

[Archives & Special Collections, Columbia University Health Sciences Library](#)

[Alan Berkman Papers](#)

**BERKMAN, ALAN**

**Papers, circa 1960-2010 (bulk 1985-2000)**

**4 cubic feet (9 manuscript boxes, 1 record carton)**

#M-0019

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:** Alan Berkman, physician, member of the Black Liberation Army and “Resistance Conspiracy Six,” convicted criminal, fugitive, prisoner and AIDS activist, was born September 4, 1945 in Brooklyn, the second of four children to father Samuel Berkman, and mother Mona. His family moved to Middletown, New York, where his father owned a plumbing and building supply company. He attended Cornell University (BA 1967) and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University (MD 1971). He married physician Barbara Zeller and had two daughters, Sarah Machel (b. 1976) and Harriet Josina Clark (b. 1980).

Berkman became radicalized as a medical student at Columbia University. One year after he enrolled in the College of Physicians & Surgeons, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) famously occupied Columbia’s Morningside Heights campus in protest of the University’s research ties to the Vietnam War and its relations with Harlem residents. Berkman claimed that his experience working with minority populations in poor communities awakened him to the class and racial divides he had been protected from as a white person growing up in Middletown, N.Y. He was also personally affected by hearing Kwame Toure (then Stokely Carmichael) speak about the Vietnam War.

His commitment to fighting oppression is shown throughout his life’s work. In 1971, he treated prisoners injured during the Attica Prison riot in New York. In New York City, he interned at the North East Neighborhood Association (NENA) Community Health Center and the Betances Health Center, and was staff physician at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx. In 1973, he and his future wife, Barbara Zeller, treated injured participants of the American Indian Movement (AIM) during the occupation at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

On October 20, 1981, members of the American militant groups, the May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization, the Black Liberation Army, and the Weather Underground, robbed a Brink’s armored car, stealing \$1.6 million, in Nanuet, New York, resulting in the deaths of two police officers and a Brink’s guard. Berkman treated the gunshot wound of one perpetrator, but refused to collaborate with the FBI investigation. In May 1982, he was charged for civil contempt of a federal grand jury. These charges terminated with his arrest in December of that same year for providing medical treatment to a fugitive. He was also charged as an accessory after the fact to bank robbery and murder. He was released on bail but failed to appear in court; he went underground. On September 4, 1984, Berkman and an accomplice participated in the gunpoint robbery of a Connecticut supermarket, stealing \$21,480.

Under surveillance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Berkman and fellow fugitive Elizabeth Ann Duke were arrested in May 1985 outside Doylestown, Pennsylvania, in possession of firearms and a key to a nearby garage containing 100 pounds of dynamite. Berkman went to

trail in what is known as the Resistance Conspiracy case involving five additional defendants: Marilyn Jean Buck, Linda Sue Evans, Susan Rosenberg, Timothy Blunk, and Laura Whitehorn; all charged with the 1983 U.S. Senate bombing and other bombings claimed by the clandestine May 19 Communist Organization or M19CO – a splinter group of the Weather Underground, whose members splintered from the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Elizabeth Ann Duke skipped bail and is still at large in 2016.

In 1987, Berkman was convicted on felony charges and for skipping bail. He was also convicted in the State of Connecticut for robbery in the first degree. While incarcerated, Berkman was diagnosed with cancer, specifically Hodgkin's lymphoma. Due to his health problems, Berkman was often in custody of U.S. Marshals' Service, but served time at the U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners at Springfield, the Federal Medical Center at Rochester, and at United States Prison Marion. He criticized the quality of his health care while in custody, with particular aim at Marion Prison's carcinogenic water.

Identifying as political prisoners, Berkman and the other Resistance Conspiracy defendants based their political work on anti-imperialist principles. His wife, Barbara Zeller, advocated on his behalf and other U.S. political prisoners by distributing literature and initiating letter writing campaigns.

On July 2, 1992, he was released from prison on parole. His case was deliberated by the New York State Board for Professional Medical Conduct and signed a consent agreement allowing him to reinstate his medical license. Under the terms of his probation and the reinstatement of his medical license, his medical practice was supervised by another physician, Dr. Harold Osborn. His state license was on probation March 1992-March 1994.

He served as Medical Director for El Rio Treatment Services (1993) and Highbridge-Woodycrest Center (1994), both in the Bronx. He entered the Harlem Hospital Physician Assistant Program (1994) and became a research fellow at Columbia University HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies (1995). He was appointed Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychiatry (1988). He left Highbridge-Woodycrest Center in 2003 after accepting a full-time faculty position at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. He was made Assistant Professor of Clinical Epidemiology and Clinical Sociomedical Sciences. His parole ended March 1997.

Outside of his academic appointments, Berkman founded Health Global Access Project (GAP), an AIDS patient advocacy group that lobbied the Clinton administration to require less expensive, generic drug equivalents to be sold by U.S. pharmaceutical companies to foreign countries, resulting in a dramatic reduction in the cost of AIDS medications internationally.

He died on June 5, 2009 in Manhattan, survived by his wife and two children.

References:

Day, Susie. "Political Prisoners: Guilty until Proven Innocent." *Sojourner: The Women's Forum*, February 1989, 17.

Hevesi, Dennis. "Alan Berkman, 63, Activist Doctor, Dies." *The New York Times*. 2009. Accessed July 12, 2016. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/15/nyregion/15berkman.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/15/nyregion/15berkman.html?_r=0).

Wikipedia. Accessed July 12, 2016. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan\\_Berkman#cite\\_note-NYTObit-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Berkman#cite_note-NYTObit-1).

### **SCOPE & CONTENT**

The Alan Berkman papers includes correspondence, form letters, oral history transcripts, interview transcripts, court and trial documents, parole certificate, appointment letters, diplomas, medical licensure records, research study applications, biographies, curricula vitae, memoir drafts, poems, articles, notes, speeches, prison diaries, clippings, pamphlets, photographs, certificates and awards, plaques, and digital video. The bulk relate to Berkman's legal issues; his trial and prison term are well documented through court documents and correspondence with legal counsel, friends and family. His papers contain only one folder relating to his role as founder of Health GAP.

### **ARRANGEMENT/ORGANIZATION**

This collection has been organized into five series: I. Biographical; II. Legal; III. Medical career; IV. Writings; V. Non-print media.

#### **SERIES I. BIOGRAPHICAL, CIRCA 1960-2010**

Timelines, chronologies, diplomas, certificates, awards, interview and oral history transcripts, obituaries, and letters of condolences document the life and death of Alan Berkman. This series contains personal correspondence not relating to his legal issues or medical career. Includes an album presented to him upon his release from prison, materials relating to his memorial held by the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. The Cornell University Class of 1967 25<sup>th</sup> reunion yearbook includes a story about Berkman written by classmate Susan Mokotoff Reverby (pages 40-41).

#### **SERIES II. LEGAL, 1973-2001**

Legal documents include original letters, as well as facsimiles and photocopies of correspondence, from defense attorneys Ronald L. Kuby, William M. Kunsler, Susan V. Tipograph, and William Mogulescu; Public Defender Rosemary Herbert; the Parole Commission; Bureau of Prisons; and other offices on behalf of Berkman regarding his medical condition. Part of these efforts involved requests to transfer Berkman to a different prison to meet his medical needs, the change in his security classification, and ultimately, his release on parole. Includes letters written on behalf of Berkman to the Parole Commission or the presiding judge, advocating for his release.

Contains court documents from Berkman's trial including FBI evidence presented to the court, such as fraudulent passports, driver's licenses, leases and other documents seized at The Alameda apartment in Baltimore and a garage in Philadelphia. Also includes surveillance photographs used as evidence. Folders are arranged chronologically.

Prison correspondence is arranged either chronologically or alphabetically, when dated or identified by correspondent, and is primarily comprised of original letters written in Berkman's hand. These letters were also transcribed in chronological order (2 folders; February 18, 1986-February 16, 1988). Of note is a drawing and letter to Berkman by Mumia Abu-Jamal. Letters to and from Amnesty International and Barbara Zeller relate to the quality of prison healthcare received by Berkman. A letter from William Morales, member of Puerto Rican separatist group the Fuerzas Armada de Liberacion Nacional Puertorriquena (FALN), predates Berkman's incarceration. It was written by Morales from Bellevue Hospital, postmarked April 21, 1979, before Morales escaped prison with the aid of the Black Liberation Army.

The file on the Congressional hearing regarding the quality of prison healthcare contains a packet: *Alan Berkman, MD: Political Prisoner*, circa 1988. Duplicates of statements, letters, an interview from the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, articles and other materials reproduced in the packet may be filed elsewhere. Berkman co-authored with Richard Clapp, the leaflet, "Suppressed Government Study Documents Health Risks of Water at Marion Prison," distributed by the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown (after 1986).

The series also contains many pamphlets advocating the release of Berkman and other political prisoners, published by the Campaign to Support the Resistance Conspiracy Case Defendants and the Emergency Committee for Political Prisoners.

Also included in this series is a transcript from a televised debate "Should we grant amnesty to America's political prisoners?" *Debates?* Series on PBS April 1998. The panel included Ron Kuby, a civil rights lawyer, Berkman, and Safiya Bukhari, National Jericho Program coordinator. The "con" perspective consisted of Charlie Rose, Ted Cruz, and Peter Thiel.

### **SERIES III. MEDICAL CAREER, 1972, 1992-2009**

The bulk refers to work after his release from prison. Health GAP materials includes notes, timeline, and articles. The Conference on Global AIDS folder contains notes and printouts of slides.

### **SERIES IV. WRITINGS, 1977-2009**

Berkman's writings describe his experience in prison, particularly regarding his health and cancer status. Prison diaries contain his observations of other prisoners, guards, and multiple other aspects to his life behind bars. He worked to develop his previous writings into an autobiography. His papers include correspondence (1994) relating to this book project. After his release and death, others may have re-worked his writings, interviews, correspondence, and press release statements, into his memoir. It was never published.

He gave one or more speeches for Queer Women & Men United in Support of Political Prisoners (QUISP), one in honor of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Includes two folders of poetry. Additional poetry may be found in Berkman's outgoing prison correspondence.

### **SERIES V. NON-PRINT MEDIA, CIRCA 1963-2010**

Photographs, plaques, three-dimensional glass awards, and digital video. Includes photograph and postcard reproductions of the mural *Roots of Freedom/Raices de Libertad* by Miranda Bergman, Raul Valdez and Ambray Gonzalez. Alan Berkman is depicted.

Lectures and speeches were recorded to DVD. Other digital video includes his memorial celebration and the published film, *Pills Profits Protest* (2005). Some photographs are adhered to album pages. Photographic prints of FBI evidence and Mumia Abu-Jamal are filed with Series: Legal.

**LANGUAGE:** English.

**ACCESS:** Open for research, except DVDs are closed until preservation imaging completed.

**PROVENANCE:** Gift of Barbara Zeller (accession #2013.007).

**RELATED COLLECTIONS:** Archives and Special Collections also holds a small collection of papers of his fellow College of Physicians and Surgeons student and activist, Richard Clapp. [Finding aid for the Richard W. Clapp papers, 1968-2001](#)

The Columbia University Archives holds the University Protest and Activism Collection, 1958-1999, which documents student activism by students, faculty, and staff, particularly the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

[Finding aid for the Protest and Activist Collection, 1958-1999](#)

**PROCESSING NOTE:** Processed by Jennifer Ulrich, June 2016.

#### **NAMES**

Berkman, Alan.  
Black Liberation Army.  
Columbia University -- Alumni and alumnae.  
Committee to Fight Repression (U.S.)  
Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health.  
May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization.  
Students for a Democratic Society (U.S.)  
Weather Underground Organization.  
Zeller, Barbara -- Correspondence.

#### **SUBJECTS**

AIDS activists.  
AIDS (Disease) -- Epidemiology -- Research -- United States.  
Anti-imperialist movements -- United States.  
Fugitives from justice -- United States.  
Political crimes and offenses -- United States.  
Political activists -- United States.  
Prisoners -- Civil rights -- United States.  
Protest movements -- United States -- 1970-1980.  
Radicalism -- United States.

**Genre/Form**

Black-and-white photographs.

Color photographs.

DVDs.

Interviews.

Legal documents.

Plaques (flat objects)

Poetry.

Printed ephemera.

**Alan Berkman Papers.  
1950s-2010.**

**Box Folder**

**SERIES I: BIOGRAPHICAL**

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | 1   | Autograph album: "Welcome home," 1992 June 12  |
|   | 2   | Biography, after 1983  |
|   | 3   | Biography based on a conversation with Alan Berkman April 27, 1979 by Richard [Clapp?], 2001 June 10 |
|   | 4   | Certificates and awards, circa 1960-1971   |
|   | 5   | Certificates and awards, 1994-2002   |
|   | <b>Oversize</b> Materials (19" x 15" box) |  |
| 1 | 19  | Certificates and awards: Diplomas, M.D. Columbia University, 1971, reissued 1994                     |
|   | 6   | Chronology, circa 1998-2006  |
|   | 7   | Cornell University <i>Circa 1967: 25<sup>th</sup> reunion yearbook</i> , 1992 June                   |
|   | 8   | Correspondence: Zeller, Barbara, 2009-2010   |
|   | 9   | Death: Autopsy and funeral, 2009-2010  |
|   | 10  | Death: Letters of condolences, 2009  |
|   | 11  | Family and friends' letters and artwork, circa 1980s-2009  |
|   | <b>Oversize</b> Materials (19" x 15" box) |  |
| 1 | 20  | Family and friends' letters and artwork, circa 1980s-2009  |
|   | Interviews                                |  |
|   | 12-13                                     | Oral history with Paul McIsaac, 1992 September 1   |
|   | 14  | with Dick Polman, <i>Philadelphia inquirer</i> , 1985 November                                       |
|   | 15  | with Marion Banzhaf, 2001 May 5  |
|   | 16  | Memorial celebration, Columbia University (held April 23, 2010), 2009-2010                           |
|   | 17  | Memorial statement by Alan Berkman, 2009 April?  |
|   | 18  | Messages, undated  |
|   | 19  | Obituaries, 2009   |
|   | 20  | <i>P &amp; S handbook of student activities...</i> , issue 1968-1969                                 |

**SERIES II: LEGAL**

- |   |   |                            |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| 8 | 1 | Clippings, 1973-1990       |
|   | 2 | Clippings, circa 1985-1989 |

	3	Clippings, 1990
	4	Clippings, 1993-2000
2	1	Committee to Fight Repression: Fliers, circa 1986-1990
	2	Committee to Fight Repression: Packet and other documents, 1985-1988
	3	Committee to Fight Repression: <i>The insurgent</i> , fall 1985

**Box Folder**

**Correspondence: Berkman Alan, outgoing**

8	5	1985
	6	1986
	7	1987
	8	1988
	9	1989
	10	1991
	11	1992
2	4-6	Transcribed, outgoing, 1985 July 15-1992 March 31

**Correspondence**

2	7	Unidentified letter to Alan Berkman, circa 1980s-1990s
8	12	Abu-Jamal, Mumia, circa 1980s
	13	Attorneys and Public Defender, 1990-1991
2	8	Amnesty International and Barbara Zeller, 1990-1991
8	14	Clapp, Richard, 1986-1996
	15	Coogan, Michael, 1985-1987
	16	Family letters, 1985-1988
	17	Foner, Laura, circa 1986-1991
	18	Kuby, Ron, 1989-1990
	19	Morris, Ann, 1986-1989
	20	Morris, Ann, 1990-1992
2	9	Morales, William, 1979
8	21	Neuman, Henry, 1985-1992
	22	[Neuman?], Sharon, circa 1987-1988
	23	Neuman, Sharon, circa 1989
2	10	Pollak, Louis H. (Judge), Letters to, 1985-1990
	11	Pac, Robert, circa 1989
	12	Taub, Bruce, 1985-1994
8	24	Taub, Bruce, 1985-1995
9	1	Waugh, Steve, 1985-1988
	2	Waugh, Steve, 1989-1992
	3	Zeller, Barbara, 1986-1987
	4	Zeller, Barbara, 1988-1991
	5	Zeller-Berkman, Sarah Machel, 1986-1989

**Court Documents**

2	13-14	General, 1985-1987, 1990 Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI)
3	1	Wanted notice for Alan Berkman, 1983
	2	FD-302 forms, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1985
<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	
3	3-4	Evidence, 1985-1986
9	7	Evidence: Documents, circa 1985-1986
	8	Evidence: Documents seized in Philadelphia, circa 1985
	9	Evidence: Forgeries, circa 1985-1986
<b>Oversize</b>	Materials (19" x 15" box)	
1	21	Evidence: Forgeries, circa 1985-1986
3	5	Evidence: Surveillance photographs, circa 1985-1986
	6	Government's revised trial memorandum, circa 1986
	7	Presentence report and sentencing transcript, 1989-1990
	8	Rule 35 motion, 1988 February-May
	9	Rule 35 motion, 1988-1990
	10	Motion to dismiss...on double jeopardy grounds, 1990
4	1	Medical records, 1990
	2	Memorandum to the Board of Professional Medical Conduct of the State of New York, 1991 October 28
	3	Statement of Dr. Alan Berkman, congressional hearing regarding prison health care, 1991
	4	Criminal docket up to 1992, U.S. District Court, copies made 2001 March 2
9	6	Custody classification, 1985-1990
4	5	Inmate records, 1986, undated
	6	Interviews: <i>60 minutes</i> "That's the law" transcript, 1991 March 17
	7	Marion Prison drinking water, circa 1987-1990
4	8	Parole, 1992-1996
	9	Parole hearing and legal counsel, 1989-1991
	10-11	Parole Commission: Letters of support to, 1990
5	1-5	Parole Commission: Letters of support to, 1990
9	10	Parole Commission: Letters of support to, 1990
		Political prisoners
5	6	Abu-Jamal, Mumia, 1992 [note: has black-and-white photographs]
	7	Debate transcript: "Should we grant amnesty..." PBS, 1998 April
	8	Printed materials, 1986-1994
	9	Whitehorn, Laura, letter on behalf of, circa 1990
	10	"Reach new heights" artwork for Berkman tribute, 1991
6	1	Research material? Circa 1990-2001
	2	Statements by Alan Berkman and Resistance Conspiracy defendants, 1985-1989

**SERIES III: MEDICAL CAREER**

3 General, 2001-2008?

- 4 Address books, circa 1997-2009
- 5 Columbia University appointment letters, 1998
- 6 Columbia University post-doctoral fellowship, 1997
- 7 Columbia University-Southern African Fogarty AIDS International Training and Research Program, 2008

**Box Folder**

- 6 8 Columbia University Symposium honoring Zena Stein and Mervyn Susser, 2001
- 9 Correspondence: Berkman, Alan, 1993-2009
- 10 Correspondence: Stein, Zena, 2001
- 11 Credentials, 2001-2006
- 12 Health Global Access Project (GAP), circa 2000-2002
- 13 Conference: Confronting Global AIDS, 2001?
- 14 Medical license, New York State, 1972 July 12
- 15 Medical licensure, New York State, 1992-2006
- 16 New York State Psychiatric Institute, 1997-2001
- 17 Study application: HIV sexual risk reduction in impaired populations, 1997
- 18 Study: HIV prevention with severely mentally ill men..., 2005-2007
- 19 United States department of Health and Human Services: Personnel, 2003

**SERIES IV: WRITINGS**

- 9 11 General, circa 1985-1990
- 6 20 Alan Berkman cancer drafts, after 2009?
- 21 Articles and book chapters, 1991-2008
- 22 Correspondence regarding memoir, 1994
- 23 "Death and dying in prisons," after 1992
- 9 12 Diaries, 1985 June-July
- 13 Diaries, circa 1985-1990
- 14 Diaries, 1991-1992
- 6 24 Memoir drafts, circa 1985-2009
- 7 1-3 Memoir drafts, circa 1985-2009
- 4 Memoir drafts, circa 1980s-2009
- 5-6 Memoir drafts? circa 1980s-2009
- 7 Memoir drafts, corrected typescript, circa 1985-2009
- 8 Notes, 2009 May
- 9 Notes, circa 1980s-2009
- 10 Poems, circa 1977-1978
- 11 Poems, 1985-1999
- 9 15 Political ideology
- 7 12 Prison, regarding, circa 1980s-2009
- 13 Rights and permissions, 1997, 2008
- 14 Speeches: General, circa 1992-2009
- 15 Speeches: for Queer Women & Men United in Support of Political Prisoners (QUISP), after 1991

## **SERIES V: NON-PRINT MEDIA**

### **Award, glass**

- 10 Highbridge Woodycrest Center Department of Nursing Services "In recognition of your dedication towards improving the health care of PWA's worldwide and for your valued leadership and friendship", 2003 Jan 15

### **Box Folder**

- 10 Highbridge Woodycrest Center "In acknowledgement of your skill, compassion and courage", 2001 June 21

### **DVD title**

- 7 21 Memorial celebration, Columbia University (held April 23, 2010) DVD  
21 "Alan Berkman"  
21 "Alan B remarks Health GAP"  
21 "#1 AB podium 4/23/10"  
21 "#2 AB 4/23/10"  
21 *Pills profits protest: chronicle of the global AIDS movement*, film by Anne-christine d'Adesky, Shanti Avirgan and Ann T. Rossetti. [New York] : Outcast Films, ©2005

### **Photographs**

- 7 16 Berkman, Alan, circa 1963-2000s  
17 Family, circa 1980s-2000s  
18 Mural: *Roots of freedom/Raices de libertad*, circa 1990  
19 Political prisoner's demonstration, circa 1980s-1998  
20 Resistance Conspiracy defendants, circa 1980s-1992

### **Plaques**

- 10 Global Health Justice Award presented to Alan Berkman, Health Global Access Project Inc., 2009  
10 The Austin H. Maccormick Award, 1994 May 26  
10 The American Medical Student Association at Sophie Davis, for speaking at the 2nd Annual National Project Symposium on Healthcare for the Homeless, 1997 April 11  
10 New York City Department of Health 2000 Bioethics Achievement Award, 2000 February 17

Cross-index: Legal Size boxes

Boxes 8-9

- 8 1 Clippings, 1973-1990  
2 Clippings, circa 1985-1989  
3 Clippings, 1990  
4 Clippings, 1993-2000  
5-11 Correspondence: Berkman Alan, outgoing, 1985-1992  
Correspondence:

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	18	Kuby, Ron, 1989-1990
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	21	Neuman, Henry, 1985-1992
	22	[Neuman?], Sharon, circa 1987-1988
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	2	Waugh, Steve, 1989-1992
	3	Zeller, Barbara, 1986-1987
	4	Zeller, Barbara, 1988-1991
	5	Zeller-Berkman, Sarah Machel, 1986-1989
	6	Custody classification, 1985-1990
	7	Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) evidence: Documents, circa 1985-1986
	8	Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) evidence: Documents seized in Philadelphia, circa 1985
	9	Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) evidence: Forgeries, circa 1985-1986
	10	Parole Commission: Letters of support to, 1990
	11	Writings: General, circa 1985-1990
	12	Writings: Diaries, 1985 June-July
	13	Writings: Diaries, circa 1985-1990
	14	Writings: Diaries, 1991-1992
	15	Writings: Political ideology