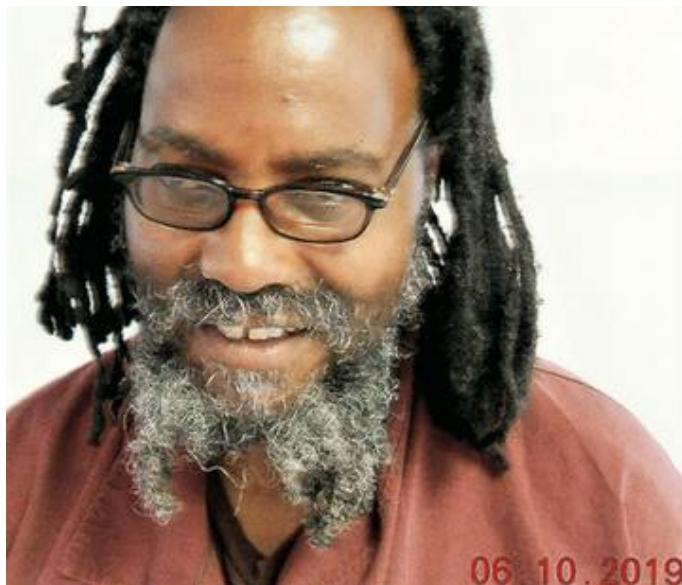


Mumia Abu-Jamal, now in his 40th year as an incarcerated prisoner, has COVID-19

written by Dave Lindorff
February 28, 2021



Mumia Abu-Jamal

Internationally known U.S. political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal has reported to friends and family on the outside that he has contracted Covid-19 in the Pennsylvania prison where he is incarcerated, and says he is having difficulty

breathing. His life is in immediate danger and he is in urgent need of hospital care.

This latest outrage was sadly predictable. Prisons across the U.S. have for years been allowing serious illness to serve as a form of “silent execution” of prisoners, many of them certainly innocent of the crimes they were convicted of. Many prisoners in the system, guilty or not, are serving unfairly punitive terms that keep them confined into an old age meaning they are particularly vulnerable to potentially fatal illnesses, whether that is flu, cancer, hepatitis, pneumonia or now Covid-19.

Noted journalist and political activist Abu-Jamal, now 66 years old and entering his 40th year in prison, is serving a sentence of life in prison without possibility of parole following his 1982 conviction of murder of a white police officer.

As I have written in my book on his case, [Killing Time](#), his conviction followed a trial that featured coached and lying prosecution witnesses (including police officers), prosecutorial misconduct, withheld exculpatory evidence, racial bias in jury selection and a racist pro-prosecution judge overheard saying at the start of the trial that he would “help fry the nigger.” His appeal process was just as badly corrupted. Significantly, it was fatally tainted by the refusal of a former Philadelphia DA, Ron Castille, who during his tenure oversaw the legal effort to defeat Mumia’s appeals, to recuse himself later when, as a state supreme court justice he ruled on those same appeals he had overseen.

The entire legal process in Abu-Jamal’s case has been an grotesque atrocity and an epic scandal.

Already suffering from cirrhosis of the liver because, like virtually all prisoners in American jails, Mumia was, until a federal court ordered it, denied timely access to medication known to be 95% effective in treating the Hepatitis C virus endemic in U.S. prisons. This was done by prison officials who were well aware that the disease, if left untreated, usually leads predictably to cirrhosis, then to liver cancer and

eventually to death. In Mumia's case, legal challenges by state attorneys for the prison system intentionally delayed that court order until he his disease had already advanced to cirrhosis of his liver.

Now Mumia has predictably caught Covid-19. I say predictably again because U.S. prisons, overcrowded and impossible to maintain safe separation in, are known to be breeding grounds for epidemic disease, and yet have not been declared priority locations for early access to the vaccines that protect against the spread of this deadly virus that has already killed half a million Americans.

This denial of vaccination to a captive population of 2.3 million people is nothing short of a crime against humanity. It is a crime made all the more outrageous because, thanks to the excessive sentences so common in this vindictive, racist, classist and deliberately cruel society, many U.S. prison inmates are old. The [Bureau of Prisons reports that 20% of its prisoners, for example, are over 50](#). State prisons may be even worse, with many of them routinely sentencing felons to as much as 40 years, or, in case of rapes and murders, life without parole. Compare that to most civilized nations which limit sentences to 10-12 years even for the most serious of crimes.

Given the current pandemic medical crisis facing the U.S. and the world, the U.S. and all 50 states should *immediately* order the release of all older prisoners over the age of 50 unless a solid case can be made in individual instances that some older prisoner poses a grave risk of committing a violent act if released.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is not such a prisoner, having been a non-violent model prisoner for his entire 39 years of incarceration.

Free Mumia and all older inmates in Pennsylvania's prisons immediately!

There is a [virtual rally for Mumia's release set for March 6](#)

Dave Lindorff is author of “Killing Time: An Investigation into the Death Row Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal” (Common Courage Press, 2003)

Source: [This can't be happening!](#)

