

THE
**Final
Straw**
A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW



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David Campbell on Antifascist Prisoners



The Final Straw Radio
July 7, 2022

TFSR: That's awesome. Thanks a lot for making the time on such short notice to have this conversation and thanks for bringing so much to the table. I really appreciate it. Oh, yeah.

David: It's been a real pleasure. It's been a real pleasure.

An interview with formerly incarcerated antifascist prisoner, David Campbell, about his experience of incarceration for participation a street melee against fascists in January 2018 in New York City and about the importance of prisoner support and the upcoming annual International Day of Solidarity with Antifascist Prisoners on July 25th.

David's former celly who could use some love:

Bruce Williams #21R0721
Orleans Correctional Facility
3531 Gaines Basin Rd
Albion, NY 14411

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David Campbell: So my name is David Campbell, a former Anti Fascist political prisoner and my pronouns are he/him. In January 2018, I was arrested at an Anti Fascist protest and black bloc against an alt-right sort of swanky evening party to celebrate the one year anniversary of Trump's inauguration. That was in New York, in Manhattan. I'll just go ahead and give you the whole thing, right?

TFSR: Yeah, totally.

David: So I got arrested at this Anti Fascist protests that was was pretty mild, but one little pocket of it turned into a brawl late at night, like 1030 at night. There were maybe six people on each side. I participated. Some fascists started swinging on me and I got involved. At some points during this brawl a cop came around the corner, there were no cops around when it started, but this cop came around the corner and without a word he just kind of did a double take and surged toward the first person in black that he saw. That was me. He grabbed me from behind without a word, and threw me to the ground, and broke my leg in two places. He was a much, much bigger guy than me.

There was right wing media there, they were covering it. This cop has to justify the fact that he chose only me and the fact that he's so much force, he has to cover the fact that he didn't say, "Stop! Police!" like you're supposed to. Also, in the course of the brawl, the cop didn't know this at the time of the arrest, but I did lose my temper and I saw a fash he got on the ground and I went over and kicked him twice. Which is right, but also like it's not a huge deal to kick someone. It's like whatever. That guy went to the ER [emergency room]. He was knocked out and went to the ER, but he walked out. He was drunk and belligerent with the cops and wanted to leave the ER before he's allowed to.

I went to the ER and spent like four days there cuffed to a bed. I got a titanium rod put in my leg. It's still there. Then I got arraigned on all these crazy charges. I mean, really insane. The cop concocted this narrative that was completely fabricated. After a couple of months we get security camera footage and his narrative was completely thrown out. I was amazed that this did not matter that the cop had just made up a narrative. They were able to just backpedal and say something else was the case. Apparently that did not matter at all. He was clearly lying.

So I fought my case for about two years. It slowly became clearer and clearer that the Manhattan DA was really gunning for me. I was the

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TFSR: I can put his contact info in the with that, or if you send it to me, I'll definitely put it in the show notes and people can decide to write him a letter or put some money on his books or whatever.

David: Oh, cool. Yeah, he's a little hard nosed about getting money. He's like, "I don't want your money." But he will appreciate it. Yeah, letters, books, whatever. I got Books Through Bars to send him a lot of stuff. He's a really good guy. I was sleeping next to him, in the bed next to him, when when the first wave COVID hit. So he's really good guy.

TFSR: Dave, was there anything else that you wanted to touch on?

David: I don't think so. I think that's it. It's been a real pleasure.

TFSR: Mutual.

David: Sending solidarity to all the Anti Fascist prisoners locked up on the upcoming J25. Yeah, everybody else out there in the struggle, keep your heads up. I guess I'll give you my my plugs, because that makes sense. One, I am on Twitter, but I don't really tweet anything, but I'm there. Sometimes I get articles published about jail and stuff and when I do I usually make a little announcement on Twitter. It's @AB_DAC. And you can find me there. There's an email there too, that you can hit me up at. If you're facing political charges, think you might do some time or you know someone who is and you just don't know where to turn. You can hit me up. I'm happy to talk to you about it. A lot of people did this for me when I was facing time. So I'm more than happy to pay that forward.

I'm also trying to write a memoir about my time as an Anti Fascist political prisoner, because it was pretty wild. So I started a Patreon. It's just Patreon DavidCampbellDAC. If you can help me get that written. I'm also in grad school right now. So I need some some funding to make this work. I'm making good progress. But that's what I got to plug.

man is airport level at best. So if you speak German and find out what's going on there, let me know. I think she was on trial recently, but I really don't know.

TFSR: I'll try to put some notes in the show notes about it.

David: I would love it if you could dig up something on that. I tried to do a little digging, but even in French. I speak French, but there's not that much. France, I think is okay right now. There was one comrade who just got sprung.

TFSR: Is that the instance of the veteran from Rojava who was facing terrorism charges along with a few other people, the cases got dropped except for against this one individual?

David: Oh, Libre Flot. He's out. He went on hunger strike and now he's out. I think it's conditional release. I don't know if the charges have been dropped. But at least he's not locked up. There were some people facing some serious charges. But thanks in part to funding from the International Antifascist Defense Fund, they all got off, which is great.

Then in Lyon, we had seven anti fascists that were allegedly members of the antifascist group that was ordered to disband by the government. They were facing really, really inflated charges for a street fight that came out at a protest with some far right French folks. They were facing a couple of years for the street fight and they got some funding from international Antifascist Defense Fund that enabled them to hire good lawyers, and they all got off. So you know, there are successes, too.

You know, sometimes, doing time is also in some ways a success. I mean, again, it sucked, but in some ways, I'm proud of my time. I didn't have to give the State anything. I went in for something I believe in and ultimately, it was way too long for kicking a guy while wearing a shoe, but it's way less than the State wanted to give me. We talked them way down. They wanted to give me years. So in some ways that's a victory, you know? I try to see it that way, anyway.

I just want to give a shout out to my man Big Bruce. Big Bruce is a friend of mine from Rikers. He's not a political prisoner, but he's a really good guy, and he's doing a two year bit in the New York State system right now. His name is Bruce Williams, he's in New York State system. He'd love to hear from you.

only person they arrested, even though it was kind of a brawl. Everyone kind of was standing around rubbernecking after I hit the ground, because now there are two people on the ground and there's a cop there. Not that I want more people to have been arrested, but that's you would expect that right?

So for a number of reasons, a lot of factors converged. And the DA really wanted to make an example of me. This was the first time this had happened in New York. This was pretty early in the Trump years and a lot of black bloc on alt-right violence or vice versa was happening around the country. It's Law and Order democratic politics, right? We're gonna lock people up and you kids will stop this nonsense on our streets. So ultimately, after almost two years, I took a non cooperating plea on two violent felonies for kicking the guy twice while wearing a shoe. That was an important component of my plea, that I was wearing a shoe. Judge asked me that. He was like, "you were wearing a shoe when you kicked this man?" I was like, "Yeah."

TFSR: You should have taken your crocs off first before kicking.

David: Yeah, it was like a lightweight like mesh top like running sneaker. I was like, "Really?" I found that incredible. Why would I be wandering around Hell's Kitchen at 10:30 at night without shoes on. But anyway, I took a non cooperating plea on two violent felonies to serve 18 months on Rikers Island, I served 12. I got a ton of incredible support, which is really I think the takeaway and what we're mostly here to talk about today, right?

TFSR: Mmmhmm. Was that the event that happened where **Gavin McInnes had the samurai sword and stuff like that?

David: No, actually. My event is often overlooked and I don't really talk about the headliners because it's like the mass shooter thing. I don't want to give them a publicity boost. So I don't normally mention the name of the events or whatever, because fuck those guys.

So the event I was arrested at was nine months before the event where Gavin McGinnis came out with a samurai sword and that was a whole thing. That was at the Metropolitan Republican Club on the Upper East Side, also in Manhattan. After that event, on the Upper East Side, there was a brawl between antifascists and Proud Boys, most in uniform. The Proud Boys vastly outnumber the Anti Fascist, I think it was like a

dozen Proud Boys on four antifa folks. and The antifa folks ended up getting knocked to the ground and kicked and stomped on the ground.

Now police showed up while this was going on and just dispersed people. After some outcry on social media, police finally started making arrests of Proud Boys. They never found the Anti Fascist folks, never identified or brought them in. Which is great. So these two cases were kind of going on at the same time. Mine, where ultimately what I went down for was kicking a guy on the ground. It was just impossible to get around that. And the other case is the Proud Boy's case, where he had problems who kicked and stomped people on the ground. There were like 10 Proud Boy defendants.

Amazingly the same DA's office, the Manhattan DA 's office, gave most of them like five days community service, including one guy who had a prior felony conviction. Which you would expect them to go harder on (that's all I mean by saying that). The "most vicious" the ones, that they were really gunning for in that Proud Boy group were offered less time than I was ever offered in about half the time. So in like, eight months, they were offered a deal to do eight months on Rikers Island. It took me two years to get to do 12 months on Rikers Island. Those two, John insman and Maxwell Hare, two Proud Boys, turned down that offer, and went to trial, blew trial, and I think should be wrapping up their four year sentences upstate right now.

So those are not the same cases, but those two cases, my case and that Proud Boys Upper Eastside case, we were studying their case very closely, my Defense Committee and myself. My lawyer was skeptical of that as a comparison at first, but eventually she got on board and she even went to the trial of those two Proud Boys, and was like, "yeah, they're doing this on both sides to make an example of left and right extremists. That's what's happening here and you're the only person on the left. There's no way around that."

TFSR: You said that it was a democratic approach towards justice or whatever democratic...

David: 'Law and order Democratic politics.'

TFSR: For anyone who may not be... because we're talking about this happening during the Trump regime, Trump was the federal government, the Democrat that you're talking about is the Democrats like De

stuff to get by while he's in and stuff live off when he gets out. Like I said, he loves lefty song lyrics. Any radical song lyrics he wants to end up we would love to have.

There's Eric King. Eric King has got about a year and a half left as well. He is currently in USP Lee in Virginia, a maximum security federal prison, where there have been explicit threats on his life. So you can call them the North Central Regional Office of the BOP at 913-621-3939. You can spread that word, it's on Eric Kings website. I think. He's a great guy who loves to get letters. He's often on mail ban, like I can never keep track of when he's allowed to receive letters and what he's not. So I'll just write him a letter and see if it bounces back or not. But it's a really nice guy.

There's Gage Halupowski, who's serving six years in Oregon State Prison, participated in one of these large scale street brawls between fash and antifa in Portland. Gage, I used to write to him, but I guess we kind of fell out of contact, but he seems like a really nice guy. He's got, I think half his sentence under his belt by this point. So like I said, I haven't talked to him in a while. But I think he's doing all right, send him letters, send him support, raise awareness, if you can.

Internationally, you have the International antifascist Defense Fund. Amazing organization, does a lot of great work. Did a lot of great work for me. I really can't speak highly enough of them.

I think a lot of people's eyes are on Ukraine right now, understandably, so. There are a lot of Anti Fascist and anarchists involved in the struggle against the invasion of Ukraine. And they're mostly lumped under the umbrella of the Resistance Committee. That's the anarchist and antifascist coalition for direct resistance to the invasion. They're funded by something called Operation solidarity. Anarchist Black Cross Dresden in Germany has a lot of good information. I think they've really like answered the call to be kind of a relay points for the struggles going on in Eastern Europe. They have a lot of great resources on the website. For support for Belarusian anarchists. There's branches of ABC in Moscow and Belarus as well. But if you're looking at to help out comrades who are really in the thick of it right now in Ukraine, I think Anarchist Black Cross Dresden's website is a good place to get started.

There's a case in Germany, someone in Lina E, it's a woman who's facing some pretty serious charges for allegedly being involved in a number of hammer attacks against Neo Nazis around Germany. I from what I understand stuff in Germany is pretty hot right now. I have very little information about this and what I can find online is all in German. My Ger-

authored a book, I'm forgetting the name of it, but also was a part of the Afro Asian Music Ensemble as well as the monkey orchestra. Both of these were communist. He was a Marxist socialist. There's an article on Wikipedia about him. Got your answer right there!

David: Thank you, it's been bothering me for years. I scratched that itch. If you don't have the time or the inclination to write a letter, a lot of political prisoners have book lists. You can find a lot of people's book lists on sites like Anarchist Black Cross Federation - ABCF.Net. There's also New York City Anarchist Black Cross. It's one of the larger and more active Anarchist Black Cross organizations. Anarchist Black Cross, if you don't know, does a lot of radical prisoner, political prisoners support work, and did a lot of great work for me. Which I really appreciate.

TFSR: New York is a part of the Federation. They have this war chest for supporting prisoners over the long term, which is amazing.

David: Yeah, so another thing you can do, if you don't want to write, send books, or do any of the visibility stuff that we talked about, you can just donate. People do need money for this stuff, and these organizations are good for it. They will forward that money to the place that needs to be. You have the international Anti Fascist Defense Fund. That is spelled with a 'C' because they're British, which we won't hold against them, but should come up if you google it spelled the American way.

TFSR: I'll link it in the show notes too.

David: There's Certain Days, a great collective that produces a radical freedom for political prisoners calendar. Some of the members of the collective were incarcerated. I think they're all out now. Most of them are out

TFSR: Xinachtli is still in at least.

David: Xinachtli, Yes. Okay. Certain Days is great though. They have a lot of great info on supporting radical political prisoners.

As for antifa prisoners in the US, we have Daniel Baker. He's serving four years and he's got a year and a half left, I think, in the Feds for Facebook posts. He could definitely use books. His wish list is on the ABC website, letters, he loves to get letters. I write to him. Funds, so he has

Blasio, at that point?

David: Cyrus Vance was the was the DA for a long time. He's no longer the DA of Manhattan. Cyrus Vance was celebrated for subpoenaing Trump's tax returns and securing the Harvey Weinstein conviction after years of pressure and ignoring that pressure and finally caving once it got to a certain fever pitch. But Cyrus Vance and his office, it's all old school cop loving Law and Order Democrats. That's what you do, right? You lock people up and be 'Pro-choice.'

TFSR: People may have been thinking again, that Trump was in office as a Republican regime, the prosecution's were being pursued by a Republican regime. That's not the case in this instance. But it doesn't really make a difference. When you look at the NYPD, and you look at the actual power structure in New York, the party difference doesn't seem to make a huge amount. It's all about keeping the machine running and maybe you've got a difference in some of the power players and instances, but everyone who's got some money is getting a cut one way or the other.

David: Yeah, yeah. I mean, hey man, a lot of people have kept me locked up and drew a paycheck to keep me in a cage. Black and brown working class people, vote Democrat all the way down the line, some of them have much more radical politics than that. That's been the case in New York City DOC for a long time. Assata Shakur talked about that. A lot of people were pretty down with what she was doing. But guess what, they're still getting the paycheck at the end of the month to keep her in a box, you know?

TFSR: This might be a good instance to bring up the prosecution of Proud Boys at a federal level happening in the United States. Again, this is under a Democratic regime. So some people on the Right are gonna say, "Oh, look, they're just prosecuting people on the far Right, but nobody's going after BLM, antifa, whatever, whatever, from 2020-2021, or before that. Which is obviously not true, because if anyone listens to our show, they heard an episode a couple of weeks ago where we talked to folks who are supporting prisoners from the 2020 Rebellion.

There's a concept that a lot of anti fascists adhere to specifically

the anti-authoritarian anarchist wing of that movement, which is the ‘three way fight’ model, where you understand that the State and the Fascists are, sometimes they are directly aligned, sometimes they are in opposition to each other to some various degree, the State often wanting to be the mediator of violence, and wanting to get rid of extremes on one end or another. Whatever might destabilize their authoritarian rule. You can see that with Putin, for instance, in Russia where he has prosecuted and broken up far Right street movements only to accept the ones that are incorporated into the State, and definitely attacked antifascist and anarchists and other leftists, in the meantime. I wonder if you have views about this prosecution of the Proud Boys that’s happening here.

David: I had a friend that supported me during my whole case while I was in. She’s a great person, her hearts in the right place, her politics are more mainstream liberal progressive than my own. She texted me one day with the news headline about Enrique Tarrío being charged with seditious conspiracy, saying it was a great victory or whatever. I didn’t get into it with her. On the one hand, it’s better than if the State was turning a blind eye to that, I think it would be much more dangerous if they were just acting like it didn’t exist at all. On the other hand, there’s a lot of collateral that comes with that. There’s a lot of things, once you start making it easier to lead repression campaigns against extremist movements on the far Right, come back around Boomerang-style on the far Left. What are you going to do? If it’s in the law and you can’t specify far Right. You craft the legislation or the administrative policy without specifying people’s exact political beliefs, right? That’s going to be on the books. It’s going to apply just as well if they want, and they will want at some point, to use it against the far left.

So we’ve seen this historically, things like the mask laws, mask laws that had been used to charge a lot of like black bloc folks and other folks wearing masks at protests for largely originally written to clamp down on the KKK organizing in public spaces while wearing a mask. You see a lot of that kind of stuff. There was a case in France in Lyon where the government forced an antifa group that was pretty active and doing some really badly needed work, Lyon has a huge fash problem, but forced the group to disband. They use an almost 100 year old law that was originally written to clamp down on far right extremist groups. It’s not just paranoia.

At the end of the day, it’s like... Man, I don’t know. I’m not going

slightly different struggle. It’s like Black Liberation, but a lot of overlap. It was incredible to be getting that news.

What news you’re allowed to have is pretty heavily restricted in jail. I wanted this article about prisoners in Italy who were sticking it up, who were rioting over COVID conditions, would get rejected by security. So I asked my friend to send it to me in French. So she found a French version article and send it to me. All right, fine. There are no pictures or anything. So like, how are they going to know? I also get so much mail, they’re not going to read through everything.

That’s another thing, if you send a lot of volume, they’re probably going to get sloppy at some point. So another reason to send people lots of letters, is just to keep the haystack big. If you think the regular post office is not great. Imagine the jail post office. Things get lost, things bounce back for no reason, things get censored. That’s something that you do have to temper your expectations to meet. There’s going to be some some bumps in the road when it comes to writing people that are locked up, because the institution is not there to make it easy for you to be in touch with them.

Oh! A benefit punk show! Another thing you can do is throw a benefit punk show.

TFSR: Yeah, and if you don’t have the wherewithal to put together a punk show you can table, like asking the venue or the bands that are playing and putting up a table with some some info about Anti Fascist prisoners or radical prisoners, generally anti racist prisoners, and starting a conversation with folks, or holding a picnic, holding an outdoor food event is the thing that we’ve done in the past for June 11 around here in past years. A nice social gathering that also shares food that checks off a bunch of the boxes.

David: Exactly. That stuff is pretty easy to put together. You can do it in a fairly short period of time. It’s enjoyable for people who come through whether or not they’re super political. I heard that there were quite a wide variety of people there. It’s just a very good scene. It was a really, really fun time. It’s doesn’t have to be punk either, you can put together a benefit experimental jazz concert, whatever you want. Where’s the intersection of experimental jazz and militant antifascism?

TFSR: There was Fred Ho, for instance. Do you know that name? Co

David: Yeah. I think that's important. Trying to over-promise. Disappointment can be really crushing, when you're locked up, especially. You don't have that much to look forward to. So try not to over promise. That's important. But I guess the thing that I mean to say here is if the idea of maintaining correspondence with someone for so long seems daunting, that shouldn't keep you from writing a letter in the first place. You can just say, "I don't know how long I'll be able to keep this up. My life is very busy. This is kind of daunting to me." Honesty is always great, right? Don't let that keep you from writing that that first letter, if that is a factor.

TFSR: Well, do you want to talk a bit more about July 25th? And some of the prisoners that folks could be doing support for or communicating with or come into contact with?

David: There's a great article on It's Going Down right now about stuff you can do for July 25th. A lot of it is like visibility stuff, you can do a banner drop, posters, stickers, wheat pasting campaigns are all great. You can do a propaganda pic like a rad pic. Get your your hoodies and your ski masks and what are those things called? Flares? That's before my time. People weren't standing around with flares when I got locked up. I don't think so. That's all publicity stuff. That's all visibility stuff and that really matters. So if you have an explicit J25 support with antifa prisoners message, that stuff really matters. The It's Going Down article also suggests dedicating a direct action to incarcerated antifa comrades. It's a great idea. Don't tell me about it. I'll hear about it later. That's fine.

TFSR: And that whole do a direct action, but don't tell Dave, in solidarity with people that are behind bars. That's a commonality of things that I like that's come out.. I think it came out of the June 11 stuff is... one way that we show solidarity and support to the people that are behind bars for doing a thing is by acting in solidarity and doing the same sort of stuff that they were involved with that got them put away. They don't have to know specifics, but getting a news clipping... that makes me sound old again too... getting a printout from an online news source saying, like, "Hey! Somebody faced off with this group of knuckleheads in so and so Pennsylvania," like, whatever.

David: Yeah, that stuff matters. I was locked up for the Floyd rebellion too. It was just incredible to be getting print outs of that stuff. It was a

to shed any tears if Proud Boys go to prison for a long time. Although, don't send people to prison, that's stupid. Yeah, I don't know. I don't know. I'm very divided on it. I think it's not a clear cut victory at all. There are a lot of risks with it. I think the important thing is that we have grassroots movements capable of pushing back on the far right. At least as well as the government. That involves everything from writing letters, making phone calls, to street fights, making art, infiltrating the groups, doxxing, building a broad cultural base of support. All that stuff. We have to get really good at that and make that really, really common in order to avoid the State needing to do that in the first place.

TFSR: And then that way we're sapping power potential from both the State and from the far right. If we're engaging more actively in these various different ways with our racist Uncle as the trope goes or our neighbors or whatever. We're definitely stronger that way than simply relying on the cops to resolve our issues.

David: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

TFSR: You got prosecuted, you went to prison... Can you talk a little bit about your prison time and how you were treated? And how other prisoners viewed you?

David: Yeah. So I went to jail. I didn't go to prison. This is like the most confusing thing because they're not technically different than most of the rest of the English speaking world. Most people use them interchangeably in English. I went to Rikers which is a jail. But I was serving sentenced time, which is pretty rare. Right? So 10% of the people on Rikers are serving sentences. The rest of detained pretrial. Most people serving sentences in the US are in prison. So, the sort of time I did and the terminology that comes with it is a little particular.

I did 12 months on Rikers, it sucked. Don't go to jail. Don't go to Rikers... if you can avoid it. Also, don't let the fash take over. There's a cost benefit thing we have to do. Unfortunately, it's built into the risk of antifascist work. You might get arrested, you might go to jail. My numbers came up and that's where I went. But it was okay. I mean, I wouldn't do it again, if I had the choice. Meaning, go to jail, I would still choose to go back to the protest that night and confront the fash.

It wasn't a fun time, but I didn't have any trouble from other pris-

ons there in terms of my politics, or what I was in for. That was one of the things that when we were negotiating with the DEA, my lawyers and I, we brought up was that I can be in real danger, upstate upstate prison system. A lot of the guards are pretty fashy. They're pretty small and don't have a lot of power ,but there are branches of Aryan Brotherhood, you know, white nationalist groups and stuff like that among the prisoners. That could put me in danger. My case had a lot of really sensational coverage from right wing media. There was stuff on Twitter about how I should get the death penalty, or whatever. So I didn't have any trouble like that Rikers, which is great.

I talked to a lot of guys in Rikers, who had done time upstate because people behind bars, they do a little time here, a little time there. It doesn't work, people keep going back. So people who have been upstate, most of them said, "Yeah, you probably would have had some sort of trouble upstate, because of your case and it was so public. The guards are all very rural working class white folks who tend to tend to be pretty Trumpy." So, I didn't have that trouble at all at Rikers. The overwhelming majority of the guards and the overwhelming majority of the prisoners are working class Black and brown folks and immigrants living in the New York area, or from the New York area. Most of them were pretty down with what I was in for, even if they were pretty apolitical. Because, again, fascism sucks. Fascism has white nationalism as an essential component, right? Because not really any way around it.

So when I spoke with him about what I was in for, which is something that people asked me very often because I kind of stood out in Rikers. I mean, I'm a nerdy white looking guy. There's a sort of suspicion about guys like me in jail, because guys like me don't get jail time. The system is a white supremacist system that doesn't really lock up college educated white folks from a middle class suburban background. That doesn't happen very often unless you do something pretty dumb. So guys would be like, "what are you in for?" "Well, I beat up a Trump supporter at a protest." After a while, word starts to spread. After I'd been in for six months, I started to have people coming up to me and be like, "Yo, I heard about you, that's pretty rad." Not all the time, but people I didn't even know throughout my sentence would come up to me be like, "Yo, good job." [laughs]

TFSR: Yeah. Better than the alternative.

will almost certainly get through anywhere. Then, once you've established contact with the person you're writing to, you can ask them in a letter written on a plain white sheet of paper in plain black ballpoint ink, "Can you get postcards? Can I send you pictures?" Things like that.

I think a lot of people are hesitant to tell the person about their lives because they feel guilty, saying like, "I went to the waterpark with my kids yesterday, it was awesome." But like you don't understand, it's the opposite when you're locked up. At least for me and most people that I know that have done time, which now I know a fair amount because I did time. People want to hear that. People live vicariously through you. That's why I asked people to tell me about the last good meal that they ate and I have no regrets. I imagined a lot of delicious meals while I was locked up. That was actually helpful. So don't be afraid to tell people what's going on in your life and what you've done that's good lately. I think a lot of people were maybe hesitant to do that. But that's actually what people want to hear.

You can also ask the person, "What do they want?" If they don't need books sent in, are there particular things they'd like to hear about? I just asked people to send me dad jokes or whatever, cat memes, print-outs of cats. I love that shit. I'll take it! So you can ask the person and see what they what they want. I write to Daniel Baker, I'll talk about him in a minute. He likes lefty song lyrics, the more obscure the better. You print out some lefty song lyrics, and send them over to him, he's really gonna appreciate that.

It can be a little daunting because people don't want to take on this commitment that could last for a long time. You write to someone who's doing 10 years or something people are like, "Wow, do I have to write this guy every two weeks for the next 10 years?" No, I had people who wrote to me and were like, "Hey, I need to take some time for myself. But you know, you come home in a couple months, it's been real, keep your head up." That's just fine. I also had people who weren't even able to give me that heads up. They told me, "I'm gonna try and write to you every week," and then I never heard from them again. I have no ill will to those people at all. I'm just glad to have heard from them. That's not a problem. I don't know anyone else who's done time either who's like mad about somebody who didn't write enough or only wrote for a couple months?

TFSR: It just seems like good practice to not try not to over-promise. You know?

meaning to read that book forever. It's a great book. I'm glad I read it. But people see that and people notice that stuff.

Sometimes Books Through Bars would send me a box full of books. Some of the stuff wasn't really interesting to me. I think I got like a 900 page global history of soccer. I was like, "I'm not gonna read this." I'm not. Nothing against soccer, I played it when I was a kid, but I'm not gonna. I have a bunch of books I need to read anyway. So, I gave it to the guy in the bed next to me and he was like, "Awesome!"

TFSR: That's dope. Do you want to talk about the process of letter writing and keep in mind that as an old person myself, I have noted at letter writing events that sometimes people need a little instruction on how to write a letter, because it's just not a thing that they grew up having to do?

David: Yeah, totally. That's one of the things that struck me when I first got mail in jail. It was so moving that I actually started to cry in the hallway. Thankfully, there was no one around because you're not really supposed to cry in jail. It surprised me, because I've gotten letters before. I'm 35. I know what letters. It means a whole lot when you get a letter when you're locked up.

So, if you don't know what to write, first of all, I would advise you to just brainstorm like you would if you're gonna send an important email. You don't have to draft it out, but just put some bullet points down on a piece of paper. You want a beginning, middle and end. It's the first time. Here's who I am. Here's what I do. Talk about how you heard about the case or not. Obviously, you don't want to include anything sensitive, right? It's probably not going to be read by anybody in the institution, but you don't know. It also depends on who you're writing to. I know some of the political prisoners that I write with now, the envelope is always cut open and stapled shut again. So, some bureaucrat has been looking through that. My stuff was pretty lax at Rikers. There's a whole lot that I got that I wasn't supposed to have, in terms of letters, nothing serious. You just want to be conscious of what you're saying, plot out what you're gonna say beforehand, if it's your first time introduce yourself.

In terms of the format, it varies a lot between institutions and jurisdictions. So, whether it's a jail or prison, what security level it is, what state it is, what locality it is, whether it's federal, whatever, but it's hard to go wrong with a plain white sheet of paper and black ballpoint ink. That

David: It's much better than the alternative. The thing about serving time in jail, is that jail is much less comfortable than prison. I never been in prison, and don't plan to go, but apparently there are more creature comforts. A lot of that, to my understanding, came out of prisoners rights movements and stuff, Attica '71... It's basically a way of buying off prisoners so they don't organize and riot. Which I'm fine with. I'd rather have guys have more comfortable beds and be able to play guitars and stuff in prison, right? There's not any of that stuff in jail. Guys who have been upstate and served prison time will tell you, "This time goes incredibly slowly and it's just psychologically torturous compared to doing time upstate. You do time upstate and it flies." You have so many activities and programs and things you can do, and little tiny creature comforts that you just do not have in jail. It's crowded, there's less this this sort of convict culture of respect, where you're a professional criminal, like it is in prison. There's some of that, but a lot of people are just like addicted to something and they stole a box of and Amazon trolley and now they're doing eight months. It's just the dumbest stuff that people are in for. It's just a very rowdy chaotic environment.

It's hard to focus. It took a lot of getting used to, but overall, I made it out okay. I had no fights, and I had no tickets, no infractions. I was inspired by Daniel McGowan, who had no fights, and no tickets and seven and a half years and CMU and the feds, and by David Gilbert, who had no fights no tickets in 40 years in New York State system.

TFSR: Who's out!

David: Who is out, free as a bird. Also Daniel, but that's like old news. He's out, which is awesome. But I was like, "Well, if those guys can do it, I can make it through on Rikers without a fight without looking like a pushover. There were times when I thought I was gonna have to fight. You know, there were times when I really thought I was gonna get a ticket. You just don't know. They call it getting caught up. You get caught up in something, you're doing six months, you have to fight for some reason to save face, because it'll make your daily life insufferable if you don't, something goes wrong and now you're facing 10 years. That can happen, that sort of thing does happen. It didn't happen to me. I'm very glad to be out.

I got a lot of support while I was in there. That's the main take-away for me, is that it's just incredible. Obviously, the whole experience sucked, but the amount of mail, the amount of books that people were

sending me, people that I wasn't particularly close to beforehand, that would just take my phone calls at all hours. No matter what they were doing, they would just drop whatever they're doing and talk to me on the phone. People that would come to visit me, including people I don't even know, would come and visit me at Rikers. I got letters from all around the country all around the world. I got books sent to me by people from all around the country. There's a fundraiser that all these strangers, people I'd had a class with in college years ago donating money to keep me going and to give me a little padding for when I got out. My defense committee is awesome, did an incredible job. Mad books, baby!

Books, that's social capital in jail. You got books, you get letters out the wazoo, like, that's huge. We will talk about that in a minute. But even before I went away, my defense committee was able to reach out to a number of former political prisoners, and put me in touch with them, and have me talk to them about what it was like to do time as a political prisoner, because that's a little different from doing time as a "normal prisoner." It's a little different in terms of experience. Yeah, but in general, you do get a respect boost. It might be cold comfort to anyone who's facing charges for something that came out of a protest or something. But look, if you got to do some time, man, and you don't cooperate with prosecution, you stick to your guns, you go in and you're very clear about what you're in for, you'll get a little bit of a respect boost from people. Not everyone's gonna care. You might still have some beef with people, but a lot of people are gonna be like, "Listen, I'm gonna pick somebody else to mess with, this person's in for something they believe in." That resonates with people, that resonates with people.

So that's really the thing that sticks with me more than how much the experience sucks, which it did suck. But the solidarity that I got from the get go. Even when I was in the hospital, people were trying to send me stuff. I found out later that they wouldn't let it through for security reasons, but it's just incredible. Even after I got out the solidarity just keeps coming. A couple of months after I got out, some guy who had done time for ELF stuff like 15 years ago just gave me a bike. He was like, "Yeah, I'm just gonna give you a bike." It was a great bike and I make good use of it. Stuff like that. I mean, you can't make that up and there's hardly even words to describe that sense of solidarity. So yeah, that's kind of the the time that I did in a nutshell.

TFSR: I wonder has the movement done an okay job in terms of follow

ist action, they like get it. It's like, "Alright, cool." So there's a lot that goes into getting mail in jail besides just emotional support, which is also huge. That's a huge component. But there's a lot more to it than that.

TFSR: I know it's different in different facilities, like you're talking about the stamps getting through, that's great. North Carolina, PA, a bunch of states, and this is prisons as opposed to jails, it's different from facility to facility with jails, county by county. But what can get in obviously, again, will differ. But with books, I've heard about people getting just a plethora of books, and then they're able to loan them out to other folks. So while there's like a social capital element, you're also building sociality with other people. You're maybe giving them a break from some of the monotony, the forced puritanical monotony of jail or prison, and also like making friends, or opening people's eyes a little bit, or whatever. It seems kind of cool.

David: Absolutely. Yeah. The books thing. I always had people coming up to me, asking me for books. "Yo, can I take a look at your books." Some guy I didn't even know, he'd been in the dorm for like two days. I hadn't even spoken a word to this guy. He comes up to me one day he goes, "Hey, bro, I see you have a lot of books. Do you have any cool books about aliens?" "I can ask for some. if you want I can ask my friends to send me a book about aliens." A couple of times, I did that too. Some guy, I forget what he was working on, he was non native English speaker, a Haitian guy, he was trying to practice his English and he wanted a dictionary. I was like, "Listen, man. You should have told me." I asked my Defense Committee. They bought a used dictionary for two bucks and sent it into me, I gave it to the guy. I mean, you gotta be careful with that, because you can't give everything to everyone all the time. Right? Then people see that as an opportunity to hit you up for anything they need. But yeah, sharing the books you get is incredible. Zines and stuff, too. I shared a lot of the radical literature I got with people.

And beyond stuff that you loan out to people to build social capital, to make life easier for them, to spread the radical ideas that you care about, there's the social element of what you read and what people see you reading. Because, again, people see everything in jail. Everything's in common, right? You are forced to live together. So, I'm a nerdy white guy and I'm reading Assata Shakur's autobiography, people are like, "Okay, well, it's probably not a total asshole." It's not just for show. I have been

ronment and when you send in something with a holographic stamp on it.. It's like, "Ooh!" It's the smallest thing, but it really makes a difference. It's just kind of like if you see someone walking down the street in the outside world, in regular life, who just has a really loud, wild, fun style. You are like, "Wow, I'm glad that person just walked by me. That rocks." It's kind of like that. Those things do matter. There's also the texture of the paper. Rikers has a pretty loose policy on mail, thankfully. So I was able to get a lot of different types, weights, colors, textures of paper.

There's a social aspect to receiving mail. If you are getting piles of letters, and piles of books, and some of its international, people look over your shoulder, they can see it's written in another language or something, people know. People talk in jail, people observe, and people talk. So people are gonna know one way or the other, they're gonna find out one way or the other. You're getting all this mail, all these books, some of it's coming from faraway places, people notice that. So even if it's subconscious, on some level, they're like, "Well, a lot of people care about this guy. He's not nobody. A lot of people think he's worth communicating with." It doesn't mean you won't have a problem with anyone again, but it increases your worth in those people's eyes.

That extends to the guards, too. They know that you have people you can contact. They know that they can't get away with everything with you and sweep it under the rug. Also it serves as proof of the political nature of your case, especially if you're in jail like me, short term facility, a lot of people lie. A lot of people lie about their charges. A lot of people inflate their charges, where they change the circumstances every time they tell the story. This one guy... it went from he was arrested in a hotel room with a dime bag of crack to like he was driving across the bridge with three helicopters in pursuit...

TFSR: His Grand Theft Auto fantasy?

David: Yeah just over a few days!

TFSR: It's a very big bridge.

David: Yeah... Yeah, there's, there's a lot of that. Look, people are skeptical and sometimes rightfully so about what you say you're in for. Well, you get all these radical books and letters and zines and stuff, it's like, "All right, this dude is clearly into antifascism." People sending you zines on anti rac-

up with post release counseling or putting you in contact with people that have that experience to be able to co-counsel with each other?

David: Yes, like the post release care. Yeah. So my support did not stop when I crossed that bridge, when I came home. My support has been incredible. A big part of that was a radical therapist that I met. Well, I didn't just like, run into her in the subway. I was put in touch with her by my defense committee before I went in, before I even knew what kind of deal I would be taking. I was still fighting my case, and it was still very much up in the air if I'd be doing like 30 days community service or seven years hard time Upstate, or if it was like anything in between.

My therapist was incredible, stayed with me the whole time I was locked up. Took my calls. Came to visit. When they shutdown visits because of the first wave, (I was locked up during the first wave) my therapist came to visit me on video visits once they instituted those. After I got out, I went to travel a little bit as much as possible, because it was still pretty crazy COVID times then. I went in October 2019 and I came home in October 2020. So even though I was traveling and stuff a little bit, just around the country, when I got out my therapist was always down to do a session remotely. When I was actually in New York, she was always down to meet up. That's that's been really incredible.

Other friends and comrades checking in seeing how I'm doing, again fundraiser money to keep me going without having to just get a day job real quick as soon as you get out, like so many people do, has been huge. I'm very, very grateful for all the support that I've gotten. I'm very aware that this experience that I had is far from the norm. I mean, I was rubbing elbows and walking among people who live the real incarceration life. I was locked up and it sucks, but like, I've used the term "jail tourist" before, I'm kind of a "jail tourist." Other guys, they're there, there again. They know the ins and outs of it. There's no safety net. There's a landing pad for them when they come home. Guys are talking about getting out and going straight to the construction site where they know they still have a job. I mean, that's insane.

TFSR: There's no shame in the support that you got, obviously, but it could be looked at that sort of thing as like an ideal that we should expand. If there's these structures that are causing harm to people who don't have the safety nets, whether it be class or racial privilege, or recidivism.

David: Yeah. Everybody deserves that. I'm not saying that I'm aware that my case is unique to have it be some white guilt thing. But I think this is the standard that we should be holding ourselves to for everyone. And listen, that's not always easy. Some people in jail do fucked up stuff, but they still deserve support, and the care that makes people maybe not want to do those things in the future. Besides a lot of other big factors, societal factors that are harder to change. But yeah, I think the kind of support that I got, if everyone had that there would be much less difficulty for people doing time or coming home from it. That's for sure.

TFSR: We're talking about this in the context of the July 25 International Day of Solidarity with Antifascist Prisoners. That's a fucking mouthful right there. But J25. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that and about some of the components, and if you experienced that directly, that's great. If not, things like letter writing, I'm sure was the thing that impacted you, and breakdown how that impacted you.

David: Yeah, so July 25, International Day of Solidarity with Anti Fascist Prisoners started in 2014 I don't know if you're gonna get into all this, the history of it and elsewhere.

TFSR: Please do.

David: It's 2014, I'm pretty sure, started as a day of solidarity with Jock Palfreeman, an Australian man who was serving 20 year sentence in Bulgaria for defending two young Roma men against far right hooligan mob. He's out now. Jock is out and did 11 years total. That's the genesis of the International Day Solidarity with Antifascist Prisoners and it's grown to be much larger and to include pretty much anyone in for a conviction that they took in the course of something that expressly antifascist.

I did get a lot of support for J25 when I was in. But I actually forgot about it. I think I confused it with June 11, which is the Day of Solidarity with Long Term Anarchist Prisoners. I wasn't really long term because I was doing a year. There's no day solidarity for medium term anarchist prisoners. I was between 30 days and 10 years for sure. So, I got a bunch of mail for June 11. And was like, "Oh, that was cool." It kind of surprised me. And then, I don't know, I just like I, I just completely forgot about July 25. I started getting all this mail again, around the week of July 25 I was like, "Oh, yeah, there's another day of solidarity. This summer really

rocks!" I got a huge uptick in the volume of mail, including a lot of stuff that was people writing me for the first time. A lot of it was just stuff that said, "Keep your head up. I heard about you, I put \$10 on your books, you'll be home in a few months, you are doing great." Stuff like that. And that's awesome. Some 65 year old grandma and Bedstuy just wrote me a letter with like an inspirational quote. I don't know where she found this thing, it was just printed. It's like, that's great. That melts my little heart. It's incredible. That sort of stuff, there was definitely an increase in that around July 25.

I think there was a funding drive from the International Antifascist Defense Fund around the time. I think they put some money on my books around the time. It makes a big difference. I mean, besides obviously having a line of contact with the outside world, or having money to buy the things you need to commissary, or to buy the things you need or want once you get out, that sense that someone's taken care of you because they know what you're in for, and then not know what you're going through, but like they get it. That's huge. That's huge. And your psychological well being, there's no substitute for that. There's no faking that.

That extends more broadly to receiving a letter in jail. When you do get a letter in jail, it's this line of contact to the outside world. Obviously, it's cool to get updates from people and find out what they're doing their lives, have someone to talk to that's not part of all the jailhouse politics and whatever, about what's going on in there. But also, it's like, people have not forgotten about me. Like, I'm worth writing to. The institution really tries to beat you down, and just make you a cog in the machine, just a number. Then it's like, "No, people remember that I'm a full fledged human being and like there are interests that we share. They want to update me on things that have happened with people we both know and care about, or are total strangers.

My defense committee, again, best defense committee ever. We put up a website that went live the day I went in, and on it there was a list of things you could write to me about, my interests and stuff. It was just great idea. I cannot give a big enough shout out to my defense committee. They rock. One of the things was like, "tell me about the last good meal you ate. So I had strangers from London writing me about the lasagna they made it or something. That's awesome. That's really incredible. People took the time to do that, and consistently. Sometimes it's a one off and that's fine.

So there's a sensory aspect to it too. Jail is a very bland, drab envi-