The Panthers, the Black Liberation Army and the Struggle to Free all Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War

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I want to get started off in a way that helps me get rid of the butterflies, and helps get us stirred as well. You know we always say, "Power to the People." And usually the response back is, "*All* Power to the People." If you don't mind indulging me: "Power to the People!" (*audience response*) "All Power to the People!"

Second thing, to just take us back, again. There's a little chant that goes along with a little march, that we used to do. I need your participation with it, if I may. It's gonna go something like this: I'm gonna say, "Hold Your Head Up High, Panther's Marching By. We Don't Take No Jive." When I say, "Sound Off," you say, "Free the People!" Then at a certain point I'm gonna say, "Break it on down." And you're gonna say, "Free the People, Free the People, Free the People," and then one loud one, "Free the People!" We got it? "Hold Your Head Up High, Panther's Marching By. We Don't Take No Jive, Got a Loaded .45. Sound Off!" (*audience*) "Free the People!" "Sound off!" "Free the People!" Right on!

Now imagine, in certain cities and certain towns where there were chapters, there were rank and file Panthers marching down the street. And here we are with this chant. It is performance, but it's performance that's really important. We are trying to show people that we are a disciplined force that is ready to act. We are trying to show people that there is a new role for us to play. And here we are: we're the Black Panther Party. And it's not only about the .45, but not without it.

It was the organizing, it was the educating, it was being available to help people to figure out ways to resist that made the Black Panther Party what it became. You know, we did the best we could. I was young: Plainfield, New Jersey, small town. But hey, Plainfield had the same problems as every other town that had Black folks in 'em. We was treated bad. We stepped forward like so many other young folks—teenagers—in high school.

You gotta imagine what our parents thought. I didn't come up to them one day and say, "Mom and Pops, I'm joining the Black Panther Party." They just kind of noticed that I was hanging out with some *different people*, you know? And now I'm not sitting in front of the television anymore, watching the comedies, or whatever. I'm sitting up here reading Malcolm X's autobiography and

Malcolm X Speaks, to the point where my father would actually get angry at me. Why is my head always stuck in this book? And sometimes he'd say, "Get out of the living room." And I'd be like, "OK, I guess I'll go outside and find my crew."

But it was where my head was at because I was a product of the '60s. A product that was, in every sense of the word, magical for so many of us. And when I tell people about the '60s, the thing I want them to get, as far as the Black community is concerned, is that we came alive as no other generation in this country since we were kidnapped and brought here 400 years before. We had been brainwashed, whipped, beat down, denied; everything that had trained us to not think of any possibility that things could be different than what white supremacy had laid down for us. But now here's the '60s and the '60s is telling us, "You can be everything." But specifically, "Black is Beautiful! Africa is our roots. And be proud of it."

We had just came from a generation, and all them generations that just accepted that niggers ain't shit. Niggers will never organize, will never get it together. You'll never do it. Now all of a sudden, there's something capturing us, there's something in the air. They're saying Black Power, that's tying us into struggles not only in Africa, but in Asia, Latin America, and right here within the United States because the Civil Rights movement was in its upswing. The Native American struggles were coming up, the Puerto Rican struggles, the Chicano struggles, the anti-war movement, the women's movement: it was *in the air*.

So why not little thirteen-, fourteen-, fifteen-year-old Ashanti (known as Michael at the time), you know? Why not get involved? Just like any other, I want to know *what I can do*. And I don't think I was any different from a Palestinian teenager, who is answering those questions right now, in occupied Palestine. I saw what the Civil Rights movement was doing, and respected it. But when I seen those Panthers, and when my best friend Jihad saw those Panthers; their magazine had a particular cover that had Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale on the cover: black berets, black leather jackets, powder blue shirt, all down to the combat boots and weapons—one on the side and one in the hand—we knew right then and there we wanted to find out about *them*. And then to find out that they organized survival programs, and they had liberation schools, where they were actually teaching Black people how to defend themselves cause they said it was *our right*. Going contrary to all the things we were seeing on television where the white reaction in the south was brutalizing Black people down there; killing folks, not only Black folks, but even white activists who was coming down there to help, in solidarity. Disappearing them. And then maybe finding them years later, and I'm sure there's a lot of other bodies that are still in swamps somewhere.

You know, but still, we're coming in. Seeing all this didn't frighten us or discourage us, it made us want to step up *more*. So now we are learning; Panthers from New York and Newark, different places, are coming to Plainfield to show us what it means to be a Panther. And the first thing we was hoping to get, or get close to, was the guns! But just like the other comrades, they shared the stories that the things we get is not the physical guns, but we get the books, which was the guns that we were first given; placed in our hands, *we're gonna read!* Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Mao Tse-Tung's *Quotations*, everybody had a Red Book, W.E.B. DuBois, Robert Williams' *Negroes With Guns*: We are reading! And many, like me, didn't like to read at all because of what school has done to us. I didn't like to read. But you inspired now. There's something in you that's different now, and you want to know. I want to know everything about Africa; I want to know everything about DuBois; I want to know all this stuff. So yeah, I'm reading now.

We got study groups: here is Black folks sitting together, in study circles, helping each other learn. Here we are now learning how to go out in the community and help tenants figure out ways to resist all the stuff that landlords do. Here we are now trying to show people how to fight back against these racist, killer police. Heavy duty. And I'm telling you when we first stepped out in our community, people did not trust us. Because like me, and others, we were called lumpen, and a lot of us were. A lot of us were into a little hustle, maybe gangs, but nothing like the gangs now. But me, I was on the border between wanting to be a burglar and a revolutionary. And actually, later on, kind of combined both of them.

But the Panthers showed us that revolution involved engaging your community and organizing them. Helping to give them a sense of hope, that we could change our circumstances. And to know that we were doing it in concert with all these other communities and movements was heavy.

I did not like white folks. I was a stone nationalist. Didn't want to work with 'em. And it was the Panthers that helped to kinda broaden my perspective on that, you know, you can't be hating all men 'cause they're white. You know, you might not want to deal with them because of what they do, but if you got a white revolutionary that's here to support you and to be your ally, you can embrace him or her. And even moving into that grudgingly, I learned to relax and accept white folks. Plainfield did not encourage that because it's a very racist place. But we're seeing a very different kind of revolution, especially for a revolutionary nationalist group. It was heavy.

Gradually, the community started to support us. The back and forth between our desire to break a certain hypnosis, and a certain psychosis, around being a victim in society to learning that you can be free individuals, and actually start to love each other, was powerful. But the government—of course, this is not a loving society, it's a very death-oriented society, a very hateful society—don't stand for that. No group that has been kept systematically on the bottom of the society is going to be allowed to come from the bottom of that society. You ain't disturbing nothin'. The history of this country says so. We understood: 500-Year War. This is 500 years of continuation. No break. From when the Europeans first came here and did what they did: Christopher Columbus and all of them. We understood that it's a liberation war. No different from the DuBois, no different from the Indigenous Nations fightin' for sovereignty. No different than the Vietnamese fighting to get the United States out of their country. We said, "The United States out of the Ghettos!" That may have been where they confined us. But then we began to look at the ghettos as, "You got us here, now it's ours! You get out." And we're gonna take over the institutions, the voice of Malcolm X. Take 'em over. We became revolutionaries, but we understood we are up against a monster that will kill us without a blink of an eye.

Huey P. Newton had already been in jail. They were trying to frame him for the cop that got killed. Bobby Seale was being framed for murder, him and Erika Huggins, in New Haven, Connecticut. Fred Hampton had got killed, and Mark Clark, in 1969. *We understood*, but it didn't stop us. As we read, we organized. As we read, we fought. That's praxis. That's putting it right into practice. We are developing as we go. We don't have to wait to have no developed ideology, don't have to wait to have all the answers; we figure it out as we go. Because our situation is that bad. We don't have the luxury of sitting back and doing all sorts of fanciful ideological positions: we'll figure it out as we go. But we took hits.

My first hit, and Jihad's first hit, was when a cop got killed in my hometown. So what do they do? They get the two main organizers, and they blame it on them, me and Jihad; seventeen years old, seniors in high school. They know we didn't do it. They know that. They know Mumia didn't

kill a cop. They know that. It's not a question of innocent or guilty. They know what they're doing: break the potential of this becoming a solid movement in Plainfield, New Jersey. Get Michael and David off the streets. Fourteen months; the last four months was the trial. If it wasn't for the fact that we had good lawyers, no telling. I never say that we would have been on Death Row, or we would have been in prison for life. My thing is we would have found a way to get out of there. Because even during that fourteen months, we was on a hack saw blade, cutting this window, trying to get out even before the jury got the case. Seventeen! Because we understood, we are warriors, at war. No if, ands, and buts. White jury came back with a "not guilty" verdict. Lawyers were able to show, classic frame up. We're out. We're back in the ranks. New York and New Jersey chapters are under heavy attack: FBI forces, local police departments, they're losing numbers, the government, the media, police forces were very successful at isolating us from our communities. They were very successful: calling us thugs, murderers, or just by terrorizing people we were dealing with.

I was back and forth between the New York and the Plainfield chapter. The free breakfast program in New York had always been very successful, in Harlem. The Harlem chapter program—every day, feeding the children. One day, some of the children get sick. And all of a sudden some of the parents start pulling their children out. We find out years later through the COINTELPRO papers that the police poisoned the fruit. So that's why they pulled the children out. It's no big deal what they're going to go through because they are that cold blooded. They're not going to let anybody come in and mess this thing up. Gotta kill you, kill you. Gotta discourage people from coming to you, gotta discourage them. Right? But they were good. We get isolated, then one day, they have charges against us and they pick us up, people not quick to come to our support. They had Panthers who were part of the Black Liberation Army, who were locked up in the Manhattan House of Detention. They are political prisoners. They're being charged with an ambush in New York and an ambush out in San Francisco. It's actually the San Francisco Eight case. Here I am, nineteen years old. And I'm approached by one of the members of the Panther Party, who asks me, would I become a member of a cell, the Black Liberation Army.

My partner at the time was pregnant. I have to think now, what am I going to do? I want to be around for this child. Daddy. I don't know nothing about being a daddy for real at nineteen. But just the idea, you know? But also, I want to win this revolution. So my decision is, goin' under. Maybe I won't be around for the victory, cause we still thought it was right around the corner. But maybe the child will come into a free world.

Alright, so here I am, I come back to the Sister and I'm like, "You got me, and you got one of my comrades, who's a year younger than me. We are here. We were waiting. It is an honor to join the ranks of the Black Liberation Army." I'm proud of it to this day, and actually my children are too, and I'm happy about that. But the thing is we went to get these political prisoners out of the Manhattan House of Detention.

I'm bringing this up for a reason. *To be free*, you have to be a little crazy. Harriet Tubman back and forth, how many times? She's gotta be a little crazy. Nat Turner: little crazy. All those movements that gotta face the viciousness of white supremacy, you gotta be a little crazy. You ain't gonna be free otherwise, by doing things so careful, and so convenient. You know, you wanna be free, it's the same thing if you want to learn something, you gotta be a little daring with the material you pick up and read. 'Cause it may change your whole life.

So here we are. Manhattan House of Detention is just concrete, steel, buildings. The Manhattan area, the Federal Building is down there, immigration, police, all around. But here's the Black

Liberation Army. We are no different from them Vietnamese guerrillas, up against the United States. American imperialism is a paper tiger. We read Frantz Fanon. And we learned from Frantz Fanon that if you can look your enemy in the eye, that fear will drop. Break the fear, and you'll see that they're not invincible. It's our fear of them that keeps them in power. So here we go. They're on trial every day. We're allowed to bring 'em food. Take the food to the jail, we give the bag to the police, he goes through it, gives it to the prisoners. But on one particular day, when we put that bag on the table, we don't let the police go through the bag. We open it up, and we pull out the guns. We take them guards, we put them in the bathroom. And I always verify to say this, we handcuff them to the toilets. Because that's the job that they do. Their attitude, I say this because of their attitude, *to be free*—attitude is very important. You gotta believe it. You cannot have fear of these people.

So here they go, we're off to the second floor, to the visiting room; a solid wall of steel, windows, telephones. No contact. Got the bag with us. Next thing that comes out of the bag is an acetylene torch, and I proceed to cut. I wasn't supposed to be the one to cut, it was supposed to be someone else who was a professional, who couldn't make it at the time. Somebody had to do it. I gave myself a crash course, I did the best I could. I'm cutting. The prisoners on the other side have taken care of the guards. The visitors on the other side are just regular people, they watchin' me, but this is New York, ain't nobody, you know, I'm cutting. But if I was experienced, I could'a been zip, zip, zip, push it out, you all come on. And I'm sure some of them other prisoners would have come out too. But it took me a long time, to the point where I had two inches to go, and the tank ran out. And that's the thing that really cuts into the metal when you got that flame on it. So then I got to look at the political prisoners, and I got to look at my comrades, you know, and you got to make a decision, we gotta go! We gotta go. It was hard for me for two reasons. One, we're not getting 'em out. Two, two of the women in our cell, it was their partners behind that wall too. And their families was waiting, we had them, somewhere else. And we was all gonna hook up after we got everybody out. So quickly, we gotta go. You turn to your comrades, "Power to the People. We out." They understood. We're gone.

Next thing you know, my family jokes about it to this day, usually when I disappear, they just gotta turn on the news, you know. So they turn on the news, and here's the thing about the Manhattan House of Detention: there's their son's picture. Alright, we know where Michael is. Or we know where he was. In the course of other things, bank expropriations, in New Haven, Connecticut. Now, I did not say robbery, 'cause we're revolutionaries; we don't commit crime. But we will go after them banks' money, 'cause that's blood money. We will fund the revolution. We will hit drug dealers. We will hit banks. We will hit insurance companies. We will hit armored cars. We are at war! And that's certainly what we did. But doing this bank expropriation in New Haven, Connecticut, Wild West shoot out, three of us are captured, I'm one of them. First day in court, we tell them, you have no right to even try us: we are soldiers of the Black Liberation Army. We ain't in here for no justice. We're soldiers. We ain't askin' for nothin.' We know what the deal is gonna be. This is a firefight. They had guns, we had guns. We are prisoners of war, at this point. When they is tryin' to frame us, we was political prisoners. With this, we're prisoners of war. That type of action, and others; many of the political prisoners that Jericho represents: Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, Albert Nuh Washington, and a whole bunch of others out of the Black Liberation Army. And we represent folks from the Weather Underground, who placed bombs in a lot of places. We make no ifs, ands, and buts about it: we are at war. This is revolution; we want to bring this Empire, as George Jackson says, to its knees. No ifs and buts. But here we are.

We didn't get a lot of support. The Left backed up from us. They called us "infantile Leftists." They used every Marxist expression they could find. You know, the liberals, of course, are not going to touch us. But they terrified our communities. So they were scared. And it wasn't but maybe the nationalist groups, or the really solid white supporters, who stuck with us. We didn't make it out of them jails, but boy did we try. We tried. Got sentenced to 45 years. Here I am off to Wisconsin. Next thing, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Next thing, Marion, Illinois. Then Lompac, California. Then I gotta come back to Connecticut. But they moved us around like that, they would not allow us to be anybody in the same place, together. At one point there were so many of us, we had collectives: Panthers, BLA, Weather Underground, Puerto Rican *Independentistas*: we're fighting, we're organizing inside. Trying to figure out ways to get out. These are many of the individuals who Jericho represent. 'Cause we come out of liberation movements here, that operate out of that 500-year war understanding that this system is not able to reform or do anything humane. Our freedom, and its death, go together. Fear. But we don't get a lot of support.

To this day, we don't get money; foundations don't give us money. People in community don't even know who we are. That's the deal. Why? Because this system was very effective in not only putting down resistance, but giving people so many diversions that encourage them to forget about that. And many parents, neighbors, family, friends, communities, for the sake of survival, and not endangering their families and children, didn't talk about it. Other communities, it's part of what they do; you pass the stories on. Ours didn't do it.

People don't know about us today. I get out of prison, first time I get out is '85, I go to New Haven, Connecticut, I ask a high school student, "What do you know about the Black Panther Party?" He asks me, "Was it a martial arts group?" Eleven years! How did that happen? Because the system is good at reconquest. The '60s shook 'em up. We shook 'em up. Even for a minute. It was good. Even for a minute. But they got it together very quickly too. And they know what to do. You see what they do in Iraq, you know? Knock all that stuff down, put American ideology in there, from prostitution to all the other bullshit about this fake democracy.

But they did it in our communities, when they destroyed Panthers and other groups, they flooded our communities with drugs and guns. Culturally, just dealing with television and movies, blacksploitation movies. Turn on the television, you get comedy and athletes. Who are the spokespersons now? Integrationists, people that's into Black capitalism; you don't hear our voices no more, you don't hear Angela Davis, you don't hear Huey P. Newton, Eldridge Cleaver. You hear people who are trying to fit in. 'Cause in this new neo-colonial situation, you gotta get those who are willing to be Uncle Toms, so that potential resistance is quelled, quickly, even before it starts.

So the end of the '80s, there's nothing, going into the '90s. Nothing. And it wasn't until the Panther movie comes out that people start to ask questions. And then begin to find out there's still Panthers. Geronimo Pratt is still in.[1] All these other people are still in from the Weather Underground. Then people start asking questions.

But then 9/11 happens. So then we get knocked back again. People don't even want to ask about it. They don't even want to bring up the topic, because of all the hyper-patriotism that's going on. But our fighters, our revolutionaries, our organizers, our thinkers are still behind walls. And now some of them are dying. I went in with them. We was all there in the '70s, I mean we

[1] Geronimo Pratt died on June 2, 2011

were in the same places together, we made a commitment to each other, like, "Ashanti, you got parole," I'm like, "Yeah, OK man."

You know, the thing is, I get out, I work for them, to help get them out. And even back then it was still, "We'll get you out by any means necessary, whatever works." You know, but things had changed. You just can't be on the corners anymore and talk about revolution, and brother and sister would be like, "Yo, what you want me to do?" Then it's like people are like, "Yo, what, you from that period? I thought all you was dead." Different, but it hurts. Now you gotta figure out how to get that attention again.

And I'm telling you the truth, we haven't figured that out. We still haven't. Because the power of the dollar bill, the power of American cultural capitalism, is great: "Get Rich or Die Tryin'." And they're even trying to push the Black Republicans. They continue to bombard our communities, and they do this to other people of color communities, other poor communities, and people in general: keep them in sync, keep them in line, so their minds don't go to revolution, rebellion, insurgency. Do it.

But we show the possibilities. Even when it seems like they got us, here comes something happening, here comes Seattle, then here comes the Zapatistas, and then all these other incidents where people from nowhere, seemingly…they uprise. And sometimes in very creative ways, and lots of different ways to organize. So I look at 'em, and I'm like, "OK, I don't have to be depressed. We can still do this. If one person fights back, we can do this. If one person still dreams, we can do this."

But we gotta get to them political prisoners. It's hard. When you gotta go visit them. You want to lie to them, and say, "Hey man, I think they got us." But when you don't have to, you can tell them, "Yeah man, I know we haven't quite pulled it together yet, but people are fighting back. They're fighting back." And they say, "Well listen, just figure out ways that involve us." Some of them can come to terms with dying inside, as long as they know that we're carrying it on, out here, and have not forgotten them.

They know it's tough, because what goes on in the prison is a microcosm of what goes on out here. It's a microcosm. They just want us to remember them. They want to be free. They would love to be free. But we know on the outside, and they know too from the Panther days in the '60s, that power is really with the people. It's with the people.

It's one of the reasons why I increasingly became an anarchist. Because I want power to the people where it stays with the people. Everything is with the people. And not just you say that, and then after all is said and done, you got a small clique of people who are really calling the shots. I want to figure out how to make a Zapatista-style revolution here in the United States, that brings all of us into this picture *how we are*, not erasing who we are. But also respecting all of our ways of fighting back. But I know that ultimately to get them political prisoners out; from Earth Liberation Front, Animal Liberation Front, to the MOVE 9, to Marilyn Buck,[2] David Gilbert, all the Panthers, and others in prison: it's got to come from us! It's got to come from us in a way that poses a political consequence to this system if they don't free Mumia; if they don't give medical attention to Seth Hayes. We got to be that fist that says, "If you don't, other things may well happen." Now that's not necessarily nice. It's just like when Rob Los Ricos spoke, and Jeff Luers—and I got to tell you, I'm very proud of you all, I'm very proud of you—but they bring up just how murderous this system is.

[2] Marilyn Buck passed away on August 3, 2010.

There's a sense of urgency here, you know, and we can't take it lightly. All of our lives are on the line, all of them. Indigenous Nations say, "Think of the next seven generations." We gotta do that, and we also gotta think about those who've been in prison for the last thirty, forty years. 'Cause if we get them, we are bringing not only them, but whose shoulders they stood on. So we're bringing the ancestors, and the children who are yet to be born, into our scope, knowing that there's nothing this system can do for us. Nothing. Not a solid thing. Unless we make them. And we're making them only until we can finally get ourselves in the position to, as we used to say in the '60s also, a blade in the throat of fascism. I hate to get graphic. But, when you feel the pain, that's what you want. When Kent Ford tells me about his son, Patrice Lumumba, I feel the pain, you know, in him. Oh man, they snatched up another one of our children. Can't theorize about it too much. You can't just be on the, you want the correct political position. We gotta figure out how to get his son home. Guilty, innocent, don't matter to me. Mumia, guilty or innocent, don't matter to me. It matters *what we do*.

The best things that have been happening in terms of political prisoners is that groups that had really not been working together, maybe really saw no reason, have begun to work together: the liberation movements and the animal and the Earth movements. 'Cause many of us in the liberation movements look at the animal movements in the way that the media projects you, that you're all these young white kids, with these funny looks, and you're huggin' trees, and you're throwing red paint on people with fur coats, and we're like, "Why do we want to mess with them?" Until you are in situations where you may be able to talk. Which I was. Daniel McGowan, Andy Stepanian, and people around the SHAC, I'm from New York. And then I got to step back and say, "Oh, that's what you're about. Now I get it." You go to one of the conferences and you see these documentaries on what they do to the animals, and you think, "Boy, Man is a motherfucker. A motherfucker." The same ones that did this to us, Africans. And they enslaved the indigenous folks too: enslaved them, lynched them. Even the Italians, and the Irish, everybody almost had a taste of this lynching, being treated bad. But it's when you see this, you gotta see how you can change this thing, get rid of it.

It's that we gave it our best, in the '60s. Some of them have been in there, the same as your age right now. You can't do it without having them in your plans. You gotta put them on your agenda. You got to. They are our Mandelas. And I said to one of them a couple of months ago, they're "even better than Mandela." At least Nelson Mandela. I go with Winnie. You know, in many ways, Nelson walked them into neo-liberalism. I'm telling you that our political prisoners still want a revolution. We gotta get 'em.

So whatever your issues are: Earth, animals, and like the indigenous folks say, "I'm talking about the two-legged, the rock people, the wing people"; that's how the indigenous folks talk, I love it. I love it because it's picturesque. Deep down, we're all very picturesque, and when we get Western, we get very clinical. We take the color out of life. When we think that way then we can decenter "Man" and begin to see ourselves as part of all these living systems again and begin to figure out how to change these oppressive dynamics that we're a part of. I look at the New York City skyline and I'm like, "Man, I would love to see that thing go." Industrialism, industrialization, we see what it has done.

Also, when the movements interact, we not only really learn about each other, for the first time, but we get to share visions. And sometimes, your vision gets enriched by the other people's visions, 'cause it's things you didn't think about. From the Feminist movement, you know, men, we've lead the movements for so long, but what happens when the women say, "Stop it, hold it,

no more." And then you have to enrich your vision 'cause you have historically left women out. And the first time I read queer theory, it shook me up when one of my best friends, who was queer, brought up to me that I made a very fucked up statement about queer people. So she gave me a book, *Queer Theory*; real quick: I'm on the subway, New York City—I love the subways, I do most of my reading on the subways. Yeah, I got the book *Queer Theory*. I'm sitting down, but I kinda hold the book down, I mean I still got my macho shit, right? So I don't want people to see that I've got a book that says *Queer Theory*; they might think I'm queer. As I'm struggling with this, I am internally going through this process. Until I get like, "What the fuck am I doin'? Read the book! Like you normally read it." And so in reading it, I'm also challenging myself in terms of my perspective, 'cause queer theory is telling me something about identity, different lifestyles, and what historical forces have done, and what capitalism does, more than just exploit a class. It ruins people for all kinds of different reasons. So now my vision of the world changes more. It becomes more inclusive, a lot more lifestyles, than I had, maybe in the '60s.

And that's always the challenge, when you meet these political prisoners and you start talking to them, they open your mind up to a reality that you probably didn't know. And I'm not talking about the reality of the prisons, you probably learned about that if you ever go visit. But when they start telling you their stories about their people's struggles, then you have to begin to include that in who you are, if we're going to make this revolution work. So like the Zapatistas say, "We can make a world with many worlds that exist," but that starts with where we are right now, including folks who have historically been left out. From the voices of women to the bodies of prisoners, and especially political prisoners. So figure out ways to put them into what you do. Just today, I sat down and wrote Patrice Lumumba. I said yesterday I was gonna do it, and Paulette knows me writing letters to the political prisoners, I ain't that good at it. But I just felt ya yesterday, and I'm like, "Oh my god, that could be my son." You know, I got to write him a letter, 'cause sometimes, that's all it calls for. And when it calls for something like just writing a letter, or the political prisoners say, "Call this number, 'cause they're treating me like this, I need a doctor." That may be all they're asking us to do, and we should be jumping on that like…ice cream. Vegan ice cream! I want you to feel, I am, I'm playful and I'm optimistic. I am that way because you stay optimistic, you do things that give me a reason to go on, 'cause it's been rough. I will not let this Empire have the pleasure of having a victory over me.

So. Rob Los Ricos is out, Jeff Luers is out, Tre is out. All three of them, actually, I have seen for the first time. I knew all about 'em, because others in their movements and us started collaborating. And I'm like, "Oh man, that's who they are, that's what they did, right on. Right on. Right on." We can do this together.

We can figure out how we can do it together in ways that respect who we are, and in ways that enrich our vision, so that we can get the world—or worlds, many worlds exist—that we deserve! We deserve the best. We deserve it. Empire down. Down, down, down. And then, we can have a party where we're dancing on it, you know what I'm saying? We can do that.

So let's get ready, by doing it in ways that we really do enjoy each other, but we also know that we gotta be loving, we gotta be nurturing, we gotta be understanding, because it's *hard*. Lot of wear and tear. And they're going to hit us. But we're going to develop to the point where we can hit them back.

And the last thing, there's an anarchist saying that says, "It's not so much about overthrowing the government, it's really about us pulling out and creating our own world so that the government gets lost in the shuffle." Because really it's our energy, and I think Rob was saying that too,

it's our energy, that really keeps them going. Let's stop giving it to them, let's start giving it to each other. The '60s taught us that. Let's do this people, we are together. We are the people. Right on. Power to the People! (*audience response*) "All Power to the People!"

Ashanti Omowali Alston help found a Black Panther Party chapter in Plainfield, NJ while still in high school. He later went on to join the Black Liberation Army. He did twelve years as a Prisoner of War, and became an anarchist while incarcerated. Sometimes referring to himself as the 'Anarchist Panther,' he occasionally publishes a 'zine with that name. Ashanti is a former board member of the Institute for Anarchist Studies (IAS), is a part of the IAS' Mutual Aid Speakers Bureau, and works with the National Jericho Movement to free all Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War. He's also recently had a child, and is writing his memoirs.

Ashanti Omowali Alston
The Panthers, the Black Liberation Army and the Struggle to Free all Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War
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