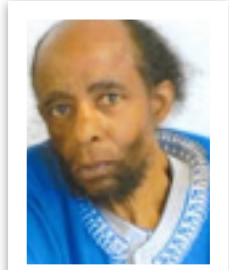


A Life That Matters

by Linda Kennedy

“Forty-five days is too long; forty-five years is beyond a travesty.”

That from Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen We Langa commenting on the time he has spent at the Nebraska State Penitentiary. He and Ed Poindexter, the “Omaha Two,” have been imprisoned forty-five years, convicted in the bombing death of an Omaha policeman in August, 1970.



W.M.E. we Langa

Police were summoned to what turned out to be a vacant house in north Omaha after a 911 call reported a woman inside screaming for help. As other officers searched the house, Officer Larry Minard was on the porch and picked up a suitcase which was loaded with dynamite. The rigged suitcase exploded; he was killed instantly. Several other officers were injured.

At the time of the bombing, Mr. we Langa and Mr. Poindexter were members of the Black Panther Party.



Edward Poindexter

The Panthers had formed an Omaha Chapter of the National Committee to Combat Fascism (NCCF) in 1969, and we Langa was the “Deputy Minister of Information.” Ed Poindexter was “Deputy Chairman.” That same year, the two also started a chapter of the “United Front Against Fascism.”

Two years earlier, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover declared an undercover war against anyone he perceived to be a

racial or political enemy of the State. That included the Black Panthers. So Omaha, a city of 300,000 whites with a Black population of fewer than thirty thousand, drew the national attention of Hoover and the FBI’s COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program). Meanwhile, local authorities also targeted them. Both were outspoken activists who had criticized the shooting death 14-year-old Vivian Strong by an Omaha police officer, also in 1969.

“We could not leave a building and enter the streets without being frisked and harassed,” Poindexter said in a documentary produced by the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) and Amnesty International, which declared the “Omaha Two” to be political prisoners almost 25 years ago.

“We were under constant surveillance and constant harassment. A great deal of energy and resources were spent on trying to provoke us into a confrontation.” But that never happened. Ed Poindexter, an honorably discharged U.S Army veteran who served in Vietnam and in Germany and we Langa were leaders who, despite occasional inflammatory rhetoric, set an example of changing the system peaceably from within. In his frequent letters to the *Omaha World Herald* newspaper, Mondo repeatedly advocated for community education and non-violence.

As part of their work for the National Committee to Combat Fascism, Ed and Mondo collaborated with several organizations on issues such as politics, fair housing, and discrimination in the schools. They exposed slumlords, protested police brutality, and the Vietnam war. They ran tutoring programs and feeding programs. In short, they worked to improve their surroundings.

Before the conviction, Mondo was a student at Creighton University. He wrote for an assortment of local and underground publications. Those include: *Buffalo Chip*, *Down Here on the Ground*, *Black Realities*, *Asterisk*, and *Everybody Magazine*. He edited the NCCF newsletter, *Freedom by Any Means Necessary*. During the day Mondo worked as a community organizer. He was employed by Greater Omaha Community Action (GOCA) under then director, Michael Adams, who was also the editor of *Down Here on the Ground*.

Mr. Adams, who lives in Northern California, says Mondo, then David Rice, “accepted being followed and harassed by police as part of the territory. He accepted it and wasn’t upset by it. They (the police) were looking for something to pin on him.” Adams remembers, “David (Mondo) had a blue 1941 Ford sedan and within two blocks of the office, he would be pulled over and searched. Three blocks later it would happen again. It was a pattern. Finally, I started taking him home.”



Michael Adams

Attorney for Mondo during the trial, David Herzog, says the two were arrested in the bombing death simply because of their affiliation with the NCCF.

Nebraska State Senator, Ernie Chambers agrees. “My view is they never should have been arrested, never tried, and certainly not convicted. They were scapegoats, framed—not for killing a cop—but to crush the Black Panther Party and with the arrest of Ed

and David, they (the Omaha Police Department and the FBI) succeeded with that.”

This case is about more than what evidence was or was not presented in the trial. In 1974, the FBI admitted it had violated the constitutional rights of hundreds of United States citizens and the government apologized but did nothing to reverse the wrongs or repair the lives it shattered.

Moreover, the case, which was upheld on appeal to the State Supreme Court, was overturned by Federal District Judge Warren Urbom. The judge maintained the defendants should be released or retried; that there had not been sufficient cause or justification to issue a warrant to search Mondo’s house where authorities purportedly found the dynamite used to make the suitcase bomb. The Eighth Circuit Court agreed with Judge Urbom in an appeal, but the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately undermined Judge Urbom’s ruling by deciding that, beginning with this case, appeals could not be pursued in the way Mondo had appealed—which was perfectly lawful when he filed his appeal.

“The State of Nebraska should immediately free Mondo we Langa and Edward Poindexter,” said Marshall Taylor, owner of Omaha’s Aframerican Bookstore. “Persons who are cognizant of facts and circumstances related to their convictions know Mondo and Ed should have been released from prison many years ago. Their 45 years of incarceration far exceeds civilized standards of justice and clearly demonstrates to the world that America still holds political prisoners notwithstanding denials to the contrary!”

Senator Chambers, who succeeded in getting legislation passed to abolish the death penalty in Nebraska agrees but is not hopeful for a release. “They were convicted of killing a cop. The only way for them to get out now is to get the Board of Pardons to commute their life sentences. The Board of Pardons is made up of the governor, the attorney

general, and the secretary of state. There is no way two of the three of those people would vote to mitigate the sentence.”

When people hear the story of Ed and Mondo, some say the prison time is a waste of their lives. Yes, that could be true; but it is not. They have wasted nothing. Despite their circumstances, and they are bleak to be sure, each of these men live productive lives, *“lives that matter,”* to quote Michael Josephson’s poem, *“What Will Matter.”*

During the last 45 years, both men have continued to teach and influence; to set a positive example and guide their peers. They are living examples of Josephson’s poem and serve as a reminder to us all to make each day count for something more than ourselves.

“What will matter is...not what you got, but what you gave.”

“What will matter is not your success, but your significance... not what you learned, but what you taught.”

Mondo says about his longtime friend, “I get a lot of (local) attention for the things I’ve done, but I’ve been here the whole time, Ed just came back to Nebraska a few years ago.”

Ed Poindexter, a graduate of North High School and Vietnam veteran, spent several years in the Minnesota State Penitentiary before being transferred back to Nebraska. He is an artist, a writer, and a teacher. He has written motivational books and music for at-risk teens. He also created a musical drama called “Shakedown Blues.” While at the Minnesota Correctional Facility, Ed wrote the curriculum and taught a self-esteem class as part of a pre-release program. He created a similar class for recidivists.

Ed is certified to instruct peer tutors in a program called “Families First” and he produced and edited a similar

program, “Project Rafiki” designed for African American males. He also had a small company which published youth focused inspirational materials. Ed Poindexter now holds a Master’s Degree from Vermont’s Goddard Graduate Program and had planned to pursue a doctorate degree in Adult Development specializing in Creative Interventions in Criminal Justice. As he learns, he teaches.

“What will matter is every act of integrity...that encouraged others to emulate your example.”

we Langa is a painter and sculptor. He is a prolific writer and poet. In 1994, he compiled several of his writings in *A View from Taney’s Place.* In 2012, he released the second edition of his poetry anthology, *The Black Panther Is an African Cat.* He has written short stories and articles for several literary journals. He regularly writes for his hometown paper, *The Omaha Star* and other publications as well. His poem, “Great Bateleur,” was featured in *Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary* by Walter Dean Myers. He has contributed material to several books including *The Race: Matters Concerning Pan-African History, Culture, and Genocide* by Dr. Yosef Ben-Jochannan.

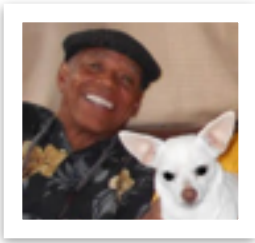
“Mondo contributed to my second book, *(A Common Sense Guide to Non-Traditional Education),*” said former Omaha resident, Dr. Walter (Wali) Gill, now of Maryland. “His chapter is titled ‘Psychodynamics of White Racism and Black Pathology.’ Mondo continues to correspond with guidance and wisdom. I value his friendship.”

Youth theatre groups in Nebraska have performed Mondo’s plays; a New York group performed his play, *Different Dances.* Mondo was an early member of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization inside the penitentiary. He serves as a mentor to young men new to the prison.

“Some of the younger ones in here listen to me because I treat them with

respect,” says Mondo. On a recent visit, I witnessed that respect returned by inmates and guards.

Anthony Pierce, who now lives in Arizona, attended St. Benedict elementary school with Mondo and remembers him as someone who always wanted to help people. “How does a guy who wanted to be the Lone Ranger turn out to be this big bad bomber that killed a police officer? I don't believe it and you can tell him, I think he's still the Lone Ranger.”



Anthony Pierce

“I lived about a block away from Mondo and I went to school with Ed,” said Omaha resident the Rev. Erven McSwain, Jr. “They did not do this. They are victims of the system. They got caught in the maze. I admire that they have been able to withstand their treatment for so many years.”



Rev. Erven McSwain

“Having been imprisoned to serve ‘during life’ has been a grievous injury for an innocent man,” said Mr. Poindexter. “And to have been forced to serve out more than twice the number of years that the statute called for is an injury compounded.” Forty-five years in a cage takes a toll. we Langa’s health is compromised by chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). At 68, he uses oxygen and a wheelchair, “...not because there is anything wrong with my legs. I just get tired and if someone is pushing the chair, I don’t have to stop to rest.” Still, he enters the visitor’s room with dignity and implacable calm. Always there is smile and a Mondo-style play on words. “I’m too young to be this old,” he said.

“I have lived a fairly long time...my mind has not grown weary and is still

open to new considerations and explorations.” He elaborated. “I was happy for Mandiba Mandela when he got out of prison, happy for Geronimo Pratt, happy for Dhoruba bin Wahad, and all the others who were held because of their political beliefs and activities. But every time such a release happens it is a sharp reminder that Ed and I are still locked up, still hidden from view in the sense that our case gets essentially no attention outside of this state. It’s as if being in Nebraska, in the nation’s midsection, disqualifies us from being worthy of attention.”

Seventy-one-year-old Ed Poindexter suffers from a heart condition, diabetes, high blood pressure, and hepatitis C, among other ailments. He takes 17 prescription medications each day.

“I am now retired,” he says. “I do little other than what I can to take care of my health and think of ways to get out of here.”

“I am not bitter or angry,” says Mondo. “I have my life to live. But as for forgiving the people who did this to me. No.”

“Mondo and Ed are not murderers!” Community leader and former president of the Omaha chapter of the NAACP, August “Buddy” Hogan, has stood by the “Omaha Two” since the beginning. “The tragedy that passed for a fair trial 45 years ago was a mockery of the United States Constitution. Instead of a fair trial, they got a judicial lynching. Mondo and Ed were framed by the Omaha Police Department; the Douglas County Attorney's office; the FBI; and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. Forty-five years later, these two men are still locked in cages by the state of Nebraska for a crime that all of the agencies listed above know that they did not commit. The evidence of government violations of their constitutional rights, prosecutorial misconduct, perjury, and suppressed evidence is irrefutable and yet has been ignored by the courts on appeal and the Nebraska Board of Pardons.”

Mr. Hogan, who lives in Southern

California, adds, “May God have mercy on the souls of those who have engaged in this miscarriage of justice.”

“I have a hope that one of the last things President Obama would do is release them,” said Michael Adams. “As a constitutional lawyer he could claim some professional concern about the shaky evidence...My best hope is that something like that would happen and that he would balance the ledger on the way out.”

“What will matter...is your character.”

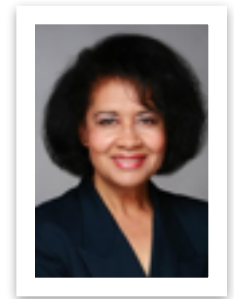
Certainly Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa and Ed Poindexter want out of the Nebraska State Penitentiary, but they refuse to admit guilt for a crime they did not commit.

“Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident It's not a matter of circumstance but of choice.”

For more information, contact:
Nebraskans for Justice at P.O. Box 11725, Omaha, NE 68111
comments@nebraskansforjustice.org
Omaha Jericho at ctrl@q.com,
eliga@nfhr.info.

To write to the Omaha Two: Ed Poindexter #27767, P.O. Box 2500, Lincoln, NE 68542-2500 and W.M.E. we Langa #27768, P.O. Box 2500, Lincoln, NE 68542-2500.

Linda Kennedy is a freelance journalist living in Seattle, Washington. She can be reached at LKMediabiz@gmail.com.



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