

Honor Harriet Tubman Today

Written by Mumia Abu-Jamal ID2413
Friday, 10 March 2006 07:07 -

In honor of The Conductor on the Day she Ascended to the Ancestors; The Talking Drum Collective present.....

HARRIET TUBMAN: WOMAN WARRIOR

By MUMIA ABU-JAMAL*

"I started with this idea in my head, "There's two things I've got a right to, death or liberty."--
Harriet Tubman

Born into a family held in bondage in Tidewater, Maryland in (or around) the year 1821, a tiny, brown baby girl named "Araminta" didn't seem like one to shake up the world.

The enslaved people on the farm called her "Minta," or "Minty," when she was a baby, but in the "peculiar institution" called slavery, childhood didn't last long.

It was at the tender age of 5, when "Minta" was rented out to a white woman nearby for "domestic work." On her first day, before breakfast, the child was lashed with a leather strap four times across her face. By the time she was 7 years old she ran away, tired of her treatment. She was so tired, and so afraid of being caught that she fell into a pig-pen, and competed with pigs for scraps of food. When she returned to the house where she worked, some 4 days later, she was beaten, whipped by a man.

Later, returned to her home farm, she was called Harriet, no longer house slave, but field slave.

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As a young woman, she made her way out of the house of bondage, and, not content with her own freedom, she resolved to return to the plantations to lead others out of bondage. She was so successful that she became a living legend to the enslaved, and a thorn in the side of the enslavers. The planters put out a bounty totalling \$40,000 (in 1850 dollars) for her capture, dead or alive.

In the hovels of the enslaved, a whisper of her name ("Moses") or the humming of a spiritual told of her presence and her mission -- freedom. She brought over 300 souls north, and built a deep network of informants throughout slave territory.

She so incensed the slavers that they pushed through the federal Fugitive Slave Act which deputized all whites in the pursuit or capture of a former (or escaped) slave, anywhere in the United States.

For Harriet, that meant slavery reached up to the Canadian border. So she started taking people up there for a taste of freedom.

She took her job dead seriously. When a captive, tired, scared, or hungry, wanted to turn back to the life he knew, he would find himself staring at a pistol in Harriet's hand, and an offer he couldn't refuse: "Go on with us, or die." There was no turning back.

When Civil War broke out, she left her home in West Canada, and came back down to do whatever she could against the slaveocracy. With her deep contacts in slave country, she gave important intelligence data to the Union Army, and she personally led several raids against Confederate targets.

One of the most famous was the Combahee River raid, in June 1863. Her contacts on the plantations on the South Carolina coast reported the placement of floating mines in the Combahee to block the Union Navy.

Under her guidance, the mines were removed, railroads and bridges were destroyed, and the Slaveocracy's most precious resource -- captives -- were liberated from the very heart of the

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Confederacy. In fact, over 800 of the enslaved were given passage aboard Union ships. It delighted "Moses" to no end, as she would later recall:

I never saw such a scene. We laughed and laughed and laughed. Here you'd see a woman with a pail on her head, rice-a-smoking in it just as she'd taken it from the fire, young one hanging on behind... One woman brought two pigs, a white one and a black one; we took them all on board; named the white pig Beauregard [a Southern general], and the black one Jeff Davis [president of the Confederacy]. Sometimes the women would come with twins hanging around their necks; it appears I never saw so many twins in my life; ...

It seemed she loved few things more than the sight of her people, free. She was a soldier for freedom.

Her words, fueled by a courageous heart, have echoed down the centuries; "I had seen their tears and sighs, and I heard their groans, and I would give every drop of blood in my veins to free them."

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