#### Political art

*Legacy* is not only a gripping political history; it also has a lot to say about how political histories can be used. The combination of understated storytelling and theatrical imagery helps the audience think about the ongoing reality of state torture with our ears, our eyes, our hearts, and our heads.

Part of what makes this movie so damn scary is how it forces us to see how police persecute people over the course of decades. But the flip side is also true; we too can defend ourselves, our friends, and our movement over the long haul.

Political organizer and scholar Allen Feldman wrote that "arrest is the political art of individualizing disorder." This statement explains why radicals are relentlessly arrested, tortured, and slandered as criminals. Given the urgency of protecting these comrades today, it also helps us figure out how we can defend them and our movement at large today.

We also have to show that the disorder we face is collective and structural. This involves talking about the prison industrial complex and the state violence that keeps it afloat.

*Legacy of Torture* is a critical tool for that project.

—Ari Wohlfeiler

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