

FBI Hunts Cleaver

SAN FRANCISCO — The Federal Bureau of Investigation has officially entered the search for missing Black Panther minister of information Eldridge Cleaver.

An FBI affidavit seeking a Federal fugitive warrant contended that Cleaver's wife, Kathleen, flew to New York Sunday with \$33,000 she had withdrawn earlier from a San Francisco bank account.

Cleaver, 33, disappeared Nov. 25, two days before he was to surrender for return to a state prison as a parole violator.

'He was a symbol': Eldridge Cleaver dies at 62

Black Panther became born-again Republican

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POMONA, California (CNN) -- Eldridge Cleaver, the 1960s Black Panther activist and fugitive who later swung to the other side of the political spectrum to become a Republican, died Friday at the age of 62.

Cleaver died at 6:20 a.m. at Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center in suburban Los Angeles. Citing a family request for privacy, hospital spokeswoman Leslie Porras declined to provide a cause of death or any details about his hospitalization.



Eldridge Cleaver

Former colleagues in the Black Panther movement expressed sadness at Cleaver's death and remembered him for his role during that turbulent time.

"I thought Eldridge was the reincarnation of Malcolm X. I'd never heard such power, such eloquence," said David Hilliard, a former Black Panther.

"Eldridge played a very critical role in the struggle of the '60s and the '70s. He was a symbol," said Roland Freeman, another former Panther.

Criminal past began in teen years

Cleaver was born on August 31, 1935, in Wabbaseka, Arkansas. His family moved first to Phoenix and then to Los Angeles, where the teen-aged Cleaver began running into trouble with the law, with arrests for theft and selling marijuana.

In 1957, he was convicted of assault with intent to murder and sent to California's tough San Quentin and Folsom prisons. While there, he wrote a powerful set of essays outlining his views on racial issues and revolutionary violence. In 1968, they were published as the

book "Soul on Ice," which became the philosophical foundation of the Black Power movement.

In one essay, Cleaver described his rape of white women as "an insurrectionary act. It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man's law ... defiling his women."

"I wanted to send waves of consternation through the white race," he said.

And he did. When Cleaver was asked to speak at the University of California at Berkeley, then-Gov. Ronald Reagan expressed outrage.

"If Eldridge Cleaver is allowed to teach our children, they may come home one night and slit our throats," Reagan said.

Helped found Black Panthers

After he was released from prison in 1966, Cleaver helped found the Black Panthers, a militant, leftist, anti-establishment black nationalist group based in Oakland, California. Cleaver became its information minister, or spokesman.



Cleaver and his wife in front of an FBI Wanted poster

In addition to its revolutionary rhetoric, the Panthers operated social programs for the African-American community.

"At that time, it was inspirational for us here in the South to see a group like that out in Oakland providing breakfasts, providing shelter for the needy," said [Tobe Johnson](#), a professor at Morehouse College in Atlanta. "He could be thought of as a hero."

But in 1968, the same year he ran for U.S. president on the ticket of the Peace and Freedom Party, Cleaver was wounded after a shootout between Black Panthers and police in Oakland. Faced with criminal charges, he jumped bail and fled the United States for a life of exile in Algeria, Cuba and France.

When Cleaver returned in 1975, he began a remarkable political transformation. He renounced the Black Panthers and told reporters that he believed he would be treated fairly by the American judicial system. After a protracted legal battle, attempted murder charges were dropped and he was placed on probation for assault.

Cleaver turned to Christianity, GOP

Cleaver became a born-again Christian, embraced anti-communism and made an unsuccessful run for the GOP nomination for a Senate seat in California. He said his "red fighting" was born from his experiences in communist countries during his years on the run.

"I have taken an oath in my heart to oppose communism until the day I die," Cleaver told interviewers during his congressional campaign.



Cleaver, left, with members of Black Panther Party

In a 1986 interview with the Associated Press, Cleaver explained his many life transformations.

"Everybody changes, not just me," he said. "I was pulled over in my car with my secretary for a traffic thing, and one of the officers walked up to the car and saw me sitting inside. He took off his hat and said, 'Hey, Eldridge, remember me?'"

"He used to be a Panther," Cleaver said. "It was hard to believe."

Drug problems plagued later life

But in the mid-1980s, Cleaver became addicted to crack cocaine, which led to new brushes with the law. He was placed on probation in 1988 after convictions for burglary and cocaine possession. In 1992, he was arrested again for cocaine possession, but a judge threw out the charges after determining Cleaver was improperly arrested.



Cleaver, a born-again Christian

In 1994, Cleaver almost died from a blow to the head administered by a fellow addict. With the help of his family, he got off drugs and reimmersed himself in evangelical Christianity.

At the time of his death, Cleaver was working as a diversity consultant for the University of La Verne, near Los Angeles.

"He was a gentle spirit," said Richard Rose, a professor of religion and philosophy who worked with Cleaver at the university. "His presence of nonconformity was still there, and he was his own person."

Last month, Cleaver appeared at an Earth Day conference in Portland, Oregon.

"I've gone beyond civil rights and human rights to creation rights," he said.

Correspondent Jennifer Auther and [Reuters](#) contributed to this report.