

# Mumia Abu-Jamal Continues to Struggle After 43 Years of Unjust Imprisonment

Since 1981 the award-winning journalist and former Black Panther Party member has been denied the right to due process and freedom of speech

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

Global Research, December 10, 2024

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

*During the early morning hours of December 9, 1981, cab driver and journalist **Mumia Abu-Jamal** was wounded and arrested on charges related to the shooting death of a white Philadelphia police officer.*

When it became known who the principal suspect was in the death of **Officer Daniel Faulkner**, the mainstream corporate media crafted their editorial approach to make it appear as if Mumia was already guilty even prior to a trial.

Since his conviction and initial sentencing to death, it has been an ongoing struggle by Mumia and his supporters to overturn this injustice and to win his release. A years-long international campaign was successful in having the former Panther taken off death row in 2011.

Nonetheless, for decades the judicial system in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has refused to seriously consider the exculpatory evidence which could exonerate Mumia and release him from incarceration. In the latest legal challenge to win a new trial, the judge hearing the case ignored the fact that pertinent information related to efforts to deny Mumia a fair hearing by prosecutors was suppressed.

Abu-Jamal turned 70 years-old in April 2024. Over the last decade his health has been deteriorating as a direct result of the horrendous conditions under which he is being confined in Pennsylvania state prisons.

He has suffered numerous ailments including diabetes, failing eyesight, hepatitis C, heart disease, among others. In every instance of a healthcare emergency, people around the country and the world were compelled to launch legal challenges and letter writing campaigns to secure the necessary medical treatments needed to save his life.

Despite these legal and health crises, Abu-Jamal remains a prolific writer and broadcaster. He has authored and contributed to a dozen books while issuing regular commentaries through Prison Radio on a plethora of topics including racism, militarism, poverty and the plight of the more than two million people incarcerated in the U.S. The most recent book that he edited entitled "Beneath the Mountain: An Anti-Prison Reader" was released in July of this year.

His case has prompted thousands of rallies and demonstrations over the decades. Every

year on April 24 (his birthday) and December 9 (his arrest anniversary), there are demonstrations in Philadelphia to demand his immediate release from prison.

His case has become a national and international cause celebre. For people throughout North America and in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, the name of Mumia Abu-Jamal is widely known as millions continue to call for his freedom.

## **How Did We Get Here?**

Mumia had been a founding member of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Black Panther Party in 1969 at the height of the United States government's counter-intelligence program aimed at neutralizing the revolutionary movement. After the demise of the BPP, he continued to work as a journalist and community organizer while eventually becoming a staunch supporter of the MOVE organization which was started in Philadelphia during the early 1970s.

In a biographical entry on the Prison Radio website, [it says of](#) Mumia's legacy:

"In the late 1970s, Abu-Jamal worked as a reporter for radio stations throughout the Delaware Valley. He was a staff reporter for WUHY (now WHYI), the NPR flagship station, and he filed nationally for All Things Considered and the Morning Report. Along with his team at Philadelphia's WUHY, he won the prestigious Major Armstrong Award (1980) from Columbia University for excellence in broadcasting. In 1981, Abu-Jamal was elected president of the Association of Black Journalists' Philadelphia chapter.... Currently, he's serving life without parole at SCI Mahanoy in Frackville, PA. Abu-Jamal's 1982 trial and its resultant first-degree murder conviction have been criticized as unconstitutionally corrupt by legal and activist groups for decades, including by Amnesty International and Nobel Laureates Nelson Mandela, Toni Morrison, and Desmond Tutu. Abu-Jamal earned his BA at Goddard College in 1996; his MA from California State University, Dominguez Hills in 1999; and an honorary Doctor of Law from the New College of California in 1996. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in the History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz."

Since the late 1960s, hundreds of activists have been locked up and framed as political prisoners for crimes in which they did not commit. Many of these freedom fighters served decades in prison as some even died behind bars.

Others, such as Dr. Mutulu Shakur and Ruchell Magee were released in their final months suffering from terminal illnesses. This treatment of activists illustrates clearly the social character of the U.S. political system which maintains the nationally oppressed peoples under repressive and exploitative conditions.

Assata Shakur, a veteran member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA), was broken out of prison by her comrades in New Jersey 45 years ago in November 1979. Eventually, Shakur was granted political asylum in Cuba.

## **Leonard Peltier Could be Freed from Federal Prison by Outgoing President Joe Biden**

American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Leonard Peltier has languished in federal prisons since being illegally extradited from Canada by the U.S. government in 1976. Peltier was

railroaded into prison for the killing of two Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents at the Pine Ridge Indian reservation in South Dakota during 1975.

Image: Mumia and Leonard



Although many politicians, celebrities and mass organizations have petitioned for a new trial or the release of Peltier, the organizer has remained in prison for 47 years. AIM grew out of the upsurge and spin-offs from the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s. The organization was founded in 1968 to fight for the rights of indigenous people whose land and lives were stolen by European settler-colonialism.

Peltier was denied parole again in June 2024. However, with the imminent departure of President Joe Biden on January 20, 2025, he could be released. Peltier and AIM have been longtime allies with the Black Liberation Movement and other oppressed peoples.

[A report published by The Hill](#) points out that a Senate Democrat has called upon Biden to release the AIM leader:

“Senate Indian Affairs Committee Chair Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) called on President Biden to grant clemency to Leonard Peltier, a Native American activist convicted of murdering two FBI agents in a controversial 1977 trial, before he leaves office. Peltier is ‘among those who deserve grace and mercy,’ Schatz said on the Senate floor Wednesday (Dec. 4). ‘If there was ever a case that merited compassionate release, Leonard Peltier’s is it,’ he continued. ‘This is exactly what that awesome presidential power is for: to right a historic wrong. And if not that, then to show mercy and let an old man die with his family.’”

Indigenous people have been denied fundamental human rights, civil rights and the right to self-determination for centuries. The release of Peltier would by the least the federal government could do to make partial amends for the genocidal policies enacted by the U.S. since its inception.

Supporters of Peltier are encouraging people to contact the White House to demand the granting of clemency by Biden to this Indigenous leader who has been imprisoned for nearly five decades. An online petition can be signed by logging on to the following URL: click [here](#).

## **Worsening Prison Conditions Prompting Self-Immolation in Virginia**

The cases of Mumia Abu-Jamal and Leonard Peltier are representative of the inhumane treatment that is routinely meted out by the U.S. ruling class to oppressed peoples and their organizational representatives. Disproportionately people of color, the poor and working

class are the ones who are subjected to the profiling, arrest and prosecution by the judicial system.

As a result of the unbearable conditions of people within the prison-industrial-complex, some inmates have begun to set themselves on fire as a form of protest against their treatment. At the Red Onion State Prison in Virginia there have been numerous cases of self-immolation.

Prison Radio broke this story earlier in the year. In one report the media outlet [says that](#):

“DeAndre Gordon, Demetrius Wallace, Tre’vaughn Brown, and Ekong Eshiet, prisoners at Red Onion, have set themselves on fire while demanding to be taken ‘off the mountain.’ The warden confirmed six men burned themselves in protest. Prisoners report the total is over a dozen men treated for burns. A number were taken for skin grafts, seven hours away, at the Evans-Haynes Burn Center at VCU Hospital in Richmond, VA. ‘These acts of self-immolation are desperate cries for help from at least twelve Black men, since September 15, who allege systemic abuse, neglect, and blatant human rights violations,’ the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus statement reads and continues. ‘People who have been incarcerated at Red Onion State Prison describe being regularly subjected to racial and physical abuse from correctional officers, medical neglect including the withholding of medicine, excessive stays in solitary confinement with one report of 600 consecutive days, inedible food having been covered in maggots and officers’ spit, and violent dog attacks.’”

Although the U.S. praises itself as being the leading democracy in the world, the country has the highest per capita prison population internationally. The overwhelming majority of those incarcerated come from the proletariat and the oppressed. (See [this](#))

Consequently, to bring about justice it is necessary to eliminate the prison-industrial-complex as a key aspect in the overall transformation of the country. Institutional racism and class exploitation must be upended to create just and equal society.

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**Abayomi Azikiwe** is the editor of the Pan-African News Wire. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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Articles by: **Abayomi  
Azikiwe**

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