

HERMAN WALLACE: THE TRIUMPH OF PANTHERISM

“The state may have stolen my life, but my spirit will continue to struggle along with Albert and the many comrades that have joined us along the way here in the belly of the beast.

In 1970 I took an oath to dedicate my life as a servant of the people, and although I'm down on my back, I remain at your service. I want to thank all of you, my devoted supporters, for being with me to the end.”

These words of compassion, dedication, and strength came to us recently from Herman Wallace, age 71, who is dying of liver cancer. He sent us a letter from prison where he was locked down in solitary confinement for 41 years for a crime he didn't commit. The oath he refers to was an oath to the Black Panther Party made with his comrades Robert King and Albert Woodfox, also political prisoners, all from New Orleans, and all also locked down for decades. They are known as the Angola Three.

James Gill said in his column in the Advocate on September 19, “The barbarous treatment of the Angola Three – the Black Panthers who were consigned to permanent and allegedly unconstitutional solitary confinement after a prison guard was murdered in 1972 – will continue to earn Louisiana international opprobrium.”

In a deposition in 2008, Burl Cain, Angola State Penitentiary's warden, said he would keep Woodfox in solitary even if he was innocent of guard Brent Miller's murder.

Which he is. Cain cited Woodfox's "pantherism" as a grave threat. Even Miller's widow, who is convinced that Woodfox and Wallace are innocent, has called for their release.

It was Pantherism – to borrow Cain's piquant phrase – that improved conditions for fellow inmates at Angola, lowering inmate-on-inmate murder rates and trying to bring an end to a rampant system of sexual slavery in which inmates were bought or traded for goods. It was Pantherism that brought the concept and the experience of brotherly love into the most violent and brutal prison in the nation. Because of their heroic work, the Central Committee of the Black Panthers allowed Woodfox, Wallace and King to form one of the first ever chapters of the Party in prison in the early 1970s.

Wallace's prison doctors have recommended that he serve out his remaining months in hospice care. But that would require Gov. Bobby Jindal's order on humanitarian grounds. Not likely.

So what do we do – those of us who love Herman Wallace and have taken comfort, inspiration, and strength from the Angola Three over the years? We're throwing a fundraiser and love fest for him on Tuesday October 8, 6:30 pm, at Ashe Cultural Arts Center, 1712 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd. We're screening the award-winning documentary *In the Land of the Free* about the Angola Three. Robert King, the only freed member, will be there to discuss it. Artist Jackie Sumell who, with Herman, designed the house of his dreams will contribute an art piece for auction. Original signed Panther Posters will be sold as well as books, CDs, and Freelines (King's candies).

Me, I'm praying for a healing miracle for Herman. But if our Cosmic Birther of all Radiance sees fit to release that intrepid spirit from that long-suffering shackled body, then I know Herman's spirit won't rest until every single political prisoner is free.

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