

Political Prisoners in America

By [J. B. Gerald](#)

Global Research, January 14, 2019

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Writing from another country I remember the Americans I'm supposed to forget, those forced into the lives that made them prisoners or simply targets of law enforcement programs. Some are religious people, Christians and Muslims. Many were Black Panthers. Some were and are radicals. Most are Americans.

All cared for their communities and people. They were condemned by society at large. Under the FBI's COINTELPRO activists in the Sixties and Seventies political and community movements but particularly the Black Panthers were targeted and hunted and engaged in fire-fights by law enforcement. Any police casualty brought charges of murder in court. How many community leaders were convicted for killing a police person? And yet through many years have maintained their innocence despite the mechanism which increases the chance for parole if a crime is confessed and regretted. One reason I don't forget them is because I don't really believe they're guilty. Here are updates for some political prisoners in the U.S..

(1)

Among U.S. political prisoners with the roots of imprisonment in the last century, is **Rap Brown** (Hubert Gerold Brown), known today as [Imam Jamil Al-Amin](#). As a young leader he was pissed, acerbic and unafraid. His late speeches are devout, eloquent, historically wise, American, concerned with the survival of his people, and religiously humble. His rhetoric frightened U.S. law enforcement since the 1960's. Convicted of murdering a police person (a crime confessed to by someone else with accuracy, three times - then recanted), maintaining his own innocence Al-Amin was sentenced in 2002 to life imprisonment without parole. Placed in a maximum security prison and principally in solitary confinement far from friends, supporters, family for years, he was transferred to Eastern U.S. prisons for medical treatment with several medical conditions which the prison system was slow to diagnose and treat. He was found to have a rare form of [blood cancer](#). His writings are suppressed.

He's not permitted interviews.⁽²⁾ With 16 years in prison, currently an appeal of his conviction slowly makes its way through appeals court. I think he's silenced because he's a wise man. Wasted by his country yet of deep human value he continues to frighten the establishment because he provides a bridge of peace between Islam and Christianity. *When the struggle becomes conscious then we understand that we don't have an option. Struggle is the price you pay for your soul. We all doing life without parole.* - Imam Jamil Al-Amin

[Abu Hamza al-Masri](#), born Mustafa Kamel Mustafa in Egypt, is a British Imam with a reputation for hating people he considers enemies of Islam. He was extradited to the U.S. to face trial in a Manhattan court not too far from the former World Trade Center(s), for alleged war related crimes in Yemen, Afghanistan and Oregon. At his trial the jury wasn't allowed to hear substantial evidence of his work for M-15 British Intelligence. Allegations against him were not based on any violence he committed but on his alleged responsibility for crimes;

most of the evidence presented was his words, sermons, statements, opinions, feelings, his freedom of expression.⁽³⁾ He wasn't found guilty of hate speech but of 11 counts of terrorism, and he is serving a life-without-parole sentence in the U.S. supermax prison, ADX Florence Colorado, essentially in solitary confinement, in "a cage like cell." Since apparently the conditions of his incarceration violate human rights law prohibitions against torture and degrading treatment,⁽⁴⁾ contravening the conditions of his extradition from Europe to the U.S., the Imam has appealed for removal to prison in Great Britain. He is blind and missing both hands which were lost in an explosion when he was younger (British media have continually referred to him as "the Hook"). With diabetes and psoriasis as well, under U.S. prison conditions at ADX Florence the stumps of his arms become continually infected.



An American, a Robert F. Wagner High School and Brooklyn College graduate who earned his M.A. in international relations in London, [Fahad Hashmi](#), as a Muslim was targeted for association with radical friends and was extradited from England to New York, held in solitary for three years before trial, was threatened with a 70 year sentence for storing a friend's luggage which held clothing for Al-Quaeda, and was sentenced on a plea bargain to 15 years which he is serving at ADX Florence, the supermax facility. Relying on technicalities and the prisoner's innocence, the prosecution and imprisonment of Fahad Hashmi affirmed American law but betrayed American justice.

In 2018 [Jalil Muntaqim](#) (Anthony Bottom) was denied parole for the 9th time. According to *Jericho New York* he "was convicted of the 1971 murders of two New York City police officers, a crime for which he accepted responsibility and demonstrated remorse. During his 47 years in prison, Jalil earned two college degrees and served as a counselor, teacher and role model for other incarcerated people. Jalil is a rehabilitated individual who poses no risk to the community. He will be appealing this very disappointing decision."⁽⁵⁾

Held for 22 years in solitary confinement in 2016 former Black Panther [Russell "Maroon" Shoatz](#) won through a legal action against Pennsylvania's Department of Corrections his reprieve from continual solitary confinement, as well as \$99,000; his case commenced in 1973 protested the prison's cruel and unusual punishment. The United Nations Special rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez noted the conditions of Shoatz's imprisonment as outside a civilized norm.

[Dr. Mutulu Shakur](#) (Jeral Wayne Williams) once of the Black Liberation Army (Black Panthers) was sentenced in 1988 to sixty years on RICO conspiracy charges and for bank robberies which involved deaths of guards and police. Led to believe he would be released Feb. 10, 2016 due to laws in force at the time, he wasn't released and was given a parole hearing for Dec.16, 2016, his 8th. Parole was denied. The government is suspected of

psychologically tormenting the well-respected Dr. Shakur so that he might confess to masterminding the 1979 prison escape of Assata Shakur. In March 2018 Mutulu Shakur filed suit against the federal government for his release alleging violation of his First Amendment Rights (principally his free speech) by the Parole Board as the reason for denying his release. ⁽⁶⁾

Arrested in April 1985, according to *Wikipedia* [Thomas William Manning](#) is expected to complete his current prison term in 2020, at which point he is to begin his next prison term of 80 years for another set of charges including the murder of a New Jersey police officer. Manning was convicted of shooting back after the officer emptied his gun at Manning and his group of families. The inhumanity of the sentencing was always intended to render the prisoner without hope. Attempts to trash and humiliate [Tom Manning](#), American, a Vietnam veteran, and each of the [Ohio Seven](#) (“United Freedom Front”, “Sam Melville Brigade”) suggests the bitter hostility of the system to white working class people if they assert both socialism and a brotherhood of black and white. In prison Manning has held to uncompromised anti-racist, American truths strongly, constantly, with hope, paintings and words. In 2006 a show of his artwork was canceled by a timorous University of Maine. ⁽⁷⁾

[Jaan Laaman](#), also of the “Ohio Seven” (“United Freedom Front”, “Sam Melville Brigade”), is serving a 53 year prison term, following a 45 year prison term. Both by court action and example he has become known as an advocate for rights of freedom of expression for prisoners, in 1977 winning his State Supreme Court case against the New Hampshire State Prison to receive his reading materials which is said to have opened prisoner education programs through New Hampshire. He is a founder of the website *4strugglemag.org*, an outlet for prison writing. On March 21, 2017, he was placed in solitary confinement for violating communications protocols (issuing of statements which apparently the prison system did not favour). He’s also threatened with transfer to a CMU (Communications Management Unit) to completely segregate his communications from the outside world. ⁽⁸⁾



The histories of John Africa’s movement and [Mumia Abu-Jamal](#) have been interwoven from the start in the tragedies which took people of faith from their lives and community, where the children of some were shot by police, where community workers and pragmatic idealists were ground up by the system’s violence. From one perspective they were falsely accused honest people, put in jail under insufferable sentences to silence them about the crimes committed against John Africa’s “family” by the Philadelphia police. The best known witness

[Mumia Abu-Jamal](#) who reported on the police bombing of the MOVE residence by Philadelphia police was subsequently charged with murder of a police officer and placed on death row. The injustices of his charges and trials, and courts and judges and incarcerations and threats of death against all of them are a grocery list of white racism to keep the black community in line, and Mumia Abu-Jamal's history is mythic in his survival over death row, beating his medical death sentence beating the silence imposed on him, to become one of the best known writers and revolutionary writers-from-prison in history. Under a ruling Dec. 28, 2018 by Philadelphia Common Pleas Judge, Leon Tucker, Mumia Abu-Jamal is finally granted an opportunity to argue for his freedom in a retrial. Judge Tucker found that the judge who presided over Abu-Jamal's previous and thought to be final appeal should have recused himself. ⁽⁹⁾ A day later six cartons of materials thought to be related to Mumia's case were discovered in the Philadelphia D.A.'s storage room. After assessment and if necessary these may provide Abu-Jamal's lawyers with leverage for additional appeals. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Mike Africa of the [MOVE 9](#) was finally released on parole Oct. 23, 2018. One of nine MOVE members convicted to 30 years imprisonment for the killing of one police officer who died of a single bullet wound in a police storming of the MOVE home; MOVE members were generally without arms and living under a peaceful ethic and it was always possible that the police officer was killed in the storm of gunfire from his fellow officers. Historically, the severity of the sentencing seems to have been an attempt to silence witnessing of the many police crimes in the Philadelphia Police's handling of John Africa's community group.

Compared to others here the [Kings Bay Plowshares](#) are up against comparatively short sentences for comparatively harmless actions. The religious basis of their protest against the full power of nuclear militarized America is also problematic, in that they were arrested because they chose to confront the government, rather than through the government's need to oppress them. For nearly half a century the [Plowshares movement](#) has broken the security of Nuclear submarines, missile silos and facilities to hammer on nuclear weapons, beating swords into plowshares. Their symbolic acts of faith are like prayer a worship of something stronger and more sacred than the weapons of mass destruction and as a group its members have, without injuring others been sent to prison for months to several years at a time. They're a help to the anti-prison movement in that they're innocent of crimes against other people and yet are condemned and treated as criminal. At their King's Bay Florida action April 4, 2018 having presented their passion play for Christ carrying real hammers, real blood amid real nuclear weapons they were arrested with a sign quoting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "The ultimate logic of racism is genocide," and began their long tedious journey through a court system challenging the faith of those in the court system. Once a decision is made concerning the "religious freedom motions" (the defendants were allowed the opportunity to present the court with the religious motivation for their actions as pleas for dismissal), the case could be dismissed or a trial date set before the end of January. ⁽¹¹⁾

In 2003 [Dr. Rafil Dhafir](#) was taken from his medical practice in upstate New York and sentenced to 22 years, not for any alleged violence but for sending medical supplies to the children of Iraq, victims of the U.S. and Coalition bombing campaigns. He was born in Iraq. His attempts to alleviate the suffering of the children there by supplying medicines, was in no way wrong though through misuse and misapplication of the law was made illegal. Medical supplies were wrongly embargoed. Dr. Dhafir as a Muslim, was referred to as a suspected terrorist by New York's Governor Pataki . To avoid his appearance as a

humanitarian the FBI also prosecuted him for medicare fraud and money laundering. Dr. Dhafir donated over a million dollars of his own for medical supplies to children. When a petition for Executive Clemency was prepared for him he refused to ask for mercy as a criminal because he committed no crime. Under Federal guidelines Dr. Dhafir is eligible because of his age for release since he has served at least 10 years (16 years in February) but his release requires the warden's approval; that hasn't happened. Katherine Hughes followed the injustices of Dr. Dhafir's arrest, trial and conviction.⁽¹²⁾ She quotes Dennis Halliday who resigned as chief of the UN's Humanitarian Aid program in Iraq, 1997-98, because he found the sanctions against Iraq, genocide. Of Dr. Dhafir he said, "I am stunned by the conviction of this humanitarian, especially as the US State Department breached its own sanctions to the tune of \$10 billion. The policy of sanctions against Iraq undermined not only the UN's own charter, but the Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Convention as well." Dr. Dhafir was obeying humanitarian law. By denying medical supplies to a civilian population it had decimated, the U.S. was violating the Convention on Genocide. Dr. Dhafir was placed in prison because he was innocent, and because the U.S. legal system has been denying its people the use of the *Nuremberg defense*, the citizen's need to counter his or her country's acts of genocide.

Dr. Aafia Siddiqui suffered a very strange conviction by a New York City jury which found her guilty of attempting to assault and murder the U.S. military personnel who were holding her prisoner in Afghanistan. As their prisoner Ms. Siddiqui was shot by them in the stomach. Tried in New York the young mother of three was peculiarly sentenced by a New York City judge to 86 years in prison. Currently the Government of Pakistan is attempting to counter this madness by seeking her return to serve the rest of her sentence in her own country. There is evidence that she has been additionally damaged in U.S. government custody. She was able to complain of physical abuse and sexual abuse at the hands of prison officials in Texas, to Pakistan's consul general. She accused male prison staff of urinating on things belonging to her. The gratuitous severe abuse of Ms. Siddiqui by U.S. authorities is not traditionally American and may be a psyops program to dehumanize Muslims, women or both, preparing the public for greater indecencies.

Ramiro "Ramsey" Muñiz, an Hispanic community leader who ran for Governor of Texas for the Raza Unida Party in 1972 and 1974, was multiply arrested in 1994 on what seemed to be manufactured drug charges and was sentenced to life without parole. The Raza Unida Party was hurt badly and may have been the government's target when it incapacitated Muñiz. He and his wife have always asserted his innocence and lobbied many years for his pardon and release. Now ill, on Dec. 10, 2018 he was released from Lexington Federal Medical Center (Kentucky) "on compassionate grounds under federal supervision."⁽¹³⁾

Juvenal Ovidio Ricardo Palmera Pineda (whose *nom de guerre* is Simón Trinidad) was extradited to the U.S. when captured as a rebel FARC leader in Colombia. A Colombian professor and peace strategist, accounts of U.S. government trials against him reveal juries that wouldn't convict him, numerous mistrials and one confused conviction for holding 3 Americans hostage (in a war zone controlled by FARC forces) for which he was sentenced to sixty years. *Wikipedia* reports that he's held in the ADX Florence Colorado supermax prison in solitary confinement. Colombia's civil war is officially at peace. He's a prisoner of war after the war is over, If released and deported he would face multiple charges under the current Colombian government.

Anayibe Rojas Valderrama of FARC with the war name, "Sonia," was captured in Colombia

in 2004, and extradited by the Americans to face drug charges. She was convicted on drug charges Feb. 20, 2007 in Washington D.C. to serve a sentence of 16 years. After serving 11 she was released on good behaviour and deported to Colombia last August where she was immediately charged with money laundering.⁽¹⁴⁾

On May 17, 2017, [Oscar López Rivera](#) was released from prison by President Obama. The Puerto Rican nationalist had served 55 years in U.S. prisons.

Initially eligible for parole in 1998 but denied parole ten times, [Robert Seth Hayes](#) was finally granted [parole July 24, 2018](#), after 45 years in prison.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

This article was originally published on the author's blog site: [Night's Lantern](#).

Notes

1. My most recent essay updating American political prisoners appeared in 2016: [“The torture of U.S. political prisoners: some updates” \(2016\)](#), *nightslantern.ca*].
2. “The unofficial gag order of Jamil Al-Amin (H. Rap Brown): 16 years in prison, still not allowed to speak,” Obaid H. Siddiqui, June 30, 2018, *SF BayView*.
3. “Abu Hamza found guilty of 11 terrorism charges,” Karen McVeigh, May 20, 2014, *The Guardian*.
4. “Hate preacher Abu Hamza: US prison is too tough,” Callum Adams, Dec. 17, 2017, *The telegraph*.
5. “Jalil Muntaqim Denied Parole Once Again!” Current. <https://jerichony.org/>.
6. “Tupac’s Father, Mutulu Shakur , files Lawsuit against the U.S. Government for Illegally Holding Him in Prison,” Sha Be Allah, March 29, 2018, *thesource.com*.
7. **A background note:** in the 1970’s Manning and his group which included several Vietnam veterans, worked out of an alternative bookstore in Portland Maine, community organizing, caring for prisoners and their families, antiwar and anti-racist. Portland police discovered a death squad in police ranks with the intention of disappearing the group. The bookstore was broken into, an employee raped, and they were under continuing threat from the KKK.
8. “Political prisoner Jaan Laaman is still being held in segregation,” staff, May 25, 2017, *4strugglemag*.
9. “Judge: Mumia Abu-Jamal can reargue appeal in 1981 Philly police slaying,” Bobby Allyn, Dec. 28, 2018, *WhyY News*.
10. “A Potentially Tectonic Event Shakes up the Mumia Abu-Jamal Case,” Dave Lindorff, Jan. 11, 2019, *Counterpunch*.
11. “Update on the Kings Bay Plowshares,” Dec 27, 2018 / “Legal Update,” Bill Quigley, Nov. 19, 2018, *The Nuclear Resister*.

12. "Is this Fairness? Is this Justice? Post-9/11 Muslim Charity Prosecution," Katherine Hughes, Sept. 20, 2014, *Truthout*. Her website [DhafirTrial](#) is recommended.

13. "Hispanic activist Ramsey Muniz free after 24 years in prison," *AP*, Jan. 9, 2019, *KRISTV.COM*.

14. "No Peace in Colombia as ex-FARC Guerrilla Sonia Awaits Release From US Prison," W.T. Whitney, July 30, 2018, *counterpunch*; "Tras ser deportada a Colombia, alias "Sonia" será procesada por lavado de activos," *Judicial*, Sept. 25, 2018, *El Espectador*.

Featured image is from the author

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [J. B. Gerald](#), Global Research, 2019

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [J. B. Gerald](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca