



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for August 23<sup>rd</sup>

#### **4 Aug - Albert Woodfox, held in solitary confinement for 43 years, dies aged 75**

*Woodfox, member of 'Angola Three', was wrongfully convicted of 1972 murder of Louisiana prison guard and released only in 2016.*

#### **MORE:**

by Ed Pilkington (*The Guardian*)

Albert Woodfox, who is thought to have been held in solitary confinement longer than any individual in US history, having survived 43 years in a 6ft x 9ft cell in one of America's most brutal prisons, has died aged 75.

Woodfox's death was made public on Thursday by his long-term lawyers, George Kendall and Carine Williams, and by his brother Michael Mable. They said he had died from complications caused by Covid.

Woodfox was a member of the so-called "Angola Three" – prisoners who were wrongfully convicted of the 1972 murder of a prison guard, Brent Miller, in Louisiana state penitentiary. The prison was built on the site of a former slave plantation and was commonly known as Angola, after the country from which most of the plantation's enslaved people had been transported.

Before the murder, Woodfox and his fellow Angola Three member Herman Wallace had set up a chapter of the Black Panther party inside the prison. They used it to protest against the segregation of prisoners and the unpaid cotton picking to which Black prisoners were subjected in chain gangs in the outlying fields.

He always insisted that his false conviction and consequent treatment were punishment for his Black radicalism. Soon after his conviction in Miller's death, Woodfox and Wallace were both placed in solitary confinement, where they both remained almost without break for more than 40 years.

Wallace was released after a concerted legal battle in 2013, even as prison authorities continued to try to get him back inside. He died from cancer two days later.

Woodfox was released in 2016 on his 69<sup>th</sup> birthday. Days after walking free, he told the *Guardian* that he had managed to endure decades of solitary, despite frequent terrifying bouts of claustrophobia, through sheer force of willpower.

"We made a conscious decision that we would never be institutionalized. As the years went by, we made efforts to improve and motivate ourselves," he said.

In later interviews with the *Guardian* over the years, and in his 2019 book *Solitary*, which was a finalist for the Pulitzer prize, he gave more detail on the extraordinary strength that allowed him and Wallace – "the other part of my heart", as Woodfox described his friend – to withstand solitary. The conditions they endured have been known to cause mental breakdown in individuals within a week, let alone 40 years.

Woodfox said that he buried himself in prison books, studying Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey. He organized games played up and down the line of solitary cells by shouting down the tier or banging on pipes – that way they held maths tests and general knowledge quizzes about Black history.

He was most proud of having in similar fashion taught several young prisoners how to read.

“Our cells were meant to be death chambers but we turned them into schools, into debate halls,” Woodfox told the *Guardian*. “We used the time to develop the tools that we needed to survive, to be part of society and humanity rather than becoming bitter and angry and consumed by a thirst for revenge.”

In the six years of freedom that Woodfox enjoyed he devoted himself to educating the public in the US and beyond about the atrocities of the US criminal justice system. He travelled widely domestically and around the world to address audiences of school children and judges.

At home back in New Orleans, he found joy wherever he could. He visited the grave of his beloved mother, Ruby Mable Hamlin, who had died while he was still incarcerated, and enjoyed untrammelled time with his daughter, Brenda Poole, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and his life partner, Leslie George.

He also adopted a stray dog found wandering on a levee near Lake Pontchartrain. He named the pup Hobo.

Notwithstanding all the institutional cruelty that was rained down on him over so many years, Woodfox remained an incurable optimist to the end. In his book he writes: “I have hope for humankind. It is my hope that a new human being will evolve so that needless pain and suffering, poverty, exploitation, racism, and injustice will be things of the past.”

### **6 Aug - Running Down the Walls 5K**

*Since 1999, prisoners and supporters throughout North America have participated in the annual event known as Running Down the Walls (RDTW) often running or walking simultaneously in many cities and prisons at once.*

#### **MORE:**

This is a 5k non-competitive run/jog/walk/roll in order to raise awareness and funds for political prisoners currently held in North American prisons. Over the years, we have raised thousands of dollars and lots of awareness around the struggle to free political prisoners. Many places will be hosting RDTW 2022 on either September 11<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup>. Locally, we are organizing RDTW for September 18<sup>th</sup> in Prospect Park and you can get details at [nycabc.wordpress.com/2022/08/07/rdtw2022](https://nycabc.wordpress.com/2022/08/07/rdtw2022)

An important component of Running Down the Walls is the solidarity runs that take place throughout numerous cities throughout North America. Solidarity runs that are held in our communities are designed to illustrate, through several small collective actions, that we have not forgotten our comrades locked up behind prison walls. Runs that are held in prisons are designed to both politicize other prisoners and to illustrate that the acts of solidarity have been heard.

This annual event is also one of the primary fundraisers for the ABCF Warchest Program – a fund designed to assist political prisoners who normally received little or no financial support with monthly checks. Other funds raised should be used to support local groups of your choosing, whether that is your own organization or another group you’d like to support. The choice is yours.

To highlight the importance of these events, we will provide you with two statements from our imprisoned, or recently released, comrades concerning RDTW:

*“As we ran we were thinking and talking about all the runners in Los Angeles and how we’d love to be out there running with them. We also spoke about the other political prisoners who were running with us in at least some other prisons... Not only our pace and spirits soared, but the sun broke through the clouds and the temperature rose to the 60s. So we ran down the walls and ran up the sun and we were glad to be doing it.”*

– Jaan Laaman

*“Regardless of how one identifies politically, support for Running Down the Walls can be an important statement of solidarity in an era that finds the movement for the most equitable social reality unduly fragmented. Such support is not only recognition of the trial and tribulations suffered by the diversity of PP/POWs imprisoned for their contributions to the struggle. It is also an affirmation that the many voices recognizing those contributions and*

*seeking justice for the prisoners are at least fellow travelers who have much more in common than at odds and share the same side of the barricade.”*

– Bill Dunne

## **SUPPORT THE STRUGGLE**

Remember that many of those arrested in the past or present are not far from us. Many of them were and are community and labor activists, queer and environmental activists people who decided to speak out against various forms of oppression and paid the price of freedom for their actions. Any one of these people could have at one time stood beside us at a demonstration, speak-out, or even an organizing meeting. At any moment it could be us who find ourselves in this situation, so it is imperative that we ensure that a strong community of support exists for these people as well as ourselves. The strength of our movement is determined by how much we support our comrades.

## **GET INVOLVED**

- **Be a participant:** As people participate in the run, we ask that people post videos and photos on their social media, using the hashtags #RDTW2022, #RunningDowntheWalls, #FreeAllPoliticalPrisoners
- **Sponsor a participant:** This can be done through a flat donation to the runner/walker/cyclist of your choice.
- **Sponsor Running Down the Walls:** Any amount helps. Contact info@abcf.net if you wish to simply donate money. Organizations can donate and be added to the list of sponsor organizations on the website and fliers/posters.
- **Donate to the Warchest:** You can send funds to Lancaster ABCF, Post Office Box 8682, Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17604 and indicate funds go to the Warchest. Please make checks and money orders to Tim Fasnacht.
- **Organize a Running Down the Walls in your area:** We'd be excited to expand the solidarity runs in more cities and prisons if are interested in organizing this event in your area. Events can be as big or small as you choose. Contact info@abcf.net if you would like support or advice on organizing an event in your area.

## **8 Aug - Mutulu Shakur Files suit against the US Parole Commission**

*On August 8<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Shakur's 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday, his legal team filed a writ of habeas corpus in federal court of the Eastern District of Kentucky.*

### **MORE:**

The legal filing challenges the May 2022 decision by the United States Parole Commission to deny mandatory parole to Dr. Shakur, alleging that this decision denied Dr. Shakur of his constitutional rights.

Dr. Shakur is currently battling terminal multiple myeloma – advanced bone marrow cancer. In May, the Bureau of Prison-contracted doctor assessed that he had less than 6 months to live. His health has continued to deteriorate since receiving that grim prognosis.

The writ of habeas corpus asserts that the Parole Commission violated the United States Constitution and its own policies by finding that Dr. Shakur is likely to commit a crime upon release. All the available evidence demonstrates that he poses no risk to anyone:

- His medical condition: Given his end-of-life trajectory, Dr. Shakur is not a threat to anyone
- His age: It is widely recognized by government agencies and courts that statistically; elders pose the lowest risk of recidivism. People over 70 like Dr. Shakur pose almost zero risk
- DOJ's risk assessment tool places Dr. Shakur in the lowest category of risk for recidivism
- His positive conduct in prison: Dr. Shakur has been a model prisoner and has earned the support of current and former BOP staff who support his release.
- His acceptance of responsibility: Dr. Shakur has accepted responsibility for his role in the conspiracy he was convicted of and he has expressed empathy to the victims and families

Dr. Shakur and his legal team have also made a request that the Commission reconsider its prior denial based on new information regarding Dr. Shakur's deteriorating medical state. The procedures of the Parole Commission allow for the Commissioners to modify a prior decision where "new information of substantial significance favorable to the prisoner, including medical information, or other extraordinary and compelling information" is provided to the Commission. The Commission has stated that it is considering this request for Dr. Shakur, but it has not yet taken any action.

One of Dr. Shakur's attorneys, Brad Thomson, of the People's Law Office based in Chicago, says,

"The Constitution prevents parole boards from making decisions that are arbitrary, irrational, and based on erroneous information. That's exactly what the United States Parole Commission has done in the case of Dr. Mutulu Shakur." He continued, "Dr. Shakur is at the end of his life and poses absolutely no threat to anyone. Federal law and public policy support that individuals in that situation can, and should, be safely released so they can spend their final days at home, with loved ones."

Dr. Shakur is also pursuing a motion for compassionate release before his sentencing judge in Southern District of New York. The United States Attorney's Office has opposed that motion and Dr. Shakur and his legal team are awaiting a decision from the judge.

Faith leaders, national civil rights organizations, acupuncturists, criminal justice reform organizations, human rights lawyers, and activists have all called for Dr. Shakur's immediate release. All of his white co-defendants have been released on parole or died shortly after release. Despite being within weeks of death, Dr. Shakur is being denied the compassionate release that would allow him to die with his sons, daughters, and grandchildren. Dr. Shakur's family, friends, loved ones, and supporters call on the U.S. Parole Commission to reverse their decision denying his parole.

The U.S. Parole Commission, U.S. Attorney's Office, and the Bureau of Prisons acknowledge that Mutulu has terminal cancer and is near death, unable to conduct the activities of daily living without assistance. Where a prisoner is near death and poses no danger, the law allows for them to be released. His supporters and legal team are calling for the law to be applied fairly and justly for the 72-year-old man dying of cancer.

Thomson says, "Today, Dr. Shakur turns 72 and there is almost zero chance he will live to see 73. He was not given a death sentence, but that is exactly what will happen if the United States Parole Commission and other government agencies don't act swiftly and fairly apply the law to Dr. Shakur."

### **August 16<sup>th</sup> - Dr. Mutulu Shakur featured on Democracy Now!**

Watch at [democracynow.org/2022/8/16/compassionate\\_release\\_black\\_activist\\_mutulu\\_shakur](https://democracynow.org/2022/8/16/compassionate_release_black_activist_mutulu_shakur)

Dozens of civil rights groups have joined an urgent push for the compassionate release of longtime political prisoner Mutulu Shakur from prison. The 72-year-old Black liberation activist is said by prison doctors to have less than six months to live, after being diagnosed with stage 3 bone marrow cancer. Shakur was part of the Black nationalist group Republic of New Afrika that worked with the Black Panther Party and others, and is the stepfather of the late rapper icon Tupac Shakur. He was convicted in 1988 of conspiracy in several armed robberies, one of which resulted in the deaths of a guard and two police officers, and also for aiding the 1979 prison escape of Assata Shakur.

We speak with Nkechi Taifa, a lawyer and longtime supporter of Shakur, as well as Brad Thomson, attorney with the People's Law Office, which has filed urgent lawsuits to secure Shakur's release. "He is in a desperate medical situation," says Thomson, who calls any claims that Shakur would reoffend if released "patently false and absolutely outrageous." "It is time for him to live out his remaining days in the comfort of his family and friends," says Taifa.

## 16 Aug - These Labor Unions Are Fighting to Keep Solitary Confinement

*A corrections officers' union in New York is campaigning against new restrictions on solitary confinement—and it's not the only union in the country opposing prison reforms.*

### **MORE:**

by Victoria Law (*The Nation*)

On February 13, at Wende Correctional Facility in upstate New York, Robert Adams had a fight with another incarcerated man while returning from recreation. As Adams explained it, officers moved to break them up, with one pepper-spraying Adams in the face before handcuffing him. Another officer taunted him, saying, "You got your ass kicked." Adams, still handcuffed, told him to mind his business. In response, he said, the first officer punched him several times in the face, splitting his lip.

According to Adams, officers brought him to the prison's medical unit, where he was treated, then placed him in solitary confinement in what is euphemistically called the Special Housing Unit, or SHU. They issued a misbehavior report for assault on staff and sentenced him to eight months in solitary. The other man received 35 days in the SHU for fighting him.

But Adams ended up spending only a month in the SHU. In March, the Humane Alternatives to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act went into effect. Hailed as the most progressive in the country, it limits solitary confinement in New York prisons to no more than 15 consecutive days.

On March 16, Adams was handcuffed, shackled, and transferred to Orleans Correctional Facility, which had converted its former 200-bed segregation unit into a Residential Reentry Unit (RRU), mandated by the HALT Solitary law as an alternative to solitary confinement. It was an early sign that, after decades of using solitary at rates above the national average, some change might be coming to New York's prisons and jails.

But the unions representing the state's correctional officers have been doing their utmost to put a halt to HALT. They currently appear unlikely to succeed—but if they do, Adams and 1190 others now held in RRUs across the state would be returned to SHUs, where they would spend at least 23 hours each day locked into their cells alone.

Back in May 2021, the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association (NYSCOPBA), which represents state correctional and police officers, filed a federal lawsuit to overturn the HALT Solitary law, arguing that it violates their members' civil rights. One year later, in mid-June 2022, federal district judge Mae D'Agostino dismissed their suit. She wrote that the union's claim that the state was constitutionally obligated to use solitary for people under age 21, over age 55, or for more than 15 days at a time "strains credulity."

But NYSCOPBA had already launched its Repeal HALT campaign, calling the new law "directly responsible for the skyrocketing violence" in the state's prisons and urging lawmakers to repeal it. While DOCCS did not address the union's allegation, advocates questioned the claims of rising violence. In fact, in other jurisdictions that have significantly reduced their use of solitary confinement, research has shown an overall reduction in prison violence and improvements in health and well-being among both incarcerated people and staff.

The following month, after a melee at Great Meadow Correctional Facility, the union circulated a press release reiterating its position. "All the HALT Act has done is taken an already violent environment filled with inmate-on-staff and inmate-on-inmate attacks, and made it worse," union rep John Roberts stated in the press release. "The Legislature needs to address this immediately and stop turning a blind eye to the violence that is occurring before something tragic happens."

Union opposition to reforms limiting solitary is not new, or unique to New York. A decade ago in Illinois, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) challenged then-Governor Pat Quinn's order to close Tamms, the state's notorious supermax prison where men were kept in long-term solitary confinement. AFSCME, which represents Illinois prison employees, opposed the closure, arguing that Tamms was necessary to maintaining prison safety and security and to keep jobs in southern Illinois, despite the fact that all of the union members employed at Tamms had been guaranteed jobs in other prisons.

Even when proposed reforms do not portend prison closures or lower staffing levels, unions representing jail and prison employees have opposed them. In New York City's jails, where officers outnumber incarcerated people, the Correctional Officers Benevolent Association has continually opposed measures to limit time in solitary, filling hearings and arguing that the threat of isolation prevents assaults. (It has also opposed a federal takeover of Rikers Island.)

In Connecticut, AFSCME Local 387, which represents correctional officers, opposed the PROTECT Act, which would have limited solitary to 15 consecutive days and guaranteed at least six and a half hours out of cell each day. AFSCME Local 387 president declared that the additional out-of-cell time would place staff and incarcerated people at risk, and Democratic Governor Ned Lamont repeated the union's reasons when he vetoed the act. An amended version, requiring four hours out of cell, passed this year without union opposition.

The Rhode Island Brotherhood of Correctional Officers has opposed S2631, a bill limiting the use of solitary. Its president, Richard Feruccio, testified against the bill at a Senate hearing and—in a move many found unconscionable—released the prison records of the formerly incarcerated people who had testified in favor of the bill at a previous hearing.

Unions' opposition to limits on solitary seems out of step with their embrace of progressive issues, including racial justice. In June 2020, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which has chapters representing police and correctional officers, passed a resolution vowing to align with the goals of the Movement for Black Lives. "We must divest from and demilitarize the police and invest in and build Black communities, not demonize and criminalize them," the resolution stated. Among their commitments, the SEIU included a pledge of "holding public security unions accountable to racial justice." The SEIU did not respond to repeated queries about solitary confinement or prison issues.

While national unions are publicly embracing racial justice, they have remained silent about the racial bias of their correctional officer brethren. People of color, particularly Black people, are not only disproportionately incarcerated throughout the United States but also disproportionately punished with solitary. A 2021 study of Pennsylvania's prisons found that Black men are more than eight times more likely to be placed in solitary confinement than white men, while a separate study by Disability Rights North Carolina found that Black people are nearly seven times more likely to be in extreme isolation than their white counterparts.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) represents 700,000 federal and D.C. government workers, including more than 30,000 federal prison employees. In response to queries by *Solitary Watch* and *The Nation*, Tim Kauffman of the AFGE said that the union, as a whole, has not weighed in on solitary confinement, prison conditions, or prison reforms. He pointed to its legislative priorities to increase staffing within federal prisons, replace mail with photocopies, prohibit the Bureau of Prisons from expanding the use of private prisons, and impose harsher punishments, including use of the death penalty, on incarcerated people who harm or kill prison staff.

AFGE's silence on solitary confinement has not necessarily mollified its chapters that represent law enforcement. In July, AFGE announced that it was conceding to demands for separation by AFGE Council 118, which represents thousands of ICE agents and was one of the few unions to endorse Trump's 2016

campaign. Council 118 President Chris Cane had previously charged that the national union had become a far-left organization.

Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO, which ignored requests for comment, has resolved to defend the rights of and embrace all union members, regardless of political leanings, professions, and uniforms, even as it has opposed prison labor and for-profit prisons. Thirteen law enforcement unions are among its ranks. In 2020, as demands to defund the police swept the nation and public imagination, the AFL-CIO convened a task force on racial justice. The following year, that task force convened a policing subcommittee, which included the International Union of Police Associations. That subcommittee issued a Public Safety Blueprint for Change, rejecting calls to defund or abolish the police, and instead proposed a program encouraging officers to break the blue wall of silence when they see abuses.

The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) classifies assault as any attack by an incarcerated individual, even if no physical injury occurs. By this classification, assaults—against both staff and other incarcerated people—have been increasing. But advocates note that these numbers paint a skewed picture.

As of July 1, 2022, DOCCS recorded 699 assaults against staff, compared to 1,177 in 2021 and 1,047 in 2020. It recorded 691 assaults on other incarcerated people, compared to 1,108 in 2021 and 1,205 in 2019. Although the law had been in effect for only three months when these statistics were compiled, unions representing New York's jail and prison employees blame HALT for the increased violence.

Jack Beck, former director of the Prison Visiting Project at the Correctional Association of New York, notes that prison officers have unfettered discretion on what charge(s) to level against a person. "There's no accountability," he told *Solitary Watch* and *The Nation*. "No one is disciplined for writing too many tickets." And, on the rare occasion when a ticket is dismissed at a hearing, the officer who wrote the ticket faces no consequences.

While the number of tickets for assault on staff has increased in 2022, nearly 74 percent of staff involved reported no injury and just 2 percent reported a moderate, serious, or severe (as opposed to minor) injury. For staff who intervened in assaults between incarcerated people, nearly 98 percent reported no injury, 2 percent reported a minor injury, and one person reported a moderate injury. Clearly, the recorded increase in violence reflects an increase in ticketing, not necessarily an uptick in attacks.

Beck also noted that it's not unusual for officers to write tickets charging that an incarcerated person assaulted staff to cover up their own violence. In 2016, for instance, federal prosecutors indicted five New York correctional officers with brutally beating a man at Downstate Correctional Facility and then conspiring to justify their actions by falsely charging him with assault.

Beck points to another reason that correctional officers' unions have opposed reforms to solitary. "New York has by far the richest number of security staff in the nation," he stated, with 17,015 staff for 30,817 incarcerated people—or a nearly one-to-two ratio. As its prison population declined by over 40,000 from 72,649 in 1999, the state has been shuttering prisons, reducing the need for security staff.

But the specter of violence—whether in response to criminal justice reforms keeping people out of prisons or to laws changing internal practices—allows officers, and their unions, to argue for keeping, if not increasing, staffing levels.

According to DOCCS, the new Residential Reentry Units are not meant to be punitive. Instead, the agency's December 20 memo states: "Such units shall be therapeutic and trauma-informed and aim to address individual treatment, rehabilitation needs, and underlying causes of problematic behavior." Furthermore, people in RRU are supposed to be offered seven hours of out-of-cell programming.

That's not what Adams is experiencing. He spends most of his day in a cell with an adjoining recreation pen. He is allotted only one hour in that pen during weekdays. On weekends, he can spend up to four hours in the pen by himself.

"This is just SHU 2.0," Adams told *Solitary Watch* and *The Nation*. "A dog's kennel is bigger than this."

In the morning, officers escort him to a classroom for the required program. There, his feet are shackled together and fastened to the floor beneath his desk. Only then are his handcuffs removed. With eight to 10 other men, he spends the three-hour class shackled to the floor.

On weekday afternoons, he can participate in what's called "therapeutic rec"—in which he and others are shackled to the floor in the day room to watch three hours of TV and movies. If he chooses to go, Adams misses the window of time in which officers distribute tablets allowing people to make phone calls from their cells. Most days, he chooses to stay in his cell and talk with his family.

Adams's experience is not unusual. Jerome Wright, codirector of the HALT Solitary campaign, said that the campaign has heard similar complaints from people in other RRUs. "HALT is not just about how much out-of-cell time you do, but also about programming," he said. But in the RRUs, programs such as anger management and substance abuse treatment are not offered, leaving people like Adams with little to do.

"The whole goal is to have programming so people don't get traumatized too much and they have options and opportunities when they get back to [the general prison] population," Wright said.

While DOCCS did not address NYSCOPBA accusations that HALT has increased violence, it did tell *Solitary Watch* and *The Nation* that it has convened a steering committee to implement the law and "hope[s] that the out-of-cell programming offered in the Residential Rehabilitation Units...will have a positive effect on the population and lead to safer correctional facilities across the state."

Despite the RRU's shortcomings, Adams is glad that the union's lawsuit failed. He noted that HALT still significantly limits segregation time and the charges that can land a person in isolation, protections that were previously absent.

"Before HALT, they were giving out SHU time like it was nothing," he said. "They were completely abusing their discretion." In 2015, he recalled, "I got into it with an officer, he put his hands on me and I defended myself. They gave me 700 days in the box. I did 675 days out of 700 days.... I didn't get out of the box until 2017."

## **17 Aug - Mumia Abu-Jamal Remains the Voice of the Voiceless**

*After 40 years of incarceration the "voice of the voiceless" remains a focus of international attention.*

### **MORE:**

by Abayomi Azikiwe (*Pan-African News Wire*)

During the late 1960s, Mumia Abu-Jamal became a youth activist in the city of Philadelphia where a succession of racist police chiefs engaged in widespread abuse against the African American community.

Philadelphia has a centuries-long history of African self-organization dating back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when the Free African Society, African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and other institutions were formed by Richard Allen, Sarah Allen and Absalom Jones.

During mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society provided avenues for men and women to build support for the Underground Railroad and the movement to completely eradicate involuntary servitude in the antebellum border and deep southern states. By the 1960s, the city became known as one of

the first municipalities where African Americans would rise up in rebellion on the north side during the late August 1964.

Max Stanford (later known as Muhammad Ahmed), a co-founder of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) in 1962, was from Philadelphia. RAM preceded the Black Panther Party (BPP) and sought to form an alliance with Malcolm X (also known as El Hajj Malik Shabazz), a leading spokesman for the Nation of Islam and later the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). RAM advocated for the development of a revolutionary movement in the U.S. and consequently became a target of the Justice Department.

In 1969, Mumia joined the Black Panther Party at the age of 15 when the organization was deemed by the then Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) J. Edgar Hoover as the "greatest threat to national security" in the United States. The Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) had a special division which was designed to monitor, disrupt, imprison and kill various leaders and members of African American organizations from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the BPP as well as a host of other tendencies. Documents released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) since the mid-to-late 1970s indicate that the BPP was a principal target of the U.S. government and local police agencies.

Why was the BPP considered so dangerous by the leading law-enforcement agency inside the country? In order to provide answers to this question it must be remembered that between 1955 and 1970, the African American people led a struggle for civil rights and self-determination which impacted broad segments of the population in the U.S. helping to spawn movements within other oppressed communities.

The Black Panther Party was first formed in Lowndes County Alabama in 1965. Its origins grew out of the organizing work of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), whose field organizer, Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture) was deployed to the area in the aftermath of the Selma to Montgomery march in late March of the same year. Working in conjunction with local activists, an independent political party was formed known as the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO). The group utilized the black panther as its symbol while rejecting both the Republican and Democratic Party.

In subsequent months, there were other Black Panther organizations formed in several cities including Detroit, Cleveland, New York City and other urban areas. In Oakland, California during October of 1966, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

This movement represented an emerging phase of the Black liberation struggle where there were calls for armed self-defense, mass rebellion and the political takeovers of major municipalities by those who had been excluded from the reins of official power. Thousands of African American youth flocked to the Black Panther Party viewing the organization as a symbol of uncompromising resistance to racism, national oppression and economic exploitation.

### **Mumia and the BPP**

Although the BPP was projected in the national corporate media as gun toting militants willing to use weapons against the police when they were threatening the Party and the community, most of the work of the organization revolved around distribution of its weekly newspaper, the establishment of free breakfast programs for children, community health clinics for the people in the most oppressed areas of the African American community while building alliances with revolutionary forces among other sectors of the population including, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Asians, Native Americans and whites committed to fundamental change within U.S. society.

Mumia noted the diversity of programmatic work during his tenure in the BPP of the late 1960s and early 1970s in his book entitled "We Want Freedom": "As the Breakfast program succeeded so did the Party, and its popularity fueled our growth across the country. Along with the growth of the Party came an increase in the number of community programs undertaken by the Party. By 1971, the Party had embarked on ten

distinctive community programs, described by Newton as survival programs. What did he mean by this term? We called them survival programs pending revolution. They were designed to help the people survive until their consciousness is raised, which is only the first step in the revolution to produce a new America.... During a flood the raft is a life-saving device, but it is only a means of getting to higher ground. So, too, with survival programs, which are emergency services. In themselves they do not change social conditions, but they are life-saving vehicles until conditions change."

On December 4, 1969, the Chicago police under the aegis of the Illinois State's Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan and the Chicago field office of the FBI, raided the residence of BPP members on the city's west side. Two Panther leaders, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were killed while several other occupants of the house were wounded.

These police actions along with hundreds of other attacks on BPP chapters across the country resulted in the deaths of many Panther members and the arrests and framing of hundreds of cadres. Numerous BPP members were driven into exile as others were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

### **The Voice of the Voiceless from the Streets to Death Row**

On December 9, 1981, Mumia was arrested in Philadelphia and charged with the murder of white police officer Daniel Faulkner. He was railroaded through the courts and convicted on July 3, 1982. The following year, Mumia was sentenced to die by capital punishment. He remained on death row until 2011 after an international campaign to save his life proved successful.

However, his death sentence was commuted to life in prison without parole. Mumia and his supporters have maintained that he is not guilty of the crime of killing a police officer.

After his sojourn in the BPP, Mumia utilized his writing and journalist skills learned in the Party to become a formidable media personality in Philadelphia. He was a fierce critic of police brutality and a defender of the revolutionary MOVE organization which emerged during the 1970s in the city.

Mumia was a co-founder of the Philadelphia chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) in the 1970s. He worked as a radio broadcaster and writer exposing the misconduct of the police surrounding the attack on the MOVE residence in August 1978. In 1979, he interviewed reggae superstar Bob Marley when he visited Philadelphia for a concert performance.

While behind bars Mumia has become an even more prolific writer and broadcast journalist. He issues weekly commentaries through Prison Radio where he discusses a myriad of topics including African American history, international affairs, political economy, the deplorable conditions existing among the more than two million people incarcerated in the U.S. along with police misconduct.

A renewed campaign entitled "Love Not Phear" held demonstrations around the U.S. and the world during the weekend of July 3 marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his unjust conviction in 1982. Love Not Phear says that it is committed to the liberation of all political prisoners including Mumia Abu-Jamal.

An entry on their website emphasizes that: "The landscape has changed over the last 40 years, a time frame that also marks the years Mumia has been incarcerated. The fight for the release of political prisoners requires a recalibration in order to challenge police corruption and racism as they have evolved in this new landscape. We cannot deny the racism, corruption, and misconduct that permeated the so-called 'Halls of Justice' during Mumia's arrest and unjust kangaroo court trial. The people today know the truth; commonplace bribed witnesses, suppressed evidence, biased judges, and backroom deals put Mumia behind bars."

Mumia through his attorneys has filed another appeal based upon evidence related to prosecutorial misconduct which has been further revealed over the last four years. The hearing will take place on October

19 in Philadelphia. Supporters of Mumia and other political prisoners will attend the hearing in this latest attempt to win the long-awaited freedom for this activist who is now 68 years old.

### **18 Aug - LORE IS FREE!**

*After a lengthy stint inside, Lore is free. We've included a message from her below.*

#### **MORE:**

It's Lore here! I am out of prison and safely in the arms of family! Thank you all for your two+ years of urgent work and generous donations that all built up to my liberation! These efforts sustained myself and my peers in FDC. You filled my heart, my hands, and kept my mind free.

I look forward to bringing you all in for continued support of the disproportionately affected Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people and parents incarcerated right now. If you can, please continue donating to my commissary drive, and keep your attention and action focused here for upcoming ways you can support those on the inside. Your sweet support in the future will swell my big dreams for those who remain stolen. Thank you all for being a light for punished people who need love, healing, accountability and liberation most of all.

Please stay in touch with me on email ([freelore@protonmail.com](mailto:freelore@protonmail.com)), if you have ever written to me please send me your address again, I'm excited to stay in touch!

### **20 Aug - "Southeast Greenland Polar Bears" by Marius Mason**

*Marius' support crew posted a new painting at [supportmariamason.org](http://supportmariamason.org) and we've included what Marius wrote to accompany the painting below.*

#### **MORE:**

Marius writes: "I came across this hopeful article in Science that announced a discovery of a small population of polar bears in Greenland (only a few hundred individuals), who had managed to learn some very different hunting strategies and some new target prey that allowed them to survive – despite disappearing sea ice and climate change. Scientists call the ability to modify behaviors and learn new ones "plasticity." So I was happy that this tiny population impressive and distinct group of bears had proved themselves of 'smarter than the average bear.'

The article also stressed how important to the species survival a 50-year-old international treaty – The International Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears – has been in protecting what little is left of habitat and populations. So there's your small bit of hope for what's wild and beautiful!"