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To My People

Assata Shakur

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TO MY PEOPLE

Black brothers, black sisters, I want you to know that I love you and I hope that somewhere in your heart you have love for me. My name is Assata Shakur (slave name JoAnne Chesimard), and I am a revolutionary. A black revolutionary. By that I mean that I am a field nigger who is determined to be free by any means necessary. By that I mean that I can never be free unless all of my people are free along with me. By that I mean that I have declared war on all forces that have raped our women, castrated our men and kept our babies empty bellies.

I have declared war on the rich who prosper on our poverty. The politicians who lie to us with smiling faces and all the mindless, heartless robots who protect them and their property.

I am a black revolutionary, and as such, I am the victim of all the wrath, hatred and slander that amerikkka is capable of. Like all other revolutionaries, I have been hunted like a dog, and like all other black revolutionaries, amerikkka is trying to lynch me.

I am a black revolutionary woman and because of this I have been charged with and accused of every alleged crime in which a woman was believed to have participated. The alleged crimes in which only men were supposedly involved, I have been accused of planning. They have plastered pictures alleged to be me in post offices, airports, hotels, police cars, subways, banks, television and newspapers. They have offered over Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000) in rewards for my capture and they have issued orders to shoot on sight and shoot to kill.

I am a black revolutionary and, by definition, that makes me part of the Black Liberation Army. The pigs have used their newspapers and TV's to paint the Black Liberation Army as vicious, brutal, mad dog criminals. They have called us gangsters and gun molls and have compared us to such characters as John Dillinger and Ma Barker. It should be clear, it must be clear to anyone who can think, see or hear, that we are the victims. The victims and not the criminals.

THE REAL OUTLAWS

It should also be clear to us by now who the real criminals are. Nixon and his crime partners have murdered hundreds of thousands of third world brothers and sisters in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Mozambique, Angola and South Africa. As was proven by the Watergate, the top law enforcement officials in this country are a lying bunch of criminals. The president, two attorney generals, the head of the FBI, the head of the CIA, and half the white house staff have been implicated in the Watergate crimes.

They call us murderers, but we did not murder over 250 unarmed black men, women and children, and wound thousands of others in the riots they provoked during the sixties. The rulers of this country have always considered their property more important than our lives. They call us murderers, but we were not responsible for the more than 6,000 black people lynched by white racists. They call us murderers, but we were not responsible for the 28 brother inmates and the 9 hostages murdered at Attica. They call us murderers, but we did not murder and wound over 30 unarmed black students in the Orangeburg Massacre. We did not shoot down and murder unarmed black students at Jackson State or Southern State either.

They call us murderers, but we did not murder Martin Luther King, Kwame T'U, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, George Jackson, Nat Turner, James Chaney and countless other black freedom fighters. We did not bomb four black little girls in a Sunday School. We did not murder, by shooting in the back, 16-year old Rita Lloyd, 11-year old Rickie Rodden, or 10-year old Clifford Glover.

They call us murderers, but we do not control or enforce a system of racism and

oppression that systematically murders black and third world people. Although black people supposedly comprise about 15 per cent of the total amerikkkan population, at least 60 per cent of murder victims are black. For every pig that is killed in the so-called line of duty, there are at least 50 black people murdered by police.

Black life expectancy is much lower than white and they do their best to kill us before we are born. We are burned alive in firetrap tenements. Our brothers and sisters O.D. daily from heroin and methadone. Our babies die from lead poisoning. Millions of black people have died as a result of indecent medical care. This is murder. But they have the gall to call us murderers.

They call us kidnappers, yet Brother Clark Squire (who is accused along with nic of murdering a New Jersey state trooper) was

and their hunkies have committed some of the most brutal, vicious crimes in history. They are the bandits. They are the murders. And they should be treated as such. These maniacs are not fit to judge me, Clark Squire, or any other black person on trial in amerikkka. Black people should, and, inevitably must, determine our destinies.

Every revolution in history has been accomplished by actions, although words are necessary. We must create shields that protect us and spears that penetrate our enemies. Black people must learn how to struggle by struggling. We must learn much by our mistakes.

I want to apologize to you, my black brothers and sisters, for being on the New Jersey Turnpike. I should have known better. The Turnpike is a check point where black people are stopped, searched, harassed, and assaulted.



kidnapped on April 2, 1969, from our black community and held on \$100,000 ransom in the New York Panther 21 conspiracy case. He was acquitted on May 13, 1971 along with all the others of all 156 counts of conspiracy by a jury that took less than 2 hours to deliberate. Brother Squire was innocent. Yet he was kidnapped from his community and family. Over two years of his life were stolen, but they call us kidnappers. But we did not kidnap the thousands of brothers and sisters held captive in amerikkka's concentration camps. Ninety per cent of the prison population in this country are black and third world people who can afford neither bail nor lawyers.

They call us thieves and bandits. They say we steal. But it was not us who stole millions of black people from the continent of Africa. We were robbed of our language, of our Gods, of our culture, of our human dignity, of our labor and of our lives. They call us thieves yet it is not us who rip off billions of dollars every year through tax evasions, illegal price fixing, embezzlement, consumer fraud, bribes, kickbacks and swindles. They call us bandits, yet every time most black people pick up our paychecks we are being robbed. Every time we walk into a store in our neighborhood we are being held up. And every time we pay our rent the landlord sticks a gun into our ribs.

THEY ARE THE CRIMINALS

They call us thieves, but we did not rob and murder millions of Indians by ripping off their homelands, then call ourselves pioneers. They call us bandits, but it is not us who are robbing Africa, Asia and Latin America of their natural resources and freedom while the people are sick and starving. The rulers of this country

Revolutionaries must never be in too much of a hurry or make careless decisions. He who runs when the sun is sleeping will stumble many times.

Every time a black freedom fighter is murdered, or captured, the pigs try to create the impression that they have squashed the movement, destroyed our forces and put down the black revolution. The pigs also try to create the impression that 5 or 10 guerrillas are responsible for every revolutionary action carried out in amerikkka. That is absurd. Black revolutionaries do not drop from the moon. We are created by our environment, shaped by our oppression.

We are being manufactured in droves in ghetto streets; places like Attica, San Quentin, Bedford Hills, Leavenworth and Sing Sing. They are turning out thousands of us. Many jobless black veterans and welfare mothers are joining our ranks. Brothers and sisters from all walks of life who are tired of suffering passively make up the Black Liberation Army.

There is and always will be, until every black man, woman and child is free, a Black Liberation Army. The main function of the Black Liberation Army at this time is to create good examples to struggle for black freedom and to prepare for the future. We must defend ourselves and let no one disrespect us. We must gain our liberation by any means necessary.

It is our duty to fight for our freedom.

It is our duty to win.

We must love each other and support each other.

WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT OUR CHAINS.

We must fight on!!

JoAnne Chesimard

Fig. 1. "To My People." Third World Women's Alliance's *Triple Jeopardy* 3 (2) November/December 1973, 10. Courtesy of Frances Beale.

To My People¹

Assata Shakur

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The Real Outlaws

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They Are the Criminals

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JOANNE CHESIMARD

Assata Olugbala Shakur is a political activist, author, and former member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. Despite forensic evidence showing her innocence, she was convicted of the first-degree murder of a NJ State Trooper in 1973. In 1979 she escaped from prison, and in 1984 she was granted political asylum in Cuba. She continues to live there in exile.

Notes

1. Transcribed from Shakur 1973. Assata Shakur composed “To My People” as a letter while imprisoned in New Jersey in 1973. The National Committee for the Defense of JoAnne Chesimard and Clark Squire circulated the letter for publication in radical newspapers and journals, including the Third World Women’s Alliance’s *Triple Jeopardy* based out of San Francisco and New York City.

Works Cited

Shakur, Assata. 1973. “To My People.” *Triple Jeopardy* 3 (2): 10.