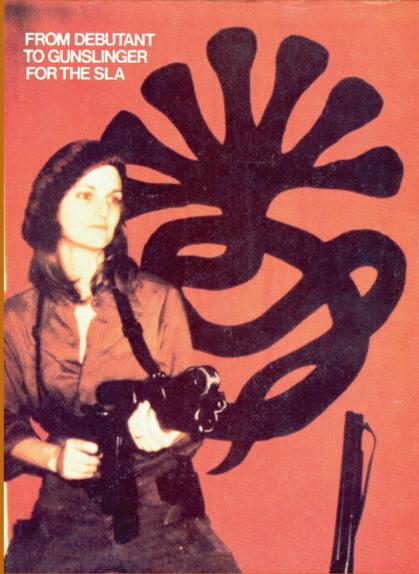


THE TRIAL OF PATRICIA HEARST



[Credit: back cover of *The Private Life of Patty Hearst* (magazine) by John Thomas Church; published by National Mirror, Inc. 1975]

In early 1974, Patricia Hearst, granddaughter to San Francisco Examiner proprietor William Randolph Hearst, was a wealthy college student at Berkeley. During the night of February 4, she became much more. While darkness cloaked the neighborhood, masked, gun-wielding intruders entered Hearst's apartment, whacked her fiancé on the head with a wine bottle, and took her away. For three days, no one knew what her location or condition might be.

Then, the violent, leftist Symbionese Liberation Army released an audiotape. Hearst reported that she was being treated well, and General Field Marshall Cinque (escaped convict Donald DeFreeze) demanded, in exchange for Hearst, the release of two SLA members held on murder charges. He also demanded that the Hearst family provide \$70 worth of food to every needy person in California.

In response, Patty's panicked parents, Catherine and William Randolph Hearst, Jr., donated nearly \$2 million in food to the state's poor and promised \$4 million more upon their daughter's release. But there was no further word for two months.

In the next tape, released in April, Hearst announced that she had joined the SLA and changed her name to "Tania," after revolutionary Che Guevara's wife. An accompanying photo showed her posed before the SLA's seven-headed cobra. When the surveillance cameras at the Hibernia Bank in San Francisco captured images of a gun-toting Patricia/Tania and her SLA compatriots during an April 15 robbery, this new image seemed confirmed. A month later, Hearst fired an automatic weapon from the back of a van during an SLA robbery at Mel's Sporting Goods in Los Angeles. She then dropped out of sight for more than a year.

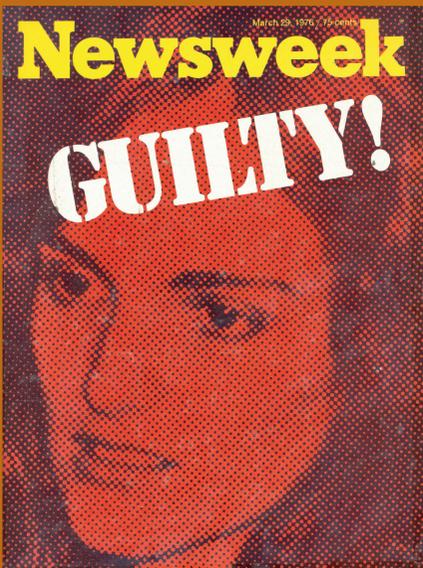
Finally, during a raid on a San Francisco SLA safe house, Hearst was taken into custody on September 18, 1975. She was arrested for her part in the Hibernia Bank robbery and taken to jail, where she received the first of many psychological evaluations.

For Patty's defense, the Hearsts hired attorney F. Lee Bailey of Boston, who had successfully defended the (alleged) Boston Strangler as well as Sam Shepard, who had been accused of murdering his wife and who was the inspiration for the television series, "The Fugitive." Bailey announced to the media that Patty had been a "prisoner of war" and had cooperated with her captors solely to stay alive.

Hearst's trial began exactly two years after the night of her kidnapping—on Feb. 4, 1976—in the San Francisco district courtroom of Chief Judge Oliver Carter. No one in the room disputed Hearst's presence at the Hibernia Bank robbery, but the prosecution, led by US Attorney James Browning, asserted she had participated willingly, while the defense insisted she had been brainwashed. Weeks of expert psychiatric testimony ensued, and despite her attorney's best efforts, Hearst also took the stand, where she proceeded to take the Fifth more than 40 times. Although she described her mistreatment at the hands of the SLA in grueling detail, following her attorney's instructions, Hearst declined to testify about her experiences between the fall of 1974 and her 1975 arrest, leaving much to the jury's—and prosecution's—imagination.

Although they reportedly wept and vomited as the guilty votes mounted, the jury took only 48 hours to convict Hearst of bank robbery and use of a firearm in the commission of a felony. Chief Judge Carter sentenced her to the maximum penalty on each charge, a total of 35 years, pending a final psychiatric evaluation. But by the time Hearst's final sentencing hearing arrived in September 1976, Chief Judge Carter had suffered a heart attack and died. He was replaced on the case by Judge William H. Orrick, Jr., who reduced Hearst's sentence to seven years but would not issue probation. He said he felt Hearst was "in no need of rehabilitation," and instead deserved punishment. "Violence is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated," he explained.

A Los Angeles judge sentenced Hearst to probation for her involvement in the Mel's Sporting Goods incident a short time later. But despite appeals filed with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the US Supreme Court, Hearst's federal conviction was upheld. She remained in prison and refused to discuss parole, because she said it implied guilt. After receiving countless letters and a petition from Congress, President Jimmy Carter conditionally commuted Hearst's sentence in 1979. This ended her incarceration, but it was not until 2000 that she was fully vindicated. One of the many pardons President Bill Clinton issued as he left office was for Patricia Hearst.



Courtesy of the Northern District Historical Society