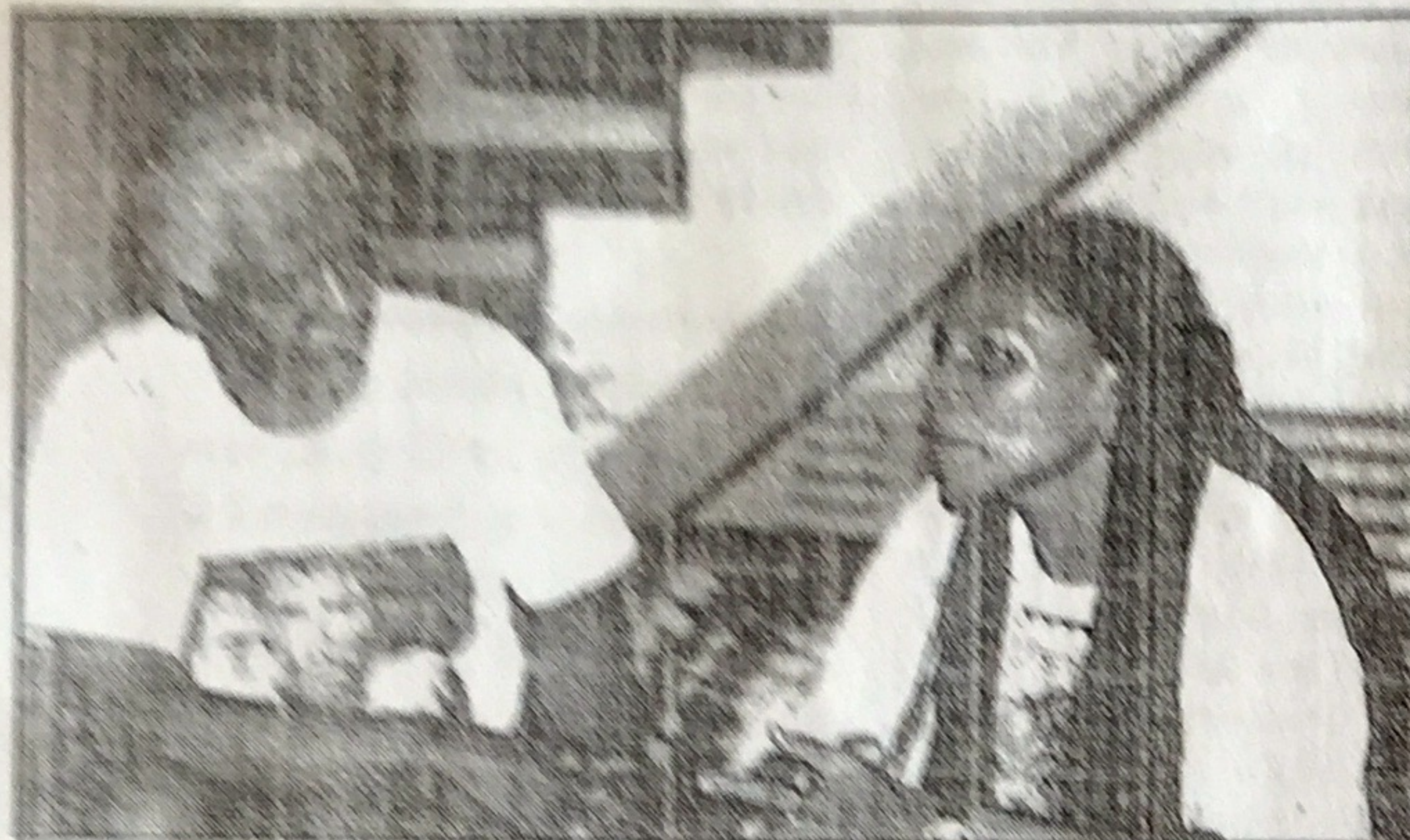


International Update

Assata Shakur:

Interview by Dr. Tolbert Small



Courtesy of Tolbert Small

Dr. Tolbert Small (left), The Commemorator Medical Editor and OGBPP Board member, visits in Cuba with Assata Shakur (right), former Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army member.

Editor's note: This interview with Assata Shakur took place in August, 1997, conducted by Dr. Tolbert Small in Cuba, where Shakur lives in exile. Assata Shakur was targeted by the United States government because of her involvement with the Black Panthers and the Black Liberation Army. Six times between 1971 and 1973 she faced trial on charges including murder, in which she was either acquitted or the charges were dismissed. Convicted of the 1973 murder of a state trooper on the New Jersey Turnpike, Shakur escaped from prison with the aid of other activists. She has lived in exile in Cuba since approximately 1978. This is the second The Commemorator interview with Shakur. The first interview appeared in the December, 1995 issue of The Commemorator.

Dr. Small: Assata, I think we all had our reasons for getting involved with human rights struggles. At the time we were growing up, our people had to sit at the back of the bus because they grew up in the South. If they didn't say "sir" they would be lynched. Police were brutalizing people in our community because of racism, and most of our family could not get an education. What were some of the reasons why you got involved in the human rights movement?

Assata: When I was a teenager, the civil rights movement was very important in the struggle of our people. I spent the earlier part of my life in Wilmington, North Carolina, where my grandparents lived. They had a

small business by the beach which guaranteed that black people could go to the beach, because North Carolina at that time was totally segregated. I went to an all black school. We lived in all black neighborhoods. There were white hospitals, black hospitals, white libraries, black libraries, so there was essentially total segregation and when the civil rights movement started, of course, we all saw it as something tremendously important. And although my grandparents supported the civil rights movement, they were not too happy about their granddaughter being part of it. I would actually sneak out to go to the meetings. There was a civil rights organization that had their headquarters a little down the street from my grandparents' business. I was always going in there and listening and finding out what was happening and if I could get away, I'd be there.

Then I went to school in New York and did some voter registration there when I was really young. I was really shocked at how many people didn't vote. I really became active when I got to college. By the time I got to college I had seen so much pain, that I just could not take looking at people in my neighborhood strung out on heroin, frustrated by poverty and unemployment.

Once I got into school there was a liberation movement taking place. This was the beginning of the black power movement. All of a sudden I was thrust into this world where people were

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Affirmative Re-Action?

By: Commemorator Staff

On October 10, Reverend Jesse Jackson — fresh from his latest crusade to save affirmative action — assumed a new position as Special Advisor to the Secretary of State and President of the United States for the "promotion of democracy in Africa," punctuated for the national media with a kiss from Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

The face of the African continent has been undergoing transformation throughout the last six months in favor of national liberation forces and against the world forces of imperialist interests led by the United States. It was on May 17, 1997 that Laurent Desire Kabila, leader of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo/Zaire and one of the few surviving followers of the first President of the Congo Patrice Lumumba, declared the Democratic Republic of the Congo, culminating 35 years of revolutionary struggle.

Five presidents from neighboring countries appeared at Kabila's inaugural podium, where Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni issued a call for pan-African unity: "Africa is neither Anglophone nor Francophone. My name is Yoweri Museveni, son of Kagata. I am Bantuphone and not an Anglophone, because from Cameroon all the way to South Africa we speak Bantu Languages." Museveni added that the Congo Alliance's victory "liberated not only the Congo but also all of Africa."

In addition to Uganda's backing, the Congo Alliance's military command had critical African backing from the government of Rwanda's Paul Kagame (former soldier in rebellions against dictators Idi Amin and Milton Obote), in addition to Angola, Burundi, Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia and the rebels who control Southern Sudan.

The victory in the Democratic Republic of Congo has inspired exploited and oppressed peoples across the region to action in a

domino effect. On October 15 in Congo Republic (a sovereign country on the western border of the Democratic Republic of Congo) General Denis Sassou-Nguesso's Cobra militia, with the support and aid of socialist Angola, took control of the capital, Brazzaville, and the nation's second largest city and economic center of this oil-rich nation, Pointe-Noir. Former President Pascal Lissouba who had favored U.S. over French oil company trade and political deals, fled Brazzaville in anticipation of the takeover by Sassou-Nguesso's rebel forces.

Anti-imperialist and anti-colonial forces in Rwanda and Burundi have similarly stepped up their fight to liberate their countries and respective natural resources from the clutches of western imperialism.

As special advisor, Reverend Jackson is charged by President Bill Clinton with "encouraging respect for human rights and improving the functioning of democratic institutions throughout the African continent." History shows United States-sponsored projects undertaken in Nicaragua, Chile, Haiti and elsewhere throughout the world served to undermine progressive freedom struggles and/or socialist movements while justifying military despots on the dole from the C.I.A., the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

In the name of "democracy" and "security," the United States supported, for example "democratic elections" such as those held in Nicaragua in 1989 in which the U.S. stance towards the Nicaraguan people was clearly "vote for Chamorro and we'll stop shooting you and mining your harbors." In El Salvador, the U.S. supported efforts to elect members of ARENA, the death squad organization controlled by the ruling autocracy to political office.

Reverend Jackson's assignment comes at a critical time. The United States, as Chair of the United Nations Security Council, is

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Assata Interview

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studying our history and studying black literature. I felt like I had just been taken out of a cloud and connected to my roots and to activism. So I decided to become involved in the student movement, and fought against the war in Vietnam. I also worked with many community organizations such as the Black Panther Party and eventually became a member.

People could take power over their lives, and not have to be victims or a robotic tool of the system. There is the possibility of taking control over your life, and if enough of us do it we will have a new world that will be more humane and more just than the world we live in.

For me, becoming involved politically was not only a form of helping my community but a form of helping myself. In working for the liberation of our people I began to liberate my mind by learning about liberation struggles throughout the world. I started to become aware of all these countries that I never had any political vision of before, nor any appreciation of their cultures. I learned about Cuba, and I learned about Che Guevara. My world expanded in a way that it would never have if I had not become an activist. And I enjoyed it. Sometimes we would go to demonstrations and they (police) would viciously hit us with night sticks. I didn't enjoy that part of it, but I enjoyed having faith that this planet could be changed. That gave me a feeling that my life made some sense and there was a reason for me being on this planet. People could take power over their lives, and not have to be victims or a robotic tool of the system. There is the possibility of taking control over your life, and if enough of us do it we will have a new world that will be more humane and more just than the world we live in.

Dr. Small: You obviously love your people, love humanity. Che Guevara said a true revolutionary is motivated by love. I know you were a member of the Black Panther Party

what are some of the positive things that you remember? I know you worked in the breakfast program, the free clinic.

Assata: Well, I worked with the Party pretty much from the beginning of its inception in New York and I did work to free the Panther 21, a lot of whom were friends of mine. My official membership in the Party began in 1969, 1970, because I really had problems with some of the work methods used by the Party. I come from a method of organizing that is very respectful. I have those same "down south" habits, I believe in respecting people and I don't believe in cursing in front of old people. At that time the Party had this style; they would go into churches and say, "If you don't support our program to free Huey, fuck you," things like that. I could not deal with that and I told them it was a problem.

They said that the Party was as strong as the people in it. So they convinced me to join it, officially. I thought that made sense and I thought that maybe I would have something to offer. In my opinion, it was the most revolutionary Party at the time. The positive things for me were working with people and the breakfast program, even though I was not used to getting up in the morning. I was severely cursed out the first days because I didn't get there on time. After that, it was beautiful just to work with the children, to just be useful, so I did all kinds of work with the medical cadre, since we were trying to set up a free health clinic in Harlem. I also worked with the children's program, teaching children about black history, which was one of my pet projects. I enjoyed working with people, I enjoyed the spirit of the Party, I enjoyed the discipline that was present in our offices. In Harlem we tried to be quite disciplined. I enjoyed studying, because it was in the Black Panther Party where I started to be part of a study group, and we started to study the works of Lenin and Kim Il Sung and a whole lot of other people. I was liberated. Going to school at the same time, I was always overworked and overloaded, but the activism and the people all made it worthwhile. And at that time we were naive, we really thought that the revolution was going to be in a couple of years, so everything seemed urgent. It was an energetic moment, it was a powerful time in my life in shaping the consciousness of my mind.

(Continued in next issue: Assata

Liberation Radio

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to hear the shot and the screams of Kantako's wife, who thought he had been hit. After brushing off shards of shattered glass, Kantako resumed broadcasting within minutes and has frequently played the tape of the assault. Incredibly, the Springfield Police, who have a sub-station located in the projects near the Kantako apartment, never came to investigate the attempted assassination, despite the fact that they monitor BLR daily. All of Springfield's 15 principal media outlets suppressed the story.

The Rodney King uprising in Los Angeles had its counterpart in Springfield's John Hay Public Housing Projects, where Black Liberation Radio is located. Some observers have called the "micro-rebellion" in Springfield the most sophisticated in the nation. Scores of young people outflanked the cops in

The Rodney King uprising in Los Angeles had its counterpart in Springfield's John Hay Public Housing Projects, where Black Liberation Radio is located. Some observers have called the "micro-rebellion" in Springfield the most sophisticated in the nation.

two nights of skirmishes and destroyed the police substation and the housing authority security office. Mbanna and Dia broadcast the action live.

The local authorities are currently attempting to evict the Kantako family and tear down the projects in which they live. Mbanna and his family continue to resist and continue to operate the radio station. Kantako views his mission as one of helping establish micro-radio stations as an educational resource for the people in urban neighborhoods all over the country and beyond. There is increasing support for his contention that social/economic conditions confronting the mass of Black people in the U.S. constitute a state of genocide. He views the establishment of independent, non-commercial Black liberation micro-radio stations as a key element in exposing and resisting the genocidal policies of

the U.S. power structure. Black professional class has developed a cheap, state media model that has great potential.

The biggest roadblock to creating a non-commercial network around the technological or financial. The establishment has the potential of hundreds of stations. Kantako is doing. Thousands of individuals with the guts, commitment, awareness, thirst for information to human liberation. They know that they have to upset the applecart about to put the organs of mass communication in the hands of the people.

The BLR story is a through alternative means of interest in micro-radio country and elsewhere. Berkeley and Radio among the better-known of community radio have sprung up in many Pan Africanist Congress established a Black network out of California politically repressed Human Rights envisaged as a revolutionary work its advocacy work a mission in Tetsuo Kogawa has free radio stations in

Frederick Douglass Black abolitionist and out a long time ago cedes nothing with never has and it never Kantako is pressing moral force and a sheer will power. He is that-be will allow continue is anybody's hinge on what the rest not do. Frederick Douglass "Find out just what power to, and you have amount of injustice will be imposed upon will continue until with either words or both. The limits of scribed by the end whom they oppress."

(Michael Townsend at the University of Springfield. Husayn widely-published writer President of New headquarterd in the area.)

Assata Speaks on COINTELPRO Today

Interview by Dr. Tolbert Small

(Continued from last issue)

Editor's Note: This is part two of an interview held by Dr. Tolbert Small with Assata Shakur in August, 1997. (See The Commemorator December 1997 issue), where Shakur describes her early involvement in the civil rights movement and how she became an active Black Panther Party member.

Dr. Small: Do you think the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) is still going on?

Assata: Oh, absolutely. I think it's accelerated, it's much more sophisticated, there are more computers now, there are more spies in our community because of drugs. When you inundate a community with drugs you create the conditions where not only are people incapable of taking control of our lives and

struggling, but they become prey to police agencies that want to use them to spy on the community and to carry out whatever dirty filthy deeds that police agencies want them to carry out. I think that even with the Freedom of Information Act passed in the 1970's, we didn't get a whole lot of information.

I've got my (FOI) files, and one small percentage of files is in this huge box, and what it consists of is hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pages blacked out. So how can anyone call that "freedom of information?" They tried to make me pay for it even when I was in prison. They said "we've spied on you, we've tried to kill you, we've destroyed your life, now you have to pay us so we can send you the papers relating to that and have most of the pertinent information crossed out." They really tried to make me pay. I think that we worked something out



Photo Courtesy of Dr. Small

Assata Shakur (left), former Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army member, now living in Cuba, and Dr. Tolbert Small, (right) The Commemorator Medical Editor and CCBPP Board member, in August, 1997.

where we would only pay a small amount, we had to pay for shipping. Originally they wanted me to pay an enormous amount per page, for literally hundreds and thousands of pages. It was adding insult to injury. So I think that, yes COINTELPRO is still going on, and one of the things I would like to talk about specifically are the victims of COINTELPRO of the sixties and seventies. Even though the FBI has admitted that they spied on people, tried to neutralize people, used every dirty trick in the book including framing people, they have never identified or admitted who those people are. So you still have political prisoners in those prisons who were victimized by COINTELPRO, targeted by COINTELPRO, but nevertheless, the state does not admit that they victimized any specific people.

Geronimo had to be imprisoned 27 years until they released him and they're still not admitting to what they did to him. Duruba bin Wahad spent 19 years in prison and they never admitted what they did to him. And all of those political prisoners, many of whom have been in prison more than 20 years, are still there, and they're saying, "Well, you prove what we did to you, you prove that we framed you, you prove that we used false evidence, we bribed witnesses, that we tortured witnesses, etc." And in many of the cases it's public knowledge that people are in prison based on testimony that was tortured out of people. It's obvious that Mumia Abu-Jamal was framed. It's obvious that the New York 3 are imprisoned based not only on perjured testimony but testimony obtained by torture from a witness who tried to say he was tortured and told what to say. It's public knowledge but the state is indifferent, the state is indifferent to political prisoners, the state is indifferent to prisoners in general.

One-third of young black men are either in prison or under the so-called "jurisdiction" of the criminal justice system. We are subhuman beasts

right now. The government on every level, whether it's the federal government or it's the state government, is really pushing and running on a racist platform, and whether they couch the racism in ending affirmative action (and affirmative action has never been very affirmative nor has it been very active in terms of eliminating some of

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—Assata Shakur

the effects of 400 years of racism, but they want to eliminate even that small bit of positive action). They want to cut that out. They want to blame everything on immigrants. They criminalize the black community and cut out any kind of social welfare program, cut out any sort of education program, jobs program. So what they're saying essentially is that these people should go off somewhere to a corner and die, "We take no social responsibility for them."

There is very little difference, in my opinion, between being a semi-citizen and a semi-slave so that the condition of African people in the United States is becoming more and more critical. There is more pain, more homelessness, and so I think that the answer to the conditions created by the state in our community is nothing more than lock them up, more repression. I believe that the COINTELPRO program which exists today, under a different name, is much more deadly than it ever was in the 1960's and '70's.

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