

# **COINTELPRO and Qubilah Shabazz**

Rebecca Hill and Nikolas Kautz

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The New York Three. The New York Twenty-One. The Chicago Seven/Eight. COINTELPRO, the government's campaign to thwart potentially revolutionary social movements with tactics both "legal" and illegal, has long been associated with larger US cities. Even the recent case of the Minnesota Eight, in which eight African-American men—uniformly described in the mainstream press as Vice Lords—got snatched up after the shooting of a white police officer, barely put these cities of less than 2 million on the political-repression map. Then came Qubilah Shabazz. Observers around the world, and many people here, are scratching their heads about how the dubious indictment of Malcolm X's second daughter happened to go down in this overgrown cow town.

But don't let "Minnesota Nice" fool you. As the life-long shenanigans of infiltrator Michael Fitzpatrick became known, casting doubt on the government's contention that Qubilah Shabazz hired Fitzpatrick to kill Minister Louis Farrakhan, the Justice Department in Washington, DC tried to play the "local yokel" card. For about a day, the national press quoted unnamed government lawyers vaguely insinuating that Minnesota's US attorney, a fresh-scrubbed fellow with the excellent name Lillehaug, was a naive Midwestern clodhopper, hoodwinked by a con-man informer. Then Attorney General Janet Reno stepped in to dispel all the nonsense and stamp her approval on the frame-up. Reno knows. The COINTELPRO credentials of the authorities here are perfectly in order.

## **The War on AIM**

The FBI office here is named for the two agents killed on the Pine Ridge Lakota Sioux reservation in 1975; Leonard Peltier was framed for their shootings and still sits in prison. Much of the government's war against the American Indian Movement has been planned here. The government waged that war in large part with infiltrators a tad better at their jobs than Fitzpatrick. The Native casualty count far outnumbered the government's.

Among the murdered was Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, an AIM organizer gunned down in 1976. Now, the government claims to be re-opening her unsolved case. Instead of investigating themselves (duh), or the pro-government Indian "GOON squads" that ran the reservation, they say AIM members suspected that Aquash was an informer, and killed her. As the FBI's own documents show, and as several excellent books recount, the Feds tried to feed disinformation to AIM that Aquash was working for them. This tactic is known as "badjacketing," or putting a "snitch jacket" on someone. In both the Shabazz and the Aquash cases, the government wants to manipulate emotions around a powerful unifying force in popular movements: martyrs. They want to sow division. They want to blame the movements themselves for murders by the "agents of repression." Will we let them?

## **The War on Young, Black Men**

A more recent case, the Minnesota 8, should boost the local authorities even higher in Reno's esteem. Eight African-American men were accused in 1992 of being Vice Lords, and of killing a white police officer and a suspected Vice Lord police informer. At trial, it came out that the dead man, Ed Harris, was being set up to look like a snitch. Officers including a well-known Black detective repeatedly stopped him on the street, talked to him, and let him go. He was among eight

young, Black, male execution-slaying victims in a period of weeks. Two and a half years later, suspicion persists in the community that some or all of the men, possibly including Harris, were murdered by the police as payback for the policeman's death. Court documents show the quiet, background involvement of the FBI, who may have planted one of the star witnesses. Loverine Harris, Ed Harris's wife, had previously testified against a man in Illinois who went to prison for murder. She was the FBI's "confidential, reliable informant" in that case. Four convictions, two guilty pleas, one acquittal, and one legal limbo later, the police have made short work of what was left of the old Vice Lord leadership. Two men prominent in bringing the Vice Lords into the gang coalition United for Peace are in custody, one for supposedly holding a bunch of people at gunpoint in a garage because his car repairs weren't to his satisfaction, the other for allegedly ringing in the New Year with a few pistol shots from his balcony. With that grim background report, let's welcome Qubilah Shabazz to the Twin Cities.

## **Start of a New War?**

Nobody with a lick of sense believes Qubilah Shabazz hired Michael Fitzpatrick to kill Min. Farrakhan. The only question worth posing is what the government is up to. Speculation includes the following, starting with the most obvious point:

- ☒ No matter how astutely the Nation of Islam handles this, Min. Farrakhan can only lose popularity from a big, public reminder of his rivalry with Malcolm.
- ☒ Either Min. Farrakhan or Ms. Shabazz could be targets of violence now, because of a plan cooked up by the government. Observers at her St. Paul arraignment noted that anyone in the standing-room-only court room could have had a weapon.
- ☒ On one of the surveillance tapes, Ms. Shabazz is said to object to Fitzpatrick's plan, worrying that Jews might be revenge targets after Min. Farrakhan's assassination. Remember that Fitzpatrick infiltrated the JDL, the group Rabbi Meir Kahane founded in direct opposition to the Black Panthers. The government would like nothing better than a shoot-out between JDL and NOI sympathizers.

The Nation has shown how it's going to play this. Min. Farrakhan's first comments emphasized FBI hostility, downplayed his role in Malcolm's murder, and sent sympathy to Ms. Shabazz. The Final Call, the NOI paper, took a different tack: "Government, Jewish militant linked to the plot to kill Farrakhan," its headline screamed the first week in February. Let's not screw around. Michael Fitzpatrick is not a "Jewish militant." I'm a Jewish militant. Michael Fitzpatrick is a snitch. Anyway, whatever the government's plan, they're a lot less able to carry it out if everyone is loudly doubting their story. Demonstrations in support of Qubilah Shabazz should go down in a bunch of cities before her next court appearance, postponed till sometime in March.

## **UNITE FOR QUBILAH!**

The Committee Seeking Equal Justice for the Minnesota 8 didn't need to be told twice about deadly government trickery. No sooner had news of Ms. Shabazz's indictment broken than busy

Committee members were strategizing about a campaign in her support. After her daughter entered a not-guilty plea on January 18, Dr. Betty Shabazz greeted and thanked half a dozen Committee members who had loitered outside the St. Paul Federal Courthouse in sub-zero wind-chill. “United we stand! The US government is the real hit man!” Committee members shouted, trying to warm up the chilly national press corps. They held a banner with the pictures of Malcolm, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Fred Hampton, all COINTELPRO martyrs. The Committee’s February 18 forum, “Snitches, Frame-ups, and Provocateurs: Qubilah Shabazz, Malcolm X, and the Making of Crime,” helped build for a demonstration on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Malcolm’s murder, February 22. Events will continue building up through Ms. Shabazz’s trial. The group understands that heavy local support will be critical in defeating the railroad.

## **The Government’s Tool**

As for Fitzpatrick, he is an informer of the commonest, lowliest kind. This is not a free-lance spy who directs his own operations. This is a lifelong hot-dog and loser whose thrill is selling people bullshit. Cops at every level, from celebrity US attorneys to the local gang-unit officers, know how to control the con-man crook. In 1993, Fitzpatrick was looking at five years for coke he’d been caught holding. Qubilah Shabazz had for years been his fantasy “get out of jail free” card. He remembered her from high school and thought she just might kind of remember him. We don’t know what Fitzpatrick may get in return, but his drug charge seems to be in limbo, and he’s hanging out somewhere under government protection. The local straight press has admitted that Fitzpatrick does most of the talking on the video and audio tapes that will buttress his testimony against Ms. Shabazz. The only thing about Fitzpatrick that isn’t clear yet is just when he became an informer.

At 18, he tried to blow up a Russian-language bookstore in New York, for motives that remain obscure. His taste for the crazy side of life may have hooked him up with cops or right-wingers who put him up to it, or he may have cooked up that one on his own. But after that, with FBI agents controlling him, he joined the crypto-fascist, racist Jewish Defense League in New York, got some folks to agree to blow up the Egyptian tourism office, and testified against the two JDLers who went to prison. He went into witness protection, and from there into chemical-dependency treatment. He wound up here.

## **Fitzpatrick’s Minneapolis Adventure**

Only dedicated media snoozers can have missed how Love and Rage’s own Christopher Day Gunderson helped bust Fitzpatrick out. Not long after the first descriptions of Fitzpatrick hit the press, Christopher went, “Hmm.” A few phone calls to anarchists who’d been active in Minneapolis in the mid-80s confirmed it. This was the same Michael, the big, ugly “free-beers-for-everyone!” Michael, who’d started hanging around Backroom Anarchist Books late in 1986.

Christopher’s statement to William Kunstler, one of Ms. Shabazz’s lawyers, is excellent reading. It describes the arrival of a tough-talking, tale-telling guy in his 20s who tried to sway a nascent, mostly-teenage group to stop having candy-ass demos and start blowing shit up. When no one took his bait, he urged the Backroomers at least to start throwing shit around. “After a few hours we were all intoxicated and all convinced by Michael of the merits of a plan to attack a polling

station with bags of human feces,” Christopher states. Sober in the morning, they instead went ahead with a mild guerrilla theater protesting the 1986 election. Fitzpatrick planted a can of mace in the bookstore moments before suburban cops burst in looking for a runaway. They instantly found the mace behind the books where the infiltrator had stashed it. He talked a man who was crashing in the bookstore’s loft, but was not formally in the collective, into keeping a shotgun in the store, since things were getting so “heavy.” The collective talked the man into giving the gun back to Fitzpatrick. If you’re a convicted felon caught with a gun, you either go to prison or you don’t. It all depends on if you’re a Vice Lord or a white informer like Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick boasted to the anarchists of having been in the Communist Workers Party, the group that an Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms undercover agent set up to get shot up by the Klan in Greensboro, NC, in 1979. To a woman he wanted to impress, he boasted he’d infiltrated the JDL. She passed word back to the Backroomers, who threw him out forever in December 1986 or January 1987.

### **‘Til the chickens Come Home to Roost**

The authorities here are used to getting away with infiltration, frames, and murder. Qubilah Shabazz’s trial this spring will be an opportunity to teach them a lesson. An international show of unity for Ms. Shabazz will be necessary. Rest assured the movements here will be inside the court room and out.

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