

# WHEN ACTIVISM IS YOUR CRIME

Mutulu Shakur

New Afrikan  
Political Prisoner

**F**orty-five year-old Mutulu Shakur, a New Afrikan activist, is a long time affiliate with the Republic of New Afrika, a movement to secure land and self-determination for African people in the United States. Currently serving a 60-year sentence regarding charges of bank robbery and the liberation of Assata Shakur from a New Jersey prison, he is imprisoned in the federal penitentiary at Florence, Colorado, the newest, most isolated, and arguably the most oppressive maximum security prison in the country.

As a young boy in Baltimore and Jamaica, Queens, Mutulu Shakur quickly became aware of racial and class discrimination as his mother's failing health led him into early adulthood and political consciousness. "I was the middle man between my mother and the welfare system, the social security system, the hospital system," he said in his most recent interview from a cell while at Marion federal penitentiary in Illinois. He vividly remembers trips to the welfare center. "The way (the welfare worker) was looking at my mother, the challenging of her, I would try to tell my mother, 'later for this,' and she would insist that I continue the negotiations. That was very degrading at an early age."

At age 17, in 1967, Shakur got involved in the historic movement for educational control of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools because, as he recalls, "I had been miseducated, abused, and disrespected" by yet another state system. Here he met a dynamic principal named Herman Ferguson, who had a profound influence on his life. Ferguson was running for Senator of New York State in the Peace and Freedom Party, which organized for the development of an independent Black nation. Shakur helped organize the campaign and also became active in the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). Later, when Ferguson was imprisoned for his political activism with RAM, Shakur was active on his defense committee as well as the National Committee to Free Political Prisoners.

At age 19, Shakur traveled to New Bethel Church in Detroit to participate in the formation of the Republic of New Afrika, an activist group committed to establishing a Black, independent land base in the states of South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia and Alabama. During the meeting, the church was surrounded by police and gunfire rained in the windows. Subsequently, Shakur along with 500 others gathered there were arrested. That same year, the FBI started its COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program) file on Shakur, one which would be updated every three months for the next 15 years.

In 1970, a car accident which paralyzed a friend's children led him to acupuncturists who were able to quickly restore the children's movement. "After that, I was strung out on acupuncture," he said. Shakur learned that acupuncture could also be used to cure drug addiction, and took this new-found knowledge to the Lincoln Hospital Detoxification Program in the South Bronx. Later, he became certified as a Doctor of Acupuncture. Within a few years, he started a rehab program, treating up to 150 people per day, which was recognized as the largest and most effective of its kind by the National Acupuncture Society, the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the World Society of Acupuncture.

Shakur later formed the Black Acupuncture Advisory Association of North America (BAAANA) in a Harlem brownstone and continued to work on curing drug addiction through acupuncture. During this time, law enforcement officials claimed that he masterminded an arm of the Black Liberation Army called "The Family" to expropriate funds from 23 banks and armored cars in order to finance BAAANA. Shakur was also charged with the planning the escape of Assata Shakur in 1978. In 1981, he was indicted and went underground until his capture in 1985.

Shakur has endured extreme security precautions imposed on him despite his relatively clean record while in prison. Currently at the maximum security prison in Colorado, he endures a 23-hour-a-day lockdown

isolation. Shakur has spent most of his life in what activists call the liberation struggle. With a government program (COINTELPRO) exclusively targeted toward disrupting this movement, it is easy to see that his imprisonment is primarily political. The great deal of sympathy and light sentencing (6 years, after living freely under an assumed name for 23 years) given to anti-Vietnam War activists like Catherine Powers—who was accused of participating in a bank robbery to support the cause during which a police officer was killed—makes the racial politics involved in Shakur's case undeniable.

TYEHIMBA JESS

## JUSTICE DENIED? Fourteen Years Later, Sekou Odinga Remains Imprisoned For His Alleged Participation in the Escape of Assata Shakur

**S**ekou Odinga was raised in a family of nine, with three brothers and three sisters. "My schooling ended in the 10th grade when I was kicked out for defending myself against an attack from a teacher," says Odinga. "At the age of 16, I was busted for robbery and sentenced to three years as a 'youthful offender.' I spent 32 months at Comstock [Great Meadows Correctional Facility] in upstate New York. In 1961-1963, Comstock was very racist. No Blacks worked in any capacity at the prison. One of the sergeants working at Comstock was the head of the local KKK. My first political education came at Comstock."

After leaving prison in 1964, Odinga became involved in the Cultural Nationalist movement. He joined Malcolm X and the Organization of African American Unity in 1965. After Malcolm's death, he became disenchanted with the organization and left the OAU to focus on anti-poverty community activism. In 1968 he joined the Black Panther Party (BPP) and later became the section leader of the Bronx chapter, sharing an office with the Harlem chapter.

In 1969, Odinga and 20 other BPP members were charged with criminal conspiracy in the New York "Panther 21" case. Numerous BPP offices around the country were raided and Panthers were killed and arrested. That the FBI, with the cooperation and support of local police departments, harassed and threatened Party members, supporters and their families is well documented. For his own safety, Odinga went underground. Months later, he traveled to Algeria to help to establish the international section of the BPP.

On October 23, 1981, after returning to the U.S., according to Odinga, he and Mtari Shabaka Sundiata were ambushed in Queens by a joint task force of New York City police officers and FBI agents. Odinga was arrested. "When I was captured, I was burned with cigars, beaten and had my head flushed in toilets," recalls Odinga. "I was taken to a window, and the officers threatened to throw me out. This went on for about six hours, when they were trying to get me to give up information on my other comrades. I was captured in October 1981, and I didn't get out of the hospital until February '82."

Upon his release from the hospital, Odinga was charged with six counts of attempted murder of police officers. Odinga insists that he was shooting over his shoulder in self-defense while being chased and shot by the police. During his trial the judge refused to allow Odinga to submit his medical records as evidence, suggesting he may have fabricated his wounds. Odinga was also charged with racketeering, participating in the liberation of Assata Shakur from the Clinton Correctional Facility for Women and expropriating an armored truck.

"They called the liberation of Assata Shakur kidnapping because jail-breaking was not a federal charge," Odinga states. "It was a state charge. So that the feds could get it, they claimed that while liberating the sister, the comrades tied up and held two of the guards. Even though they didn't

take the guards off the grounds, the court said taking them from one room to another was kidnapping.

In 1983, Odinga was convicted of two federal charges under the RICO Act and was sentenced to 40 years imprisonment and a \$50,000 fine. He was also convicted of all six counts of attempted murder and was sentenced to 25 years-to-life to be served consecutively.

Directly from court, Odinga was sent to the United States Penitentiary (USP) Marion. "Marion is a joint they claim is for those who can't deal in regular prisons—who kill and run drugs and try to escape. They never gave me a chance," Odinga asserts. "They treat me differently. They just don't acknowledge that I'm a prisoner of war." Odinga stayed at Marion for three years before being transferred to Leavenworth. He is currently incarcerated at USP Allenwood in White Deer, Pennsylvania. The United States government insists that he is a criminal. **KAI LUMUMBA BARROW**

## "THERE'S DEFINITELY A WAR GOING ON" Sundiata Acoli, One of The "Panther 21," Has Spent The Past 20 Years in Federal Penitentiaries

**I** am a prisoner of war," says Sundiata Acoli. "A prisoner of war is a revolutionary who is engaged in acts of armed struggle and has been captured. There is definitely a war going on in this country. The war began when Black people were brought here as slaves."

Born and raised in Texas, Acoli, a mathematician and a computer analyst, graduated from Prairie View A&M in 1956. After working for three years as a mathematician/computer programmer for NASA at Edwards Airforce Base in California, Acoli spent the next 13 years at various computer related companies in the New York area.

In 1968, Acoli joined the Black Panther Party (BPP) in Harlem. In addition to fighting against police brutality, the BPP supported such programs as community control of schools, free breakfast for children, free health care, etc. In 1971, Acoli was arrested along with 20 other BPP members and went on trial in the New York "Panther 21" case.

"Twenty-one of us were indicted on ridiculous charges of conspiring to blow up the flowers in the Bronx Botanical Gardens, conspiring to blow up five major department stores in New York City, conspiring to bomb several police precincts and conspiring to kill policemen," recalls Acoli. Although Acoli's co-workers, Computer People for Peace, raised and posted bail, the judge refused to release him. The legal process took two years and the trial lasted eight months. Although the defendants were acquitted of all charges, throughout the trial they remained imprisoned.

During this time COINTELPRO was in full swing. And upon his release, according to Acoli, he was constantly followed and harassed by the FBI and local police forces. On May 2, 1973, Acoli, Zayd Malik Shakur and Assata Shakur became involved in a confrontation on the New Jersey Turnpike with state troopers. In what Acoli describes as a law enforcement ambush, Zayd Shakur was killed, Assata Shakur was wounded and one state trooper was killed.

"When I was captured," Acoli recalls, "police immediately cut my pants off so that I only wore shorts. Whooping and hollering, a gang of New Jersey state troopers dragged me through the woods, through water puddles and hit me over the head with the barrel of their shotgun. They only cooled out somewhat when they noticed that all of the commotion had caused a crowd to gather at the edge of the road, observing their actions."

Acoli was tried and convicted although there was no credible evidence he had killed the state trooper or had even been involved in the shooting. At sentencing, the judge stated that Acoli was an "avowed revolutionary," and sentenced him to life plus 30 years to be served consecutively. Since his incarceration, Acoli has been subjected to the worst the U.S. penal system has to offer. During his pre-trial detention, according to Acoli, he was denied all medical care, kept in isolation, permitted no visits from family or

friends and prohibited from seeing or reading any newspapers.

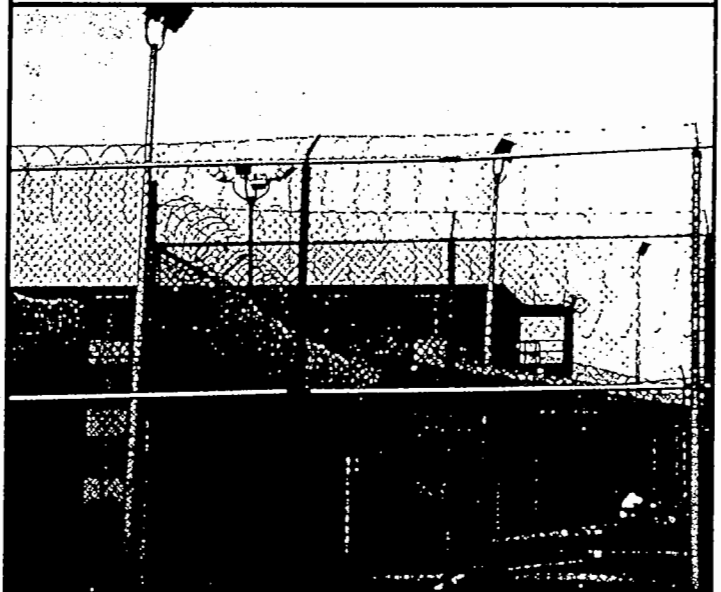
In 1981, he was moved to federal custody and held at the United States Penitentiary (USP) Marion in Marion, Illinois, one of the worst prisons in the country and condemned by Amnesty International for violating the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. After eight years at Marion, he was transferred to the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas.

In the fall of 1992, the New Jersey Department of Corrections granted Acoli the return of all of his "good" time, making him immediately eligible for parole. Thousands of supporters from around the world submitted letters on his behalf and several job offers were made in anticipation of his release. Instead of bringing Acoli to New Jersey for his hearing, the United States Parole Board conducted a hearing at Leavenworth. Acoli's attorneys were not allowed to be present.

In the fall of 1993, after conducting a series of formal parole hearings (where Acoli was not allowed to be physically present and could only participate via telephone), the New Jersey Parole Board denied him parole. Further, they determined that Acoli could not reapply for parole for another 20 years, giving him the dubious notoriety of receiving the longest parole "set off" in the history of the state of New Jersey. Presently, Acoli is incarcerated at USP Allenwood in White Deer, Pennsylvania. He has spent 13 out of 20 years incarcerated in solitary confinement.

**KAI LUMUMBA BARROW**

## SO WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A POLITICAL PRISONER OR POW?



"Our daily existence is harsher than most other prisoners because the government does everything possible to break us. They send us to the harshest prisons: Marion, IL and Florence, CO for men; Alderson, WV, Lexington, KY, and Mariana, FL control units for women. These, and similar state prisons, are as far away from family, friends and attorneys as possible. They lock us down for many years in isolation units while cutting off our communications with most of the outside world. They tamper with our food, try to break up our families and treat them rudely when they visit, fail to provide adequate medical care, aggravate and provoke us. They try to set us up to be brutalized or killed by guards or preferably by other prisoners. All this, and more, to try to break our spirits and/or to make us proclaim to the world that we were wrong to struggle for our people."  
—SUNDIATA ACOLI

# DISCOVERING DHORUBA'S DUNGEON

Finally free after nearly two decades of political imprisonment, can Dhoruba Bin Wahad escape the imprisonment of his conscience?

*While there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is still a soul in prison, I am not free.*

—Eugene V. Debs

Before I boarded the G train to Bergen Street, I had some inclinations as to who Dhoruba Bin Wahad was. Or so I thought. Numerous people had warned me about his charming disposition and laid back attitude. In addition, endless hours of research led me to a man whose political exploits had been well documented, especially by the FBI. A one time Bronx gang member turned political agitator, Dhoruba Bin Wahad's life story makes the movie *Panther* seems like an early evening bedtime story for children.

Born and raised in the South Bronx, Richard Moore, as he was referred to in those days, quickly fell into the gangland traps of violence and other crimes. At the same time, he began to carefully observe a white America which always seemed to be on the verge of imploding on African and Latino communities. After a short stint in prison, he came out practically screaming politics and wielding a new name indicative of the cultural and ideological upheaval he had undergone while locked up north. The new name was "Dhoruba," meaning "he who is born in the storm." Subsequent to his release, Dhoruba joined the Black Panther Party for Self Defense and rose to the level of regional leader. After numerous attempts by law enforcement officials to incarcerate him, including the Panther 21 case, he was charged with shooting two police officers in a case plagued with inconsistencies, withheld evidence on the part of the prosecution and about an ocean worth of doubt. Almost two decades later, the ruling was overturned and Dhoruba was released, allowing him to pick up where he left off.

All this being said, when I stepped out of the station and into the beaming morning sunlight, I really wasn't concerned with who Dhoruba was and what he meant to the afro and long-hair of the late sixties and seventies. That was the concern of history books, stary-eyed historians and our suddenly omniscient elders reminiscing about how things used to be. A proud product of the "me" generation, I wasn't ashamed to live up to my negativity. I wanted to know who he is now and, most importantly, what he means to the baldies, skin fades and blow dries?

At times, his eloquence is reminiscent of Marvin Gaye's sweet rhapsodies. Where Louis Farrakhan's metaphorical blasts budge you into submission, Dhoruba Bin Wahad coaxes you to join him on a revolutionary journey.

Ultimately, the struggle for liberation is also the struggle of ideas, he says slowly and deliberately, his voice gentle enough to lull a baby to sleep. It's the ideas of the oppressor versus the ideas of the oppressed.

The concept of "liberation" and the ensuing struggle, it is a potent and influential force in Dhoruba's life. Whether it is the clothes he wears, the music he listens to, the company he keeps, or even the religion to which he subscribes, every aspect of his life revolves around it.

He is very concerned that this message reaches the Hip-Hop Generation. But I think to myself that at times, perhaps the message of liberation can be quite subordinating. "We have to understand that if we want to overcome oppression, we have to be prepared to understand that the oppression we suffer under is based on the government, it's based on force. That's where the political power grows out of," he insists. He rambles on about armies and regimes, but I'm still lost on his prior thought. As much as I hate to admit it, he hit the proverbial nail on the head. The words linger uncomfortably around my dome.

"The majority of youths don't see themselves as revolutionaries," he preaches, "because they haven't got the idea or concept of what revolution is. When they have the opportunity to engage in a process that is revolutionary, they seldom step forward because a lot of times people are used to fronting. They wanna front. They wanna posture. Young people pick up that [Panther] symbolism," he continues. "They get out there, like Public Enemy, in their Panther gear, in their Panther garb, but they ain't got the heart and ain't got the mentality that goes with it."

His chastisement ends there and within minutes, he is bestowing upon today's youth more credit than we even give ourselves. He cites the fact that we dug up Malcolm's memory and that of the BPP by ourselves, along with the fact that we know who the enemy is; he concedes that we have a handle on reality that most generations didn't have. According to him, we are merely "out of position" like in a game of handball. What we lack is a revolutionary consciousness and an historical understanding of who we are. The dilemma facing our generation, according to Dhoruba, will be to define who we are and what we will be.

At one point, as we sped from downtown Brooklyn to uptown Manhattan, I posed the question as to how much he was still a political prisoner in a society where we are all prisoners of some sort. His reflective and tired tone swings my attention to the same weariness in Otis Redding's voice as he wallowed in every verse of "Change Gonna Come." Dhoruba was thinking aloud. Mumia. Jailed comrades. Life. The value of a day.

Dhoruba's state of mind is like other "former" political prisoners. There is a void of sorts where there was once a fiery, feisty and free soul. Undoubtedly, part of his soul is trapped in prison, alongside his incarcerated friends. Another part of his soul was lost a long time ago with every fallen comrade. How much is left only Dhoruba knows. Dhoruba Bin Wahad has been a United States political prisoner for nineteen years and will continue to be such. It is the price of having a political consciousness in the U.S.

MARC LANDAS



# ACTIVIST ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TO FREE POLITICAL PRISONERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR

**T**he 1960s and 1970s witnessed a heightened wave of popular protest and resistance, from the fight for Black liberation to antiwar revolt. As J. Edgar Hoover's FBI responded to such militant challenges, many Blacks were railroaded into prison.

They typically received sentences far longer than what right-wingers or so-called criminal offenders would receive for the same offense. Movement organizations launched ad hoc committees and campaigns to stop the courtroom charades, but such work diverted energy and resources away from other community centered commitments.

"Political imprisonment in Amerikkka is older than the U.S. government itself," says Chokwe Lumumba, chair of the New Afrikan People's Organization (NAPO) and a co-founder of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. "It can easily be shown that in regards to the political imprisonment of New Afrikans (Blacks), the U.S. government hasn't gone wrong, it's never been right." Both groups that Lumumba works with are involved in freeing incarcerated Black political activists.

Lumumba, an attorney who lives in Jackson, Mississippi, has been active in the New Afrikan independence movement for nearly thirty years. He defended the Pontiac 16 (a case involving a prison rebellion in Illinois where three guards were killed) and won not guilty decisions for ten and dismissal charges for the other six. They were all facing the electric chair. He also worked on many phases of Assata Shakur's many trials as well as the cases involving Black and white freedom fighters accused of abetting the liberation of Assata Shakur, armored car expropriations and other actions. Additionally, he won an acquittal of all major charges against Lance Parker, one of the brothers charged with fomenting the Los Angeles rebellion of 1991 and is currently general counsel to Tupac Shakur. Lumumba draws a line of distinction, however, between New Afrikan PP/POWs and someone like Tupac. "Although their cases have a political dimension, they are not political prisoners in the sense of a Mutulu Shakur," Lumumba explains. "However, part of our survival as a people is linked to what we allow to happen politically to our young people like Tupac Shakur and Lance Parker."

The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM) has, as a part of its general program of action, supported work on behalf of New Afrikan/Black freedom fighters. Most of its work, however, primarily

focuses on those political prisoners and POWs who espouse independence for the New Afrikan/Black nation. Monifa Akinwole and Makungu Akinyela are national coordinators of the MXGM and can be reached at P.O. Box 380058, Adelphi Station, Brooklyn, New York, 11238, (917) 879-4077 or at the Malcolm X Center for Self-Determination at 8724 South Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles, CA, 90044, (213) 734-2302.

The Campaign to Free Black and New Afrikan Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War in the United States seeks to fill a void. Its founders, Tanagull Jones and Dhoruba Bin Wahad, recognized the need for an organization exclusively devoted to working for the freedom of Black PP/POWs regardless of the organizations they belong to. The Campaign is not focused on a single or individual case, but is especially active in meeting the needs of the incarcerated activists. We often forget that they are human beings and not mere causes. They sometimes need shoes, commissary funds, a typewriter, a telephone call and visits from family and friends. The Campaign, like NAPO/MXGM and the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika, also has been pushing to get political recognition in the international community for Black PP/POWs. Recently, Dhoruba traveled to Afrika to the Seventh Annual Pan-African Congress to secure a resolution in support of Black freedom fighters in the U.S. The Campaign is a grassroots effort



**CHOKWE LUMUMBA WORKS TO FREE INCARCERATED BLACK POLITICAL ACTIVISTS AS CHAIR OF THE NEW AFRIKAN PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION AND THE FOUNDER OF THE MALCOLM X GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT**

and is growing from the material and personal contributions it receives from everyday people. Contact the Campaign at Kingsbridge Station, P.O. Box 339, Bronx, New York, 10463-0339, (718) 624-0800.

There are also many committees organized on behalf of particular PP/POWs (e.g., the New York 3, the Queens 2, MOVE, etc.). One is the Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign, P.O. Box 5538 Manhattanville Station, New York, NY 10027. Ali Bey Hassan, politically imprisoned during the New York Panther 21 Conspiracy Trial in the early seventies, is its national coordinator. The work of this committee is singularly focused, but Sundiata's focus goes far beyond his own cell. His book *Sunviews* remains a potent statement of his political ideas. There are also active committees to free Geronimo Pratt, now held captive for almost 25 years, Leonard Peltier and other Native American political prisoners, Mexican PP/POWs, Puerto Rican *independentistas*, white anti-imperialist activists (Marilyn Buck, Linda Evans, Silvia Baraldini) and many others.

**AMILCAR SHABAZZ**

# PEEP



I hate you with a

DRE DOG • I HATE YOU WITH A PASSION

# DON'T



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*"Don't be shocked because I've been to prison. That's what America means: prison!"*

—Malcolm X

Most Afrikans were originally brought to America in chains, as prisoners, captured from the shores of Afrika. Once here, they were put on slave plantations, which in itself was a form of mass imprisonment—where all Afrikan men, women and children were subjected to life sentences without parole. Most of us understand what the term "prisoner" means, but what is a political prisoner? A political prisoner is someone who is in prison for struggling to free their people, or a people, from the oppression of others.

Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, was a political prisoner. During the World War I era, he struggled to free Afrikan people. He preached "Afrika for the Afrikan—at home and abroad," and organized more Afrikans in the Western hemisphere for freedom than any other person before or since. To destroy his movement, the U.S. framed Marcus Garvey and sent him to Atlanta Penitentiary, making him a political prisoner in the clearest sense.

As the Garvey movement declined, Elijah Muhammad began organizing Afrikans into the Nation of Islam. He preached that Islam is the true religion of Black people, that we are a Black Nation and that we need land to form an independent nation of our own. He also preached that Afrikan people should not fight in European wars and refused the draft during World War II. For this he was sent to prison, making him also a political prisoner.

Most of the Afrikan leaders who became presidents of the newly emerging independent Afrikan nations during the 1960s had histories of being imprisoned. Presidents Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Ben Bella of Algeria and Jomo Kenyatta of the dreaded Mau-Mau of Kenya were all previously political prisoners. Most of them were new-styled political prisoners: they had struggled to free their people not only by speaking and organizing demonstrations, marches and strikes, but through armed struggle as well.

A similar transition occurred in the struggle for freedom in the U.S. Martin Luther King, the apostle of non-violence, like many before him, struggled during the early 1960s, making speeches and organizing demonstrations, marches and boycotts. Martin was arrested numerous times during these occasions and when imprisoned he was a political prisoner.

Malcolm X opposed King's philosophy of non-violence. Instead he advocated that Black people should gain their freedom "by any means necessary," and that we had the right to defend ourselves from unjust attacks. The Black Panther Party (BPP) and the Black Liberation Army (BLA) took Malcolm X's philosophy and put it into practice. Those of us imprisoned for following his teachings and using arms to defend our communities and ourselves from COINTELPRO-inspired assassination attempts are known as Political Prisoners or Prisoners of War (POWs).

Most BPP and BLA members arrested during the early 1970s and 1980s are POWs—as are Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Mexicans, Asians and even some European Americans who fought alongside us in solidarity. We defended our communities with arms because we were being attacked with arms and other lethal weapons: drugs, firetrap housing, urban removal, high unemployment, bad schools, inadequate medical care and a host of other atrocities. Most of us imprisoned during those times are still in prison, some 20 to 25 years later, irrespective of our nationalities.

However, truth crushed to the ground shall rise again. Knowing this, most of us have survived, and even thrived, in this inhumane environment because we know that we were right to struggle for our people's freedom. And one day—when enough people come together to demand our release—we too, like Nelson Mandela, shall be free.

**SUNDIATA ACOLI**

Black Liberation Army, Prisoner of War

