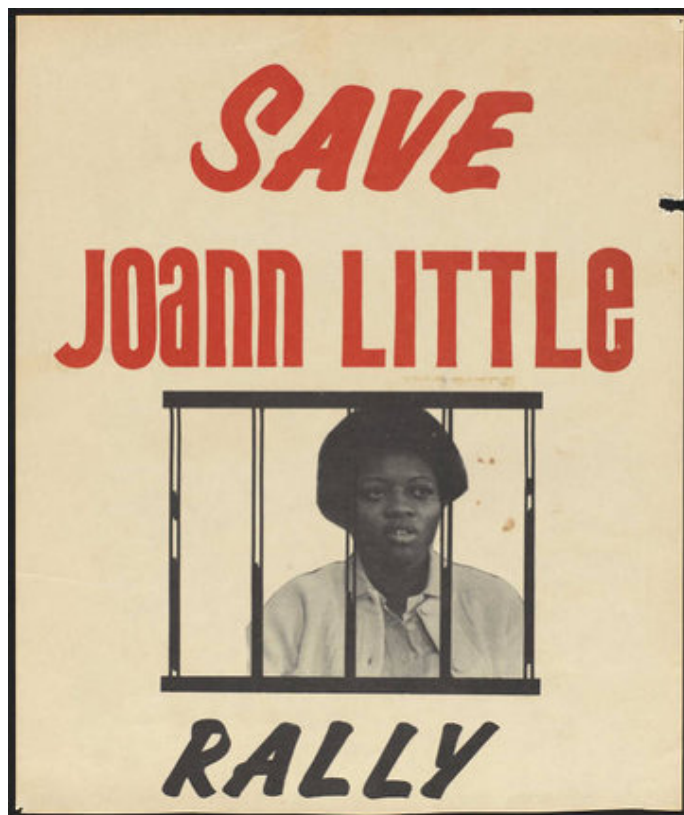


Who gets to claim self-defense?

written by Stephen Millies

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The people's movement fought to save Joann Little, a Black woman prisoner who killed a white prison guard rapist in self-defense.

How did Kyle Rittenhouse justify killing anti-racist activists Anthony Huber and Joseph Rosenbaum, as well as wounding Gaige Grosskreutz in Kenosha, Wisconsin? This white racist vigilante who worships Trump and the police claims that he was merely defending himself.

The right of self-defense was also claimed by Kenosha cop Rusten Sheskey for shooting Jacob Blake seven times on Aug. 23, 2020, leaving him paralyzed. The shooting of Blake, a Black father of seven children, led to the anti-racist protests in Kenosha.

Kenosha County District Attorney Michael Graveley refused to press charges against Sheskey. U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland declined to prosecute.

Four New York City police officers claimed self-defense when they fired 41 bullets at Amadou Diallo. The unarmed African immigrant was killed in the Bronx on Feb. 4, 1999. New York Gov. George Pataki moved the trial out of the Bronx to assure the cops' acquittal.

Sean Bell was killed by police on what was supposed to be his wedding day on Nov. 25, 2006, in the New York borough of Queens. After firing 50 shots at the unarmed Black man, the police claimed self-defense.

They were acquitted in a non-jury trial by Judge Cooperman.

Judge Schroeder in Rittenhouse's trial might as well have been his defense attorney.

Self-defense was the excuse for Cleveland cop Timothy Loehmann for killing 12-year-old Tamir Rice. The Black child was carrying a toy gun.

So was 13-year-old Nicholas Naquan Heyward Jr., who was playing cops and robbers in Brooklyn's Gowanus Houses on Sept. 27, 1994. Officer Brian George saw the toy gun and killed the honor student. The cop wasn't even indicted since this too was

allegedly “self-defense.”

Even the vigilantes who killed the Black jogger Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia claimed to be acting in self-defense. It was only because the Black community mobilized that these lynchers were convicted.

No right of self-defense for oppressed

Every legal system admits that people have the right to defend themselves. This right was never meant to apply to the oppressed.

Those who were enslaved didn’t have the right to defend themselves against their slave masters. Serfs didn’t have the right to self-defense against serf owners.

Celia was a 19-year old enslaved African who was continually raped by the Missouri slave master Robert Newsom since she was 14. Her two daughters were born because of these rapes.

Newsom crawled into Celia’s cabin one last time on June 23, 1855. Celia defended herself with a stick, killing Newsom. Celia was indicted for murder for defending herself while she was pregnant.

Circuit Court Judge William Hall instructed the all-white jury that “if Newsom was in the habit of having intercourse with the defendant who was his slave and went to her cabin on the night he was killed to have intercourse with her or for any other purpose and while he was standing in the floor talking to her she struck him with a stick which was a dangerous weapon and knocked him down, and struck him again after he fell, and killed him by either blow, it is murder in the first degree.”

The jury found Celia guilty and the judge sentenced her to be hanged. Celia escaped but was recaptured. After her child was born stillborn, [she was hanged](#) in Fulton, Missouri, on Dec. 21, 1855.

One hundred twenty years later, [Joann Little was acquitted](#) of killing the white prison guard who attempted to rape her in North Carolina. The imprisoned Black woman took Clarence Alligood's ice pick and defended herself with it.

Even though Alligood's body was found naked from the waist down, Little, who had escaped, was declared an "outlaw." This allowed police to kill her on sight. The prosecutor claimed Little had lured Alligood to her cell.

Like the mobilization to secure justice for Ahmaud Arbery, it was only because people organized that Joann Little was declared not guilty. This was the first time that a woman was found not guilty on grounds of self-defense for defending herself against rape.

Never forget Sammie Osborne!

No Indigenous person was ever given the right to defend themselves against the U.S. government that was committing genocide against them. President Abraham Lincoln had 38 members of the Dakota Sioux Nation hanged on Dec. 26, 1862, in Mankato, Minnesota.

Killer cops always claim that they had to make split-second decisions to save their lives. On the Sunday morning of Aug. 17, 1941, the Black sharecropper Sammie Osborne had to make a split-second decision in Barnwell County, South Carolina.

The day before his white landlord, William Walker, had forced him to work at gunpoint despite Osborne having an injured foot. Now, the drunken Walker barged into the shack where Osborne had been sleeping.

He beat the 18-year-old sharecropper with a stick that he held in one hand while holding a .32 caliber pistol in the other. Seeing that his life was in mortal danger, Osborne grabbed a shotgun and killed Walker.

There was no right to self-defense for Sammie Osborne. According to the 1940 census, Barnwell County had a 64% Black majority population. But a jury of 12 white men found Osborne guilty.

Sammie Osborne was sentenced to death by Strom Thurmond, who later became South Carolina's governor and ran as the presidential candidate of the States' Rights Party in 1948.

Thurmond spent 48 years in the U.S. Senate as its most notorious racist. His friend, Joe Biden, spoke at his memorial service.

After being resentenced to death by another judge, the now 20-year-old Sammie Osborne was strapped in South Carolina's electric chair on Nov. 19, 1943. As the electrodes were placed on his head, [Osborn's last words](#) were, "I'm ready to go because I know that I am not guilty."

The next year, 14-year-old George Stinney Jr. was burned to death in the same electric chair.

The acquittal of Kyle Rittenhouse gives a license to kill for every other white racist vigilante. All those who defend Rittenhouse, like Jimmy Dore or The Militant "socialist newsweekly," put themselves on the side of white supremacy.

