

MEDIA MAIL

Panthers, Panthers Everywhere...

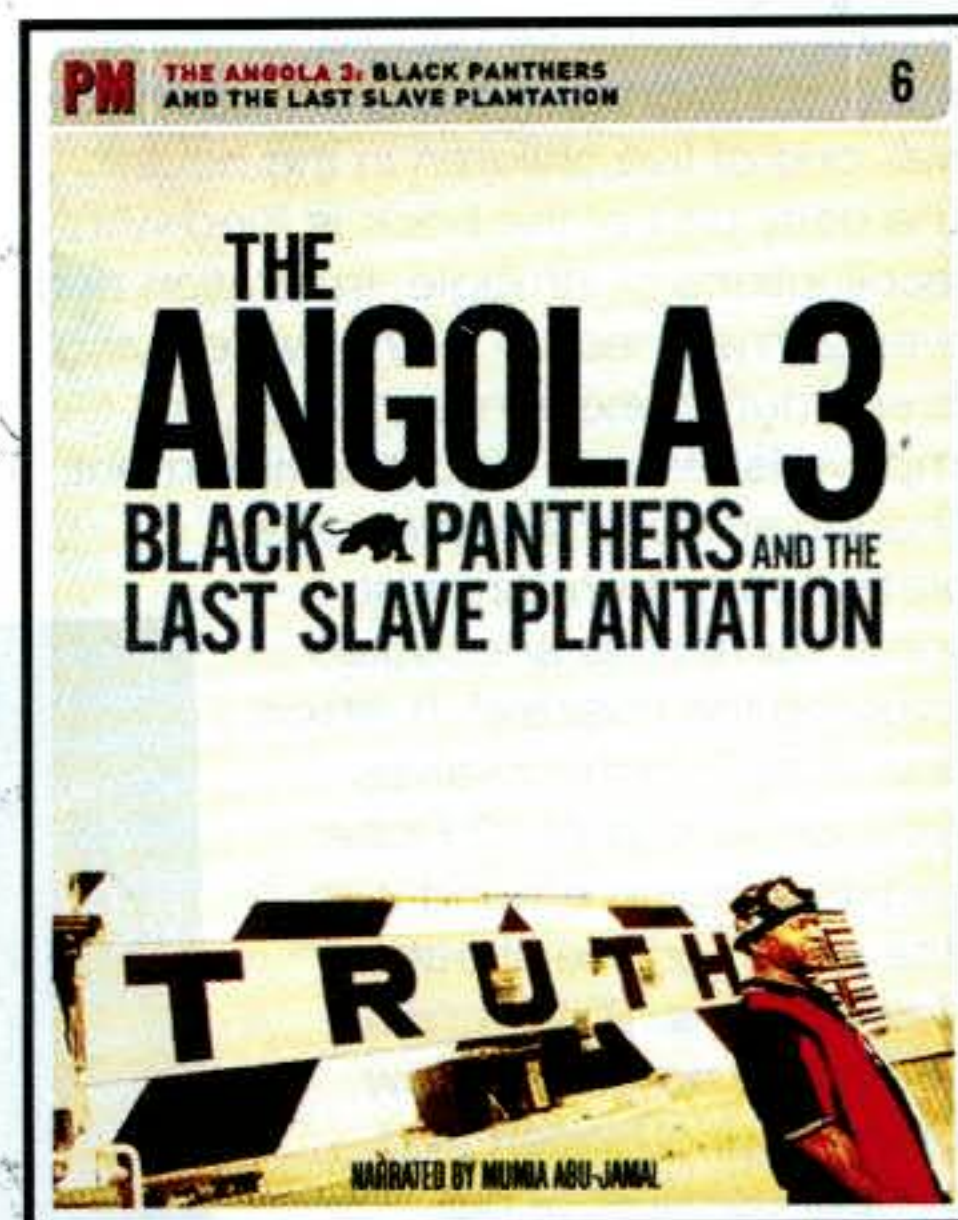
With Dan Fedorenko and Andrea Gibbons

Revolution. Seems like we're all too cynical to believe in that shit anymore, though it is happening in other parts of the world. Here though? Hard to imagine, though the occasional small riot might make us wonder. But in the 1960s and 70s the Black Panther Party believed it was imminent, and they fought for it. And we know the truth, right? All that stuff they were so righteously angry about is still around today. In fact, some things are a whole lot worse. The police haven't stopped killing people of color; just remember Oscar Grant shot in the back while lying face down on the floor of the BART station in Oakland. More people are in prison than ever before, about 2.3 million of them with another 5 to 6 million on some kind of probation. And the structural racism inherent in the system is clear when you consider that today, 1 in 9 black men between the ages of 21 and 29 are incarcerated... That's part of the reason why the Black Panther Party has never stopped being a symbol of inspiration in spite of its flaws, and will always be a vital movement to learn from.

The Angola 3: Black Panthers and the Last Slave Plantation, DVD - 109 Min., price: \$19.95, publisher: PM Press (www.pmpress.org)

The case of the Angola 3 stretches back over the past 36 years and the struggle is alive today. It is hardly known, yet it shows clearly the depths of the prison-industrial complex, and the lengths to which officials will go to stop any kind of organizing for prisoners' rights. Angola is 18,000 acres that went from plantation to prison with no break in between, even maintaining the sugar cane and cotton fields. The documentary *The Angola 3: Black Panthers and the Last Slave*

Plantation could certainly use a bit of editing down, but it is an outstanding documentary on the prison itself and the three best-known political prisoners it holds within its walls. It has long been considered one of the bloodiest prisons in the United States, with its institutionalized murder and violence, inmates sold into sexual slavery, inhuman living conditions, and acknowledged corruption. The story itself is a cliffhanger; the ending still to be determined by us. The Angola 3 have been in solitary confinement for longer than any other human beings alive in this country today. Framed to maintain them in prison and away from the general population after they formed the only official Black Panther Party Chapter within prison walls, Robert King was partially exonerated in 2001 after 29



years in solitary, while Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace remain. They were in solitary for over 35 years, and at the time of this writing their cases have been all but overturned. It is only the fierce opposition of the State Attorney in opposition to federal court decisions that keeps them in prison. The documentary, narrated by Mumia Abu Jamal, does a great job of combining the men's own testimony recorded from prison, with footage and additional interviews with political prisoners, former Black Panthers and other radical activists, and academics, to present Angola's reality. It gives a sense both of daily life there, but more importantly how the prison itself fits into the bigger political and economic picture. And it goes over the cases used to frame the three men and many are skeptical of prisoner claims to innocence, but even the family of one of the victims is clamoring to know who actually killed her husband after seeing this evidence. This film doesn't disappoint!

From the Bottom of the Heap - 217 pages, by Robert Hillary King, published by PM Press

As mentioned above Robert Hillary King is currently the only member of the Angola 3 to be released from prison and *From the Bottom of the Heap* is his autobiography. This highly readable and quick-paced story begins with his birth in Louisiana in 1942 and follows Robert's childhood growing up poor and black in pre-Civil Rights era