

**HELPFUL INFORMATION  
FOR YOUR LETTER OF SUPPORT\*  
FOR PAROLE OF  
HERMAN BELL**

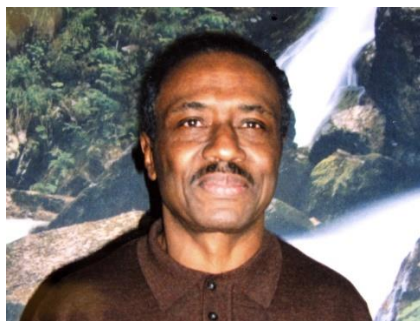


*\*Letters to be sent to:*

Tyler Morse & KB White  
Parole Preparation Project  
c/o Law Office of Michelle L. Lewin  
168 Canal Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10013

*Letters Due By: **December 15, 2017***

## 2018 PAROLE EFFORTS FOR HERMAN BELL



**Herman Bell** has been to the New York state parole board 7 times and been denied 7 times. His next parole board appearance will be in February 2018, when he will be 70 years old. At this next appearance, we hope that Herman will have a better chance of being seriously considered and therefore released. New regulations governing parole hearings mandate that an applicant's risk of recidivism be considered as a "guiding principle" of the hearing. Herman has the very lowest risk score, based on the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision's measures. In addition, six new parole commissioners were added to the Board and several, though not all, of the older, law-enforcement connected ones have been retired. The new commissioners are mostly from social service and reentry backgrounds. Personal letters of recommendation and community support can play an important role in Herman's next hearing.

On September 5th, Herman was brutally assaulted by a group of correctional officers at Great Meadow Correctional Facility. As is most often the case in these incidents, Herman was initially charged with assault on a guard. In fact, Herman had done nothing to provoke this attack – and, furthermore, showed restraint, non-violence, and discipline in the face of brutality. In 95% of the cases in New York where a prisoner is charged with assaulting a guard, the prisoner is convicted and sentenced to box (Security Housing Unit) time. However, the charges against Herman were dropped within a few weeks, as letters of support poured in from all over the world. This is a stark reminder that, while Herman poses no danger to society, his continued imprisonment as an elder subjects him to extreme danger. He needs to come home.

### *How You Can Help:*

Herman has accepted full responsibility for his part in the Black Liberation Movement. His years of excellent accomplishments in prison show that he has taken deep responsibility to the broad community and to creating a better, more peaceful society. He has paid a great price – **44** years of imprisonment, thus far. He is going to the New York state parole board for the eighth time in February 2018 and deserves to be paroled, to come home to his family and community.

[1] Your letter should "accentuate the positive." Rather than pointing out the injustices of prior parole appearances, the letters should state that Herman Bell will be an asset to the community if released.

[A] *Those who have met/know Herman* should speak about their impressions of him and why he will be an asset and lead a law abiding life after release. Those who have known him a long time should speak of how he has matured over the years of his imprisonment.

[B] *Those who have not met Herman* should state how they have become aware of him (through writings, etc.) and also reiterate their belief that he will be an asset and lead a law abiding life.

[C] *Those who know Herman and/or only know of him* should offer to make available whatever support they have in re-integrating him back into the community (jobs, counseling, medical, educational).

[2] - Please write your letter to the attention of the New York State Parole Commissioners -- on professional letterhead, if possible.

[3] - Please indicate how you know Herman, or if you don't know him personally, how you know of him. The "Re:" line of your letter should be "Herman Bell, 79C-0262."

[4] - Please sign your letter and mail to:

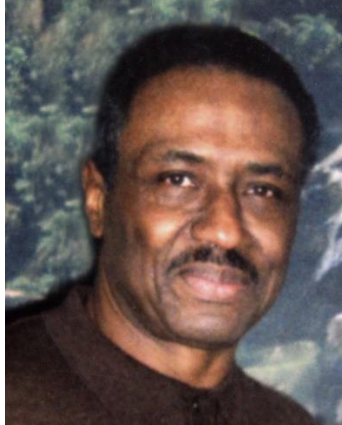
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***Herman very much appreciates your efforts and your support.***

## **FACTS**

### **Re: 2018 PAROLE EFFORT FOR HERMAN BELL**



[1] When Herman Bell goes again to the NY parole board in February 2018, he will have been imprisoned over **44** years.

[2] Herman has appeared before the NY parole board 7 times and been denied each time.

[3] The parole board keeps citing the nature of Herman's charge of conviction for their denials - a fact which will never change - instead of Herman's impressive, 38+ years (in NY state) prison record.

[4] Herman has earned both his Bachelors and Masters degrees while in prison.

[5] Herman has earned his paralegal certificate in prison.

[6] Herman has devoted his time to mentoring, educating, inspiring others he's in with, encouraging them to educate themselves and learn skills so that they may live successful, recidivist-free lives when they get out.

[7] Herman is renowned for his football coaching skills throughout the NY state prison system.

[8] Herman has taught English grammar and writing skills as well as Black History, and has organized countless Black History month celebrations through the years.

[9] With activist farmers in Maine, Herman organized the Victory Gardens Project, where – for eight years -- diverse urban and rural communities came together to learn to grow organic produce which they harvested and distributed, free, back into their communities.

[10] Herman has devoted his adult life to uplifting and protecting Black people, and to the betterment of all people in our society.

[11] **After more than four decades of imprisonment, Herman deserves to come home!**

## CASE SYNOPSIS



*Herman during NY trials*

In the aftermath of the murders of Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, Dr. King, Fred Hampton, and Mark Clark, to name a few, coupled with the Civil Rights Movement, the burgeoning Black consciousness movement, and the anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the tone and spirit of those times can be described as highly charged and volatile. And in the wake of what had been perceived as an unambiguous racist policy of police malevolence, willful brutality, excessive use of deadly force and general disrespect of Black people's rights, scores of policemen at that time were seriously injured or fatally shot in the Black community.

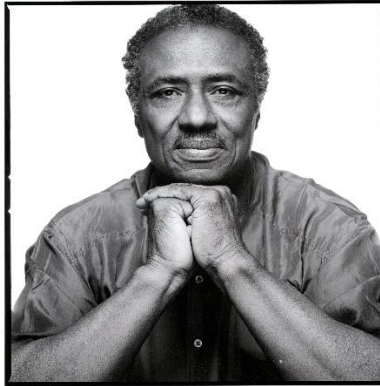
I come out of that time period. In 1974, the New York 5 (Nuh Washington, Gabriel Torres, Jalil Muntaqim, Francisco Torres, and me) stood trial for killing two New York City policemen, to which we all pled not guilty. This first trial resulted in a hung jury. During the second trial, charges against the Torres brothers were dismissed. Coerced witnesses, manufactured and circumstantial material evidence, along with prosecutorial and judicial misconduct are what persuaded the jury to convict me, Nuh, and Jalil at the end of the second trial. No eyewitness identified any of us as the assailants. Years and years of state and federal appeals have been unsuccessful.

I am a former member of the Black Panther Party. It's now generally known from documents revealed by the congressional 1976 Church Committee (which were not admitted as evidence during my trial) that a domestic program of political repression cointelpro existed to neutralize or destroy the Black Panther Party. In fact, any Black political organization or individual deemed to be a threat to U.S. security, as determined by then FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, was a prime target. Hoover gave his agents a wide range of discretionary power legal and otherwise to achieve this objective. Thus the Church Committee report revealed a U.S. government secret war initiated against the Black protest movement which I was part of.

Since being granted our paper freedom, Black Americans have long claimed the right to pursue happiness in our own fashion. Our historic fight since slavery has always been one that focused on carving a political and economic niche for ourselves in America. During the 1960s and 1970s, people were killed on both sides. To the degree that my humanity compels me to value and feel remorse for the loss of all life, human and otherwise, I feel remorse that people were killed and families and lives were destroyed. The past is behind me now. Many from those days have moved on and have been forgiven, but I've not been permitted to do so. In February 2018, I will again appear before the New York State Parole Board. I am requesting your help. I ask you to please consider my personal evolution these past 44+ years of imprisonment in composing your letter of support for my release.

## MESSAGE FROM HERMAN BELL

Fall 2017



Hi -- I've been told it's good that you should hear my voice, hear something direct from me. So where to begin, what to say? A pal of mine, I met him in here, went home after 32 years of imprisonment. He left me a note as he departed. He wrote: "It appears my number has come up. You witnessed firsthand how corrupt and confusing the Penal/Parole System is . . . I will be forwarding you a redacted copy of my minutes so you'll know exactly how trifling the system is. Listen to me preaching to the choir . . .

"Anyway, you have seen a hundred decent guys get out. It breaks my heart that they think of you as a threat to society because I know you personally and it has been a pleasure to be in your presence, as you always maintain a positive outlook, even during the most painful times. The Herman Bell that I know is a warm, caring human being that understands how life works, understands that he cannot change what took place almost half a century ago. Yet, you smile, hold your head high, and gave me invaluable advice, genuine concern, and let a few knuckleheads know I was a friend of yours, which I hold dear to my heart. Your friendship is valued beyond words. In a real world setting, I believe you would be a fine addition to society. If the Board could see what I see. I value your friendship and am always an ear for you and a shoulder to lean on. Be safe, stay strong, and know you have a real friend out there." My thought is that your curiosity might want to hear what he says of me, as I want you to connect with me, want you to feel my hand in yours, want you to see and experience my journey. I've been locked in a prison cell for 44 years; have spent more time in prison than I have on the streets.

I need your support to get me out so I can go home. I'm as ordinary as your neighbor next door. No different than you are. I have a wife, children, and two lovely school-age granddaughters. I value hard work, fair treatment, social justice transparency and accountability. You can say I'm a "people's" person. I believe strongly that people should help people, that "to each according to his or her needs and from each according to his or her ability."

You see, I am not a criminal in the strict sense of the word. I never posed a danger to civil society. I never sought personal gain from my political actions; never robbed, never threatened, coerced, nor intimidated anyone in civil society. I never sold drugs. But I did, as did others, militantly resist the unrelenting structural violence of white racist domination and control that has afflicted the Black community since Black people were brought here as slaves.

Accordingly, in early February 2018, I will appear once again before the New York State Parole Board, for the 8<sup>th</sup> time. I'm eligible for parole release every 2 years. I've done the time on a 25-to-life sentence. I have satisfied all structural requirements over these long years and have had no serious disciplinary issues. Yet each time I appear before the Board, I'm denied parole "due to the nature of my offense;" the assassination of two NYC policemen.

The nature of my sentence of conviction arose from the immense social turmoil of the '60s and '70s and the f.b.i.'s infamous counter-insurgent program known as COINTELPRO that sought through diverse and insidious means to destroy the Black Panther Party founded in Oakland, CA in 1965, that I was a member of. This government program sought to deny Black political and economic self-empowerment. Destruction of the B.P.P., in the words of then f.b.i. director Hoover "by any means necessary," was paramount to this design.

Nationally, Cointelpro enlisted the aid of local and state police agencies in this campaign. It was a push to maintain the levers of racist political power in this country that has dominated and controlled the lives of Black people through terror, bloodshed, lashing and lynching since its founding.

The rage and sorrow of Black people had sat in the darkness far too long. And we pushed back in defense of our community: against that tradition of domination and control that has persistently fed off Black people in this country longer than they have been freed. It was an unapologetic direct attack on and resistance to the racist power structure in this country that has so historically maltreated and shamelessly exploited Black people as though it were a national birthright. It gratified some and astonished others. And as unfortunate and regrettable as it often is in civil conflict, violence and bloodshed on both sides are bound to occur.

You may find my sentence of conviction inexcusable. You may likewise find the government's actions during those times inexcusable too. We Panthers were imprisoned. f.b.i., state, and local police agents and their provocateurs went unindicted for their unprovoked attacks on the Black community.

"Slavery by Another Name," a book by American author Douglas Blackmon, says of America: "We formed in molds twisted by the gifts we received at the expense of others. It is not our 'fault.' But it is undeniably our inheritance." Former f.b.i. director Comey admits that "the history of law enforcement in this country was not only part of the architecture of oppression but also a brutal tool of that system."

This history, these events, are what I'm up against whenever I go before the Parole Board. The NY police union (PBA) have a close connection with the NY tabloids and each time before I go

to the Board, newspaper articles opposing my release is a front page story and online the PBA my release, when it's just the PBA.

You can write the New York State Parole Board and tell them how you feel. By writing the Parole Board supporting my release (because I've done the time, have satisfied all legal requirements, and deserve to be released) does in no way mean that you advocate, support, or intend to mimic what I did yourself. It simply mean you think I've done enough time and should be allowed to go home.

*Thank you – Herman*

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*Above photo taken 2015 by Bryan Shih for his book *The Black Panthers: Portraits of an Unfinished Revolution**