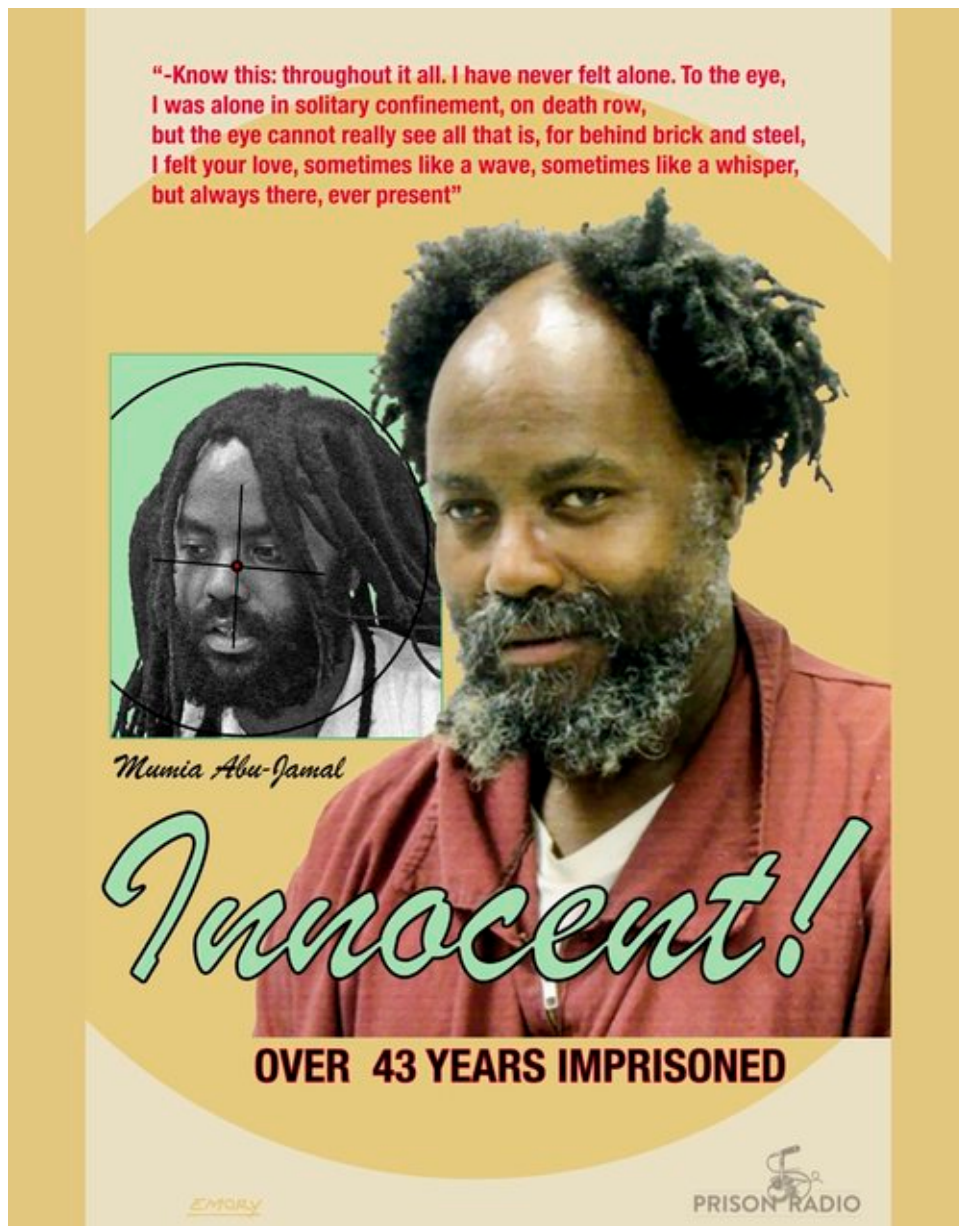




Struggle-La-Lucha.org

Mumia embraces the LGBTQ+ movement

written by Lallan Schoenstein
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Poster by Emory Douglas for PrisonRadio.com
available at: tinyurl.com/Emory-Mumia-stickersposter

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a brilliant and empathetic revolutionary journalist known as “the Voice of the Voiceless,” hailed as a leader of people working for peace and justice. He is a father, a grandfather, and a longtime ally of the lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer plus (LGBTQ+) movement. He has been incarcerated for 43 years, since

Dec. 9, 1981. Few political prisoners have been held behind bars for this staggering length of time.

At the time of his arrest, Mumia, a reporter for the Black Panther Party, was president of the Philadelphia chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists. By the age of 15, because of his news reports, the FBI had begun tracking the young writer through its draconian and illegal program known as COINTELPRO – not for violent behavior, but because of his “inclination to appear and speak at public gatherings.”

Reporting on police brutality and the MOVE siege

It is widely viewed that the racist Philadelphia Police Department targeted Mumia because of his courageous reporting on police brutality. Specifically, he was writing about the police attacks on the MOVE organization, which culminated in a year-long siege of the MOVE house. In 1978, nine members of MOVE were falsely charged with the murder of a police officer. In his coverage of the trial, Abu-Jamal pointed out that the officer was most likely killed in the barrage of police crossfire.

Decades of solitary confinement

Mumia, a U.S. political prisoner, served 29 years in solitary confinement on death row. Following a powerful international campaign demanding “Freedom for MUMIA,” his death sentence was ruled unconstitutional. Now he has a life-without-parole sentence. Mumia Abu-Jamal has said: “My only crime that night is that I survived.”

Countless due process violations began just moments after Abu-Jamal was found critically wounded, shot through the chest near the prone body of Officer Daniel Faulkner. From that moment on, members of the Philadelphia Police Department began to manufacture Abu-Jamal’s guilt, conceal his innocence, and charge him with

murder.

From early on, it was established that Abu-Jamal's trial was patently unjust. Philadelphia prosecutors excluded Black people from juries. In Abu-Jamal's case, 11 out of the 15 peremptory strikes were made to bar Black people from his jury.

His conviction came in a trial that Amnesty International and numerous human rights groups said showed extensive evidence of prosecutorial, judicial, and police misconduct, and "effectively strip[ped] Mumia Abu-Jamal of any meaningful legal representation," all seriously violating international legal standards.

A few years ago, it was officially disclosed that cartons full of evidence had been discovered, hidden in a Philadelphia City Hall closet 36 years earlier. Mumia's legal defense team said this evidence would establish his innocence. Despite that, in 2023, Philadelphia Common Pleas Judge Lucretia Clemons ruled that it was too late for the evidence to be heard.

Support of the LGBTQ+ movement

In recent years, Mumia has become increasingly outspoken about queer and trans issues. In 2000, he wrote a commentary denouncing the brutal murders of three white gay men: Matthew Shepard in Wyoming in 1998, Billy Jack Gaither in Alabama, and Eddie Northington in Virginia, both in 1999. He was responding to an LGBTQ+ campaign in support of his freedom, called Rainbow Flags for Mumia, that Leslie Feinberg initiated.

"The sickening attacks on gay people in cities across the nation recently are a reflection of the sickness that simmers at the core of the American soul. It is here that a truly perverse hatred is bred, and from here that all attacks are launched against all who are seen as Other.

"This violence, which seems psychosexual in nature, is an attack on the self that

seeks to destroy a part of the self that threatens the self. From Matthew Shepard, to Alabama, to that bloody American ground that was once the seat of the Confederacy, Richmond, violence, spawned by the dark pit of hatred and fear, is unleashed by men who claim a false and twisted 'purity.'

"More often than not, those who find themselves attacking gay folks violently are replaying a violence that they grew up with, or that they continue to act out of, against their family or children.

"Is it a coincidence that Richmond, the city where a Black man was burned to death and decapitated, is followed several months later with the decapitation and torture of a gay man? I think not.

"This cruel and savage violence must be stopped — but it won't be the cops that stop it, for they are the agents of legalized state violence. The brutality that occurs in their own homes daily, the recent spate of cops who kill their wives and kids, more than proves it.

"The people are the solution! So, my thanks to the Rainbow! Ona Move! To Freedom!

In the 2012 book "The Classroom and the Cell: Conversations on Black Life in America," Mumia said in a transcript that "Huey P. Newton spoke out, back in 1970, about gay liberation. He didn't just mention it. He said, 'We, the Black Panther Party, support gay liberation just as we support women's liberation.' He saw it as part of the struggle for human liberation. ... It was the most forward position of any radical and revolutionary movement of the period, and reflected Huey's keen thinking on issues before his time.

Newton's 1970 statement, made by a Black Panther Party (BPP) leader, came just a year after the Stonewall rebellion, giving ground-breaking support to the then-

strong and growing movements for women's and gay liberation. Newton called for building an alliance with both movements."

Radio documentary: A revolutionary evolution

Mumia Abu-Jamal explained his decades-long evolution to open solidarity with queer and trans liberation in a radio documentary, "Mumia Abu-Jamal Embraces LGBTQ Liberation" produced by Bob Lederer, host of the program Out-FM on WBAI in New York. Out-FM is a weekly anti-racist program by and for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, gender non-conforming, intersex, queer, and questioning communities.

In his interview with Mumia, Lederer included an account of the prisoner's evolution on queer issues by Noelle Hanrahan, a lesbian journalist who has recorded more than 3,000 of Abu-Jamal's radio essays on prisonradio.org, which airs the voices of incarcerated people.

In the interview Mumia said: "When you think about what Huey said at the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention about gay folks and lesbian and queer folks, I must be honest with you, it was not well received by members of the Party. We were shocked in some ways, confused in other ways. But as usual, this was Huey at his finest. And he was a true revolutionary intellectual, who was usually ahead of his peers. ...

"And I thought about it in the same context as Dhoruba bin Wahad, who was one of the Panther 21, and he talked about gay liberation. So some of the most advanced sectors of the Black liberation movement began to think about it far more broadly and deeply than even when Huey made his call."

In Mumia's 2004 book, *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party*, he wrote about the Panthers' 1970 Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention in

Philadelphia, which around 6,000 activists attended. He called it “a way of developing a revolutionary superstructure that would be the groundwork for a new society” and noted the wide array of groups – of students, socialists, Native peoples, women, and gay and lesbian groups – were invited to contribute. Workshops were held separately by gay men and lesbians, the former more multi-racial than the latter, and the gay men – but not the lesbians – were allowed to present to the larger convention.”

Mumia wrote: “The many diverse workshops provided the basis for one of the most progressive Constitutions in the history of humankind,” citing calls for Black and Third World representation in governing institutions, national self-determination, sexual self-determination for women and homosexuals,” and the universal rights to housing, health care and day care. ... Much of the movement was. ... deeply macho in orientation and treated women in many of these groups in a distinctly secondary and disrespectful fashion.”

But he also noted that “women were far more than mere appendages of male ego and power, they were valued and respected comrades. The women really were the glory of the Party. And I mean, they were the Party’s hardest workers, the most disciplined members and leaders.”

Mumia cited the emergence in the 2010s of the queer-led Black Lives Matter movement as a major spur for straight Black liberation leaders to embrace LGBTQ+ liberation:

Mumia also spoke movingly of the lessons he has learned from gay and trans prisoners in the institutions where he has been incarcerated: He gave an eyewitness account of the horrendous oppression of incarcerated gay men and trans women.

“Well, you know, being in many ways, a blockhead and a nerd, I used to think that for a gay or even a trans man in prison would be a touch of heaven. It’s quite the

reverse. They catch hell from prisoners and staff alike. So think about the alienation in isolation that breathes in such a person. I've seen people - literally seen them - try to commit suicide by jumping off of a rail onto the floor. If you hit your head or your neck, you can kill yourself, and I've seen that several times, in several places, in several prisons. Prison, by its nature, breeds isolation in human beings and atomizes them to the extent that it further isolates and separates them. And for trans and gay men in prison, it's a hell in a hell, you know? They get the worst of it."

Confronting anti-trans violence

In 2019, [Mumia released a commentary](#) denouncing a wave of murders of Black trans women:

"In recent weeks, we have seen naked violence unleashed against trans women, directed against them by the state in the form of police beating and by rightist forces in this emerging fascist movement in America.

"What does this mean? Why now? I believe it comes now for a specific strategic purpose, for trans women stand on the periphery of the gay rights movement, not its nucleus. This means they are isolated and, as such, targeted by rightist forces to isolate them further.

"We must not forget that they are, after all, Black folks in the land and at an era where and when Black life remains cheap. Now add Black, gay, and transgender. See where the analysis goes? And if it's Black trans women today, it'll be Black straight women tomorrow and Black children soon thereafter.

"That's the nature of the fascist beast: attack those who seem weak, isolate them, destroy them. Since Charlottesville, we've seen the emergence of rightist racist forces that are committed to destroying Black life and to proving that Black lives don't matter.

“The lines of Black people are the literal foundation not just of America but all of us. We need to build a radical movement that protects all of us, for all of us can consign such racist violence to the trash heaps of history.

“From Imprisoned Nation, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal.”

Noelle Hanrahan of Prison Radio wrote: “I ‘came out’ to Mumia on my second recording trip in 1992. Sitting across from him, I said you know the committee in San Francisco that is your defense committee has 10 women on it. Seven are lesbians. He was shocked, yet open. I told him Alice Walker was bi, Angela Davis was a lesbian, Bayard Rustin, James Baldwin were gay.

“He was profoundly curious. Warm. He asked, ‘Why?’ I said, ‘We’re deeply oppressed by this society and those of us who are revolutionaries see our liberation bound intrinsically with yours.’

“Mumia, while complicated, is one of the warmest persons I have ever met. Mumia Abu-Jamal’s instinctual curiosity and warm wonder, his lack of judgment or distance and harshness, kept me coming back. I see him 3-4 times a month, strategizing about his freedom, because when we love we win, when we survive we win, when we fight we win.”

Bob Lederer ended his interview by thanking “the amazing Mumia Abu-Jamal for the interviews. Special thanks to two dedicated Free Mumia activists, Dr. Suzanne Ross of International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia, Noelle Hanrahan of PrisonRadio.org, Johanna Fernandez of the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home, Pam Africa, Dawn Reel, and Betsy Mickel. Thanks to Nathaniel Moore and Claude Marks of the Freedom Archives for providing the audio of Dhoruba Bin Wahad. And thanks to my Out-FM colleague and husband John Riley for providing production support, as well as to my two collectives, Out-FM and Resistance in Brooklyn, for advice. And thanks to WBAI studio engineer Max Schmid. Our closing music will be ‘Never a

Prisoner! Free Mumia,' by Rebel Diaz.”

