

Why Are They Still in Prison?

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Featured image: Herman Bell

On April 27th, 2018 Herman Bell went home to his friends and family. Eligible for parole after 25 years he served 45 years, as a model prisoner. His 8th application for parole was granted by the New York State Parole Board Feb. 18, 2018 but the announcement was followed with extreme attempts by the New York Police Department's Patrolmen's Benevolent Association to make sure Bell never left prison. The police union (PBA), The Daily News, The New York Post, even Mayor de Blasio, Governor Cuomo, and several State Senators all tried to pressure the Parole Board to reverse its decision. The PBA and widow of one of the victim officers attempted a court challenge. After he was publicly labeled the killer of two NYPD police Bell was so 'put down' and dehumanized in a speech by the PBA union boss it put Bell's safety at risk.

The sentence given Herman Bell by the judge was not a life sentence but 25 years to life which intentionally included the possibility of parole. With irregularities in the evidence presented parole was a necessary inclusion. Police and politicians don't have the legal right to take over the judge's decision by excluding parole or the Parole Board's decision to grant it. Bell is just one of many U.S. elders who have served too many years as U.S. political prisoners. Some of these were involved in police shootings. Some shot back in self defense. Some were framed by the FBI's COINTELPRO program. Some were at war against an illegal government policy to stop the Black momentum for change by any means possible, and they were fighting for their lives, their children, their communities. By pressuring courts and parole boards against their release the police continue a war against the American left and the former Black Panthers which was initiated in the 1960's. A policy of illegal treatment of Blacks in particular rose from an NYPD and FBI alliance as part of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI policy - to neutralize Panther organizers and allies and community leaders. It spread throughout the country.

There remains reasonable doubt Herman Bell or his co-defendants were even present at the shooting of two New York City police. There's evidence of police 'buying' witnesses. Bell's first trial was declared a mistrial. His second trial was provably replete with perjured evidence, evidence illegally withheld from the defense, and possibilities of incorrect identification. It became clear that the essential police witness was tortured by police to provide false evidence. All appeals of the illegally obtained conviction were denied. After years in prison Bell apologized for committing the crime he was charged with. This provided the Parole Board with some proof of his remorse and rehabilitation and is likely to have led to his parole.



Concurrent FBI practices against Black leaders since the mid 1960s included the murder of Martin Luther King Jr.. Extensive works by attorney William Pepper have provided strong evidence proving an assassination by police agents and the Southern Mafia under the direction and in the pay of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI, with the backup of a ten person U.S. army death squad. Fred Hampton was simply murdered in his bed by Chicago police. These are among many, not only leaders but increasingly the unarmed innocent people of color or simply poor people, walking down the street or stopped for a traffic violation.

While the NYC police union was outraged at the parole of a "cop killer" NYPD killed yet another unarmed Black civilian, Saheed Vassell, known to his neighbourhood as helpful, friendly but mentally ill. One witness to the killing said it looked like a standard professional hit. Vessell was unarmed. Probably the team of plainclothes police shot not to disable but to kill.

An insight into the the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association's lobbying against Bell's release was revealed by Natasha Lennard's April 25 article in The Intercept which notes that The New York Post's headline of 367,000 letters of protest to the Parole Board were the product of only 6000 complaints made on the PBA website which could automatically generate up to 67 letters per complaint, protesting the release of all those convicted of killing police. The Intercept article also notes that CBS New York found 86% of those it polled, favouring the Parole Board's decision to free Bell.

With respect for the honest police officers, Wikipedia notes 23 NYPD members were killed outright during the destruction of three buildings at the World Trade Center in 2001. 343 New York City firemen were killed outright of 412 emergency workers in all. Many more are dying from the effects. Over fifty thousand emergency responders who worked to clean up the hazard afterward show the rates of cancer and related illnesses beyond accurate measure. If one adds the casualties both of military and of civilian populations killed by wars resulting from the "terrorist attack" hundreds of thousands have died. Who believes the guilty have been arrested?



This is Italy's Judge Ferdinando Imposito (image on the left), Honorary President of the Italian Supreme Court, former legal consultant to the United Nations, and fearless opponent of Mafia in Italy- he's speaking in *Incontrovertible*, a 911 documentary by Tony Rooke (a Killing Auntie Film):

"The 9/11 attacks were a global state terror operation permitted by the administration of the USA, which had foreknowledge of the operation yet remained intentionally unresponsive in order to make war against Afghanistan and Iraq. To put it briefly the 9/11 events were an instance of the strategy of tension enacted by political and economic powers in the USA to seek advantages for the oil and arms industries."

Of police casualties at the World Trade Centre, Judge Imposito says:

"They are policemen. They are members [of] security. I am to tell you that we need the truth. Because without truth it is impossible to improve. this problem we have now we have had for many years but it is not finished..... You have to know that a lot of soldiers, a lot of policemen, a lot of members of security, have been killed. This problem has not been solved."

Instead of outrage at thirty and forty year old grievances swaddled in lies and false testimonies, the New York's Patrolmen's Benevolent Association should mourn all its officers who have died in the line of duty but address those still being lost to the unsolved problem of 9/11.

Aside from Herman Bell, there's an aging group of political prisoners from the 20th Century, who lifetimes ago were alienated into violence, or framed under the FBI's COINTELPRO program, who were given sentences impossible to survive and survived anyway but are denied parole and a return to their communities and families. They were judged and sentenced by courts under adverse circumstances. As I understand it the primary reason for refusing them parole is that parole boards don't consider them remorseful. They haven't changed their political beliefs which under the U.S. Constitution they're allowed to have. They've given the years of their lives in faithfulness to their beliefs. In the court of history who will call them criminals?

The political prisoners force us to recognize the injustices of our system. To not be concerned with them is to lie to yourself. Eligible for parole or not, and innocent or guilty as charged, these years later it becomes a greater injustice to keep them in prison. The society lacks their resistance, their concern for their communities, everything that COINTELPRO policies stripped from America so the country could gradually slip into fascism, racism, white supremacy, and empire. Leonard Peltier, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Rap Brown - Imam Jamil Abdullah al-Amin, Jalil Muntaqim, Jaan Laaman, Tom Manning, David Gilbert, Judith Clark, Sundiata Acoli, Dr. Mutulu Shakur, Robert Seth Hayes, Ruchell Cinque Magee, Russell Maroon Shoats, each of the remaining MOVE 9, and there are others, are admired for their endurance and refusals to compromise with injustice. They're simply men and women on the other side of power. Many are victims of the establishment's hate crimes. Many have fought for the country's promises of social justice and equality. Why are they still in prison?

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