

Torture Methods Similar to Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib used against members of Black Panther Party



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.

About the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights

The mission of the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights ("CDHR") is to draw attention to human rights abuses perpetrated by the government of the United States and law enforcement authorities which were carried out in an effort to destroy progressive organizations and individuals. By building coalitions with organizations and groups that advocate for human and civil rights CDHR hopes to bring an end to these abuses. CDHR's basic principals are set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the U.N. Convention Against Torture.

COINTELPRO AND THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

Shortly after the founding of the Black Panther Party, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover described it in September 1968 as "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country". By July 1969, the Black Panther Party had become the primary focus of COINTELPRO and was the target of 233 of the 295 authorized "Black Nationalist" COINTELPRO actions including the assassination of some of its leaders like Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in Chicago and armed police attacks on Panther offices in many cities. The FBI placed illegal wiretaps on the Party headquarters in San Francisco, infiltrated the organization with numerous agents, used every possible means to provoke violence within the organization and engaged in a number of schemes to arrest, detain, falsely accuse,

incarcerate, torture and murder members of the Black Panther Party.

According to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence chaired by Senator Frank Church, COINTELPRO was an illegal and unconstitutional abuse of power by the FBI. The Committee found that many of the techniques employed by the FBI would not be tolerable in a democratic society even if all the targets had been engaged in illegal activity.

THE TORTURE IN 1973

In 1973 when 13 alleged "Black militants" were arrested in New Orleans, some of them were tortured for several days by law enforcement authorities in striking similarity to the horrors visited upon detainees in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. The New Orleans police tortured the men with the following methods:

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

As Harold Taylor says:



"In 1971, two brothers and I were set up by the FBI. We didn't learn about COINTELPRO until years later but the experiences we had were identical. We were ambushed in 1971. I was shot in the head, arms and leg.

In 1973 I was arrested in New Orleans with a number of other members of the Party. Some of us, me included, were beaten and tortured for several days. It was a nightmare experience. Eventually I was taken from New Orleans and stood trial in Los Angeles and San Diego. I was found not guilty of everything and the charges were dismissed.

In 2003 the detectives that were responsible for my torture in New Orleans came to my house to try and question me. I have not been the same since. In 2005 I was brought back and forth before grand juries in San Francisco investigating a case from over 30 years ago that is being blamed on the Party. I refused to testify and was held in contempt of court and locked up."

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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. Apparently McCoy and Erdelatz exited the room when the men failed to provide satisfactory answers to their questions.

Speaking about McCoy and Erdelatz, 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. And these same people I have to come in contact with, I have to go before courts in front of, 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."

According to Hank Jones, one of the grand jury resisters,



"Over thirty years later the two lead investigators with the SFPD, along with FBI agents have reopened the case. Beginning in January 2003 several other people, and myself, have been targets of a covert investigation stemming from those past incidents. Several of us have been served

with subpoenas, compelling us to appear before a Grand Jury in an attempt to force us to give testimony incriminating others and ourselves. Some of us, myself included, felt that this was abusive of the law and the constitution. Rather than submit to these unjust proceedings, five of us, independently chose to stand in contempt of court and were sent to jail. I have been described as a witness, a target, a person of interest, and even a member of a terrorist organization. Some of us feel that this procedure is given impetus by the existence of the Patriot Act, which we view as a continuation of the COINTELPRO procedures of over thirty years ago.”

Ruben Scott was tortured in New Orleans and describes what happened to him in the following manner:

“That’s when this guy put this coat over my head and told me they was gonna put my feet in some water and electrocute me. That’s when they started sticking me with cattle prods and needles. And after about two-and-a-half hours of this constant beating, they just sat me in a chair and one of them pulled out his gun and cocked it and put it to my head and said that, I oughta shoot you in your ear just to see if the bullet would come out the other end. This went on for four to five days of constant beating, you know.”

These men have continued to make valuable contributions to their communities. Richard Brown describes his role in the community as follows:

“For the past six years I have been a Community Court Judge Arbitrator working with the San Francisco District Attorney’s office. We place a lot

of emphasis on restorative justice, so most of the community service done will be done in our own community where the offender can give back to the community.”



Like Ray Boudreaux, all of these men have led a peaceful existence, caring for their families and giving back to their communities. Ray reflects on his life by saying that,

“Actually, for the last 25 years I’ve lived a pretty peaceful and a quiet life. My politics are still the same. It’s just that I’m not active. People come to me sometime as a peace-maker. And all of that has to do with all of my experience.”

At age 70, Hank Jones describes the impact of the current situation on his life.

“Today, as I attempt to maintain a normal existence, to work and attend to my family, I live under the constant threat of another subpoena, or even another incarceration. In essence I have been robbed of peace of mind, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I am therefore compelled to resist these tactics and inform the public of my recent experience, feeling that something similar could happen to anyone given the climate of fear, paranoia, and abuse of authority that is rampant in our country today.”



Richard Brown is proud of the service he has given to his community and he states,

“I am still doing exactly what I did when I was in the Black Panther Party, serving the community and my people. And I’m not tired yet.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

**Committee for the Defense of Human
Rights (C.D.H.R.)**

P.O. Box 90221

Pasadena, CA 91109

(626) 345-4939

CDHR_RIGHT@hotmail.com