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Pontiac Brothers Collection Finding Aid:

Description:

This collection contains comprehensive organizational materials from the Pontiac Prison Support Coalition (PPSC) who organized in support of the 31 prisoners put on death row following the 1978 Pontiac Prison Rebellion in Pontiac, Illinois.

The Pontiac Prison Rebellion:

On July 22, 1978, prisoners at Pontiac Prison (Illinois) rebelled. During the rebellion 3 white guards were killed and millions of dollars of damage was done to the prison. For the next 8 months, prisoners were locked in their cells 24 hours a day while investigators gathered evidence. Testimony by these investigators during the pre-trial motions revealed that bribery (over \$75,000 at that point had been paid to witnesses) and intimidation (reluctant witnesses were threatened with the electric chair) were tools of “persuasion.” Eventually, 31 men, 28 Black and 3 Latino, were indicted for various crimes. Sixteen of these men, all Black, were charged with killing each guard 4 different ways. These men faced a total of 200 charges, any one of which could have lead to the electric chair. The Pontiac case was the largest civilian death penalty case in the history of the US. At the conclusion of the case, all those charged with capital offenses were acquitted.

Pontiac Prisoner’s Support Coalition (PPSC):

The Pontiac Prison Support Coalition was a broad based coalition of community and human rights organizations, working within the larger Coalition to Free the Pontiac Brothers. The PPSC was called into existence by the Pontiac Brothers and other concerned prisoners and acted in accordance with the desires of the Brothers who were consulted in detail on every non-trivial issue. The PPSC and the Pontiac Brothers were unified in:

- Demand the abolition of all inhuman and abusive conditions at Pontiac and other Illinois prisons
- Repeal Class X legislation
- Revoke the Death Penalty
- Expose the investigation and its coercive strategy to scapegoat prisoners
- End the deadlocks

PPSC maintained an office, put out regular publications calling for demonstrations, and challenged the myths about the case put forward by the mass media. They were organized into three committees- Finance, Education and Outreach. They specifically took responsibility for:

- Educating primarily White people about the racist nature of the prison system
- Combating anti-prisoner, racist attitudes and practice
- Winning support for the demands of the prisoners
- Providing political and legal support for the prisoners who will be charged

Size: 12 Folders - 1 Slide Show - 20 Digitized Records

Date Range: 1978 – 1981

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Collection Contents:

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Folder 1: PPSC Newsletters –

The folder contains educational materials used to organize support for the Pontiac Brothers Defense effort.

Subjects: Prison; Anti-Racism; Education

Keywords: Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Death Penalty

- PPSC Newsletter: State demands mass executions [37 copies]
- PPSC Newsletter: Pontiac trail begins [18 copies]
- PPSC Newsletter, Mass Death Penalty Trial in Cook County
- PPSC Newsletter No. 1 (October 1978)
- PPSC Newsletter, No. 2 (November 1978)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 3 (March 1979)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 4 (April 1979)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 5 (June 1979)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 6 (July 1979)
- PPSC Newsletter, No. 7 (September 1979)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 8 (October 1979)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 9 (November 1979)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 10 (December 1979)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 11 (February 1980)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 12 (September 1980)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 13 (December 1980)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 14 (April 1981)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 15 (May 1981)
- PPSC Newsletter: No. 16 (September 1981)
- The Lomax (From the Outside to the Inside) Published by Concerned Families & Friends of Prisoners

Folder 2: PPSC Internal Records -

The folder contains handwritten notes, personal accounts, memos, progress reports, draft proposals, etc.

Subjects: Prison; Anti-Racism

Keywords: Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Death Penalty

Folder 3: PPSC Funding Requests and Reports -

The folder contains funding proposals and requests, donation letters, finance reports, etc. Subjects: Prison; Anti-Racism

Keywords: Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Death Penalty

Folder 4: The Fuse

The folder contains the periodical the Fuse, published by the New Afrikan Prisoner Organization.

See New Afrikan Prisoners Organization

Subjects: Prison; Black Liberation; Anti-Racism

Keywords: New Afrikan Prisoners Organization; The Fuse; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Death Penalty; New Afrikan

- The Fuse (formerly Stateville Raps): No. 6 (Jan-Feb 1978)
- The Fuse (formerly Stateville Raps): No. 8 (April 1978)
- The Fuse: No. 9 (Aug 1979)
- The Fuse: No 10. (Sept 1979)
- The Fuse: No. 11 (September 28, 1979)
- The Fuse: No. 12 (October 12, 1979)
- The Fuse: No 13 (October 26, 1979)
- The Fuse: No. 13 (October 30, 1979)

Folder 5: PPSC Assorted Correspondence -

The folder contains personal correspondence regarding the Pontiac Brothers case. Subjects: Prison; Anti-Racism

Keywords: Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Death Penalty

- Mr. Vogel: As you know, indictments against two men ...
- Governor Thompson: After more than ten weeks of testimony ...
- WGN Continental Broadcasting Company: Rebuttal: Editorial (4th June 1981)
- WGN Continental Broadcasting Company: Pontiac Trail (18th May 1981)
- Letter by Office of the Governor: Dear Sister Eleanore: Governor Thompson requested that I respond to your letter ... (16th February 1981) [two pages]
- Letter by University Christian Ministry: Dear Steve, the six of us who journeyed to ... (18th March 1980) [two copies, one original]
- Letter by Steve Whitman to University Christian Ministry: Dear Bud, thank you for ... (24th May 1980)
- PPSC: Re: Deplorable conditions (29th January 1980) [stapled, original]
- Response to article by R. Jay Gibson: Dear Post-American (21st October 1979)
- PPSC to Buddy, Paul and Shel: We want to present an argument of why we think ...
- Note by Brian Price for Steve Whitman
- Article by Brian Price: The Truth about Criminality
- Letter by The Progressive (12th March 1981)
- Letter by Prisoner Advocacy to Governor James Thompson (9th July 1981)
- Letter by Prisoner Advocacy to David Vogel (8th July 1981)
- Letter by Bob O'Brien to David Vogel (8th July 1981)
- Letter by Bob O'Brien to Governor Thompson (8th July 1981)

Folder 6: PPSC Form Correspondence -

The folder contains organizational correspondence regarding the Pontiac Brothers case. Subjects: Prison; Anti-Racism

Keywords: Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Death Penalty

- Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition (PPSC) – blank letter paper [4 copies]

- Greetings: In many states ...
- PPSC: To whom it may concern: The trails of the Pontiac Brothers... (10th March 1981) [3 copies]
- On July 22, 1978, 1100 prisoners participated in ... [3 copies]
- PPSC: The murder trial of 10 Pontiac Brothers ... (5th April 1981) [3 pages]
- Dear Judge Miller: Recently I have read accounts ...
- Dear Judge Miller: I protest the injustice being done ... [2 pages, stapled]
- Dear Judge Miller: I protest the injustice being done [15 copies]
- Judge Knecht: Willie Hardy is scheduled for ... [3 copies]
- Mr Vogel: As you know, indictments against two men ... [2 copies]
- Governor Thompson: After more than ten weeks of testimony ... [3 copies]
- PPSC: Dear : The trail of the Pontiac Brothers is scheduled (27th February 1981)
- PPSC: Dear : Within the next few months, the state of Illinois ...
- Steve Whitman: Draft of Letter to be sent to local papers (29th May) [5 copies]
- PPSC: It is our feeling that a neighborhood newspaper campaign ... (24th August 1980) [5 copies]
- Weekend Booster: Northwestern prof aids 'Pontiac 17' (31th May to 1st June 1980) [8 copies]
- Dear Mr Whitman: The copy of the full page ad ... (5th August 1980) [4 copies]
- Steve Whitman: This article is about 1200 words [handwritten note]
- Article by Steve Whitman: On July 15, 1980 attorneys CL and EM filed [6pages, 1250 words]
- Dear Friend and Supporter (June 1, 1980)
- Dear Friend and Supporter (October 18, 1979)
- PPSC Meeting Reminder (January 29, 1981)
- An Open Letter to the Citywide Coalition to Free the Pontiac Brothers (From NAPO & PPO)
- Dear Supporter of the Pontiac Brothers.. (on gang membership in prisons)

Folder 7: PPSC Flyers and Outreach Materials -

The folder contains flyers and outreach materials regarding the Pontiac Brothers case. Subjects: Prison; Anti-Racism

Keywords: Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Death Penalty

- The Truth about Pontiac: A slide show about Pontiac prison
- Human Rights Violated at Pontiac Prison 31 Indicted – 17 May Die
- In Solidarity with the four nationalists from the Pontiac Brothers
- Pontiac Fact Sheet: a chronology
- PPSC: Party! Celebrate the victory of the Pontiac Brothers
- Prison Workshop Players
- Did You Know Fact Sheet
- Petition to Free the Pontiac 31
- The Truth About Pontiac Pamphlet Mock Up
- Get Involved – The Pontiac Prisoners Need Your Support
- Picnic Party Flyer
- January 1981 Update for Church Booklet
- The Victory of the Pontiac Brothers
- Attica
- PPSC Come to Court
- The Pontiac Brothers Defense Committee – Break the Chains
- Justice for the Pontiac 31 – Drop the Indictments
- Unite or Parish - Demonstrate
- Smash the Frame-Up! Demonstrate the Free the Pontiac Brothers
- Stop Big Jim Thompson's Racist Death Lottery
- The Pontiac Frame-Up: Lynching in Progress: From the Rebellion to the Indictments of the 31

- Demonstrate the Free the Pontiac Brothers
- PPSC Support Form
- DEMONSTRATE Novemehr 3 Chicago Brochure
- Rally for Human Rights: Marion/Pontiac Demonstration Pamphlet
- Update on Legal Proceedings Pamphlet (missing cover)
- From the kamps: Why the Rebellion From a Pontiac Brother Flier
- "To All Our Relations," invitation to attend a documentary on the prison rebellion legal status of the 14
- Rally for Human Rights Marion/Pontiac Demonstration Poster
- Bury the Arms! Free the Pontiac Brothers! Flier

Folder 8: PPSC Press and Media Releases -

The folder contains press and media released by the PPSC between 1980 and 1981. Subjects: Prison; Anti-Racism

Keywords: Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Death Penalty

- May 1, 1980
- August 8, 1980
- December 16, 1980
- January 29, 1981
- February 27, 1981
- March 12, 1981
- March 26, 1981
- April 5, 1981
- April 21, 1981
- April 29, 1981
- May 10, 1981
- May 12, 1981

Folder 9: PPSC Advertising Materials -

The folder contains advertising materials and campaigns released by the PPSC. Subjects: Prison; Anti-Racism

Keywords: Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Death Penalty

- Letter: Dear : Today the ads that you helped to pay ... (17th September)
- Letter: Dear Mr. Whitman: The copy of the full page ad (5th August 1980)
- Chicago Tribune: Prison Trail (7th August 1980)
- PPSC: Dear supporter of the Pontiac Brothers (8th October 1980) [two pages]
- Chicago Tribune: Mass Death Penalty Trail in Chicago (17th September 1980) [original]
- Chicago Tribune: Mass Death Penalty Trail in Chicago (17th September 1980) [photocopy]
- Chicago Tribune: Did you know? That despite the large Black and Latin ... (17th September 1980) [2 copies]
- Letter: Dear: The PPSC, the organization I have been working with ...
- This is the add paid for by PPSC...
- Greetings: In many states and in far away lands
- In envelope: Dear: Today the ads (September 17); Dear Mr. Whitman (August 1980); Prison trail (7 August 1980) [two copies each]
- Re: The Add: Why the Sun Times and not the Tribune [2 copies]
- Brochure: Sun- Times
- Brochure Media Market Guide: The figures the Tribune did not furnish
- Letter: Mr. Whitman: Thank you for your inquiry into (27th August 1980) [original]
- Letter: Mr. Whitman: Your advertising copy submitted in a letter .. (29th August 1980 [original]
- Letter: Chicago Reader: Dear Steven: We will be able to publish ... (20th August 1980)
- Brochure: Chicago Reader

- Dear Southtown Economist: Enclosed is the copy for an ad ... [2 copies]
- Chicago Tribune: Mr. Whitman: Thank you for your inquiry regarding advertising in the Chicago Tribune ... (28th May 1980)
- Brochure: Chicago Tribune rate card (1980)

Folder 10: Press Clippings and Photocopies -

The folder contains news clippings and photocopies of news clippings from local and regional news sources. Assorted photocopied clippings from the Chicago Tribune, Guardian, Chicago Sun-Times, Defender, New York Times. Date range 1979-1980.

Subjects: Prison; Anti-Racism; Media

Keywords: Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Death Penalty

- Article: Many ask to be executioner [9 copies]
- Article: Pleasure in pulling the switch [9 copies]
- Jury clears prisoners of guards' riot deaths (Chicago AP)
- Sun Times Article: Pontiac decision painful but necessary (4th June 1981)
- Sun Times Article: Angry senators deny extra funds for Pontiac defense (13th May 1981)
- Chicago Defender Article: Hail Pontiac Brothers verdict; longest trail of its kind (11th May 1981)
- Article: Pontiac jurors see victims' photos
- Sun Times Article: Pontiac prosecution fails miserably, defense says (7th May 1981)
- Sun Times Article: Key dates of Pontiac riot and its aftermath (19th May 1981)
- Sun Times Article: Here are 10 defendants acquitted in Pontiac trail (19th May 1981)
- Sunday Sun Times Article: All 10 Pontiac defendants acquitted (10th May 1981) [two pages]
- Chicago Tribune Article: 10 freed in Pontiac killings (10th May 1981) [two pages]
- Sunday Sun Times on Pontiac brothers (10th May 1981) [three pages]
- Chicago Sun Times: Pontiac jurors urged: Use your imagination (6th May 1981) [two pages, stapled]
- New York Times: Inmates acquitted in '78 Illinois riot (11th May 1981)
- Chicago Sun Times: How state lost jury in Pontiac trail (11th May 1981) [two pages]
- Chicago Sun Times: Drop other Pontiac cases: Fahner (12th May 1981)
- letter to the Guardian editors: Pontiac 10
- Birmingham Post-Herald: 2 sentenced to life in black's slaying (28th February 1980)
- The Burning Spear: Kill the death penalty (August 1979)
- Photo of Black man on electric chair (The Burning Spear Special Edition: August 1979)
- Reader: Frank Teague (21st March 1980)
- PPSC Table of content for Clipping Packet
- NY Times: 2 Years after Illinois Prison riot, tension and doubt unresolved (22nd October 1980) [6 copies]
- Chicago Defender: Protest deadlock (5th March 1979) [1 original, 1 copy]
- Sun Times: Shift sought in trail of 17 Pontiac cons (7th March 1979) [1 original, 1 copy]
- Sun Times: Gregory warns of more prison riots (30th September 1979) [1 original, 1 copy]
- Guardian: Pontiac Brother's trail nears (16th January 1980) [1 original, 1 copy]
- Chicago Defender: Pontiac 17 trail stirs up marchers (23rd July 1980) [1 original, 1 copy]
- Bloomington Pantagraph: Rowe: Excessive discipline cause of riot [6 copies]
- Chicago Tribune: Charge cover-up in jail deadlock (7th March 1979) [1 original, 6 copies]
- Chicago Tribune: Court hears Pontiac prisoner (25th October 1978) [1 original, 6 copies]
- Sun Times: Prison witnesses paid off: defense (19th January 1980) [1 original, 6 copies]
- Chicago Lawyer: State pays Pontiac witnesses (May 1980) [1 original, 6 copies]
- Chicago Tribune: Death penalty threat used in probe of riot at Pontiac (May 29th 1980) [1 original, 6 copies]
- Chicago Defender: The Pontiac uprising and letters to the editor (6th August 1980) [1 original, 6 copies]
- Photo of Thaddeus Pinkney (22nd July 1978)
- Map of Illinois (NY Times 22nd October 1980)
- Article: Root of Pontiac riot recalled
- Letter by PPSC: To Whom it may concern: The trails of the ... (10th March 1981)

- PPSC: Pontiac trail begins (9th March 1981)
- PPSC: Guard testifies for prosecution; previous lies admitted (12th March 1981)
- Chicago Defender: Pontiac 10 trail begins (5th March 1981) [2 copies]
- Sun Times: Key Pontiac witness admits repeated lies (13th March 1981) [1 original, 12 copies]
- Sun Times: State rests in Pontiac murder trail (21st April 1981)
- Sun Times: A former Pontiac State Prison inmate testified ... (15th April 1981)
- Sun Times: Saw pair attack guard: ex-inmate (14th April 1981)
- Sun Times: Relocation money used for drugs (17th March 1981)
- Article: Witness describes stabbing at Pontiac (10th April 1981)
- Guardian: Pontiac Brothers' trail nears (16th July 1980)
- Chicago Defender: Racist, inhumane conditions (24th April 1978)
- Chicago Lawyer: Be fair, Judge Miller (December 1980) [3 copies]
- Article: Prosecutors decide to drop Pontiac case
- Sun Times: Pontiac guard's story of attack by cons disputed (30th April 1981)
- Chicago Lawyer: The incredibility of the Pontiac case (May 1981)
- PPSC stapled documents of summaries and clippings on the prosecution's case, pre-trial proceedings and investigation [40 pages]
- Note: PPSC Clipping packet [handwritten]
- Chicago Defender: Letter to the editor: Why they had no trouble at Stateville (18th April 1979)
- Chicago Tribune: Judge blasts state delays at Pontiac (23rd January 1979)
- Chicago Tribune: Pontiac memo reveals 38° reading in cellhouse (30th January 1979)
- Chicago Tribune: Judge may pick outsider to take over Pontiac (31st January 1979)
- Chicago Tribune: Charge IDC lied in deadlock case (31st January 1979)
- Chicago Tribune: Lawyers try to stop Pontiac riot grand jury (22nd February 1979)
- Chicago Tribune: Unrest at Pontiac continues in court (30th March 1979)
- Chicago Tribune: Supreme Court to name Pontiac slayings judge (30th March 1979)
- Sun Times: Pontiac inmates' trail will be in Cook County (2nd June 1979)
- Chicago Tribune: Pontiac trail moved here (2nd June 1979)
- Chicago Tribune: Murder charges against ex-inmates to stand: judge (25th June 1980)
- Chicago Tribune: Pontiac riot inmates to be tried in 2 groups (15th August 1980)
- Chicago Defender: Pontiac 16 is split in half for upcoming trail (16th August 1980)
- Chicago Tribune: 15 will face slaying charge in Pontiac riots: prison chief (6th January 1979)
- Sun Times: Death penalty sought in prison guard killings (22nd January 1979)
- Chicago Tribune: Pontiac trail cost put at \$2million (21st September 1979)
- National Catholic Reporter: Pontiac case illustrates death penalty inequities (18th April 1980)
- Chicago Tribune: Prison trail Invitation to perjury? (7th August 1980) [2 copies]
- Article: Lots of talk, but little action (24th January)
- The Daily Northwestern: Pontiac murders (30th October 1980) [2 copies]
- Article: Pontiac defense lawyer says judge uses racist procedures
- Chicago Tribune: Pontiac: Did anybody lean anything? (8th November 1981)
- Chicago Tribune: Pontiac defendant's charges reduced (April 24th 1981)
- Chicago Tribune: Ad by PPSC (17th September 1980)
- Chicago Defender: Pontiac prison still near boiling point (September 1979)
- Letter to the editor: Pontiac attorneys
- Article: Defense layers' behavior in Pontiac trail is questioned
- City on a Hill Press: Sixteen Black inmates charged with murder (19th February 1981)
- Twanas: Activists to be prosecuted (February 1981)
- Sun Times: Cons' lawyers hit at Pontiac trial (25th March 1981)
- Sun Times: Boast of Pontiac guard-killing told (24th March 1981)
- Reader: Chicago's Free Weekly, Vol. 8 No. 2, October 6, 1978
- Reader: Chicago's Free Weekly, Vol. 10, No. 2, October 3, 1980

Folder 11: Pontiac Brothers Slide Show –

Slideshow (93 slides) produced for educational and outreach efforts related to the Pontiac Brothers case.

Includes two copies of the slideshow transcript and 19 sets of additional slides.

Subjects: Prison; Anti-Racism

Keywords: Pontiac Prison Rebellion; Pontiac Brothers; Pontiac Prisoners Support Coalition; Death Penalty

Folder 12: Pontiac Brothers Miscellaneous Box Contents -

- Press Release: Reidsville Brothers Defense Committee
- Free the Reidsville Brothers!
- The Lumpenproletariat and Repression: A Case Study by Edward A. Lee
- Motion to Dismiss For Lack of Proper Jurisdiction over Defendants July 15 1980
- Henry Pretson, et al v. James Thompson, et al. Brief and argument for Plaintiffs-Appelles
- Notes for trial/hearing
- Prisoners are People Too, Poems by John Bailey