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Political prisoner Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa has joined the ancestors

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Mondo was a mentor to other prisoners and respected by guards

Michael Richardson

Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa died on March 11, 2016 of respiratory failure at the maximum-security Nebraska State Penitentiary. Mondo was serving a life without parole sentence for the 1970 murder of an Omaha policeman, a crime Mondo vigorously denied all the way to his prison deathbed.

Mondo was born in Omaha, Nebraska, as David Lewis Andrew Rice on May 21, 1947. Educated in parochial schools, Mondo was a young Catholic activist in high school, testifying to the Nebraska legislature about the pernicious influence of pornography on youth. Mondo was a member of several church youth groups and became active against housing and employment discrimination. Mondo led a pray-in at the Douglas County Courthouse to oppose discrimination.

A performance artist, Mondo became active in guitar masses at Holy Family Church and was quick to volunteer for community activities. Mondo began writing for “underground” newspapers and monitored complaints against Omaha police. Mondo's work with welfare rights groups led to his employment at Greater Omaha Community Action as a neighborhood outreach worker.



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As a young man, Mondo seemed to be everywhere, doing everything. Then racial riots in Omaha and the 1969 police shooting of fourteen year-old Vivian Strong sharpened Mondo's focus and Mondo joined the Black Panther Party. Serving as an officer in the United Front Against Fascism and later the National Committee to Combat Fascism, Mondo attracted the unwanted attention of Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover who ordered Mondo and his colleague Edward Poindexter removed from the streets.

The August 17, 1970 bombing murder of Patrolman Larry Minard, Sr. was the perfect opportunity for FBI agents working under directives of the infamous **clandestine COINTELPRO counterintelligence operation**. Mondo and Poindexter were blamed for directing fifteen year-old Duane Peak, the confessed bomber. The FBI Laboratory withheld a report on the identity of the anonymous 911 caller that lured Minard to his death. The Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Division, in a fierce rivalry with the FBI, processed the evidence and claimed Mondo had dynamite powder in his pants pocket. Unknown to jurors, who never heard the 911 recording, the ATF evidence had been tampered with after Mondo surrendered. An *Omaha World-Herald* photo of Mondo with his hands, which tested clean, jammed into his pockets at the time of his surrender proves the dynamite particles were added after Mondo was in custody.

Mondo and Poindexter were convicted after an unfair trial in 1971. Mondo appealed to federal court and U.S. District Judge Warran Urbom ruled Mondo's rights had been violated and ordered a new trial or Mondo's release. A three-judge federal appellate panel upheld the order for a new trial. However, the United States Supreme Court used Mondo's case to restrict prisoner appeal rights and retroactively applied the restriction on Mondo. Justice William Brennan called the decision “profoundly disturbing.”

Mondo's case returned the Nebraska Supreme Court which ruled Mondo ran out of time to appeal while he was in federal court. Mondo never received the new trial four federal judges had ordered. Mondo's last appeal to the Nebraska Supreme Court was denied without even a written decision.

Mondo was repeatedly recommended for parole back in the mid-1990's but was denied eligibility by the Pardon Board. A sticking point in Mondo's efforts for freedom was his refusal to admit to any role in the Minard murder.

While in prison, Mondo gained the respect of inmates and guards alike. Mondo abandoned Christianity and became a Muslim. Finally, Mondo evolved to his own religious views best described as an agnostic pagan and adopted a vegetarian diet. Mondo painted and wrote poetry, essays and plays and while in prison wrote several books.

Mondo was a mentor to many prisoners over the years as he tried to move them from a life of crime to one of commitment to community. Mondo edited the *Harambee Flame*, a prison journal of his pan-African beliefs and philosophy.

“After several years in the penitentiary I decided it didn’t make any sense for me as an African to have a European name. I had to improvise,” explained Mondo. “My name basically means wild, natural man-child of the sun in four African languages.”

Wopshitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa and Ed Poindexter, now called the **Omaha Two**, have been in prison forty-five long years. Failed by the justice system, Mondo was not bitter. Mondo's body was caged but his mind was free:

“Today, too many of our young people—in particular, males—are slaves to guns, slaves to violence, slaves to the idea that their African lives aren’t worth anything, slaves to the idea that their lives aren’t worth living. Today, we should be reflecting on what to do to counter the messages being delivered to our children and youth by school curricula, television, movies, video games, the music industry, and other institutions that are making slaves of our youth to violence, materialism, etc. Today, we should be reflecting on what to do to free ourselves from the invisible chains that bind our heads and spirit.”



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