

BLUE-ON-BLACK BRUTALITY

BLACK AMERICA'S NEWSMAGAZINE

*Celebrating
10 Years
OF EXCELLENCE*

emerge

NET LOSS

**HOW A \$21 BILLION
INTERNET DEAL
GOT AWAY**

**EXCLUSIVE:
ASSATA SHAKUR
IN CUBA**

**FLORIDA'S
"JEB CROW"**

'HOOD REHAB

TIGER WOODS

MAY 2000

\$2.98US \$3.50CAN

05>



0 74470 01261

<http://www.emergemag.com>

**THIS
IS YOUR
LAST ISSUE**
Call 1-800-888-0488
NOW to Renew!
Please mention NLAS99 when you call.

FORMER BLACK PANTHER ASSATA SHAKUR

is still healing in Cuba, after evading COINTELPRO and charges of murdering a New Jersey State Trooper in 1973

THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Nation of Islam, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Black Liberation Army (BLA) share at least one thing in common: They all were targets of the FBI's counter-intelligence program (COINTELPRO). Former Panther and BLA activist Assata Shakur is one of the few COINTELPRO survivors now living in political exile.

From 1971 to 1973, Shakur was charged with six crimes, including murder, all of which resulted in dismissal or acquittal. On May 2, 1973, when New Jersey State Police officers stopped the white Pontiac she was riding in on the New Jersey Turnpike, an ensuing shootout left her traveling companion, Zayd Malik Shakur, and trooper Werner Foerster dead. Four years later, she was convicted of Foerster's murder and the assault of another officer, despite neurologists'

amount of repression at the end of the '60s and the early part of the '70s, which forced people to have to go to prison or to disappear.

EMERGE: Repression?

SHAKUR: Against political activists, specifically. There was a case, for example, in the Black Panther Party. We were the number one target of COINTELPRO, the counter-intelligence program that was set up by J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI to "neutralize" political activists. Hoover deemed the Black Panther Party to be the most dangerous organization to the security of the United States. What they did was not only try to kill — actually out and out kill — people like Fred Hampton and Mark Clarke, they set people up on false charges, they drove people crazy. They did everything to try and criminalize our movement, and try to destroy our movement.

EMERGE: What did the BLA mean to you?

SHAKUR: To be honest, I would be dead if it weren't for the people

A SURVIVOR

testimony that she was shot while seated in the car with her hands in the air and rendered physically incapable of pulling a trigger.

Sentenced to life in prison, Shakur broke out of a Clinton, N.J., state prison and surfaced in Cuba in 1987. Ten years later, then-New Jersey Police Superintendent Carl Williams wrote Pope John Paul II asking that he urge Cuban officials to extradite Shakur. That letter sparked events that brought Shakur back to the public's attention, and Gov. Christine Todd Whitman has sought Shakur's return to New Jersey to stand trial.

EMERGE: As a former member of the Black Panther Party, what do you consider its most important legacy?

SHAKUR: I think the most important legacy of the Black Panther Party was the fact that it was not just a party that wanted a piece of the pie. It was a party that wanted to make a whole new set of changes for the liberation of African people in the United States. I think that the Black Panther Party was one of the first revolutionary organizations that had a sense of not only struggling for the liberation of Black people, but had a vision of changing the entire society.

EMERGE: After the Black Panther Party, you were a member of the Black Liberation Army. What were the primary goals of that organization and how were they achieved?

SHAKUR: Actually, the Black Liberation Army was not an army, an organized body. What the Black Liberation Army was was very different in different parts of the country. There was an enormous

who took the risk, who said, "We are going to have you come into our house. We're going to take care of you. We're going to protect you. We're going to struggle with you in whatever way we can." If it were not for those sisters and brothers, who took those positions, I would be absolutely dead.

EMERGE: It sounds like one of the goals was keeping you alive.

SHAKUR: Keeping each other alive.... People can't even envision how many people were persecuted by the government. In my specific case, they were trying to accuse me of harboring or aiding and abetting fugitives.

EMERGE: Did you?

SHAKUR: No, not really. Not because I wouldn't have. I was in a very public reality and I was very above ground, and it was impossible at that time for me to aid or abet or hide fugitives, but I certainly would have. I certainly felt that people who were persecuted by the government on unjust charges should be protected, should be hidden, should be fed, should be cared for, and I was willing to do that.

EMERGE: In hindsight, what do you wish the BLA, or you as an individual member, had done differently, if anything?

SHAKUR: One of the mistakes that we made was thinking that we might not live until the next day. We didn't take into account that we had to build families, that we had to build strong relationships with each other. We had to make a way to educate our children, and have them not be isolated and not grow up alone feeling different from other children, but to have a community, a safe place where they

DIALOGUE BY LORI S. ROBINSON



Assata Shakur leads a solitary life in Cuba.

could express themselves, where they could have children their age who were politically conscious. I think many of our children grew up feeling isolated, not having that sense of community.

EMERGE: In the incident on the New Jersey State Turnpike, who shot state trooper Werner Foerster?

SHAKUR: The gun that shot Werner Foerster was found under the body of Zayd Malik Shakur, in his hand. Blood was on the trigger. So you can draw your own conclusions from that.

EMERGE: Forensic evidence indicates that your gunshot wound incapacitated you from firing a gun. Even *The New York Times* reports that the prosecution could not prove that you fired the fatal shot. What was your conviction based on, the premise that you shot Foerster or on the New Jersey law that states that all parties involved with killing a police officer are equally responsible?

SHAKUR: My conviction was based on the color of my skin. I was convicted by an all-White jury. The prosecution brought in not one single witness. I was shot with my hands in the air. We didn't have a name for it then. Nobody had heard of racial profiling. We didn't even think about that just driving down the New Jersey Turnpike,

EMERGE: You've said that you don't believe that there is justice in the United States for anyone.

SHAKUR: No, I think that the rich White people have more of a chance of receiving justice than anybody else. What they do is just buy freedom. It has nothing to do with justice. They just have almost immunity. Class immunity, race immunity, whatever you want to call it, but that's not justice.

EMERGE: What would it take for the United States to develop a system that is just?

SHAKUR: Well, you can't have criminal justice without having social justice, without having economic justice, without having educational justice, without having health-care justice. I mean for them, justice is just us — White people; just us — rich people.

EMERGE: In a 1998 open letter, you said you were ashamed of participating in your own trial because it was so racist. If you could go back to the trial's beginning, what would you do differently?

SHAKUR: I've thought about that a lot. During the trial, a few times, I really thought of just telling the lawyers, "Go home, I'll defend myself." I had done it before, but everybody felt that we

just being Black, was a dangerous thing to do. It never occurred to me that I was going to be shot like that.

The conviction was a forgone conclusion given the pre-trial publicity, given the all-White racist jury, and given the total prejudice of the judge. They used the so-called felony conviction law to not only charge me with the murder of a New Jersey state trooper, they charged me with killing Zayd Malik Shakur, even though the police clearly stated that he was shot by police. To be frank with you, when I found out I was accused of killing Zayd, it affected me psychologically.

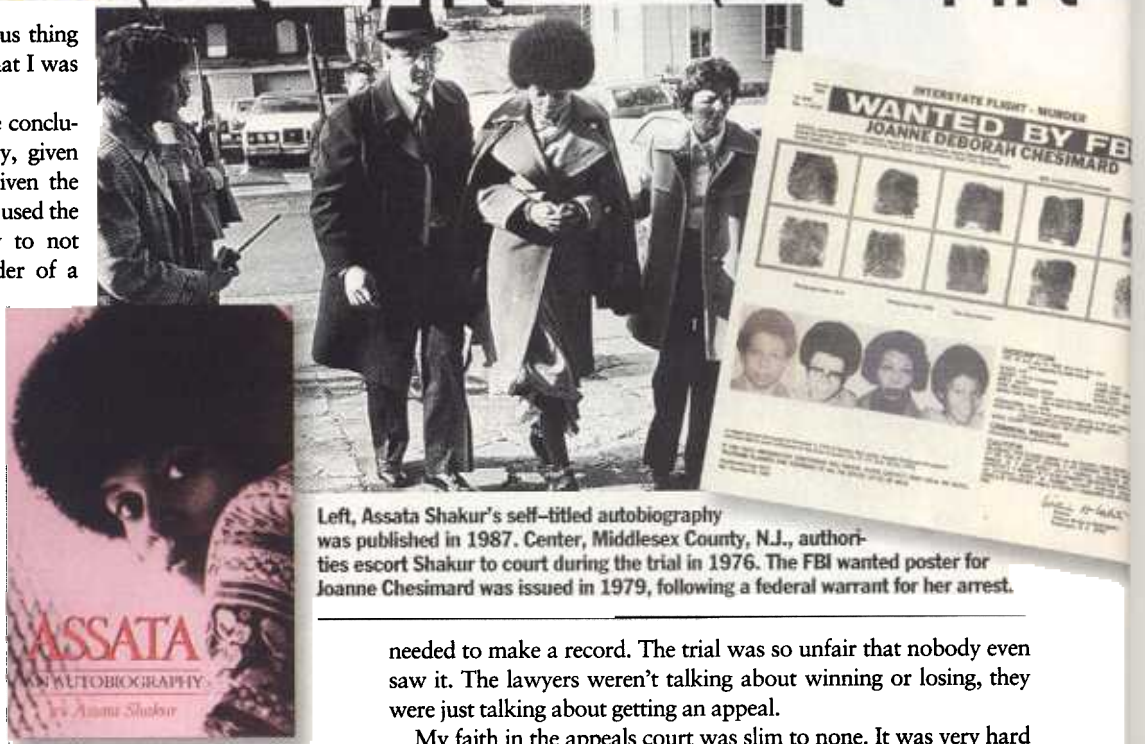
EMERGE: Did you receive support from other activists?

SHAKUR: No, it was very hard because most of them lived in New York. They had to come to New Jersey every day, and the judge would threaten to throw them off the

case if they came one second late. Bill Kunstler came on the case, this was after Stanley Cohen [my first lawyer] died. The judge called off every dime that was state money that was to be allotted for expert witnesses. He also tried to get Bill Kunstler thrown off the case, and actually had a hearing, which went on for weeks. Instead of preparing for the case, we were dealing with showing cause for why Bill Kunstler shouldn't be thrown off the case.

My other lawyer was Lennox Hinds, who had been at the head of the National Conference of Black Lawyers. They tried to disbar him. He was representing me on the civil case because during the whole time of the trial and more than a year before the trial, I was held in a basement of a men's prison, in solitary confinement, in a cell that was like about more than 90 degrees, with blinding fluorescent bulbs that were turned on 24 hours a day. His case went up to the Supreme Court because he told the truth, that it was legal lynching, and that I was being railroaded.

"The hardest pain for me is the separation from my daughter"



Left, Assata Shakur's self-titled autobiography was published in 1987. Center, Middlesex County, N.J., authorities escort Shakur to court during the trial in 1976. The FBI wanted poster for Joanne Chesimard was issued in 1979, following a federal warrant for her arrest.

needed to make a record. The trial was so unfair that nobody even saw it. The lawyers weren't talking about winning or losing, they were just talking about getting an appeal.

My faith in the appeals court was slim to none. It was very hard for me to conceive of conducting a trial with the vision of getting an appeal. The judge was like the prosecutors and the prosecutors had unlimited resources. We couldn't even afford to have basic expert witnesses. It was just so totally unfair that I should have just fired the lawyers and tried to defend myself. Everybody was like, I would be gagged in a minute. The problem was that, to be perfectly honest, I would have had a hard time admitting it then, but solitary confinement — week after week, day after day — does something to you. I was not my normal self. I was not as strong as I usually am. It got to the point where I couldn't even read.

EMERGE: You couldn't read?

SHAKUR: I couldn't concentrate. I would just look at the book my mother brought me. I remember doing math because I had to have some kind of stimulus — nothing, no radio, no television, nothing worked down there.

EMERGE: How long were you in solitary?

SHAKUR: Altogether, more than two years. So I started doing math problems like they have in Mensa, for people who are supposed to be super intelligent. They had these problems, and I would sit there and that was the only way I could have most of my concentration again. For me, that was the hardest thing because I am a people person and people are my joy, my life, my luxury. I was in a cell with a guard looking in on me 24 hours a day in front of the cell, and feeling like an animal. So I think that if I had it to do over again, I would defend myself.

EMERGE: You made a daring break out of prison in 1979. How did you break out?

SHAKUR: I did not break out. I was liberated. That's all I have to say about that.

EMERGE: How did you end up in Cuba?

SHAKUR: I don't want to talk about that.

EMERGE: How many times have you met Fidel Castro?

SHAKUR: I don't know. I've seen him and I've been introduced to him, but I don't really know Fidel Castro. It's not like, "How ya doin', Fidel?" When I came to Cuba, I respected Fidel. I had a lot

streets or whatever and they snuck this part in, in between. They used my slave name [Joanne Deborah Chesimard]. Part of it was the strategy to slide it in so that nobody would know about it. The other part is just a slave-master, racist mentality that is not only the case with the newspapers and television stations that tell you, "Nigga, we call you what we feel like calling you."

EMERGE: New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman has raised the bounty for your capture from \$25,000 to \$100,000. Has that affected your life?

SHAKUR: It certainly hasn't made it easier. It was not just a question of her raising the bounty. It was a question of the chief of the New Jersey state police also saying that he was going to look for private donors, people who would contribute money so that he could hire soldiers of fortune...that's a mercenary. That's somebody that will do anything for money, whether it is kill, kidnap, maim or torture. Essentially, it is the same effect as having a contract on my life and on my liberty.

EMERGE: Are you worried that you will be used as a bargaining chip or returned from Cuba?

no separation from my family... I've seen my grandson once."

of respect for him, and now I can say that as a leader, he has really given me faith. I can say that I love him. He must work at least 18 hours a day. He is a compulsive teacher; that's one of the reasons that he is so intelligent. Fidel gives such long speeches, but they really are classes. If you look at countries that are helping African people, Cuba is the number one country, in terms of sending doctors, training doctors. Because of solidarity that the Cubans have — not just the government, but the Cubans themselves — they have shown [solidarity] to not only Africans that struggle in the United States, but struggle all over this world. They have given so much with so little resources. You can't help but love them. If it wasn't for Cuba fighting for Angola, I don't think that South Africa would be free of *apartheid* today.

EMERGE: How was it for you to integrate into Cuban society?

SHAKUR: It was hard. I'm your basic Black sister from the states, and I miss my people. I miss my music. I miss the culture. I miss the verbal interchange. I miss my ebonics. It was difficult because I had to learn a new language. I had to learn a different culture.

EMERGE: Is the situation with Elian Gonzalez relevant to you, personally, and to African-Americans, in general?

SHAKUR: Well, the hardest pain for me is the separation from my daughter and separation from my family right now. I've seen my grandson once. Communication is hard. There is nothing in my life that is harder than to be separated from my child and my grandchild. That's a pain that everybody thinks that they know. So when I look at a government who is going to take a child who watched his mother die — he's 6 years old — and to say that that child cannot be with his father, his family, his grandparents...that's a monster. The people in Miami have no scruples, no principles. Who do they think they are? These Miami politicians want to use that child as a tool, a trophy. What goes through their minds? They're not interested in liberating anybody.... All they're interested in is getting the property back that they think they lost in Cuba.

EMERGE: A bill calling for your extradition passed unanimously in Congress. Some Congressional Black Caucus members have said that they wouldn't have supported it if they understood that you were on the list. Has anyone reached out to you to apologize?

SHAKUR: Well, Maxine Waters wrote a letter to Fidel Castro. She was very clear. She said that they had been bamboozled, that the bill had been introduced during a session that was supposed to be a noncontroversial session where the leaves are renamed with

SHAKUR: It's possible, but I believe that the people here in the government have principles, maintain those principles and are not afraid of the United States government.

EMERGE: Are there any issues regarding Black people in the United States that particularly concern you?

SHAKUR: I think we are becoming conscious as a people that racism wounds, oppression wounds. When you're wounded you need to heal. That was one of the things that I found out about my life. I came to the point that I realized, "Wow, I must heal."

EMERGE: How did you heal?

SHAKUR: I'm still healing. It's a process, coming to grips with all that pain. I used to try to just file it in the back of my head. I felt that people wanted me to be this strong Black woman and I had to be that. I am a strong Black woman, but at the same time, I started to be honest enough with myself and say in many ways, I am a walking wound. That means I have to heal, to try to understand what happened, to try to heal spiritually and not try to hide it.

EMERGE: Was there some turning point that enabled you to start expressing yourself and to start healing in a conscious way?

SHAKUR: I think when my daughter went back to the United States to study, I felt she made the right decision. But at the same time, I was grief-stricken. It was like I was losing her again. I was so full of grief I couldn't express it. I didn't even want to look at it. I was so tense, and I really couldn't focus in on what was happening to me until a friend gave me an article that dealt with the biological and emotional changes they went through when the mother separates from the child, and the grief and the anger. I wondered why she gave me this. Then I realized it, and a tear came. I realized that I must work on it, and I need to do that to be a better person.

EMERGE: If your conviction were overturned today, what would you do?

SHAKUR: I honestly don't know. I think that I would meet with some of my closest friends and get some opinions on what I should do, what would be the correct thing to do. It would not be easy for me to go back to the states. I would want to go back only because I love people there and because I believe that I have a duty to struggle for my people and to free political prisoners, to fight to save Mumia [Abu Jamal]'s life. Those are the things that I would think about, and try to figure out what my work should be. I tell you, it would not be easy for me. ■