The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we’ve been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humorous) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

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https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org
This zine contains two segments - first up, Lorenzo Kom’bo Ervin talks about attempts in the 1960’s and 70’s at building a prisoners union in the United States and parallels with inside / outside organizing in the USA today.

Then we hear from Ohio death row prisoner from the Lucasville Uprising case, Bomani Shakur (aka Keith Lamar) about his struggle to stay alive and call out the injustice in his and so many cases.

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country. In the middle of the fucking ocean, man. Kids in Syria right now sleeping in mud, eaten mud. So, I’m not under the the impression that I’m somehow in the worst possible situation you could be in on this planet, I don’t buy.

So that’s, I just don’t want people to come at me “woe is Keith, poor Keith” you know what I mean? This is a hell of a planet, man, it’s fierce. And you have to be strong and you have to uphold your convictions, you have to be clear, you have to be educated, you have to arm yourself, you have to be intelligent. And that takes a community effort, not just something that you just can do by yourself. You know, you gotta build circles, you know what I mean? You have to build communities, you have to reach beyond yourself in order to make your life mean something. So, yeah, if that’s the last exchange together that’s a good point to leave on.

TFSR: Yeah, I appreciate that. And thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me. And with the audience.

BS: No problem.

TFSR: I wish you so much solidarity.

BS: Yeah, same here. And I just want to also acknowledge young people at RAM in New York. You know, they the ones who initiated this month of solidarity and I just want them to know that my heart goes out to them, and I’m really appreciative of them taking the time to involve themselves in my situation. And hopefully, through our exchanges, they’ve been able to understand that I feel the same way about them. We’re both in this struggle, and that putting our heads together, the least we can do is change ourselves. We might not be able to change this system, you know, because these people get nuclear bombs, you know? [laughs at the absurdity of it].

TFSR: [Laughing] That’s some perspective.

BS: You know what I mean? But we could change ourselves, though and that’s what Viktor Frankl said, when you confronted with circumstances you cannot change, the challenge is to change yourself. And so I’d encourage each and every one to take up that challenge, man, because that’s the most important thing. To change yourself, to not be a slave. And, you know, at the end of the day, not to be on the side of the executioners, man.
when somebody else tells you “you have to be a prisoner, an inmate”. No, I’m a human being!

And, so, I would like to think that, you know, if I’m somehow blessed with the opportunity to walk through those gates that I will continue to be a human being. But one of the things that James Baldwin - and I wanted to share this with listeners - first get that book, The Fire Next Time, it’s an awesome book. It was written probably 30–40 years ago, but a lot of what he talked about in that book, especially if you Black, especially if you a young Black person in this country, a lot of it is still pertinent today. But one of the things he said that was pertaining to all of us he said life is tragic simply because the earth turns, and because the sun rises and sets, and one day for each of us it will go down for the last, last time. So that’s the reason why life is tragic. That no matter what we do that tomorrow will be Thursday. And then the day after that will be Friday. We can’t stop it. And that the sun inexplicably rises and sets and that one day for each of us, I mean, yower you know, 30–40,000 people have died on Coronavirus. Those people were not imprisoned, they were out there, on the outside. You know, so we all kind of on death row because that’s what being on this planet is about. And one of the other things that James Baldwin said, he said that that’s the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty in our lives, will imprison ourselves in taboos and totems and churches and steeple mass and races and armies in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have.

So here I am on death row and we havin’ this conversation, you are in a different situation than I am and that I think it’s the misunderstanding. But your life is in just as a serious situation as mine is, if you’re looking at it properly. You only have a limited amount of time to do something righteous with your life. All of us do. And the fact that these people who are in power, who create definitions on, or limits on we can become and what we can do, you have to move beyond that. And understand that this is your one shot life, and it’s on you to make mean something. And that’s whether you in prison or on the street. You know I’m not waiting for some magical day when the doors open to live my life, I’m living my life right now. I’m doing what I feel is right, right now.

And that’s the thing about if you want to be my comrade, if you want to be somebody circulating in my circle, then that’s the understanding that I have about who I am. You know, I mean, we in the same boat. And that is we on planet Earth. And it’s a hell of a place to be. I mean, you got kids right now walking through deserts trying to get over to this

Lorenzo Komb’oa Ervin
interviewed by True Leap Press:

True Leap Press: So yeah, we’re talking about the prisoner union, and this is the ‘70s?

Lorenzo Komb’oa Ervin: Yeah. ’73, ’74 and ’75. It’s actually all the way up to ’77, when the Supreme Court made a ruling that it was unconstitutional.

TLP: To have a prisoner union?

LKE: Yeah, it was unconstitutional, the United States Supreme Court. But by that time, they had signed up 1000’s of prisoners all over the country, in different states that started their own union there in that state in the state prisons. But here’s the deal all this came after the Attica Rebellion and the massacre there and everything. And the anger of the prisoners took various forms. You had other rebellions, and you had strikes, and you had a number of things like that happening in local prisons.

But then some people organized, I think it was in North Carolina, as far as I can remember. The original prison labor unions were started by a guy, Jim Grant, who was a civil rights activist, and some other prisoners in the North Carolina state prison system. It also was going down in places like Walpole [State Prison, currently MCI Cedar Junction - ed] in Massachusetts, and that movement first was just the strike. And then after that, and they made contacts with activists on the outside — which is a common thing back in the 1970’s and the ’60s, was to make contacts with activists on the outside — and they were able to get some support from outside. And so they just started organizing a union, they didn’t ask for a union. They didn’t say “Can we have a union warden?”

So they started organizing unions all over and it started just sweeping the country, you know. You know, California had a big, big contingent, you know, and everything, and other states as well, you know, and it just starts sweeping the country. And, and before long, 1000’s of prisoners were in these unions, and they were demanding prisoners rights, and end to the beatings in prison and long term confinement, the problem of the basic human rights and all this kind of thing. And so, as it got stronger, it tried to build a central union, and it was that point, that this is after some
years of going down and having protests and organizing people on the outside putting pressure on the government, and so forth, after all this is going on, then they tried to create a central prisoners labor union. That's when the wardens took, took them to prison, various state wardens — prison wardens — and so forth, took them to court and wound up filing in the United States Supreme Court. I think it was '77 or '78 that they got the decision against the whole idea of this, this kind of movement being unconstitutional, they said, and a threat to prison security.

So, what was interesting that, at that time, many of us, we had a split in our ranks, because someone was believed that going to court and fighting and all this was a good thing to do, and others of us felt like we should just continue organizing and build the strongest possible movement that could even resist, repression. And it didn't matter in final analysis because they just came down on all those of us that they thought were leaders and so forth and just put us away.

Now, there's one thing though: in the federal prison system, I knew Jim Grant, I met Jim Grant in prison, they shipped him out of North Carolina down to the Atlanta federal prison. And we had started to build a federal prisoners labor union, tried to do that. And, of course, around that time that the decision came down and everything and they isolated a bunch of us and all that.

TLP: Shit.

LKE: But here's the deal: the prison's labor union, the difference between it and just the strikers that we've seen in recent years is, it was hooked up with the Black Power movement hooked up with the Black Power movement, the civil rights movement, and other organizations that were still live on the outside, you know?

TLP: Can I ask a question?

LKE: Yeah.

TLP: What would you say, then, of the need to connect groups like Movement for Black Lives, into more radical black organizations that do like grassroots stuff on outside with the prison movement?

LKE: Well, I'll say this, it might require some study — but I just off the and so I can protect myself. That's what each of us are trying to do inside these places.

I wear a mask, I wash my hands, to the point now where my hands are basically raw. I'm trying not to catch it, you know. I'm trying to stay alive. The same thing I'm doing, by talking to you, this is all about just trying to stay alive because I have a right to be here.

TFSR: Yeah.

BS: My life means something to me, you know? And in as much as my life is not for these people to take, I intend to fight them. If that's by wearing a mask or writing an essay, or whatever form that takes, I intend to fight them to the bitter end. And that's on everything.

TFSR: So what do you plan on doing when you get out?

BS: I don't think I think a lot about getting out, you know? I'm doing, I'm living my life right now. Trying to be true to who I am right now. And I imagine, or at least I hope, that I would be able to continue with myself should I find myself on the other side of this. But I don't particularly like to look at life as in and out. Particularly when it pertains to all the things we've been talking about. I'm not the only one doing time here, we're all doing time, in the sense that we are all, you know, kind of trapped in these dichotomies. Black, white, poor, whatever, gay, straight, whatever. Those are prisons, basically.

When I first was thrown into this place they only allowed us to have four books. And that's been one of my major support networks in prison, having an informative library. I tell people all the time that my library is like my family, my extended family. Richard Wright, James Baldwin, particularly James Baldwin. And so, when they told us we can only have four books I was really in a pickle, because, I can't, it's like choosing between your brothers and your father. Like, you got to get rid of them. So, I memorize a lot of books, a lot of main paragraphs and whatnot. And James Baldwin, in particular, his book The Fire Next Time, I committed damn near that whole book to memory. His book, more than any other books, really gave me the sense that we are all in the same boat. We here on planet Earth. And just because these people who are in power, say that “oh you in prison and so you must behave in this particular way, because you are in prison,” that's all about being imprisoned. That's all about being
BS: I’m in solitary confinement and I was already in quarantine. I’ve been in quarantine for 27 years now. You know, I already had a mask because if they sprayed mace in here we’re all connected to the same ventilation system. So if a guy is sprayed down with mace in another pod, ultimately that mace will find it’s way to me. So we already had masks. We were already you know, prepared for Coronavirus basically. Nothing much has changed where I am. And from my understanding one guard tested positive and pretty much we’ve been wearing masks openly around here now. The administration of the prison passed out masks to each of the prisoners here.

But, you know, we in a closed environment, that’s what solitary confinement is. You don’t have any contact with the outside world basically. And so, if there’s any advantage to being in this type of situation, you very seldom if ever get sick in these places. And I’m not saying that we are not concerned, we definitely, definitely are concerned about catching the virus cuz it’s not so much catching it’s about what happens to you if you do. Because the health care in these places, as you might imagine, leave a lot to be desired, man. Because, the money has been reallocated to build more prisons, the money that they have to take care of prisoners when they get sick or whatever, that money has been put in other places.

For instance, at the prison here in Marion, Ohio, my understanding that they have over 1,900 prisoners who have tested positive for the Coronavirus. Damn near 80% of that particular prison. And for when I’m understanding - it’s been hard to get the exact numbers - but from what I understand, you know, 6-10 people have died, prisoners and and some staff. I don’t know whether or not is true or not, but I’ve been given to understand that they have shipped other guards into Marion because they are running low on workers. So there again is an example of just poor people just being thrown in the fire, man. A lot of these guards obviously don’t live with the awareness that they share something in common with the people they are guarding.

Because that comes down to narrative, right? I used to tell myself a story when I was standing on the corner selling drugs to my community. And that’s how you do those things and save your conscience. You tell these stories, lies basically. But these are just poor people. So, you know, as I said I used to hate these people, but the opposite of a hate is not hate. The opposite of hate is understanding. And so, I just tried to keep my mind focused on that, on trying to understand what I’m caught up, and then trying to understand where I end and where there’s other shit begins...
been missing for so long. You know, I’m saying other than Attica, that moment with Attica, there has not been a mass base of support in the Black community for prisoners. You know, it just hasn’t existed.

TLP: Well, I remember when we were talking though, I remember when we were talking, and we were talking about — it had just been right after the prison strike in 2018 — and we were talking about the moment in the late ’90s, where it was like 1998, there was Critical Resistance-

LKE: Right.

TLP: - there was the Anarchist Black Cross, it like just emerges, kind of a reemerges, as a federation and a network.

LKE: Right.

TLP: And there’s INCITE! — Women of Color Against Violence. So like, there’s this moment and then you’re also even calling, in 2002, you’re calling for a united prison front, a whole united movement across, and you actually say verbatim “Critical Resistance, the North American Anarchist Black Crosses, and all movement for like, queer, disabled, an all oppressed people, colonized people, united prison front. And so I just wanna say that, like, that moment-

LKE: Did it come though? The thing is, did it come? Did it happen?

TLP: But what what needs to be addressed is that these organizations and networks are in place, and it’s like taking those existing contain-ers, and then doing them, right?

LKE: Well bear this in mind, it isn’t really about organizations as much as it is about prisoners and their families and the communities they come out of, versus what the state has done to communities of color ever since they resorted to the war on drugs, for instance. And the rise of the police, the paramilitary police, and all these kinds of things, you know. This was stuff that the original Black Panther Party had educated about and tried to fight about. And they been trying to explain to white radical allies and so forth, that, the party...we’ve talked about it — the party had a perspective on fascism and the state. And, you know, their thing was that they realized used to hate the police, man, the guards. Because it was obvious to me that they was profiting off my pain. Not so different than me standing on the corner profiting off the pain of these drug addicts and whatnot. See that’s how I saw it, I still see it that way but I realized that they just poor people trying to provide for they family. It’s despicable, though, but that’s what capitalism is about. It’s about degradations, it’s about bringing people down to they lowest level so they don’t have any qualms about exploiting, you know, they neighbor. That’s what it’s all about.

But you as an individual, you might not be able to change the world but you can change yourself. That’s the knowledge I’m trying to get into young people, to understand that, you know, this thing is big. Yes, it is. The universe is vast, man, it’s big. And you might not be able to change racism, because people who are far more intelligent than I am have tried. Yet here we are in the 21st century and we’re still having the same conversation. So I’m not under the illusion that I’m gunna be able to say anything to change the system, but I have changed myself. And no matter what these people say, no matter what they ultimately do, they can’t change that fact. That’s what I’m trying to get other young people to understand, you know?

TFSR: Yeah. Kind of in that same general topic about the degradation and the view that poor people are replaceable, whether they be the people that are in the cages or the people that are walking around and get to go home at night...

BS: That’s right.

TFSR: Across the US, government’s at various levels have shown themselves totally incapable of effectively dealing with the spread of Coronavirus throughout the population, particularly hitting populations of color for a lot of reasons.

BS: Yeah, right.

TFSR: And prisons are most certainly an area that we see folks really denied the means of sanitation, food, exercise, fresh air and protective gear. How have you experienced the pandemic at OSP Youngstown? Do many guards and prisoners seem stricken with COVID-19 and are there any safety precautions being offered?
of the community, and so you are sent to prison to be repaired to that community, right? But we all know that that’s not the case. And that, really, the criminal justice system is a business. It’s an $8 billion a year business. So we’re talking a lot a lot of money is involved in putting people in these cells. And you can say whatever you wanna say, but they created the justification to lock people up in these cages. And I came to that understanding quite late in my life, but I came to it though.

So, one of the things you talk about the nonprofit getting books into younger people, part of my understanding about my life, my life is just not for myself. I come from a community, from a people, you know? And this community that I come from are oppressed. There’s some young person right now sitting at home or walking down the street right now who would be where I’m at, because that’s how the system works, right. And, so it’s my job to try to get some kind of information to this young persons hand to try to help him interrupt this plan that is set up for him. Because it’s not anything personal and that’s really the most horrifying thing about living this this life. I mean, they don’t really give a damn about Keith Lamar, Keith Lamar is nobody. Another nigga we gunna kill. And they been killin a nigga in America for 400 years and everybody know that. You know, I mean let’s talk real about it.

But that’s how “they” feel, it’s not how “I” feel. So I have to, you know, behave in a way that reflects my beliefs and feelings. So, what I do is try to get books in these people hand, because books, or becoming into a greater awareness of who I am and what life is about, is what has allowed me to survive what I’ve been through. You shouldn’t have to come to prison to learn about life, to learn about who you are, to be educated. And that I was mentioning to someone the other day about the root word of education is “educe”, to bring forth that which is already there. That’s not being done in the public school system. You go through all those years of education and end up at the end all of that “learning” and don’t have a “clue” about who you are. And that’s on purpose. Because your life is not your life as far as these people are concerned. As far as they’re concerned your life is just a piece of firewood that they can throw on fire when the fire [phone call was, infuriatingly interrupted yet again by an automated message from OCF “this call is originating from Ohio Correctional Facility and may be recorded and monitored”]. That’s all it is. It’s not just Black people, it’s poor people in general.

People don’t give a damn about our lives. That includes the guards that work here. I was telling a guy yesterday about when I was younger I that prisoners could not free themselves, they could not liberate themselves, they had to be part of a broad base mass movement.

And that was actually starting to happen to some extent. And as George Jackson was laying it out, you know, he was explaining a lot of things. He was a key figure in explaining why we had to have this kind of unity.

TLP: You also talked about Martin Sostre.

LKE: I do. I, you know, Martin saucer is my mentor so what do you think, you know? But uhh, you know, but but Martin was different. See, Martin, he came, well first he came along before George did and his organizing was to lay the basic foundation so that you could even read and talk about revolutionary activity, you know what I’m saying? Or revolutionary politics. He laid the foundation with is lawsuits.

TLP: He talking about the language of fascism, right? This is the language of anti-fascism. Right? He was an antifascist, right? That’s the term he was using?

LKE: That’s the terms he was using. And, because he said “We’re not fighting the police.” “We’re fighting the state.” “You know, that’s some profound shit! When I first heard that, and you know, cuz the left, it was about “all these fucking cops” and blah, blah, blah. And the cops are the epitome, they’re, they’re agents of the state, but they’re not the state, you know. And that’s the kind of shit, that’s the kind of shit he always would tell me, it’s important to understand the distinction between what they call police power... And it was a certain period, when the so-called police power thing came into existence in the in the 70’s and 80’s. You know, where they started creating their unions and allowed them to be autonomous from the mayor or some shit like that, or, you know, on some level. And then their rise with paramilitary policing and the SWAT teams and beyond that, you know what I’m saying?

Cause what we were talking about how there’s differences in this period, and which, you know, which reduced the strikes and the period that produced the prison labor union. And the prison labor union was a mass movement in and of itself, and it was, you know, it was an autonomous mass movement. And they went out in states all over the country. And so it took the Supreme Court to rule that this was unconstitutional.
And to this day, now in this day hardly...activists don’t hardly know about it. Activists have to be charged to always know about these kinds of movements. You know what I’m saying? Because it makes, it makes our work easier in this period in our level of understanding of how we can fight and win.

And so this this thing was more than just them having strikes. They were organizing local groups, and in local areas they had they had outside organizers that had groups on the outside working in communities and stuff. Because I remember one of the things when I was in Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, there was this group called Community Aid to Prisoners. And they used to have a radio show on college radio, in Atlanta. They used to come inside, and work with the person, or the group we had in there and everything. And the so called legalize group, the cultural group, they’d come inside, but their thing was to make sure that prisoners were not destroyed, because they seen the shit happen in Attica, and all that. So their thing was can’t let that happen again.

We also gotta link the community with prisoners and the plight of prisoners and shit, you know? And talk about the unjust and unequal condition of Black people that forces us to go to prison anyway, or allows us to be victims of prisons, you know, this kind of thing. So, I don’t know about right now, you know better about right now, about what kind of community based organizing is going on around prison support.

The thing that George Jackson was putting forward is that he said that he wanted, his idea was to have a movement where the masses of people in the streets -- including the communities where the prisoners were from, and radical prisoners and revolutionary organizations like the Black Panther Party -- could work together all over the country. And have a dynamic revolutionary perspective on the one hand, but a organizing campaign to make the prison movement into a survival movement. Like the Black Panther party organized shit.

dealing with a racist system. It’s not a matter of whether or not I’m innocent or not but what kind of deal I can get, I mean, that’s what it comes down to, basically.

And I knew that, I understood that. You know, I’m not saying that I was completely naive, I had dropped out before, but in that instance I was actually guilty. And I didn’t think I was getting away with anything. Like I said, I just got baptized six months before I caught the murder case, so I had an inkling that I was on the on the wrong path. And so me pleading guilty was another way to reclaim myself, to find my way back to myself. I wasn’t really trying to find the easy way out. But I pled guilty because I was guilty. And here these people come around and asked me to plead guilty to five murders! As if we’re talking about five dollars or five Big Macs, you know, five hamburgers.

Because that’s essentially what, if you poor and you Black in this country, that’s essentially what your life amounts to. Your life isn’t worth really shit. And the only value that your life has the value that you place on. So that goes back to, me selecting the name Bomani, that’s a way for me to inject value into my life into... And I intend to pursue it to the bitter end, if need be. If people, you know, hear my story and it resonates with them and they feel that, they support me because they understand that they too are caught up in the same system, then with those people I’m in solidarity. I don’t necessarily believe in fairytales, I don’t necessarily believe that, you know, that this situation will end happily ever after. More likely than not I will end up doing the rest of my life in prison, or strapped down to a gurney somewhere. So I’ve already come to terms with those realities. So that’s not really what’s guiding me now, a fear of the outcomes.

TFSR: Like, as you said, this isn’t just about you, but it is about you, and you’ve made a lot of efforts while on the inside to - while building your case, and trying to seek justice and reprieve from this injustice - you’ve also been working very hard writing the book, revising it. You participated in a number of different interviews with folks on the outside, academics and journalists, and you’ve helped to set up and run Native Sons as a program. Can you talk a bit about how you’ve been giving back to the world, while Ohio has kept you locked in a cage?

BS: That, again, goes back to me trying to redeem myself, you know? When you go to prison, you know, the idea, or the theory at least, is that you are a member of society who has ran afoul of the standards and laws
believe in, in order for a movement to sustain itself, people have to believe in what they involved in. So what I’m basically trying to do is retry my case in the court of public opinion, and just get the people to learn the particulars of my case, and not just the particulars of my case, the particulars or the MO of the system, how the system operates. Because this is a playbook that I’m actually talking about. I mean, it seems incredible for me to say, “Hey, listen, I was framed, and this is how” but if you go back to the Attica riot, if you go back to you know, they just got this movie come out Just Mercy with Bryan Stevenson and the ways that it railroaded this innocent man to death row. It’s the same thing happened in my case.

So it’s a playbook that I’m talking about. A old playbook that stretches back to slavery, after it became you know, extrajudicial murders, lynchings, were frowned upon in society. So, it’s legal lynching now. And it’s a way that they go about doing that, you know, and I’m just trying to get people to wake up to the realities of how the system actually operates. And wake up to the reality that we like to believe that we have overcome as a society, as a people, that we have come a long way in terms of race relations in this country. But, you know, fundamentally, especially when you’re talking about the justice system, fundamentally nothing has changed, basically.

**TFSR: Mhm.**

**BS:** Nothing has changed. So I don’t like to talk about my story as something new, that this is something that’s only happening to Keith Lamar, to Bomani Shakur. You know this is the system that I’m talking about. I mean, for people who are, hearing this message and wondering why you should give a damn about me and what happens to my life you need to understand that this can happen to somebody that you love, somebody that you care about. And when it’s your turn, they don’t, as they say in Just Mercy they don’t need any evidence, or fingerprints or anything.

And so, you know, we have to come together to make sure that justice is a two way street. Make sure that the people who are, you know, exacting these harsh penalties, that they are held accountable when they are wrong. And that they are held to some kind of accountability, when it’s discovered that they are wrong. Cause it can be said that, “I didn’t know” at the time. And I don’t see how in my instance they couldn’t have known, right? But what they assumed, and they had reason to believe, that I was plead guilty. Because that’s what people do if you poor, if you Black, if you

**Bomani Shakur**

So my guest is Bomani Shakur, also known as Keith Lamar. And he’s a man who’s currently held in death row in Youngstown, Ohio as a result of Lucasville Uprising. Bomani was present at the southern Ohio correctional facility during the uprising and prosecutors have accused him of leading a death squad that killed a guard and some prisoners. Thank you so much, Mr. Shaker for taking the time to chat.

**BS:** It’s my pleasure. Thanks for having me. Yeah.

**TFSR:** Would you tell us a little bit about yourself and what Ohio was like when you were coming up in the 70’s and 80’s?

**BS:** Well, I’m 50 years old, so I was born in 1969 in Cleveland, Ohio, one of the bigger cities in Ohio. I grew up in the in the 70’s, 80’s. I don’t have too much of a recollection of the 70’s per se, in terms of the political situation and whatnot. But I grew up in a small place called The Village. It was a working class neighborhood and mostly who lived and worked at steel mill, the public steel mill. My grandfather worked there and paid for his house in this little community. And oh, it was 100 houses in this community and everybody, you know, owned their own home, worked in the mills.

So my early childhood was relatively peaceful, you know. The most memorable part of my upbringing was that when I was between 5 and 10 years old when my family and I, my mother, my brother and sister -- I had two brothers and a sister -- still young and lived in the village. Not long after I turned 11 or 12 years old, we moved away from the village. And so that was my entrance into, like, mainstream society basically. Started going to public school, a school called Cranwood. And because, in the village, we were poor, but we didn’t really realize we were poor because that wasn’t the values or standard for that community. You can go over anybody house around dinnertime and eat. Everybody was family, literally, and figuratively. A lot of people were cousins, because of, you know, the close proximity we all was, it was like a close knit community. So you had a lot of overlap in relations and whatnot.

And that was a good thing. Because, you know, I could play with my friends, my cousins, on a daily basis, and there was really no judgment
about your attire, your social economic status. Because everybody was pretty much the same, even though you had some people had more than others, but it was never really made a point, something to focus on. But when we moved away from the village, that’s when I first became aware that I was poor poor. You know, and the kids, my peers taught me that. [They] made fun of my attire a lot, my appearance a lot. I was a young kid, at the time, I 8 or 9 years old, is what I’m referring to. And so, I was more into playing than I was intoworrying about my hair being combed or anything like that. And my mother and stepfather didn’t really mess with us boys about our appearance, so I showed up this school looking like, basically like a homeless person, basically [chuckles]. And the kids basically let me have it.

And so, gradually, in response to the ridicule and criticisms I received in elementary school I developed a complex about my appearance and started trying to cut grass, deliver papers and whatnot to make money so I can buy the various clothes I needed to stop this ridicule. And so that was really where I kind of learned -- and of course, as I grew older and went further in the school system, this lesson was compounded -- but elementary school was basically where I learned that what you have is more important than who you were. I don’t know if the kids, I’m sure the kids wasn’t aware that that was a lesson that they were teaching, that we were teaching each other, but that’s essentially what I came away with when I was around 12 or 13.

And as I entered into junior high and then high school I went deeper and deeper off into that erroneous idea about having things was more important than, you know, the person I was becoming. I fell into start selling drugs when I was 13-14 years old, and to accumulate money to buy these clothes, Polo, Ralph Lauren shirts, Guess jeans, and Michael Jordan shoes, all this material trappings that you see young kids pursuing today. It was no different back then but with the exception that we were literally dirt poor. I became a drug dealer and by the time I was 15 I was living in my own apartment, driving a Mercedes Benz, wearing Rolex watches, had a pocket full of money and a whole bunch of “friends” quote, unquote. People who wouldn’t have anything to do with me when I was had a shabby attire but now all of a sudden because I had name brand clothing I was, you know, pretty much one of the most popular individuals at my school.

And at the time I turned 17 years old had really exhausted all my options as a drug dealer basically. I mean, I was driving around in this Ohio and charged them to come up with recommendations to make the carrying out of capital punishment more equitable here in this state. And one of the recommendations that the task force - and the task force was made up of lawyers, academics, ex-judges, and whatnot, so credential people paid for through taxpayer funding - one of the recommendations that they came up with, that they gave to the Supreme Court here, Ohio Supreme Court, is that no one can be sentenced to death based solely on the uncorroborated testimony of jailhouse informants.

So not only can you not put them on death row, but you cannot, you *definitely* can’t kill them based on this uncorroborated testimony. And as I said at the outset, when they came into the prison after the uprising, they trampled the crime scene. So there’s no forensic evidence, there never was. And that’s the crux of where my case stands right now. Is trying to get the Ohio Supreme Court, the people who gave me an execution date, to follow the recommendation the task force that they convened.

You know and that’s what I’m hopefully going to build my movement around. Just that fact alone. I’m not even supposed to be on death row. For the simple fact that I’m innocent first and foremost, but secondly, legally, they wasn’t supposed to be able to put me on death row because they didn’t have any corroborating evidence. All they have is jailhouse informants who they paid to say what they said, and I can prove that.

TFSR: And so those informants were paid how? Were they given like, breaks on their sentences or?

BS: Paid in early paroles. Paid in cushy prison assignments, they was moved from maximum security to minimum security. The majority of them went home early. A lot of them have blood on the hands so they were paid in reduced sentences. And Lavelle, who was the ringleader, and possibly - from what I understand - had something, had a hand in killing the guard, is on the street now. So paid, in a real way, in a real sense.

TFSR: How are you requesting for people on the outside to help with that push to get the Ohio Supreme Court, I guess, to reassess your conviction?

BS: By doing the things that we’re doing now, you know? The whole point of me doing this interview is to make people aware of my situation. That’s the whole point of writing the book, you know. Because people have to
defined as a narrow standard with regard to Brady. You know, his standard was, “okay, it’s only exculpatory if we call somebody forward and he, at the end of his statement, says ‘And by the way, Keith Lamar was not there.’ Unless he says that,” so just to just let you know what I mean by, that if a guy came forward and claimed to have saw somebody do the very thing that I was accused of, and explained it in graphic detail. If this person before he get up and leave that interview, if he didn’t say “Oh, by the way, Keith Lamar was not there” that statement was not turned over to my defense. And all the judges, in doing this evidentiary hearing - Hasan’s attorney, Jason Robb’s attorney, James Were’s attorney - they were present when this was going on. When the prosecutor Piepmeyer made these admissions, and they jumped right on it. And they filed the necessarily briefs and then they got their cases put on hold, and some of the cases are *still* on hold.

And the judges, in they respective cases, said “Listen, this is the narrow standard that the prosecutor Piepmeyer used, and we’re gonna allow y’all to go back to comb the file yallseives. And if y’all find something that’s exculpatory, that y’all deam is exculpatory bring it back to me and I’ll make that determination.” My attorneys for some unsensible reason, didn’t follow those motions. I talk about this also in my book, and this is one of the main contentions around which we fell out, you know. Because after they promised that they would file the motions to put my case on hold, because, mind you it was at my evidentiary hearing that these admissions were made, and so if anybody should benefit from this new knowledge it should have been me. I mean, don’t get me wrong, I’m glad that other guys were able to benefit from it, but I’m just talking about the, the shabby representation that I had. And see, that’s the thing that a lot of people don’t understand about the criminal justice system. You know, if you poor you really don’t have a say in your representation. You know, you know, you know, these attorneys expect you to sit there and shut your mouth.

And a lot of times, as is my case, I was so young I didn’t really know anything about the criminal justice system. And you know, I’ve learned a great deal since my conviction, but you can’t put the wine back in the bottle as they say. You know, you know, I’m grasping at straws, basically, as you might know, I received an execution date last year for the 16th of November 2023. And one of the things: the Ohio Supreme Court issued that execution date. In 2014, the Ohio Supreme Court, the same body of judges, convened a task force to study the death penalty here in foreign automobile and, you know, driving around the same- fill up my gas tank and just traveling around all day basically like a politician. You know, selling drugs, picking up money, shooting dice, and it was the same day over and over again. I got really like exhausted living like that. And there at the end when I was around 18 years old, a group of guys tried to rob me. I had been robbed several times leading up to that, and a group of guys came to rob me instead of turning over, giving them my jewelry as I did the first case, I pulled a gun out and engaged in a shootout. You know, I was shot twice myself, in the legs and ended up shooting the guy twice in the chest. He died and I came to prison. That’s how I ended up in prison, in a nutshell. Yeah, so....

TFSR: So fast forward, I guess, 4 years, right? To, because you went in ‘89, to The Lucasville Uprising in April of 1993. Can you talk about what SOCF [Southern Ohio Correctional Facility] was like at that point, what Lucasville penitentiary was like, and and where you were when stuff popped off? What were you doing?

BS: Yeah, well, I have to go back a little bit because where Lucasville was in 1993 was a result of what it was in 1991. And 1991, white school teacher was murdered by a Black inmate. I emphasize the race because Lucasfield is located in southern Ohio, in a predominantly white community and the prisoners are a majority Black prisoners, from the inner city and whatnot. And these are kind of like, I guess you would call hicks, people who haven’t really hadn’t had any day to day interaction with Black people, except through stereotypes or in the prison.

So who know when this guard, when this female guard was murdered, people in the surrounding community was calling for the prison to be locked down, calling for more severe measures to be implement-ed to, you know, quell some of the violence that was going on. Because Lucasville was one of the most dangerous prisons in the state of Ohio. Probably still is, though I haven’t been down there and two decades now. So they appointed the new warden, Arthur Tate, and he was brought in as someone who was believed to be a hardliner, that he will put the hammer down, restore order, and get the prisoners in line. So he enacted a whole lot of draconian standards and practices and whatnot, just forcing guys to cell with people that they didn’t necessarily get along with, you didn’t really have any say on were you cell or who you cell with. Which was something in prior administration you had, that because you living with
people and so that you created a kind of unstable situation if you forced
to live with somebody you don’t get along with. But he didn’t, really care
about those types of things. And he wanted to assert his dominance.

Flash forward a few years after the teacher was murdered in 1993,
and he had drew lines on the floor, we had to stay within the lines. It was
almost like a military academy, it’s what he would seem to be after at the
time. And of course, when you have your foot on people’s necks, who are
already oppressed, it only created a kind of powder keg, that this building
and building.

Then right before the uprising, they had, every year they came
around and tested prisoners for tuberculosis. And this particular year, for
some reason, the Muslims refused to take the test on the grounds that the
tests contained the alcoholic substance called “phenol” and apparently, it
prohibited from ingesting alcohol because of their religious beliefs. They
try to have an audience with the warden and the deputy warden, to try to
suggest alternative ways this test can be administered, but Tate in keeping
with his hard line attitude and refused them all and gave them an ultima-
tum and told them they could take the test or they’re going to be locked
up, you know, put it in the hole.

He told him this, I believe, on a Thursday or Friday and let him
stew over on their decision over the weekend. And the Muslims on Sun-
day, April 11, Easter Sunday, decided that they will, take that day as an
opportunity to stage what they claimed would be a peaceful protest on
April 11. This is according to the record, several Muslims attacked gaurds
commandeered the keys and opened up all the cell doors, like I said, to
start this protest. But once they opened the doors, it was like striking a
match. And things very swiftly got out of hand.

You know, when the riot first occurred, I was on the recreation
yard, and this is one of the first first few days of spring and the yard have
been closed the whole winter. And so, I took advantage of the opportunity
to go out and get some fresh air. I was out there running and, you know,
exercising and a guard came when it was time to come back in a guard
came running out with blood streaming down his face and whatnot. So
that was the first indication that I or the people on the yard had of some-
thing going wrong on the inside. As the time went on we realized that it
was a disturbance that was happening. And that the Muslims, they had
made it known that they had commandeered to prison and that they were
staging a protest and asked if anybody wanted to participate. Because they
weren’t the only ones who were being oppressed. We all were. We all were

may have been the leader of the death squad, based on some of the people
who actually saw what was going on. But, that didn’t come out till after
the fact, because one of the other things that the state did, when I asked
for my discovery, they gave my discovery to Jason Robb and gave Jason
Robb’s discovery to me and so on and so forth, switched up, they put ev-
erything, mixed everything up.

So we didn’t find out until we got on death row proper, that what
the state’s strategy had been. And I found out that a guy named Aaron
Jefferson that came forward and admitted to killing somebody for whom
I was sentenced to death a guy named Darrell Depina. For people who
read that statement, the interviewer may have some doubts about his rec-
collection of the death of the guard, because he admitted to assaulting the
guard, Vallandingham, who was ultimately killed in the riot, and he ad-
mitted to assaulting a guy named Emanuel Newell and during that inter-
rogation the interviewer called into question his recollection of these
incidents, but not the one pertaining to Darrell Depina, which is the guy
he admitted to killing. But they had already had me on the hook for that.
And so they, they just blew over it just, buried that statement.

And not only that, you know, some of the key witnesses for the
state it wasn’t till their fourth or “fifth” statements that they all agreed that
Keith Lamar was the leader of the death squad. In a first generation, the
first statements, the first copy of the statements, they were pointing the
finger at someone else or didn’t know who did what. But what happened
in there, remember, go back to what I was saying, of the 22,000 pieces of
evidence that was collected: none of it, all of it was contaminated. So they
didn’t have objective case. So what they did, the only thing they could
have done is put together this team, they moved into this hospital called
Oakwood here in Ohio, and they went over a script. They had an open
door policy and all this is documented after the fact.

They had a open door policy in this prison where the informants
going back and forth, sharing stories, collaborating on this narrative, and
they just rode it out man. And we didn’t realize...because that’s the only
thing they could do. And not only that, they put together this snitch acad-
emy - is what it was later came to be known as - but they prevented me
from putting forth a proper defense. That was part of a strategy as well.

Well flash forward to 2007 that I won an evidentiary hearing, the
federal courts called me back to court and allowed us to call the prosecu-
tor, prosecutor Piepmeyer, who you mentioned earlier. And we put him
on the stand and he admitted on the stand that they used what was later
tell people that this system is a sham. It really is. You know, from day one as they say, it’s just one big mockery, man. It’s just you know, like...

TFSR: So Bomani, I wondered if you could talk a bit about... You had a you had a Brady Hearing a few years back to attempt to get a new trial, as far as I’m aware, because there were so many instances where the prosecutors had denied potentially exculpatory evidence from the defense. And we all know that like public defense in this country anyway is perpetually like under-funded when you get a good defender who actually wants to do their job. We’ve had Niki Schwartz on the show before, which we’re very lucky for. But I’m wondering if you could talk a little bit about some of that evidence that you’re aware of that was withheld from your ability to defend yourself and and what that Brady hearing was like too?

BS: Yeah, well, when you go to trial, one of the first things defense attorneys do is filed a motion for discovery, because the discovery is the mechanism through which you defend yourself and you want to know who said what and when. How many times they say it. And when we requested this discovery, the statements, witnesses who testified on me, it’s not just people who said they saw me kill somebody, the exculpatory evidence of people who said they saw somebody else kill the same people for whom I was charged with.

And so what they did, and it was the first time - I haven’t heard one attorney say that they have ever seen anything like this - what they did instead is turn it over to statements, they divided the names of the individual who made these exculpatory statements in one column and put a summary of the statements in another column, mixed them up, didn’t tell us who said what or you know, what’s going on -- I talked about this in my book -- and they said, “Well, this the best we can do.” So it was it was a straightforward from the from the beginning.

Not only that, I found that afterwards that a guy -- I was accused of being the leader of the death squad, and you remember, I said it was three groups who were, it was widely known that they were in charge of the riot Aryan Brotherhood, the Muslims and The Black Gangster Disciples. Well the leaders from the Black Gangster Disciples were basically made up the star witnesses for the state, after everything was all over said and done. Particularly a guy named Lavelle and Stacey Gordon. And Stacey Gordon - from what I’ve been able to piece together since the riot - he living under these kind of adverse conditions, and subjected to these arbitrary rules and regulations and whatnot that Tate was implementing. For him, to his way of thinking would quell the violence that was going on. It really just made things worse, as it often does.

So, you know, eventually one of my friends came out, and he told me, gave me a hint of what was going on, and from what I initially understood was that guys were going into other guys cells stealing their personal belongings and whatnot. I didn’t have much, and I also didn’t appreciate the magnitude of what was going on, this was in the beginning of the uprising. So, you know, I’m thinking that it will probably be something, a minor skirmish, and it’d be within within an hour. As you probably know it last 11 days, and so I was way off in my estimation of how serious and severe things were.

So I went inside and I happened to be celling in L6, on L side in the 6th pod and that coincidentally was the pod where the guards had been pushed into shower stalls and later where the alleged snitches were allegedly killed. I went back into that pod before these things happen to check on my personal belongings. And I saw the guards in shower stall, and you know, of course seeing that put me on notice as to the severity as to what was going on. Because whether or not that lasted 11 days or not you have taken the step to take on hostages, this is serious now. So, once I gradually understood the seriousness of it, of course, I compared it to my personal belongings and decided to go back on the yard. I was 23 years old, at the time, wasn’t necessarily political. I had been doing some reading, like Malcolm X and Franz Fanon and things of that nature, but I wasn’t necessarily what I would call political or even necessarily aware of this that anything can be done about the oppression that we were living under. That wasn’t my mentality at the time, I didn’t really have that kind of awareness. And not a lot of people did. In fact, majority of us filed out into the yard and stayed on the yard until late in the evening, early morning, actually, until the highway State Patrol.

So, you have the Muslims commandeered the prisons, then you have the Aryan Brotherhood who joined ranks with the Muslims and another group of individuals called the Black Gangster Disciples. And so now you have three gangs or organizations presiding over this uprising, and then you have guys who, like myself, were out on the yard watching everything unfold.

A lot of people are under the impression that since I’m on death row that I was a part of one of those three factions, but I wasn’t. And I
came out on the yard, I was actually picked up from the yard when the highway state patrol came out late early morning, April 12 and ushered us all into the gymnasium. I didn't stay inside for the 11 days, wasn't present when the murders was happening. I was on the yard when they brung bodies out onto the yard and dumped the bodies on the yard. By that time the highway State Patrol had took up stance around the perimeter fence to make sure no one escaped, but they didn't come in to try to quell, you know, the uprising. They, you know, stood there along with us and watched as dead bodies were dumped on the yard.

So I witnessed that part of the uprising and little did I know at the time that I would ultimately be accused in killing these individuals who I was watching, whose bodies I was watching being dumped on the on the yard. That was one of the first disconnects, in how I became involved in this whole thing.

As I said, they put us in a gym early the next morning, stripped us of all our clothes and so we were naked, 10 of us, and forced us into the cell. And that's really where, my problems started. I write about it extensively in my book so it might not do justice describe it over the phone. But while in that cell an inmate named Dennis Weaver lost his life. I was ultimately accused of forcing individuals to do that and participate in it but in actuality, it was another guy named Shabazz, who, really sparked all the confrontations in that particular situation and saw a way to shift the blame on me after he and the other two guys who helped him murder Dennis Weaver. Because Shabazz and I got into an altercation while we was in the cell, he was kind of like a bully type individual, and he was going around really trying to put his bluff down on each of the individuals in the cell and when he got to me, I just hauled off and punched him in his face. Something that I talk about in my book. And because of that altercation I think that was what gave him the incentive to really just say “Keith did it!”

And that became the reframe, you know, as I later but it wasn’t simply somebody pointing the finger at me. Later, when they put us under investigation, and for nothing, we didn’t have anything to do with the riot we was on the yard, and they put us under investigation, took all our property. And so, it was really in that context that I began to become a little political. Not knowledgeable about the politics, I don’t mean to say that, I just mean to say that to buy into that “us against them” mentality.

After the riot is already over with, after all was said and done, the bodies and whatnot, had us under investigation for something that was there before I even went to trial.

And I still made the decision to go forward. I had never had a trial, as I said, not a lot of people have. And so, I didn’t really know what to expect but, you know, they offered me a deal. I refused it, I demanded a trial. And, I got to see firsthand really what justice is about in this country, man. A lot of people look at these crime dramas on television and think from that they have a sense of what the American justice system is. But that’s TV shit. In real life, the first thing they do, especially if you Black, the first thing they do is try to strike all the Black jurors from the jury pool, so they can have an all white jury. That’s their secret weapon, to assemble an all white jury, that’s the first thing.

And they, go through this process called “voir dire”, where you’re allowed to question people, try to figure out what their political leanings are and whatnot. And it was just amazing. I was 23-24 years old at the time, and so, wasn’t really, really adapting, interpreting all these different, complicated words and processes and whatnot. But I was, you know, I grew up in the streets, I grew up with people who say one thing and do another, and I grew up around con men. And I saw the jury, that they were trying to finagle their way onto the jury so they can have the experience I guess, to tell their children one day, “I put a Black man on death row”. If you know anything about history -- and I’ve seen history books about the lynchings that went on in this country -- you see most of those lynchings were attended by crowds of white people. Standing there with sandwiches, like it was some kind of, you know, picnic, you know, some kind of extravaganza or something, something to tell your children about that “I did this”.

So, I saw that whole thing, and then I saw the judge colluding with the prosecutor to deprive me of a fair trial, withholding evidence, coaching witnesses, all these things, [Audio interrupted here by an automated message from OSP “You have one minute remaining”]. And I was pretty much learning by trial and error. I was looking and learning, a little bit too slow, but I was learning though. So the stuff that I’m saying and sharing, I might not be the benefactor from the knowledge because it’s after the fact, it’s hindsight, is what I’m talking about.

But I’m just telling people, as somebody who has seen it with my own eyes, what the system is really about, you know, I’m one of the few who has peeked around the corner and have developed a vocabulary to talk about these things, to articulate, you know, what the reality of this system is. You know, so that’s basically what my primary objective is, is to
a possibility to go home in your early 50’s”. But I said “but I didn’t do what y’all claiming I did. I didn’t have anything to do with it I came out on the yard.” They said “Listen, we’re not here to talk about that about what you did or what you didn’t do, obviously, it’s a moot issue at this point. We trying to figure out whether or not you want to accept this deal. It’s a good deal.” And it was a good deal! You know, 90% of people who are in prison are here because they’ve taken a deal, they’ve taken a lesser sentence than the one that they can potentially get if they demand a jury trial, you know.

But I had taken a lot of deals up to that point in my life. I dropped out of school, I became a drug dealer as I recounted. I had really, really just turned my back on my potential. And I didn’t realize that until I came to prison, until I really had to type of opportunity to slow down and see what I had done with my life. Because, you know, when I was 14 all the way to 19 it was just a blur, really that every day was a party, basically, I’m getting high, I’m selling drugs, I’m shooting dice, I’m spending money. And, I’m living what I thought, I believed at the time, was a good life.

But I had, at the end as I had mentioned, I had came to the realization that, you know, something was amiss, and right before I caught the murder case, I had disavowed the drug dealing and getting high and all that and I got baptized. Here’s the funny thing. I turned my life over to God, and that’s the second time I had done that in my life. I did it once when I was 13 when I felt like my life was coming apart, when I was losing control of the direction of my life. And I did it again, when I was 18, six months before I ultimately took somebody’s life and came to prison.

So it was always a part in me that wanted to find my way back to myself, to the self I was before I get caught up in, you know, the mainstream, I guess you could say. Before I get caught up in all the material trappings that go along with, you know, this society, you know. So when I came to prison, and when I was offered the deal I was just tired, man. I was just sick of just taking the easy way out in my life, you know? So I refused. I said “I’m not gonna do that. I’m done taking deals, I’m done going along?” Because, not only are you taking deals to get home to the possibly I could get on the stand and lied on somebody else even though a lot of guys take that route, that just wasn’t an option for me.

So the only option, that I had, because they made it plain that somebody is going to death row. In fact, before we were even put on trial, a lot of us was moved to the bottom range at the death row pod so we can get accustomed to the idea and it was it was crazy. So I had a kind of foreshadowing, a kind of glimpse of what death row would be like, because we had [audio gets cut off by automated message from OSP: “This call is originally from an Ohio correctional facility and may be recorded and monitored”]. And that got old pretty, fairly quickly. We started tearing up the cell blocks we were in, throwing our food onto the range, getting into confrontation with the highway State Patrol, suggesting or advocating that no one talks to the authorities and, and that’s how I became a target. You know, by participating in those demonstrations.

And one of the things I like people to understand about the uprising is that immediately after the uprising the state sent in their investigators and they trampled the crime scene. And they collected over 22,000 pieces of “evidence”, quote, unquote, but none of it could be matched to any victim or assailant, no fingerprints, no forensic or anything, because they rushed in and trampled the crime scene basically. They sent everything off to a crime lab to be tested and came back empty handed. And so what they had to do, the only thing they could do is create a team of informants and select people who they wanted to indictment put on.

TFSR: Quick question, just just for clarification, so that if I’m making a mistake I should know, do you prefer Keith, do you prefer Bomani? I know like one ties directly to the legal case and like legal support, what should I be calling you?

BS: Well, yeah, we should talk about that because that’s a question that a lot of people ask me. So, Bomani Shakur is a name that I selected, when I was thrown into the midsts of all this madness and needed something to kind of steer me through without losing hold of myself. So, it’s not so much a rebellion against my government name so, to speak. It’s just a way to reaffirm my purpose and conviction, because it’s easy to lose track of those things when you’re in a situation like this, and that stretches over such a great length of time and difficulties.

TFSR: Yeah, especially when you’ve got a number imposed on you, like that’s attached to your name. And it seems really powerful to be able to pick something that is like, so symbolically important to you and representative of your struggle.

BS: Right right. But a number along with, you know, just the structure of this place is a reduction of humanity, to just reduce you to animal. And so you know, choosing the name Bomani...
The full name is Bomani Hondo Shakur. “Bomani” is strong soldier, “Kuanda” [possibly mispelled -editor] is preparing for war, and “Shakur” is for thankful. So those attributes, you know, so when somebody say, “hey, Bomani” it’s just a reminder, just that you have that you are a man soldier and that whatever difficulties that I might be experiencing at that time it’s just a reminder that you can rise above those things, whatever it may be. And Kuanda, be prepared assistance, stay focused, and to study, just try to be as prepared as you possibly can. And “thankful”, Shakur, is just no matter how difficult or dark, no, the present moment might be, to be thankful for the fact that you are alive, that you are healthy that you have a lot of good people in your life. And that, although the circumstances are out of my control to a certain degree, to be thankful that I still have my faculties, that I can still stand up and fight for myself.

So, you know, I’m thankful for all the good things that are in my life and that me staying the course has produced in my life. My name is not just words, it’s, like my prison number, it’s just it resonates meaning for me, you know, when somebody call me Bomani, they just really called me to remember who I am. And, so that was, it’s my freedom name, you know, a way for me to hold on to my freedom in the midst of all this, because it’s overwhelming being in a situation like this.

And a lot of times, you feel no, you know, especially in the beginning, you know, I felt like I was in this by myself, not so much now, you know, I’m 50 years old, and I’ve come a long way in terms of my development and whatnot. And so, I’ve been lucky enough, you know, to garner a lot of support. But in the beginning, when I was not who I am today, it was, ykind of a whole lot more difficult to navigate, things, and so the name started with that, you know, that was the first realization that I needed to, inject some purpose into my life, and not just drift aimlessly through my days, that I need to be about, the business of freeing myself and represent myself. The name along with writing the book, the other things have just been me putting one foot in front of the other and trying to find my way forward, basically.

TFSR: So getting back to the days of 1993, you had said that you hadn’t before, but you’ve done some reading, you hadn’t been like, what you would consider to be like, very much engaged in politics, you’ve read some Fanon and some Malcolm X. I know for a lot of people like looking back and studying the uprising between the self advocacy of the Muslims, you know, rebelling against this obvious insult to their to their stricutures of their faith. And also the, the fact that those three groups in particular, the Muslims and the Black Gangster Disciples, as they were called at the time, and the Aryan Brotherhood could come together and -- you know, obviously imperfect -- but decrease the amount of killing and theft and harm that was occurring within the facility, possibly, and a lot of people took from it this message of like a convict race of a common shared oppression by the system. It seems like the story of what happened next what happened in the courts was in a lot of ways a continuation of that same call the baying for blood by the neighboring communities.

Like this is happening at the same time as the Waco invasion is happening in Texas and so that’s one reason that a lot of people won’t have heard about the Lucasville uprising. That’s where all the cameras are pointed.

BS: Right, uh huh.

TFSR: But I’d love to hear what you have to say about following the initial investigation where everything was trampled, how the trial was conducted, and why do you think it was so easy for these people maybe who participated in the violence to finger you, and state prosecutor Mark Piepmeier and others to target us throughout the case for blame?

BS: Well, you know, mainly I believe they were primarily interested in convicting someone for the guard’s murder. Of the 11 other people who were killed, his life was the only life that really have any real value, right? You know, they didn’t give a damn about the prisoners who was killed, as I said, they stood there and watched along with everyone else, as those bodies was dumped on the yard, I could have been one of those bodies. And no, I wasn’t political but I was extremely upset at the way that after the riots, as in the way that we were being treated. And I was vocal in my anger, treatment.

I was doing 15 years to life with the possibility for all at the time. So, when they finally, singled in on me, me focused in on me, they didn’t do so with the belief that I will go forward and demand a trial. They came to me, “Hey Keith”, you know they called me by my first name as if we was old pals or whatever, and they say, look they spelled it out for me, basically did the math for me. It’s real basic math, “if you go forward, you know, we’re going to put you on death row, if you take this deal you have