

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

[Alan Berkman Papers](#)

**BERKMAN, ALAN**

**Alan Berkman papers, circa 1960-2010 (bulk 1985-2000)**

**4 cubic feet (9 manuscript boxes, 1 record carton, 3 folders, 3.5 GB)**

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-Woodcrest 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-Woodcrest 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. This series is further organized into subseries: II.1: General; II.2: Correspondence: Berkman Alan, outgoing; II.3: Correspondence A-Z; and II.4: Court documents.

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 Armadas de Liberación 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.

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.

### **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/Raíces 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:** Time-based media is accessible using hardware and software in the reading room.

**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:** Optical disks were imaged as iso files. Unreadable disks removed from collection in 2024. Processed by Jennifer Ulrich, June 2016 and revised in 2025.

#### **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.

Box	Folder	Title	Dates
		<b>Series I: Biographical</b>	<b>1960-2010</b>
1	1	Autograph album: "Welcome home"	1992 June 12
1	2	Biography	after 1983
1	3	Biography based on a conversation with Alan Berkman April 27, 1979 by Richard [Clapp?]	2001 June 10
1	4	Certificates and awards	circa 1960-1971
1	5	Certificates and awards	1994-2002
OS box (19 x 15) 1	19	Certificates and awards: Diplomas M.D. Columbia University	1971, reissued 1994
1	6	Chronology	circa 1998-2006
1	7	Cornell University Circa 1967: 25th reunion yearbook	1992 June
1	8	Correspondence: Zeller, Barbara	2009-2010
1	9	Death: Autopsy and funeral	2009-2010
1	10	Death: Letters of condolences	2009
1	11	Family and friends' letters and artwork	circa 1980s-2009
OS box (19 x 15) 1	20	Family and friends' letters and artwork	circa 1980s-2009
1	12-13	Interviews: Oral history with Paul Mclsaac	1992 September 1
1	14	Interviews: Oral history with Dick Polman, Philadelphia inquirer	1985 November
1	15	Interviews: Oral history with Marion Banzhaf	2001 May 5
1	16	Memorial celebration, Columbia University (held April 23, 2010)	2009-2010
1	17	Memorial statement by Alan Berkman	2009 April?
1	18	Messages	undated
1	19	Obituaries	2009
1	20	<i>P &amp; S handbook of student activities...</i> , issue 1968/69	1968-1969
		<b>Series II: Legal</b>	<b>1973-2001</b>
		<b>Subseries II.1: General</b>	
8	1	Clippings	1973-1990
8	2	Clippings	circa 1985-1989
8	3	Clippings	1990
8	4	Clippings	1993-2000
2	1	Committee to Fight Repression: Fliers	circa 1986-1990
2	2	Committee to Fight Repression: Packet and other documents	1985-1988
2	3	Committee to Fight Repression: The insurgent	fall 1985
9	6	Custody classification	1985-1990
4	5	Inmate records	1986, undated
4	6	Interviews: 60 minutes "That's the law" transcript	1991 March 17
4	7	Marion Prison drinking water	circa 1987-1990
4	8	Parole	1992-1996
4	9	Parole hearing and legal counsel	1989-1991
4	10-11	Parole Commission: Letters of support to	1990

Box	Folder	Title	Date
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
5	7	Debate transcript: "Should we grant amnesty..." PBS	1998 April
5	8	Printed materials	1986-1994
5	9	Whitehorn, Laura -letter on behalf of	circa 1990
5	10	"Reach new heights" artwork for Berkman tribute	1991
6	1	Research material?	circa 1990-2001
6	2	Statements by Alan Berkman and Resistance Conspiracy defendants	1985-1989
		<b>Subseries II.2: Correspondence: Berkman Alan</b>	
8	5-11	Outgoing	1985-1992
2	4-6	Outgoing, transcribed	1985 July 15- 1992 March 31
		<b>Subseries II.3: Correspondence A-Z</b>	
2	7	Unidentified letter to Alan Berkman	circa 1980s- 1990s
8	12	Abu-Jamal, Mumia	circa 1980s
8	13	Attorneys and Public Defender	1990-1991
2	8	Amnesty International and Barbara Zeller	1990-1991
8	14	Clapp, Richard	1986-1996
8	15	Coogan, Michael	1985-1987
8	16	Family letters	1985-1988
8	17	Foner, Laura	circa 1986-1991
8	18	Kuby, Ron	1989-1990
8	19	Morris, Ann	1986-1989
8	20	Morris, Ann	1990-1992
2	9	Morales, William	1979
8	21	Neuman, Henry	1985-1992
8	22	[Neuman?], Sharon	circa 1987-1988
8	23	Neuman, Sharon	circa 1989
2	10	Pollak, Louis H. (Judge), Letters to	1985-1990
2	11	Pac, Robert	circa 1989
2	12	Taub, Bruce	1985-1994
8	24	Taub, Bruce	1985-1995
9	1	Waugh, Steve	1985-1988
9	2	Waugh, Steve	1989-1992
9	3	Zeller, Barbara	1986-1987
9	4	Zeller, Barbara	1988-1991
9	5	Zeller-Berkman, Sarah Machel	1986-1989
		<b>Subseries II.4: Court documents</b>	
2	13-14	General	1985-1987, 1990
3	1	Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI): Wanted notice for Alan Berkman	1983

Box	Folder	Title	Date
	3	2 FBI: FD-302 forms, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	1985
	3	3-4 FBI: Evidence	1985-1986
	9	7 FBI: Evidence - Documents	circa 1985-1986
	9	8 FBI: Evidence - Documents seized in Philadelphia	circa 1985
	9	9 FBI: Evidence - Forgeries	circa 1985-1986
OS box (19 x 15) 1		21 FBI: Evidence - Forgeries	circa 1985-1986
	3	5 FBI: Evidence - Surveillance photographs	circa 1985-1986
	3	6 Government's revised trial memorandum	circa 1986
	3	7 Presentence report and sentencing transcript	1989-1990
	3	8 Rule 35 motion	1988 February-May
	3	9 Rule 35 motion	1988-1990
	3	10 Motion to dismiss... on double jeopardy grounds	1990
	4	1 Medical records	1990
	4	2 Memorandum to the Board of Professional Medical Conduct of the State of New York	1991 October 28
	4	3 Statement of Dr. Alan Berkman, congressional hearing regarding prison health care	1991
	4	4 Criminal docket up to 1992, U.S. District Court	copies made 2001 March 2
		<b>Series III: Medical career</b>	<b>1972-2009</b>
	6	3 General	2001-2008?
	6	4 Address books	circa 1997-2009
	6	5 Columbia University appointment letters	1998
	6	6 Columbia University post-doctoral fellowship	1997
	6	7 Columbia University-Southern African Fogarty AIDS International Training and Research Program	2008
	6	8 Columbia University Symposium honoring Zena Stein and Mervyn Susser	2001
	6	9 Correspondence: Berkman, Alan	1993-2009
	6	10 Correspondence: Stein, Zena	2001
	6	11 Credentials	2001-2006
	6	12 Health Global Access Project (GAP)	circa 2000-2002
	6	13 Conference: Confronting Global AIDS	2001?
	6	14 Medical license, New York State	1972 July 12
	6	15 Medical licensure, New York State	1992-2006
	6	16 New York State Psychiatric Institute	1997-2001
	6	17 Study application: HIV sexual risk reduction in impaired populations	1997
	6	18 Study: HIV prevention with severely mentally ill men	2005-2007
	6	19 United States department of Health and Human Services: Personnel	2003
		<b>Series IV: Writings</b>	<b>1977-2009</b>
	9	11 General	circa 1985-1990

Box	Folder	Title	Date
	6	20 Alan Berkman cancer drafts	after 2009?
	6	21 Articles and book chapters	1991-2008
	6	22 Correspondence regarding memoir	1994
	6	23 "Death and dying in prison"	after 1992
	9	12 Diaries	1985 June-July
	9	13 Diaries	circa 1985-1990
	9	14 Diaries	1991-1992
	6	24 Memoir drafts	circa 1985-2009
	7	1-3 Memoir drafts	circa 1985-2009
	7	4 Memoir drafts	circa 1980s-2009
	7	5-6 Memoir drafts?	circa 1980s-2009
	7	7 Memoir drafts	circa 1985-2009
	7	8 Notes	2009 May
	7	9 Notes	circa 1980s-2009
	7	10 Poems	circa 1977-1978
	7	10 Poems	1985-1999
	9	15 Political ideology	undated
	7	12 Prison, regarding	circa 1980s-2009
	7	13 Rights and permissions	1997, 2008
	7	14 Speeches: General	circa 1992-2009
	7	15 Speeches: for Queer Women & Men United in Support of Political Prisoners (QUISP)	after 1991
		<b>Series V: Non-print media</b>	<b>1963-2010</b>
		<b>Subseries V.1: Awards</b>	
	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
	10	Highbridge Woodycrest Center "In acknowledgement of your skill, compassion and courage"	2001 June 21
		<b>Subseries V.2: Videos</b>	
	7	21 Pills profits protest: chronicle of the global AIDS movement, film by Annechristine d'Adesky, Shanti Avirgan and Ann T. Rossetti. [New York] : Outcast Films	2005
Digital file		"The Physician as Activist and Public Health Leader a memorial to celebrate Dr. Alan Berkman   Vice Chair, Department of Epidemiology   Associate Professor of Epidemiology and Sociomedical Sciences, Mailman School of Public Health   Friday, April 23, 2010 3:00-5:00pm."	April 23, 2025
2013_007--001		<b>Subseries V.3: Photographs</b>	
	7	16 Berkman, Alan	circa 1963-2000s
	7	17 Family	circa 1980s-2000s
	7	18 Mural: <i>Roots of freedom / Raices de libertad</i>	circa 1990
	7	19 Political prisoner's demonstration	circa 1980s-1998
	7	20 Resistance Conspiracy defendants	circa 1980s-1992

Box	Folder	Title	Date
		<b>Subseries V.4: Plaques</b>	
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