



www.moviecitynews.com

20 to Life: Life and Times of John Sinclair

In 1969, left-wing activist **John Sinclair** was sentenced to 10 years in prison after giving - not selling, giving - two joints to an undercover narcotics officer. The bust demonstrated the lengths to which officials in Michigan and Washington could go to eliminate radicals who operated outside the glare of network cameras. As chairman of the White Panther Party, which didn't have much sway outside Ann Arbor and Detroit, Sinclair was more of an annoyance than a legitimate threat to the republic. In prison, however, the profile of the former manager of the MC5 - perhaps, the first real punk-rock band - was elevated to that of a political prisoner and spokesman for a generation of pot smokers. Two years after he was incarcerated, the John Sinclair Freedom Rally attracted a throng of supporters and such luminaries as **John Lennon** and **Yoko Ono**, **Stevie Wonder**, **Bob Seger**, **Phil Ochs**, **Allen Ginsberg** and **Bobby Seale**. The attention paid to that rally by an increasingly celebrity-obsessed media caused Michigan authorities to rethink the efficacy of keeping Sinclair in prison, and he was released soon thereafter. Today, he's returned to his musicologist routes and, among other endeavors, podcasts from his adopted Dutch home at www.RadioFreeAmsterdam.com. His authorized biopic is told effectively in the music-heavy biopic, *20 to Life*, from director Steve Gebhardt and editor Tom Hayes.

- Gary Dretzka