

Joan Bird 's Statement --- October, 1969

I write this to tell you, the people, something about myself. I feel it necessary that you have some true knowledge or insight into my being -- other than the lies which are printed in the newspapers. I will start by saying that I was born here in New York City, twenty years ago. I grew up in the Harlem community and attended parochial elementary school, namely Resurrection, and from there went on to Cathedral High School for Girls. Growing up and living in the typical black ghetto community, I clearly recognized the ills or sicknesses of poverty embedded there among my people. We suffer day to day reaching out -- basically to find ourselves -- for we have been trapped into hunger, disease, and complete destitution, which is so actively present in our lives. Having loving and concerned parents, I am indeed lucky -- but there are many in Harlem who have no one to turn to for help. Their world is blatant.

My ambition: to become a nurse. I thought I could sincerely help my people in this perspective, After graduating from cathedral in '67, I entered into Bronx Community College -- majoring in nursing -- for a semester.

During this period, I felt that this was not enough. I needed and wanted to be fully aware of myself and the changing world around -- a searching for my people's true identity and their true roles in society. The need for us to unite if we were ever to achieve any sort of power.

I first heard and read about the Black Panther Party in the summer of 1968 around August, right after the incident in Brooklyn Court when 200 New York City policemen violently attacked members of the Black Panther Party. Having lived in Harlem all my life, I was aware of bad cops and police brutality, but this was more than I had ever dreamed of. I wanted to know everything possible about the Black Panther Party and its immediate purpose. So I went to the office on Seventh Avenue and met a few of the brothers. There they related to me the necessity for all oppressed people to be politically aware of the fascism which has crippled the people for centuries. I read their Ten Point Program and under-

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stood completely what brothers like Malcolm, Huey, Eldridge and Che were talking about -- liberation by any means necessary for all oppressed people of the world. I became a party member and actively participated in the various programs which are administered. Programs consist of free breakfast for the children, free clothing for the people, political education classes open to the public, and going out into the community and finding out exactly what the specific and immediate needs of the people are. I continued to go to school at night and devoted my days to working with the people. I was never tired, because doing everything possible to help my people gave me energy to go on.

To bring you further up to date, on the night of January 17, 1969, I was in a disabled car along with two brothers. We were approached immediately by two police officers. The brothers explained our circumstances. Within that short period of time I heard shots. My immediate reaction was to duck. The shooting continued. I did not see who fired first nor was I about to raise my head or body during all this shooting. After the shooting ceased, the police approached the car, heavily armed, and dragged me out and began to beat, kick, and curse me. I was then handcuffed and arrested and taken to the 34th Precinct. There I underwent the most terrifying 19 hours of my entire life. I experienced the police harassment and racist attitudes presented continuously with threats on my life. After being held for 19 hours and not given the right to contact my lawyer I was taken to 100 Center Street. That afternoon, I saw my lawyer and we went into court. There I was told I was being held as a material witness to which my lawyer sternly objected. Recess was called and I didn't get back into court until late Saturday night. I was then charged with conspiracy to commit murder, attempted murder, and felonious assault. Bail was originally set at \$20,000. My lawyer filed a complaint on my behalf, asking that my arresting officer be arrested for the assault which he inflicted upon me. The District Attorney said it would "cloud the issues," so the officer was free to depart. Following this, Lumumba Shakur and Clark Squire, also members of the Black

Panthers, were arrested and arraigned on the same charges and the same bail. My bail was lowered to \$5,000 and the brothers' bail remained the same. Three days before our court date February 7th I was bailed out. A day before our court date the two brothers were taken to court and the charges were dismissed against them but they were rearrested, there in court, on an alleged attempted robbery charge, with bail set at \$7,500 each. I went into court on February 7th and was indicted on the charges (conspiracy, attempted murder, etc.) and rearrested on the attempted robbery charges -- which meant another arraignment and bail. Bail was set at \$5,000 again. The police were using every deceitful tactic they knew of to keep us in jail. But behind the beautiful spirit of the people all three of us made bail. From here on in we all had a very busy schedule -- rallies, meetings, interviews, and mostly trying our damndest to relate to the people the true picture of the events that happened, and tell them of the true nature of the pig. I want back into school and now found it imperative that I work since all of my family's funds were exhausted by my high, high bails. I started working at P.S. 175 as an educational assistant -- which was permissible since I wasn't technically a convicted person -- although the pigs did everything possible through the news media to make me appear as a menace to society. There at this elementary school I had hoped to start the Black Panthers' Free Breakfast program. On April 2nd at 5:00 A.M. in the morning (the program got underway despite our arrest) the pigs banged on the door of my parents' apartment with an arrest warrant for me. The charges were the same as before only this time much more added on -- conspiracy, attempted murder, and arson. I called my lawyer, while they in turn raided my parents' house in a piggish fashion to find nothing. I was taken to the D.A.'S office at 100 Center Street. There I saw my fellow party members, about 21 of them, some handcuffed and some being finger-printed. Well, when we all finally entered the Supreme Court at about 1:00 P.M. that afternoon we were arraigned on the charges of "Conspiracy," etc. and bail was set, or I should say ransom was set, at \$100,000 each. Since April 2nd bail

has remained the same. This is October -- six months later. We thirteen Black Panthers who are incarcerated await trial. We recognize that we will never receive any justice in the courts. We see only the spirit of the people, which moves forth to free the people from the injustices of the oppressor.

All Power to the People!

Joan Bird