

The Black Liberation Movement: Nationwide Campaign Seeks Compassionate Release for Dr. Mutulu Shakur

Former community organizer and acupuncturist is suffering from stage four cancer

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During the 1970s, amid a draconian counter-intelligence program (COINTELPRO) launched by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) against African American organizations throughout the United States, a cadre of activists in New York City sought to continue the Black Liberation Movement in the face of escalating state repression.

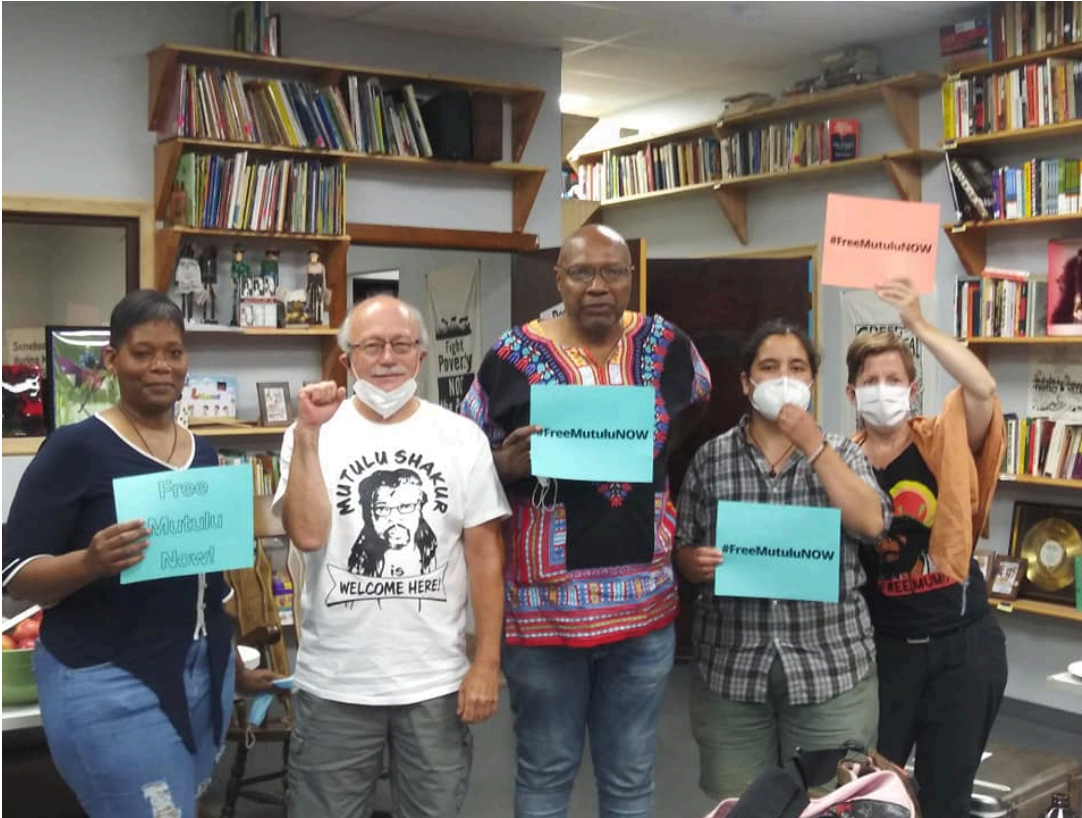
One key figure in these efforts was **Dr. Mutulu Shakur** who worked consistently to address the problems of economic underdevelopment and drug addiction gripping the neighborhoods of the South Bronx and Harlem.

Eventually, Shakur would travel to Montreal, Quebec in Canada and the People’s Republic of China to study acupuncture in order to apply this medical approach in treating people suffering from heroin addiction which had reached epidemic proportions in New York and scores of other urban areas around the country. Many strongly believed that the scourge of narcotics addiction was part and parcel of the government’s COINTELPRO project. He was the co-founder and co-director of the Black Acupuncture Advisory Association of North America (BAAANA).

After the rebellions which swept the U.S. during the mid-to-late 1960s spawning the emergence of the organizations such as the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the Republic of New Africa (RNA), the FBI under the direction of the Justice Department along with local and state police departments embarked upon a series of tactics with the strategic goals of neutralizing and liquidating the leadership of revolutionary formations. Although the bulk of documented COINTELPRO operations were launched against the BPP and similar tendencies, the entire African American movement for Civil Rights, Black Power and Socialism fell victim to the machinations of the FBI as well as other spying and destabilizing apparatuses

including the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Military Intelligence Corps.

Hundreds of organizers operating in communities throughout the U.S. were arrested, framed and railroaded into prisons. The BPP reported in 1970 that over a period of two years, 28 members of their organization had been killed as a direct result of police and FBI machinations.



Detroit meeting to win compassionate release for Dr. Mutulu Shakur, Aug. 5, 2022 (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

In March of 1968, the Republic of New Africa was formed in Detroit at the then 20 Grand Club, one of the most popular gathering places on the city's westside during the 1950s and 1960s. Initially, the organization brought together a broad spectrum of activists from across the U.S.

The RNA demanded the creation of a Black Nation encompassing five states in the southern U.S.: Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama and Mississippi. The idea was based upon several legal and political arguments which advanced the notion that people of African descent were due reparations for their enslavement and subsequent oppression and exploitation which did not end with the conclusion of the Civil War and the enactment of several constitutional amendments and Civil Rights Acts during the 1860s and 1870s.

The acquisition of a land mass along with an independent government would serve to compensate and liberate the African American people, labelled "New Africans" by the RNA and its subsequent mass organizations. After the formal founding of the RNA, leaders of the organization delivered a document to the U.S. State Department declaring their independence and demanding land to establish a separate Black nation.

[One source wrote](#) on the history of the RNA saying:

“Two brothers, Milton and Richard Henry, who were associates of Malcolm X, formed an organization called the Malcolm X Society, which was devoted to the creation of an independent Black nation within the United States. Milton and Richard subsequently changed their names to Gaidi Obadele and Imari Abubakari Obadele, respectively. The brothers organized a meeting of 500 Black nationalists in Detroit, Michigan in 1968. Exiled former North Carolina NAACP leader Robert Williams was chosen as the first President of the Republic of New Africa. The group wrote a declaration of independence and established the Republic of New Africa. The group anticipated that the U.S. would reject their demands and made plans for armed resistance and a prolonged guerrilla war.”

Mutulu Shakur and the Black Liberation Movement

Dr. Shakur has stated in an interview that he was present in Detroit during the first anniversary of the RNA in late March of 1969. A gathering was held at the nationally known New Bethel Baptist Church, pastored at the time by the Rev. C.L. Franklin, the father of legendary vocalists and composers Aretha, Erma and Carolyn Franklin, on March 29 of that year.

A clash outside the church when the meeting was concluding between two rookie white Detroit police officers and security personnel for the RNA resulted in the death of one officer and the critical wounding of another. Within minutes dozens of police officers invaded the church firing randomly despite the fact that people were still inside the building. Nearly 150 people inside and outside the church were arrested as suspects in the shooting of the police officers.

Nonetheless, then Recorder’s Court Judge George Crockett Jr. accompanied by Rev. Franklin and former State Representative James Del Rio arrived at the detention facilities. Judge Crockett immediately set up court proceedings where those arrested without probable cause were released. The incident fueled the already tense racial situation in Detroit which had been the scene of the largest urban rebellion during late July of 1967.

Judge Crockett was subjected to an attempted impeachment led by the notorious Detroit Police Officers Association (DPOA) and its supporters in the white community and the corporate press. However, Crockett remained in office while three people who were charged in the shooting were never convicted.

There were several other armed confrontations involving the RNA, the Black Panther Party and its military wing, the Black Liberation Army (BLA) between 1967 and the early 1980s. Dr. Shakur, a target of the COINTELPRO operations of the federal government, was eventually forced underground while working as an acupuncturist in New York City in 1980.

He was eventually captured by the FBI in 1986 and prosecuted under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) adopted by the U.S. Congress in 1970. The FBI tagged Dr. Shakur as the “ringleader” of an alliance encompassing the BLA, RNA, the Weather Underground and the May 19 Communist Organization. Due to the political atmosphere in existence in the U.S. during the years of the administration of President Ronald Reagan, he as well as several of his comrades were unable to receive fair trials within the legal system.

Nationwide Campaign Demands His Release on Compassionate Grounds

Although there was no DNA or independent credible eyewitness evidence linking Dr. Shakur to any of the armed confrontations with law-enforcement agencies, he was sentenced to 60 years in prison in 1988. Under the previous federal sentencing guidelines, he should have been eligible for parole in 2016. All of the other activists captured and charged in the events involving the liberation of BLA member Assata Shakur in 1979, the Brinks robbery in upstate New York in 1981, among other confrontations, have already been released from prison. Only Dr. Shakur remains in federal prison despite his terminal health condition at the age of 72.

[According to a website](#) advocating for his compassionate release:

“Dr. Shakur received his ninth parole denial in January 2021. After being diagnosed with life-threatening bone cancer yet denied compassionate release, his lawsuit against the U.S. Parole Commission and the Bureau of Prisons for unjust denials was expedited.... The acts of which Dr. Shakur was convicted some thirty years ago were committed in the context of a movement seeking equal opportunities for Black people who, it is widely conceded, were suffering catastrophically from disenfranchisement, segregation, poverty and exclusion from many of the fundamental necessities that make life worth living.... Dr. Shakur has accepted full responsibility for the acts that resulted in his conviction and for many years has expressed the deepest remorse for those who were killed and their families pleading that there is no justification for the loss of life for the victims. For over twenty-five years, Dr. Shakur has been a leading voice in the Black community calling for peace, reconciliation and healing for the countless lives lost in pursuit of basic justice and human rights.”

Organizers are continuing their work aimed at winning compassionate release. Appeals are being made to U.S. Congressional lawmakers and President Joe Biden. An educational campaign is underway to inform the public about the plight of Dr. Shakur and the need for his immediate release. Anyone interested in getting involved with these efforts can log on [here](#) in order to sign the petition and obtain detailed information on his medical and legal status.

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Featured image: Detroit press conference outside the Levin federal courthouse on Aug. 8, 2022 (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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