

an special report

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Author of "Inside Missouri State Penitentiary,"

JESSE LANG

Dies of Unknown Causes

Jesse Lang, author of our September Special Report, "Inside Missouri State Penitentiary," died of unknown causes on January 9 while still incarcerated at Missouri State Pen. It has been speculated that the prison administration may have been responsible for his death and that the publication of the essay may have been related to it.

Although the actual cause of death has not been determined, an autopsy has revealed that there were massive blood clots in the deceased's lungs, a condition difficult to explain in the 31 year-old brother since it is usually only found in the very old. According to Jesse's mother, when last seen alive, he was shackled and under the influence of some kind of medication. Because Jesse's body had already been embalmed at the time of examination, the autopsy was unable to determine whether or not his death was related to the drug treatment. But an examination at the time of death revealed that there were traces of at least two drugs in his system.

Jesse, who had been incarcerated since 1968, was first labelled a "troublemaker" and a "communist" about three years ago when he became interested in political writings and requested that his family send him such material. From that point on, he was constantly intimidated by the prison officials.

He spent much of the last two years of his life being shuttled between the prison hospital and the Maximum Security wing of the prison. In Maximum Security, he continued to come under attack, was frequently placed in solitary confinement and denied all privileges. When these pressures brought on a nervous breakdown, he was transferred to the prison hospital. There, he is said to have been drugged repeatedly with the depressant Prolixin, which caused him to "act strange." Upon release from the hospital, he was immediately sent back to the "hole" where he had another breakdown.

Our report this month is dedicated to the memory of Jesse. It is also a call for your assistance in helping to change the conditions that led to his death and threaten the lives of other brothers and sisters who are still being dehumanized by the nation's prison systems. We shall make no attempt to eulogize him, nor to speak for him. We shall let him speak for himself, for he can do that much more fluently than we ever could.

In "Inside Missouri State Penitentiary," Jesse presented an unremitting and penetrating account of the realities of prison life at the Missouri institution. It was written in July 1973. Five months later (December 1973) he wrote the essay presented in the following pages. Entitled "Details from My Nervous Breakdown," it is a perceptive account of the pressures that led to his first major psychological

crisis. A postscript, an excerpt from a journal Jesse kept during the last few months of his life, speaks to some of the questions left unanswered in "Details."

Jesse's sister, Ruth (Yohance) Lang, first brought him to our attention. She has also been closer to Jesse and his situation than anyone else outside the prison. On page 7 she relates some of her concerns about the events surrounding Jesse's death. There, she also tries to see past the anguish and frustration she feels about his death to the hope that finding out what happened to him may save someone else's brother's life and change the conditions Jesse so graphically described.

Finally, we report on the efforts that have been made thus far to launch an investigation into Jesse's death and change the conditions affecting other prisoners at Missouri State. We also suggest some ways in which you can become involved.

Details From My Nervous Breakdown

By Jesse Lang

I was under heavy tension for two straight weeks when it happened. The local dogs here had been persecuting me and I had just lost a very important connection in my life. She was a nice woman and among my few enjoyments were her knowledgeable correspondence and the kindness and patience she had shown. I became very irritable as I saw people that I hated everyday, but I could do nothing about my situation that wouldn't be harmful to me.

Then they put this Muslim in the cell with me. His name was Nathaniel Shabazz. He was 38 years old and a very strange looking man. From the very first second he came into the cell with me, I felt a deep nervousness. I was overcome with the thought that this person spelled trouble for me as if I had already experienced this before.

As he was put into the cell with me, I introduced myself and we immediately began to talk about the local dogs here. I made the brother welcome to all of my possessions, (i.e., commissary, soap, toothpaste, stamps and reading material) as I do with all the people who are put into my cell. This person was closely watching me as if he was investigating me or something. All he ever talked about was Mr. Elijah Muhammed and white devils. He would read my Marxist Leninist literature and then would deliberately attempt to lure me into an ideological argument with him. But being like I am, I don't argue. I'd always use his own conversation to throw him off--an old Chinese tactic, i.e. use a person's own weight to throw him.

Finally, all of a sudden one day, he said that in order for two people to live in a cell together one had to conform to the other. They had to be in unity or they would be in each other's way and would cause a friction; and that with two ideologies in the same cell one must be true and the other must be false and that he must seek the truth; that if Marxism and Leninism is true, Islam

was either a lie or Muhammed is not a prophet and he must constantly seek the truth. He told me that one of us was practicing falsehood.

At this point, I told him that the proof was in the pudding. I asked him what was he looking for; that if it's peace he seeks, he can get it easily. I would give it to him on demand, but if he sought trouble, to take it to the so-called "devil white man" and practice it on him. For I had enough troubles of my own and I wanted peace with my brothers. Then he told me that peace is in truth and that it was his job to show me the truth because he teaches absolute truth and that he was going to put the truth in me as he was sent to the prison to put truth in men here. I told this nut that when a flint rock is struck onto a hard surface, that there is always a spark and that a spark always creates fire, and that fire burns and has no conscience. This man said he didn't want fire, so I told him that he shouldn't rub the rocks then.

Things went smoothly for a few days until I began to show my manners again. I bought him \$5.00 worth of food and some stamps and responded to him very kindly. He started telling me of all my nice qualities: that I didn't smoke, eat pork, use profanity; that I ate right and exercised properly; and that I loved my people. Now, he said, all I had to do was to submit to Allah and I would leave this cell a Muslim; that he was going to teach me Islam and make me a Muslim; that Allah said that all Black people are Muslims and Mr. Muhammed was going to get us or kill us before he'd let the devil have us. He told me that I was following the devil, Lenin and Marx, and that Allah was going to whip me for it and that in the name of Master Fard Muhammed, that he was going to teach me Islam. I told him to take a good look at me, and asked him if I looked like a child that he could tell what to do. He should try to be in peace with me, I said, instead of trying to change my life which