

Lynne Stewart ordered to Prison: The Criminalization of the US Justice System

By [Claude Jacqueline Herdhuin](#)

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On Thursday, November 19th, long time civil rights attorney Lynne Stewart was ordered by Judge John G. Koeltl to turn herself in to begin serving a 28-month prison sentence for her 2006 conviction for conspiracy and providing material support to terrorists. This 70 year old woman has devoted her life to the poor, the underprivileged, the black community and to cause of social justice.

Anyone who could not afford for a lawyer could knock at her door. Today, Lynne Stewart is fighting not only for her freedom but for any American's freedom.

Lynne Stewart did not benefit from the US justice system. Her case became important after 911. Let me remind you that her only mistake was to ignore the US Bureau of Prisons Special Administrative Measures (SAMs) she had to sign in order to defend Sheik Omar-Abdel Rahman. The SAMs are unconstitutional and constitute a violation of both the First Amendment and the Sixth Amendment right to legal counsel.

The Clinton Administration did not consider Lynne Stewart as a terrorist and a traitor. Her case was merely considered as an administrative violation. She received a letter to that effect, and could not visit her client in prison for some time. Then, she was allowed to visit him and pursue her work as a lawyer. It is only on April 9th 2002 that she was arrested, in the aftermath of 911, when the legal environment in the US became almost hysterical. So hysterical that the attorney general John Ashcroft went to David Letterman's Late Night show to tell America that Lynne Stewart is a traitor to the Nation.

Today, in the US media, Lynne Stewart is presented either as a terrorist or a traitor, who deserves the worst punishment. The truth is she is doing her job as a lawyer. She is a 70 year old woman with years of life experience as mother, a grand-mother, an activist and a lawyer. As a young white American, she fought for the cause of African Americans, because she believed in justice. Decades later, she defended Sheikh Omar-Abdel Rahman, because she still believed in justice.

Today, she is in jail, and she still believes in justice. Even if her trial brings us back to the worst period in America, namely the McCarthy era.

In her November 17th press conference, Lynne Stewart said she is too old to cry but it hurts too much not to.

She also warned the other defence lawyers: "This is a warning shot for other lawyers. Don't advocate for your clients in a vigorous, strong way."

I have known Lynne Stewart for five years now. The first time I heard about her as a defense attorney was in the newspapers, in 2004. They described Lynne Stewart as a terrorist and, with my husband, we decided to contact her to see what really happened and who she was. We decided to make a documentary and find out what happened. We have been very cautious to be as neutral as possible.

Years later, I can say that Lynne Stewart's only error was to be overconfident. She had confidence in justice, and the government of the United States betrayed her:

By attacking the First Amendment right of free speech, free press and petition;

by attacking the right to effective assistance of counsel by chilling the defense; (and)

by invading the private conversations, private-attorney-client meetings, faxes, letters and e-mails to gather the 'evidence'.

Please sign the petition to free Lynne Stewart

<http://www.petitiononline.com/091127Is/petition.html>

To send Lynne Stewart a letter, write:

Lynne Stewart
#53504-054
MCC-NY
150 Park Row
New York, NY NY 10007

You can also call or write to President Obama:

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Please include your e-mail address

Phone Numbers

Comments: 202-456-1111
Switchboard: 202-456-1414
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/CONTACT/>

Claude Jacqueline Herdhuin is a screenwriter, assistant-director and writer.

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