

## Rap Icons Godmother - Assata The Fugitive

Written by Robert ID1767

Monday, 08 August 2005 04:53 -

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With the support shown to the 'Hands Off Assata' campaign being so visible and being supported by many in hip-hop culture and by highly visible rap personalities, along with politicians and grass roots activists, we are all well aware of Assata Shakurs struggle.

The follow article was written by Kathleen Cleaver who was married to Black Panther freedom fighter Eldridge Cleaver.

Why has the FBI placed a million-dollar bounty on Assata Shakur? By Kathleen Cleaver

Twenty-eight years ago, in a highly disputed trial, an all-White jury convicted former Black Panther Assata Shakur of the murder of a New Jersey state trooper. In 1979, while serving a life sentence, she escaped from prison and eventually resurfaced in Cuba, where she was granted asylum and has lived ever since. But the U.S. government has continued to pursue Shakur, regularly increasing the bounty on her head and classifying her as a "domestic terrorist."

Last May the Justice Department issued an unprecedented \$1,000,000 bounty for the return of Assata Shakur, 58, who continues to maintain her innocence.

Kathleen Cleaver, a law professor and former communications secretary for the Black Panther Party, talks about why we all need to know about Assata, and why she must live free:

'I was startled when I heard about the \$1,000,000 bounty for the capture of Assata Shakur. What triggered this renewed interest in Assata? Why spend so much time and money to hunt her down when Osama bin Laden, head of an international terrorist enterprise, remains at large?

It turns out that FBI and New Jersey police officials revealed the million-dollar bounty on May 2 of this year, the thirty-second anniversary of the New Jersey Turnpike shootout in which State Trooper Werner Foerster and Black Panther Zayd Shakur were killed. Sundiata Acoli and Assata Shakur were arrested for the murders. Assata was severely wounded, shot while her

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hands were up. She has always insisted—and expert defense testimony from the trial bears it out—that she did not kill anyone.

But in separate trials, Sundiata and Assata were convicted of murdering Werner Foerster.

In 1979, while incarcerated for life in the Clinton Correctional Facility for Women in New Jersey, Assata escaped.

As the FBI circulated the wanted poster that called for her arrest, all over the New York–New Jersey area her supporters hung posters proclaiming “Assata Shakur is welcome here.” Cuba gave her political asylum several years later on the grounds that she had been subjected to political persecution and had never received a fair trial.

Apparently the million-dollar bounty has already been covertly offered by police to a relative of Assata’s for assistance in kidnapping her from Cuba. This bounty evokes the memory of those vicious slave catchers who were paid to capture and torment our runaway slave ancestors and return them dead or alive. This extraordinary bounty on the head of a Black woman inevitably brings to mind Harriet Tubman, that Underground Railroad “conductor” whose ability to organize escapes earned a \$12,000 price on her head from the state of Maryland.

Outraged slave owners added \$40,000.

Many freedom fighters I knew and loved, including Eldridge Cleaver, to whom I was married, were arrested and imprisoned because of our membership in the Black Panther Party. Our organization started in response to the gruesome war in Vietnam and the racism and injustice here that drenched our lives in violence. Demonstrations, riots, rampant police brutality and political assassinations marked those years when I witnessed thousands upon thousands of people arrested and hundreds killed. Many turned into fugitives to save their own lives, including my husband, whom I joined in Algeria in May 1969. That was around the same time that Assata, then a bright New York City college student named Joanne Chesimard, joined the Black Panthers.

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WE had a concrete ten-point program to end racial inequality.

The Black Panther Party demanded the power to determine our own destiny.

We insisted on decent housing, appropriate education, economic justice, an immediate end to police brutality, and other rights our people had been fighting for since slavery ended. We were not patient, we were not passive, and we were willing to defend our principles with our lives. Since Panthers couldn't be bought off or scared off, the government made the decision to kill us off.

Back in 1968 we became prime targets for law enforcement and intelligence agencies, particularly after J. Edgar Hoover, then FBI director, labeled us the "greatest threat to the internal security" of the United States. We were young and passionately determined to secure the freedom of our people in our lifetime. Joining the Black Panther Party at the height of this assault, Assata saw our leaders imprisoned and killed. Both Black Panther Party founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale faced the death penalty, and Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, leaders of the Illinois chapter, were murdered in a predawn raid while they slept. Assata reported that she was beaten, tortured and denied medical attention after her arrest, then continually threatened by police and prison guards while in their custody. There was no question that she felt her life was in danger.

Under international law and Cuban law, Shakur is entitled to the protection and freedom of asylum. There are no legal grounds for her return to the United States because no treaty of extradition exists between the United States and Cuba, which has been subjected to a U.S. blockade and trade embargo for more than 40 years.

Despite this, the U.S. government and the state of New Jersey have repeatedly called for her capture. The meaning of this new million-dollar bounty is to encourage and finance what amounts to a kidnapping, one that could end with Assata's death. Our memories are haunted by stories of fiercely independent Blacks whose dignity and pursuit of freedom won the hatred of enraged White men who sometimes murdered them, riding publicly in lynch mobs that no law restrained.

The government has elevated this barbaric conduct to the diplomatic level as a way to

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re-imprison one Black woman who dared fight for our freedom. The FBI and the state of New Jersey must be forced to obey the law. We cannot allow them to engage in lynch-mob diplomacy.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

For more information about Assata Shakur's case and what you can do to support her, please visit [www.handsoffassata.net](http://www.handsoffassata.net) , or call the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement at (718) 254-8800.

A listing of statements/articles in support of Sis. Assata can be found at [www.assatashakur.org](http://www.assatashakur.org) , in addition to flyers, banners, and activities in support of our Sista happening near you.

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#### Page 1

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#### Page 2

<http://www.essence.com/essence/lifestyle/voices/0,16109,1081943-2,00.html>