



SPEAK OUT!

FOR THE RELEASE OF PLAINFIELD'S BLACK HOSTAGES

BOBBY LEE WILLIAMS • GAIL MADDEN • GEO. MERRITT JR.

Plainfield, N.J. During the "hot summer" of 1967, a black youth, Bobby Lee Williams, was wantonly shot by a white policeman, John V. Gleason. Hundreds of ghetto residents who witnessed the shooting struck back in anger at the offending officer, bringing about his death.

After unleashing a reign of terror in the ghetto, the police arrested twelve black people and charged them with murder.

Of the twelve, two young black residents of Plainfield, Gail Madden, 24, mother of two, and George Merritt, Jr., 25, a Marine Corps veteran, are now serving life sentences for their alleged participation in the killing of Patrolman John Gleason.

The third black youth, Bobby Lee Williams, 24, shot and maimed for life by Gleason, is himself facing trial under a three-count indictment. If convicted, Williams faces a possible sentence of death or life imprisonment.

The facts of this tragic case deserve the attention and intervention of every American concerned with the integrity of the judicial process and with decent race relations throughout our land.

Madden and Merritt have been punished and Williams is yet to be punished, not for guilt in the murder, but because the State wants them as hostages to assure the "good behavior" of the black community of Plainfield, New Jersey.

For the full story



BACKGROUND FOR TRAGEDY

RACIST
PATTERNS
IN
PLAINFIELD

The story of Plainfield is a familiar one. Its unrepresentative government reflected the view that its well-to-do residents (executives who commute to New York) could take care of their own needs, while the

black population -- almost one-third of the residents -- could be safely ignored.

Most of Plainfield's black people are confined to a ghetto of decaying slums. Unemployment is high and the employed work chiefly at menial jobs; school drop-outs are numerous and those who manage to obtain a high school certificate come out with no marketable skills, thanks to a de facto internally segregated school system. Intensifying the misery of ghetto life is an aggressive, bigoted police force, which used the word "Nigger" over the police radio as recently as 1966.

PLEAS
FOR CHANGE
MET
WITH
SMOOTH TALK

A decade of pleas for change has been to no avail. A protest march led by black ministers and another led by the local NAACP met with apathy or smooth talk, but no remedial action. Hopeless and desperate, the ghetto reached its flash point and erupted on July 14, 1967. The police cordoned off the ghetto.

GLEASON
LEAVES
HIS POST
TO INVADE
GHETTO

On July 15th, a group of black youth met with Mayor George Hetfield to complain about brutal police practices. According to an NAACP official, with "no meaningful answers coming forth," the meeting broke up. On July 16th, the police broke up a meeting of black youth in Greenbrook Park that had been called by black leaders to draw up a list of grievances and to "cool" the atmosphere. The ghetto exploded with anger. On that very night, Patrolman Gleason, well known in the ghetto for his racism, left his assigned post at the cordon check-point at Plainfield Avenue and West Front Street and walked alone into the ghetto, stalking a black youth for three blocks.

Hundreds of ghetto residents gathered; an unknown person threw an object, knocking off Gleason's helmet. Retrieving it, Gleason came up shooting, hitting Bobby Lee Williams with three shots in the abdomen and arm. Williams was rushed to the hospital and thought by many to be dead. The enraged crowd pursued Gleason, overtook him, and stomped and kicked him. He died 12 minutes after being brought to the hospital.

THE PLAINFIELD TWELVE

BLACK
COMMUNITY
MUST PAY,
TWELVE YOUTH
ROUNDED UP

The police unleashed a reign of terror in the ghetto -- they rounded up twelve young blacks for sacrifice and pressured others into becoming State's witnesses. To the deep-seated problems that had caused the social unrest, the answer of the authorities was a mass trial that would continue the oppression of black ghetto dwellers.

Gail Madden, first of the twelve to be charged with the crime, was arrested almost two months after the assault on Gleason. The last was not arrested until early 1968. The trial began in September 1968, 14 months after the assault. Most of the defendants spent months in jail before being released on bail.

STATE'S
WITNESSES
ILLEGALLY
COERCED,
RECAANT IN
COURT

Six prosecution witnesses, threatened and coerced by the State during the reign of terror in the ghetto, recanted in court before the judge but, unfortunately, not in the presence of the jurors. The public, through the press, saw the police in their true light, frantically and illegally extracting false statements from intimidated black people -- but these facts never reached the jury. Might not the jury verdicts have been different if they had known? The chief prosecution witness, who implicated six of the twelve defendants, had 20/200 vision -- in effect, was legally blind.

TERROR
FOR EFFECT
AT THE TRIAL

The trial itself was conducted in an intimidating atmosphere of racial provocation. All participants, including the court-appointed defense attorneys, were frisked daily for weapons. The pressure on the jury to convict was produced by falsely emphasizing the possibility of racial violence in the courtroom itself.

JERSEY
JUSTICE

The trial of one of the defendants was postponed because of his attorney's illness. Eight of the eleven were acquitted and the jury was deadlocked on the ninth. Two, Gail Madden and George Merritt, Jr., were convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment on December 23, 1968. By conducting sessions on Saturdays, holidays, and evenings, the judge made good his promise to have the jury home for Christmas.

The conviction of Madden and Merritt is groundless. The State has gotten its pound of flesh: it has two black hostages and an indictment against Bobby Lee Williams.

In March of 1969, the State announced that it would not try the postponed case nor retry the deadlocked one.

Madden and Merritt Are Black Hostages, Not Criminals

BASIS
FOR
CONVICTIONS

It is impossible to explain why Gail Madden and George Merritt, Jr. were singled out for conviction. The only rational explanation is that someone had to pay for the death of a white officer. The police are now harassing those who were acquitted. Two have been convicted of "the possession of marijuane"; two others have been convicted on charges relating to the 1967 ghetto disturbances.

CASE
AGAINST
MADDEN

Gail Madden, a large woman weighing 250 pounds, allegedly wearing a bright dress, was seen on the edge of the crowd, not at the center of it where the assault took place.

One prosecution witness testified that he had seen her jumping and kicking at "something" in a crowd estimated at between 50 and 200. Gail Madden was arrested on a charge of "looting" only 15 or 20 minutes after the assault on Gleason. The police testified, and laboratory analysis confirmed, that there were no blood stains, human hairs, or cloth fibers on her shoes or dress. Had she jumped up and down on the upper part of Gleason's body, there would have been blood stains on her shoes. If she had jumped on the lower half of his body, her weight would have caused visible damage, yet none was found.

CASE
AGAINST
MERRITT

George Merritt, Jr. is a Marine Corps veteran with a four-year service record and an honorable discharge, a government worker highly praised by his superiors. Even though a prosecution witness claimed to have seen Merritt assaulting Gleason with a meat cleaver, the State's pathologist failed to testify that Gleason's body bore a wound made by a meat cleaver. This same witness, in open court, three times identified incorrectly a third person as one who wielded a baseball bat in the assault, yet the person so identified had been in jail at the time of the assault. Six witnesses established that Merritt was not present at the scene of the assault. Another prosecution witness refused to place Merritt at the scene when asked if he could do so.

Merritt was obviously chosen as the second victim because the jury could hardly permit a 24-year old mother to be assigned sole responsibility for the beating of the policeman.

Police Place Williams in the Dock to Decapitate Leadership in Ghetto

WILLIAMS
FACES
DEATH
PENALTY

It is a commonplace that victims of police abuses are falsely charged with crimes. Such charges create a justification for the lawlessness of the police.

Bobby Lee Williams, the victim of Gleason's gun, is charged with the serious crime of inciting "numerous and divers persons" (presumably black persons) to kill or injure Officer Gleason. This is an impossibility, since he had been wounded and removed to the hospital before the assault on Gleason took place. Williams is further charged with malicious assault on Gleason and with assault and battery on him while in the performance of his duties. If convicted, Williams faces a death sentence or life imprisonment.

STATE
AIMS
TO
TIGHTEN
GHETTO
BONDS

These charges may seem difficult to prove, but the State has shown itself resourceful in obtaining a conviction with no evidence. The stakes are high in the Williams case. If the State can make its charges stick, it will have established judicially what it failed to do at the murder trial; it will have created a valid reason for Gleason's presence in the ghetto. And, short of that, a justification for Gleason's use of his gun.

A conviction will remove from the scene a militant who, at great personal risk, is seeking to contribute to the leadership of Plainfield's black community. Though Williams had been removed from the scene prior to the assault on Gleason, the police later threatened him if he refused to serve as a prosecution witness in the murder trial. Williams steadfastly refused to join the conspiracy. On December 1967 a sealed indictment was handed down against Williams. As late as November 12, 1968, a last effort was made by the police to force Williams to testify. For his refusal, Williams was threatened with indictment. Two days later, on November 14, 1968, the indictment was made public and Williams was arrested.

A conviction of Williams will intimidate and tighten the bonds of the ghetto on those trapped within it. But the State can achieve its goals only through a frame-up similar to that which produced the conviction of Gail Madden and George Merritt, Jr. Public concern can make the difference.

EMINENT ATTORNEYS JOIN THE DEFENSE

Gail Madden and George Merritt, Jr. have obtained labor and civil liberties attorney Frank Donner to handle their appeal. Bobby Lee Williams will be represented at his trial by civil rights attorney William Kunstler.

PLAINFIELD JOINT DEFENSE COMMITTEE

At the behest of the defendants and their families, community leaders have joined the PLAINFIELD JOINT DEFENSE COMMITTEE FOR BOBBY LEE WILLIAMS, GAIL MADDEN, and GEORGE MERRITT, JR. The Committee's Co-Chairmen are Freeman Whetstone and Dr. David Frost and the Treasurer is Paul Polskin. The committee calls upon the public for all possible assistance. An informed and aroused public can help guarantee freedom for the three hostages.

Urge Your Relatives, Friends, and Neighbors to Do These Three Things Now:

1. Bring the facts of these cases to your church, synagogue, trade union, school, youth organization, political club, civic organization. Invite our committee to send a speaker to your group.
2. WRITE TO: Governor Richard J. Hughes, State House, Trenton, N.J., asking him to quash the indictment against Bobby Lee Williams and to free Gail Madden and George Merritt, Jr.
3. WRITE TO: Jacques E. Wilmore, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 26 Federal Plaza, New York, N.Y., asking him to investigate the conditions in Plainfield and the conduct of the governmental authorities that led to the indictment of 12 young black people for the murder of Patrolman Gleason and to the indictment of Bobby Lee Williams.

CONTRIBUTIONS are needed for court costs for Bobby Lee Williams' trial and for the appeal of Gail Madden and George Merritt, Jr., and to carry on an extensive public campaign. Attorneys Frank Donner and William Kunstler are serving without fee. Contributions should be sent in care of the Treasurer to the address given below. Please make checks payable to: PLAINFIELD JOINT DEFENSE.

Plainfield Joint Defense Committee
218 Watchung Avenue
Plainfield, New Jersey 07061

- () I would like to help with the work of the committee.
() I would like to have a committee spokesman address our group.
() Enclosed please find a contribution of \$ _____.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....TELEPHONE.....