

CAMDEN 28

A Documentary by
Anthony Giacchino

83 Minutes, Color, 2006, Video



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THE STORY

In the early-morning hours of Sunday, August 22, 1971, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Attorney General John Mitchell announced that FBI agents had arrested 20 antiwar activists in and near a draft board office in Camden, New Jersey. Five days later, Mitchell made public the indictment of these individuals and included eight others who were linked to the break-in. The major charges against the group were conspiracy to remove and destroy files from the draft board, FBI office, and the Army Intelligence office; destruction of government property and interfering with the Selective Service system. If convicted, some of the indicted faced up to 47 years in federal prison. The men and women arrested that summer of '71 in Camden called themselves "America's conscience." The government called them the Camden 28.

Surprisingly, included among the Camden 28 were four Catholic priests and one Lutheran minister. All but one of the remaining 23 were Catholic laypeople. All were part of a nonviolent antiwar movement the government and the media referred to as the "Catholic Left." One of the most dramatic tactics utilized by this movement was breaking into Selective Service offices across the country to remove and destroy government draft records that identified young men available for military service. The activists claimed that their civil disobedience was meant to call attention to their belief that killing – even in war – was morally indefensible. They targeted the draft for the simple fact that it was the clearest symbol of that immorality because it compelled citizens to kill. Between 1967 and 1971, members of the "Catholic Left" claimed responsibility for over 30 draft board raids and the destruction of close to a million Selective Service documents. By 1971, the "Catholic Left" had become one of the most inventive forces of the antiwar movement.

The surprise arrest and unorthodox trial of the Camden 28 is a story of friendship and betrayal played out against the backdrop of one of the most turbulent periods in recent American history.

During the more than two months the defense took to present its case, each of the defendants spoke at length, often with moving eloquence. In an unusual arrangement three young lawyers aided the activists who chose either to act as their own lawyers or to have "co-counsel," in which defendants could both speak for themselves and have an attorney speak for them. Far from pleading innocent to the charges, they proudly proclaimed their guilt. "I ripped up those files with my hands," declared the Rev. Peter D. Fordi, adding, "They were the instruments of destruction."

The Camden activists asked the jury to "nullify the laws" against breaking and entering and to acquit them as a means of saying that the country had had enough of the "illegal and immoral" war in Vietnam. They also asked the jury to acquit on the grounds that the raid would not have taken place without the help of a self-admitted FBI informer and provocateur. The defendants emphasized that they had given up their plan, for lack of a practical means, until the informer-provocateur had resurrected it and provided them with the encouragement and tools to carry it out.

After three and a half months, the case went to the jury. Judge Fisher's charge broke new legal ground. Despite the fact that the defendants admitted plotting the action before the informer appeared, Judge Fisher informed the jury they could acquit if they felt government participation in setting up the crime had gone to "intolerable" lengths that were "offensive to the basic standards of decency and shocking to the universal sense of justice." However, he added that although it was in their power, it would not be proper to decide the verdict on the issue of the war, and that "protest is not an acceptable legal defense, as sincerely motivated as I think they were." After three days of deliberations, a jury of seven women and five men returned a verdict of not guilty on all charges against the antiwar activists. According to The New York Times, at that moment, "the defendants . . . and 200 supporters . . . burst into cheers, wept, hugged one another and sang a chorus of Amazing Grace." The acquittals represented the first complete legal victory for the antiwar movement in five years of such draft board actions.

THE CAMDEN 28

We are twenty-eight men and women who, together with other resisters across the country, are trying with our lives to say "no" to the madness we see perpetrated by our government in the name of the American people – the madness of our Vietnam policy, of the arms race, of our neglected cities and inhuman prisons. We do not believe that it is criminal to destroy pieces of paper which are used to bind men to involuntary servitude, which train these men to kill, and which send them to possibility die in an unjust, immoral, and illegal war. We stand for life and freedom and the building of communities of true friendship. We will continue to speak out and act for peace and justice, knowing that our spirit of resistance cannot be jailed or broken.



JAYMA ABDOO, 20, is a graduate of Immaculate Heart Academy in Bergen County, NJ, where she was the senior class coordinator. Her involvement with anti-war activities began with the McCarthy campaign in 1968. Jayma attended Trinity College in Washington, DC until December 1970, and has worked since then as a children's librarian.



DR. WILLIAM ANDERSON, 36, is a Westmont, NJ osteopath. His private practice includes a large number of poor residents of Camden's Puerto Rican community, as well as aged residents of the McGuire Housing Project. The father of six children, Bill is a graduate of Temple University College of Pharmacy and the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic medicine.



REV. MILO BILLMAN, 39, is a Lutheran minister. Ordained in 1958, Milo worked for five years with the Appalachians in the Cincinnati area; helped develop Columbus, Ohio ECCO, an anti-poverty foundation funded by OEO; and is currently Outreach Director of Camden's EPOC (Economical Program and Outreach Committee). Milo is married and has two children.



TERRY BUCKALEW, 21, is a graduate of Wildwood Catholic High School, NJ, where he was elected by the faculty to serve for State Senator Kay on Law Day. Valedictorian of his class, he was presented with the John F. Kennedy award for courage and moral integrity. He attended Rider College in Lawrenceville, NJ and has worked as a court clerk in the Federal Third Circuit of Appeals. Terry has refused induction into the armed forces.



PAUL COUMING, 23, graduated from Boston Technical School and then worked as a VISTA volunteer in Appalachia. He has been active in anti-war activities for several years and was a member of the Boston 8. Paul refused to carry his draft cards and was sentenced to one year (suspended) and three years probation, after being forcibly removed from a church sanctuary. He was charged with criminal contempt when he refused to answer questions at the Harrisburg Grand Jury and is awaiting trial for this.



EUGENE DIXON, 37, is a Camden resident and the father of four children. He attended Rutgers University and has been employed for twenty years as a supervisor for a Philadelphia automotive firm. Gene has been active as an officer and teacher in the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine as well as an officer in the PTA. A prize-winning poet, his writing has been published in a number of magazines and periodicals.



REV. MICHAEL DOYLE, 36, is a Camden diocese priest. He was associate pastor of St. Joseph's Pro-Cathedral, where his youth masses drew people from miles around. He was retired by the Bishop in February for his anti-war activities, but in April was stationed at St. George's Church in Camden. A native of Ireland, Mick holds a Master's Degree in Education and has taught at Camden Catholic High, Cherry Hill, and at Holy Spirit High, Atlantic City.



ANNE DUNHAM, 23, a native of Pelham, NY, is a graduate of Ursuline Academy and attended Marymount College, Manhattan, and the College of New Rochelle. She taught Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in Pelham, and did volunteer work as a tutor in Harlem. She is a former employee of the Archdiocese of NY's Board of Education. She also worked for the now defunct Resistance Book Distributors.



REV. PETER FORDI, 35, is a Jesuit priest at Woodstock Religious College, NYC. A native of Jersey City, he attended St. Peter's Prep and Seaton Hall before entering the Jesuit order in 1956. Peter holds a degree in Theology from Woodstock College and has taught at St. Peter's and Brooklyn Prep High Schools. He took public responsibility with a group known as the East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives for raids on draft boards in Philadelphia and a GE office in Washington, DC in February 1970.



KEITH FORSYTH, 22, is a native of Ohio. Since moving to Philadelphia two years ago, he has worked as a cab driver and has been active in the anti-war movement. Recently he joined the October 4th Organization, a revolutionary group based in the Kensington section of Philadelphia, and works primarily with the legal defense and anti-war projects of that organization.



MICHAEL GIOCONDO, 42, was a Franciscan brother for twelve years, stationed in Costa Rica and Washington, DC. For a number of years, he has worked in Camden, where he founded El Centro, an inner-city service for Spanish speaking people, and helped originate GAP, a bi-lingual newspaper. Mike worked in the Landlord-Tenant division of Camden Regional Legal Services and at the time of his arrest was employed as a program specialist for NJ's Drug Education Program, which suspended him without pay.



ROBERT GOOD, 22, a former seminarian, spent five years studying with the Missionary Society of the Divine Word. He also attended Xavier University in Cincinnati. Bob was active in the civil rights movement in Cleveland's West Side and has also worked with alcoholics in that city. He is now a resident of NYC working with the Harrisburg Defense Committee.



JOHN GRADY, 46, from the Bronx, is married and the father of five children. A sociologist and former instructor at Marymount College, John was a Fulbright Scholar in London, England, and founded the Drew Foundation in New York. He has long been active in civil rights and anti-war activities. John is a Navy veteran of World War II and a former candidate from the Bronx for Congress. He was chairman of the defense committee for the Catonsville 9, Milwaukee 14, Boston 8, and New York 8.



MARGARET INNES, 27, a native of Boston, Massachusetts, holds a BA from Regis College, Weston, Massachusetts, and is presently completing work on a MA at Boston College in special education for emotionally disturbed children. She was in the novitiate of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and worked in the Regis College Lay Apostolate in St. Croix, Virgin Islands. For three years, Marge has taught in public schools in Dorchester, Massachusetts.



REV. EDWARD MCGOWAN, 36, has been a Jesuit for thirteen years. A resident of Woodstock College, he is considered an expert on American Indian affairs. A native of the Bronx, Ed worked with Fr. Philip Berrigan in a Baltimore ghetto parish and participated in draft board raids with a group known as the New York 8. He also taught high school for three years in Rochester, NY, and has been active with the Harrisburg Defense Committee.



FRANCIS MEL MADDEN, 33, a native of Boston, Massachusetts, was ordained a Franciscan priest in 1965. He became interested in the drug problem at Daytop Village, a rehabilitation center for addicts. Subsequently he founded Liberty Village, a similar treatment center in Jersey City, in 1967. Married in 1969, he is the father of a baby girl and boy. The former director of training for NJ's Drug Education Program, he was suspended without pay from that job at the time of his arrest.



LIANNE MOCCIA, 21, a native of Revere, Massachusetts, is now a senior part-time student at Fordham University, the Bronx. She graduated from Mt. St. Joseph's Academy, Brighton, Massachusetts, where she was a member of the National Honor Society and worked summers with the Christian Appalachian Project in Kentucky. She has worked at the Defense Committee and the Resistance Book Store in the Bronx, and was a member of a "conspiracy of conscience."



BARRY MUSI, 23, a native of Massachusetts, has worked as a draft and military counselor and with the resistance support community. He left his alternate service duty (which he was doing as part of his Conscientious Objector status) in January of 1971, and moved to Dorchester where he now is involved in community and movement activities.



REV. EDWARD MURPHY, 34, is a Jesuit priest and a native of NYC. Ned, who has taught Classics and Theology, entered the Society of Jesus in 1955, and after studying and teaching, was ordained in 1968. Among other resistance activities, he was a member of the New York 8 and operated a coffeehouse in Ayre, Massachusetts, for GI's from nearby Fort Devin. He is also a draft counselor and was a national coordinator of the Harrisburg Defense Committee.



FRANK POMMERSHEIM, 28, a native of New York, is a graduate of Colgate University, where he played varsity basketball. He also attended Columbia Law School and then was a VISTA lawyer in Alaska. He is presently a lawyer with the East Harlem neighborhood office of the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs, headed by Bess Myerson.



JOAN REILLY, 20, of Brightwaters, Long Island, has attended three Catholic girl's schools. She is currently enrolled as a junior at Marymount College, Tarrytown, NY where she is majoring in psychology and philosophy. Joani worked as a Christian Appalachian Project volunteer and was elected as a student senator in college. One of four children, she works summers with retarded children.



ROSEMARY REILLY, 22, from Brightwaters, Long Island, graduated from the Academy of Saint Joseph, Brentwood, NY and attended Newton College of the Sacred Heart, Maryville College, and Marymount-Manhattan College. "Ro Ro" managed the Resistance Book Distributor's office in New York and also worked with the New York Defense Committee.



ANITA RICCI, 22, is a native of Philadelphia. She graduated fifth in her class at St. Maria Goretti High School and won a scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania. Anita also attended Temple University on scholarship, where she majored in Sociology. She worked in the Resistance Book Store in Philadelphia.



KATHLEEN RIDOLFI, 23, a native of South Philadelphia, attended Temple University on scholarship as well as the Philadelphia Textile College, where she majored in design. Following her graduation from St. Maria Goretti High School, "Cookie" worked in a Washington, DC anti-

poverty program. She has also worked for the US Postal Department. Cookie was manager of the Resistance Book Store on the Temple University campus and was among those named in the Harrisburg case indictment.



MARTHA SHEMELEY, 34, a Camden social worker, formerly taught school in the Camden diocese. Now a mother of a ten year old boy, Martha graduated from Seaton Hall College, majoring in psychology. She served as president of the Affiliates of the American Psychological Association and has lectured extensively on “The Underground Church” and “The Role of Women in the Church.” Being a gifted writer, her feature articles and theater reviews have been published by the Catholic Press.



JOHN SWINGLISH, 28, from Cleveland, Ohio, now lives in Washington, DC. A Navy veteran, he worked for the Defense Department doing research on nuclear guided missile destroyers. Formerly chairman of the Catholic Peace Fellowship in DC, John has long been active in attempting to influence the Catholic Church to re-establish its priorities. John was indicted for criminal contempt after refusing to testify before the Grand Jury in Harrisburg and was named a co-conspirator in that case.



SARAH TOSI, 20, of Hohokus, NJ is currently involved in community work in Dorchester, Massachusetts. A 1968 National Science Foundation scholarship winner, in 1969, she graduated from Immaculate Heart Academy, Bergen County, NJ, where she was president of the National Honors Society. Sarah was a NJ district coordinator for the 1968 McCarthy campaign. She attended Wellesley College and was active in Boston’s Paulist Center, a group of peace activists. Sarah is also a talented musician.

ROBERT WILLIAMSON, 22, is currently employed as a caseworker for the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. Bob says that “The FBI keeps what it would like to think is a complete record of my activities and beliefs in its Philadelphia office. Anyone who wishes to know this information is hereby granted permission to remove this file (and any other) for the purposes of publication.”

ANTHONY GIACCHINO, Director

Anthony Giacchino has been working as a producer in television and documentary filmmaking since 1994. *The Camden 28* is the first feature-length documentary he has directed.

After graduating from Villanova University with a BA in History and German in 1992, he received a Fulbright grant to study history at the University of Freiburg, Germany. In 1993 he moved to Leipzig, Germany where he worked as an English instructor for the Amerikanisches Sprachinstitut.

In February 2005, Anthony Giacchino co-produced and co-directed an independent documentary in Dresden, Germany. The film, *Time Bomb*, explores how the 1945 bombing and destruction of Dresden is remembered in Germany today. *Time Bomb* is currently being edited. In the political arena, Anthony shot, produced and directed a short documentary on David McReynolds, the 2000 Socialist Party candidate for President.

Anthony has also produced studio-based content and documentaries for The History Channel. As a freelance producer for the network, he has produced THC's Sunday-morning talk shows, HistoryCENTER and Hardcover History, as well as its primetime series *History vs. Hollywood* and a variety of specials covering topics from the dedication of the National World War II Memorial in Washington, DC to the 2004 Democratic and Republican National Conventions.

Anthony Giacchino has received documentary film grants from The A.J. Muste Memorial Institute and the Philadelphia Independent Film and Video Association.

DAVID DOUGHERTY, Director of Photography

David Dougherty began his career as an independent videographer in 1993. His clients have included numerous television stations, corporations and special interest groups. He also oversees a team responsible for audiovisual design, installation and production at a leading pharmaceutical firm. Dougherty graduated from Temple University in 1992 with a bachelor's degree in radio, television and film and is pursuing a master's degree in organizational dynamics from the University of Pennsylvania. He is a member of the International Documentary Association.