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What to a Prisoner is the Fourth of July?

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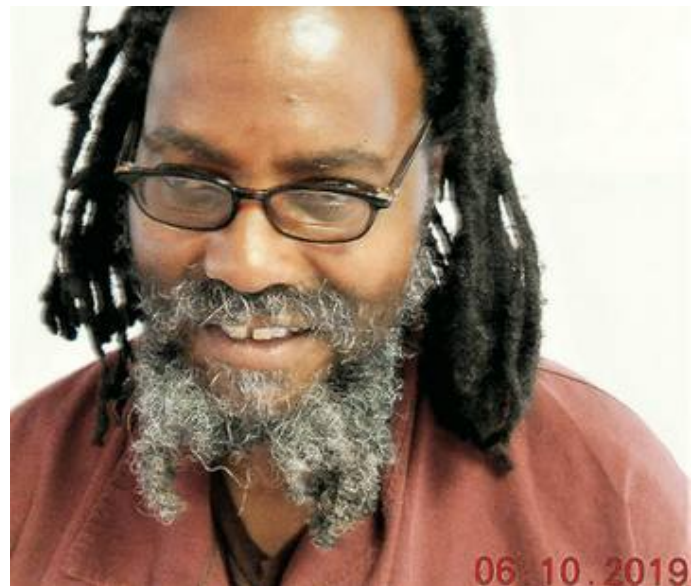
On the occasion of Nelson Mandela's visit to Philadelphia in 1993.

"At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh! Had I the ability and could I reach the nation's ear. I would, today pour out a stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed but fire, it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.

"What to the American slave is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all the other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence. To the slave your shouts of liberty and equality are

hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety and hypocrisy! A thin veil to cover up crimes, which would disgrace a nation of savages! There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States at this very hour”

— Frederick Douglass July 5, 1852.



Mumia Abu-Jamal

July 4, 1993, saw African National Congress President Nelson Mandela in Philadelphia quoting this Fredrick Douglass speech as he accepted the Liberty medal along with South African State President F. W. de Klerk. If the joint presence of Mandela and de Klerk were not enough to stir controversy, then the award presenters, Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell and U.S President Bill Clinton, certainly stoked controversy amongst radicals. Hundreds of Black Philadelphians, while certainly admirers of Mandela, took umbrage at de Klerk’s presence.

Although we the awarders are known as “We the People-Philadelphia,” the actual everyday people of Philadelphia had little say in choosing the Liberty medal awardees and less say in rejecting the widely unpopular honoree de Klerk. The choice of Liberty medalists was not made by the people, but by corporate Philadelphia, big business.

Why? Why were the people, many of whom have worked for more than twenty years against apartheid and for Mandela’s release frozen out, their protests against de Klerk all but ignored? When the African majority takes power in South Africa, U.S big business wants friends there. If one reads the names of corporate sponsors of the Liberty medal, it sounds like a roll call of the Chamber of Commerce: Unisons Corp, Pennsylvania Bell and the like.

Mandela, who has not voted in the government elections in seventy-four years,* and de Klerk president, by way of election counting only minority non-Black votes, has only the hope of liberty no more.

The white minority in South Africa has done its level best to stifle African liberty for three hundred years.

The African majority even after the awards still isn’t free.

From death row, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal

** In 1994, after the first elections during which Black people could vote, Nelson Mandela was elected president of South Africa.*

Reprinted from “All Things Censored,” essays by Mumia Abu-Jamal

