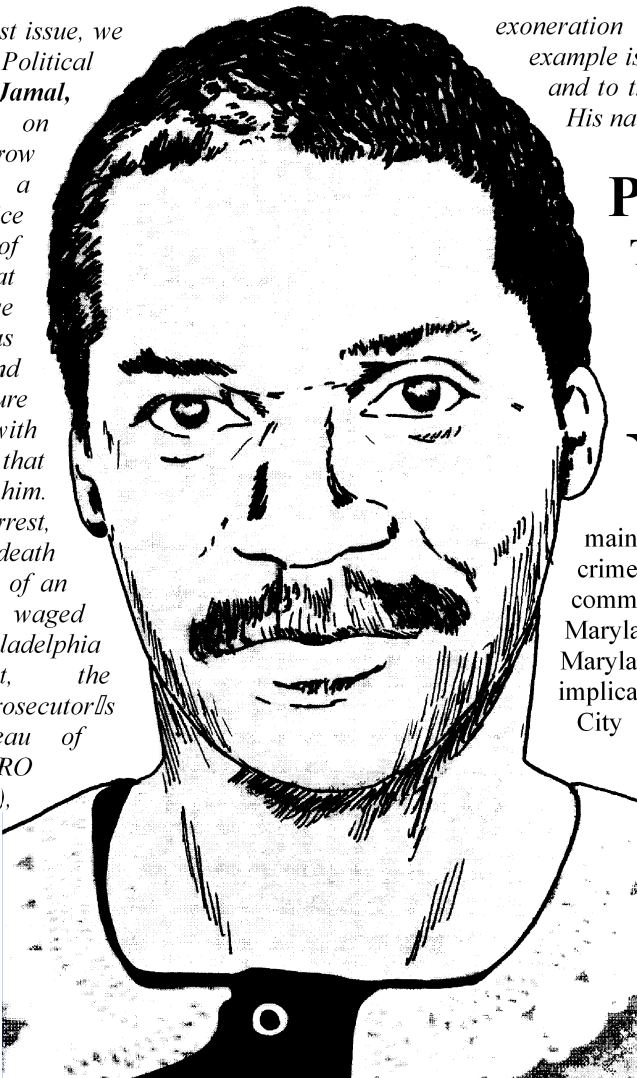


A Panther's Struggle: Marshall "Eddie" Conway's Fight For Freedom

EDITOR'S NOTE: Last issue, we reported on the case of Political Prisoner **Mumia Abu-Jamal**, currently being held on Pennsylvania's death row for the murder of a Philadelphia Police officer in December of 1980, a conviction that was obtained by the use of "evidence" that was at best contradictory and at worst a pure fabrication, complete with withheld evidence that could have acquitted him. Mumia's arrest, incarceration and death sentence are the result of an extensive campaign waged against him by the Philadelphia Police Department, the Pennsylvania State Prosecutor's

Office and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program), designed to eliminate, assassinate and otherwise neutralize potential leaders and organizations that were vital to the causes of Afrikan Liberation (such as **The Black Panther Party**), the **American Indian Movement (AIM)**, anti-war efforts and other organizations that opposed the status quo of U.S.-led Western domination of world affairs. This month, we examine the case of a home-grown Political Prisoner, one who is being held right here in the State of Maryland. He is also a veteran of the Black Panther Party, convicted on evidence that was obtained through fraudulent means of murdering a police officer in Baltimore in 1969. Like Mumia, he remains strong in his commitment to Afrikan Liberation and in his determination to prove his innocence of the charges against him, even after 28 years behind bars. Like Mumia, there are organizations in the area that are devoted to his

exoneration and release, and like Mumia, his example is an inspiration to those who meet him and to those who are fighting for his release. His name: **MARSHALL "EDDIE" CONWAY**.



Political Prisoner The Marshall E. Conway Case

By Sister Njingha
Marshall E. Conway Support
Committee

Veteran Black Panther Party leader Marshall Edward (Eddie) Conway continues to maintain his innocence of a 28-year-old crime, which he claims not to have committed. Currently incarcerated in Maryland House of Corrections in Jessup, Maryland, Eddie states that he was falsely implicated in the murder of one Baltimore City police officer and the assault and attempted murder of two other officers. Eddie states, "At no time in my life have I killed or attempted to kill anyone. I have no involvement with that incident. I'm innocent." Eddie claims to be the target of the local police and the FBI's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO), which was designed to destroy individuals and organizations that were considered to be politically objectionable.

Eddie asserts that he is one of many political prisoners in the United States as a result of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's and Assistant Director William Sullivan's war against the Black Panther Party.

According to police accounts, shortly after 9:00 pm on the night of April 24, 1970, Officer Donald Sager and Officer Daniel Sierakowski responded to a domestic complaint. When they arrived at 1201 Myrtle Avenue they talked to a woman who said she was afraid of her abusive husband. After the officers returned to their car to make out their report. While writing their report, three men walked past the patrol car. The woman who made the complaint signaled from her door for the officers to return to her home. Officer Sierakowski opened the door to get out, and a hail of gunfire hit their car from behind. Officer Sierakowski was shot four times in the

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stomach and in both hands. Officer Sager was shot in the head while still seated in the car. He was later pronounced dead at the hospital. Officer Sierakowski managed to reach the car radio and called for help.

Not far from the crime scene, Officer Roger Nolan and Officer James Welsh received a dispatch call and responded. Based on the information received about the direction in which the assailants fled, the officers went in pursuit of the suspects. According to their report, they apprehended two suspects on a lot across from Myrtle Avenue approximately four blocks from the crime scene. The officers handcuffed them and placed them in the back of their patrol car. The men were later released. Approximately three blocks away, near Fremont and Mosher Avenues, they noticed a man running into an alley. Officer Nolan left the patrol car on foot and pursued the man. Officer Nolan claims that as he turned the corner of the alley, the man shot at him and they exchanged fire. The man got away. A ballistics expert testified that eight of the bullets removed from Officers Sager and Sierakowski or found near the scene came from the same .45 pistol used to fire at Officer Nolan.

At the same time, police apprehended two suspects approximately two blocks from where the officers were shot. Jack Johnson, Jr. and James Powell (both later identified as members of the Black Panther Party), were apprehended under the back porch of a house. Several rounds of ammunition and a .38 caliber handgun were found lying on the ground between the two suspects. The next morning, another gun, a .32 caliber pistol, was allegedly found at the arrest site concealed underneath a sandbox. A ballistics expert testified that a .38 caliber bullet was removed from the skull of Officer Sager. Powell was charged with murder in the first degree, and Johnson was charged with murder in the first degree, plus assault with intent to murder.

Although there was no direct physical evidence to link Eddie with the events surrounding this case, a warrant was issued. On April 25, 1970, Eddie was arrested shortly after he reported to work at Baltimore's Main Post Office. According to the testimony of the arresting officer, the warrant was obtained based on information provided by an informer.

One attempt by the prosecution to make its case was to try to use one of the other defendants against Eddie. Jack Johnson, who was closely tied to the shootings by evidence, was alleged to have cut a deal with the state implicating Eddie in the crime. In return for his testimony, Jack was to receive complete immunity from prosecution. When Jack took the stand, he pleaded the Fifth Amendment.

In addressing this issue, court appointed public defender Attorney McAllister stated in his closing remarks: "You don't let a murderer go unless you're trying to get someone else." This attorney had been fired by Eddie, but Judge Harris insisted he remain as the defense attorney.

Another attempt at case building by the prosecution was based on the "stacked deck" identification made by Officer Nolan. Four days after the shootings, Officer Nolan was shown two groups of six to eight photographs. The first set contained a picture of Eddie that was taken six years earlier. The second set contained a picture taken of Eddie at the time of his arrest. Eddie's picture was the only picture that appeared in both sets.

To put the same person's picture in two small sets of shots could possibly influence and prejudice a person's decision. A lineup is

probably a better means of identification. Because of the influence possible by the people showing the photos, photos should only be used if there's nothing else available. Eddie also says, "By the time you got to the second photo of the same person, wouldn't you make the assumption that this is the photo you're supposed to identify?"

The most disputed piece of circumstantial evidence introduced by the prosecution was the testimony of a known jailhouse informer named Charles Reynolds. This informer was placed in Eddie's cell for four days. Reynolds was being transferred from Maryland House of Corrections in Jessup to the state of Michigan. There he would stand trial on previous forgery charges. For some reason, instead of a direct transfer to Michigan, Reynolds was placed in Eddie's cell at Baltimore City Jail some thirty miles away from Jessup.

Reynolds claims Eddie confessed to having taken part in the shootings and filled him in on the details. After Reynolds' transfer was completed, he sent a letter to the Baltimore City Police Department stating he had witnessed Eddie's confession. Reynolds asked for a favorable recommendation to the Michigan parole board in exchange for his testimony. Prosecuting attorney Ward and the chief investigator flew to Michigan to take Reynolds' statement. Reynolds told them that Eddie told him that the shooting of the police officers was an initiation mission ordered by the regional director of the Black Panther Party, Paul Coates. Reynolds went on telling details that could have been found in any Baltimore newspaper twice a day at that time. Reynolds claims Eddie said he disposed of the .45 caliber pistol in the harbor, returned home, and put up watch (this last statement was not explained). Prosecuting attorney Ward stated that he was convinced that Reynolds was a reliable source because the watch was never mentioned in the newspapers.

Eddie and many other people believe that Reynolds was deliberately placed in his cell. Eddie claims he knew he was an informer because the word had come to him through the prison grapevine. Eddie says, "I would not have given Reynolds the time of day and surely no conversation about my pending case. One thing all Panthers studied was the law, entrapment and underhanded police tactics." Eddie states, "Since they planted him in my cell to make a case against me, it would stand to reason that they fed him the information they wanted him to know, like a 'smoking watch'." Eddie also said, "When they first came up with the indictment, the watch thing was never mentioned."

Unlike the prosecution, Eddie was never able to present his case. At the beginning of the trial, Eddie fired his first lawyer, Nelson Kandel. Eddie says, "Mr. Kandel wanted to handle my trial as a criminal trial, and I wanted it handled just as it truly was, a political railroad." Judge Harris appointed public defender McAllister to handle Eddie's case. Eddie fired him and requested the court to allow Attorney Arthur Turco, who was at the time of the request Eddie's cell mate, to represent him. Arthur Turco was awaiting a decision on his own case and asked that bail be set for his pretrial release. Judge Harris denied Eddie's request and McAllister stayed on as his assigned lawyer. Eddie then filed a petition in court asking that his trial be halted on grounds that Judge Harris failed to allow him the Attorney of his choice.

In light of the judge's decision, Eddie requested to represent himself. Judge Harris granted him his request but insisted that Mr. McAllister remain at the defense table to assist Eddie if he needed

advice. As a result, Eddie felt he was not being given the right to a fair trial and refused to take part in the trial because he says he was being railroaded. Eddie only returned to the courtroom to protest and demand a new trial and then ask to be returned to his cell. Eddie did not participate in his defense and was denied a request to make his own closing arguments.

"I thought that any defense I put forth would be fruitless because it was clear to me--in the frame of mind I was in--that America and Maryland did not wish to really have a fair trial. I was under the impression now that the attorney general of the United States, who was John Mitchell at the time, had decided that this chapter [of the Black Panthers] was to be eradicated, and that we were the victims of that program I know I sort of blew my opportunity to have a trial, but my position was that I never had an opportunity to have a fair trial in the first place."

Eddie says he has an alibi and can account for his whereabouts at the time the crimes were committed. He declines to make a public statement because he feels that the place for that discussion is in front of a jury when he gets a new trial.



Marshall E. Conway:

My comrade, my brother, my friend.

By Paul Coates

Marshall E. Conway, my comrade, brother and friend, has been imprisoned since April 1970. Twenty-eight years ago he was arrested and charged with the fatal shooting of a Baltimore police officer and the attempted murder of two other policemen. Eddie was a leading member of the Black Panther Party. Eddie, myself and other young Black women and men joined the Party seeking an organizational vehicle to end the exploitation and degradation of Black people. We were frustrated by the limited success of the Civil Rights movement and the government assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. We united to actively change "the system", by any means necessary.

Unknown to many Black people at that time, the U.S. government had implemented a repressive covert operation called COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program) with the intention of disrupting, discrediting and destroying Black Nationalist organizations, particularly the Black Panther Party.

Eddie insists that his arrest was the result of repressive covert action. He has steadfastly maintained his innocence and the belief that he was singled out for punishment because of his leadership in exposing police agents within the Baltimore chapter. His theory is supported by the extraordinary tactics used by the state to convict him.

The state's weak case against Eddie would have been easily exposed if the Baltimore chapter had not been struggling for its survival. Eddie's defense was organized when our resources were nearly exhausted by other costly and complex trials. No less than

21 members and community workers were either prisoners or fugitives at the time of Eddie's arrest. Always few in number, we were overwhelmed by our legal predicament. Of course, this too was part of the plan to neutralize the Panthers. It was an effective plan used nationwide. We found ourselves in constant need of lawyers. Yet few lawyers were willing to work on Panther cases, especially when our dire financial conditions were discovered.

Consequently, Eddie went to trial with scant financial resources and no legal defense team. Against his wishes, he was represented by a court-appointed attorney whom he met only briefly, once at the city jail and once as he was entering the courtroom for his trial.

Eddie demanded that the court appoint Arthur Turco, a New York lawyer and Panther supporter, as his attorney. Mr. Turco at the time was Eddie's cell mate, having been arrested and charged for his support of the Panthers. When refused, Eddie asked to represent himself, a request that was approved on condition that a court-appointed attorney advise him at the defense table. As the case proceeded, however, it became clear that the judge did not intend for Eddie to defend himself. In protest, Eddie refused to attend his trial, returning only for brief appearances to renew his objections to court-appointed representation. Handicapped by inadequate legal representation, Eddie was predictably convicted in what is still remembered as one of Baltimore's most publicized cases.

Although some post conviction work was done on Eddie's case, we were never able to build and maintain the mass support needed to enlist legal and financial support. In the several years it took to move Eddie's case to the appellate level, a pro bono team of lawyers pointed to the unconstitutionality of several judicial decisions in Eddie's trial. For example, lawyers contended that Eddie received "hybrid" representation, a result of the judge authorizing Eddie's self-defense while at the same time permitting court-appointed representation. As such, Eddie had no clear representation, a situation found unconstitutional in other cases. Nevertheless, the Maryland courts turned down Eddie's appeal.

For his part, Eddie has remained strong, providing leadership to inmate councils and coordinating meaningful programs for other inmates. He actively conducts legal research to aid his own and others' defense. He exercises regularly to maintain his health and spirit. Recently, he experienced the joy of having a son obtain a Master's Degree in Engineering. Fortunately, although imprisoned, he has strong ties to two sons who were infants when he was unjustly arrested. Although prison life has been a challenge, Eddie has been infraction free for over two decades. Administrators, attorneys, and others who work inside the state prison system commend his exemplary behavior. While incarcerated, Eddie has:

- ◊ Earned a B.S. in Social Science from Coppin State College
- ◊ Earned an A.A. in both Education and Management Science from Essex Community College
- ◊ Earned a General A.A. Degree at Baltimore City Community College
- ◊ Organized literary and other events for fellow inmates
- ◊ Become proficient in computer graphics and founded a computer literacy program for inmates

The legal work around Eddie's case continues. The struggle for justice has been long and will take longer. We will not be satisfied until the "scales of justice" tilt fairly towards Eddie.



Thoughts from Within

A Regular Feature From Eddie Conway

Genocide or Self-Reliance?

The present conditions in America dictate that Black people in particular and poor people in general are faced with one of two choices going into the twenty-first century. On the one hand there is the choice of genocide. The current trends in our society of drugs, AIDS, imprisonment, unemployment, destruction of the family structure, lack of health care, lack of social support programs, and economic and educational deprivation (particularly computer illiteracy), just to name a few, will continue to grow if we do nothing. And by doing nothing, we choose genocide.

On the other hand is the choice of self-reliance. Soon, no one—not the government, big business, White America or liberal charities will be able to, or willing to, reverse these general trends. Only our collective efforts can save our community and our people.

The first step toward our survival into the twenty-first century is to form a supporting network among organizations and individuals—a united front. A closer look at the possibility of creating local and national networks will be the subject of a future message.

Yours in Truth and Justice,

Marshall “Eddie” Conway



EDITOR'S COLUMN:

MY MEETING WITH EDDIE CONWAY

by De Cliff.

He extended his hand and, with a big, warm smile, introduced himself: “Eddie Conway.”

I had just arrived at the Activity Room at the **Maryland House of Correction (MHC)**, part of the State of Maryland's prison complex, for a meeting of the **Writers' Club**, at which

time I was to meet one of the icons of the national Political Prisoners' movement and one of the country's longest-held political prisoners, **Marshall “Eddie” Conway**. The information I had read about him, as well as the accounts of my friends who knew him, made him seem larger than life, but at the same time a sincere, committed and kind man. Upon meeting him on the evening of Thursday, March 19th, I found both impressions to be true.

Standing at slightly over six feet tall and of strong build, but still exuding a gentleness that puts one at ease, Baba Eddie is a person you notice not simply because he dominates a room with his personality, but more because of the way he treats those around him, like welcome guests at his home. The unfortunate part is that, for the past 28 years, his home has been the Maryland House of Correction in Jessup, Maryland.

I had written a total of 13 questions I was prepared to ask him in case the opportunity for a structured interview presented itself, questions on topics ranging from the conduct of his original case and his part in it; his life at MHC and his relationships with other inmates (his various programs for inmates, including literacy and computer literacy programs, have earned him great respect from them) and correctional officers (“They know I’m a political prisoner and a model prisoner. ... With most of them we have a mutual respect. ... They don’t mess with me and I don’t mess with them”); how he has kept his own family together, despite 28 years of incarceration, better than many of us who are “free” have been able to do (or, as Eddie has said, “You’re not free, you’re just loose”); his connection with political prisoners across the country; and current efforts to win his freedom. But this was more a getting-to-know-you visit, an opportunity to meet the man without asking a lot of questions, and, since I expect to be able to talk with him on at least a semi-regular basis, the “interview” could come later. This day, it was more important to get to know him, to develop a rapport, and to feel the positivity he exudes.

The **Writers' Club**, of which Baba Eddie is a part, is an effort to help the inmates learn to express themselves in creative, positive ways as a means towards healing (or rehabilitation, or redemption, if you will). The inmates involved in the program show a real interest in learning about new things and in finding positive means of self-expression.

This issue of **KUUMBARepoirt** includes one of Baba Eddie's *Thoughts From Within* commentaries (See above). They give a small insight into the intellect and commitment he brings to the causes of Afrikan Liberation and Human Rights, causes he espoused over 30 years ago as a young member of the Baltimore Chapter of the Black Panther Party. I plan to share with you more commentaries from Eddie and Mumia Abu-Jamal, as well as conversations with Eddie, in future issues, as well as some updates on the MHC **Writers' Club** project, including the **Writers' Club Banquet** held April 14th at MHC, at which the inmates entertained several special guests.

I want to thank Dr. Ken Morgan, local organizer, writer and political activist, for introducing me to the **Writers' Club** and my resulting introduction to Baba Eddie. If justice prevails, the scandalous circumstances of the trial that led to his incarceration and his positive works since that time will assist those of us “on the outside” who fight for him to finally expose the truth about his case and win his freedom.

REFLECTIONS ON JERICHO '98

by De Cliff.

LAFAYETTE SQUARE, BENJAMIN BANNEKER CITY (WASHINGTON, DC), FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 1998:
What would the papers say?

Would they report that "hundreds of marchers converged on the White House to protest in support of a number of convicted criminals they referred to as 'political prisoners'"? Would they say that "members of a variety of militant, radical and extremist groups that claim membership in the black power [note the obligatory lowercase--Ed.] and communist ultra-left wing turned out to deliver an anti-police, anti-law-and-order message to President Clinton's empty Oval Office"? Would they refer to Clinton's trip to Afrika which strangely coincided with the March and make some remark about "poor planning" (although the March had been planned for close to a year, more than likely since before Clinton's trip to Afrika was even proposed)?

Or would they simply say nothing at all?

Downtown in the Nation's Capital was abuzz with marchers as they first gathered at Malcolm X Park on 16th and Euclid Streets, NW, then headed to 14th Street, where, under the watchful eyes of March organizers as well as City and Park police, they made their way toward Lafayette Square, directly across Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House, for **Jericho '98**, the much-anticipated March in Support of the United States' Political Prisoners (as mentioned in the last three issues of **KUUMBAReport**). Estimated by many participants and observers at between five and ten thousand in number, marchers from all over the United States and some from abroad formed a large, vocal phalanx cutting through Northwest DC, turning the heads of pedestrians and motorists and bringing people in shops and office buildings to the doors and windows to see what was happening. Supporters of Political Prisoners from the MOVE Nine to Leonard Peltier to Puerto Rican Freedom Fighters to Mumia Abu-Jamal to Fred Hampton, Jr. to Thomas Manning to (of course) Marshall **Eddie•Conway** flooded the Square to hear the words of national organizers for the Political Prisoners• Struggle and to receive inspiration and direction from former Political Prisoners as well as a broad spectrum of Civil Rights and Afrikan Liberation leaders.

Icons of the Afrikan Liberation (or "Black Power") Movement such as *Angela Davis* and *Kathleen Cleaver* were there. Lawyers involved in the Political Prisoners• Struggle such as *Michael Warren* and *Nkechi Taifa* were there. MOVE representatives *Pam* and *Ramona Africa* were there. Musical artists *Kongo* and the MOVE-affiliated *Seeds of Wisdom* performed music of liberation. Minister *Ben Chavis Muhammad* of the Nation of Islam (NOI) spoke, and onetime high-ranking NOI Minister *Khalid Muhammad*

was in attendance with lawyer and community organizer *Malik Zulu Shabazz*. *Dennis Banks* was among those who took to the stage in support of *Leonard Peltier*. *Geronimo jiJaga*, released from San Quentin last June after 27 years of imprisonment when a judge reviewed his case and found no evidence that he had committed the murder of which he was accused, addressed the crowd, as did *Njingha Conway*, wife of *Marshall Eddie•Conway*. Former Black Panther and **Jericho '98** organizer *Safiya Bukhari* spoke to effectively close out the speakers•program.

Among the activist organizations represented were the Afrikan Peoples Socialist Party, the National Peoples Democratic Uhuru Movement, various organizations representing Puerto Rican Political Prisoners, MOVE, Native American activists, the Black Panther Party, the NOI, the Organization of All-Afrikan Unity and many others. The groups shared information on their programs, their platforms, and Political Prisoners they supported. Journalists and representatives of the Afrikan and liberation/revolutionary press, including *Revolutionary Worker* newspaper, *Workers•World* and WOL/WOLB Radio, were on hand to record and report the event to their readers and listeners.

As writer C. Clark Kissinger, a regular contributor to the *Revolutionary Worker* newspaper, wrote in an e-mail promoting the event, "The Jericho 98 campaign seeks to educate and demand amnesty for over 150 political prisoners and prisoners of war presently jailed in the US. As members of political groups struggling for liberation and justice, their political actions were criminalized and severely punished with long and harsh prison sentences. ... While quick to point out human rights abuses in other countries, the United States has always denied the existence of political prisoners in this country. There is a long history of the governments attempt to quash dissent by any means necessary through counterintelligence programs, the infiltration of political groups, frame-ups of innocent people and even government-sponsored murder. ... Fighting for the freedom of political prisoners is a vital part of fighting the repressive political agenda so prevalent today. The dismantling of welfare and affirmative action, the suppression of political dissent, abortion clinic bombings and church burnings, the scapegoating of immigrants, the criminalization of youth--we say **It's All One Attack!**"

As far as the "mainstream" press was concerned, rather than offer up condescending descriptions designed to diminish the importance or the impact of **Jericho '98** (as they did to the **Million Man March** in 1995 and the **Million Woman March** last year), they apparently chose not to report on it at all, a most effective way to relegate such an event to obscurity as well as a slap in the face to the organizers, speakers and participants who continue to seek justice and truth by conceiving, promoting and implementing events such as this. Their hard work in attempting to get the American people to WAKE UP must be acknowledged and supported by those of us in the Afrikan-centered press as well as by those of us who seek truth, justice and liberation for Afrikan, Native American and other oppressed, repressed and suppressed people.

For Merle Africa

Written on MARCH 13, 1998
by Mumia Abu-Jamal

For almost 21 years, this beautiful courageous, principled soldier of the army of life, **Merle "China" Africa**, endured the small minded, petty, political persecution in unjust incarceration in the hell holes of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

On August 8, 1978, the City, the State and the Federal Government conspired to liquidate Merle and all other MOVE members in their West-Philly house. Today it appears they have finally accomplished this task. The strong, committed, resolute minister and disciple of John Africa suddenly, inexplicably died this morning.

Merle should have been home with their babies, well over twenty years ago. But she and the remaining 8 MOVE political prisoners remained entombed in state prisons, simply for the crime of "being MOVE members".

Let our loss spark a fire that fuels the engine of freedom for all of the remaining MOVE political prisoners. Let our hearts, spirits, voices and hands demand that they be freed from this unjust draconian political persecution. Let us truly work to free all MOVE political prisoners right now.

Long live the spirit of Merle "China" Africa.

Long Live JOHN AFRICA.

Ona MOVE -

Mumia

Statement from The MOVE Organization on the Passing of Merle Africa

“Our sister **Merle Africa**, a strong, healthy MOVE woman in her forties, died at State Correctional Institution (SCI) Cambridge Springs at approximately 3:00 am on the morning of **Friday, March 13, 1998** in a very suspicious manner. Merle was one of the MOVE 9 that was arrested in Powelton Village on August 8, 1978 for the accusation of murdering policeman James Ramp. Despite the innocence of each of the MOVE 9, Merle and our other 8 sisters and brothers were sentenced to 30-100 years each in prison. This was the twentieth year of unjust imprisonment for Merle and the rest of the MOVE 9. An innocent woman spent twenty years of her life in prison and died under very suspicious circumstances. MOVE wants to know what killed our sister. MOVE wants to know how many more innocent MOVE people have to die in prison like Merle did, and what are people gonna do about it.

“WHAT WE DO KNOW IS THIS!:

“Merle had a stomach virus several weeks ago. This virus was going around the prison, as well as the Cambridge Springs,

PA area.

“Merle was eating oatmeal, crackers, peanut butter, fruit, salad, not from general dining area, but from commissary and brought to her by our MOVE sisters and other inmates.

“She was visited by MOVE members less than a week before her death and she was recovering from the virus. Two weeks ago, she was visited by the attorney for the MOVE 9, Paul Hetznecker who said Merle was in good health.

“On 3/12, on her way to work Merle was stopped by officials and a nurse and she was ordered a lay-in. On the lay-in she was confined to her living quarters and fed only food prepared for her by the prison. Merle was issued this ‘lay-in’ despite recovering from her virus and working daily. Upon being issued this ‘lay-in’, a prison nurse said to Merle, ‘you know you’re dying don’t you?’

“In the very early hours of 3/13 our sister Debbie Africa discovered Merle unconscious less than 24 hours after being issued this “lay-in” and given the prison’s food.

“While Debbie was with Merle, Merle’s heartbeat, breathing and pulse were strong. Because she lost consciousness, Debbie alerted prison officials, who summoned paramedics from an outside hospital that was 10 minutes away. The medical attention took over 40 minutes to arrive. When the paramedics arrived, Debbie was ejected from the room and not allowed to monitor them while they worked on Merle, and was not allowed to see any of what was going on.

“At first, the prison said that Merle had died of tumors. Merle had never complained of tumors, or any symptoms of tumors to MOVE people or her own mother. Merle did not have tumors when she was unjustly arrested 8/8/78. Prison officials later changed their story to say that Merle died of natural causes. Merle, as all MOVE members, was known for being healthy and strong and fit. She was not a sickly person. She was a young woman in her 40’s. Merle was an innocent woman unjustly imprisoned for 20 years.

“WE NEED ... TO QUESTION [w]hat happened the morning of March 13th. Why was a ‘lay in’ ordered? Please call and ask Superintendent Mr. Wolf this question. Also copy your inquiries to Commissioner Horn and Governor Ridge. Ask why Merle was not allowed her MOVE diet. Why did the authorities suddenly become concerned about the food Merle was getting. They have never allowed the MOVE diet and have on occasion marked the garlic, which is MOVE’s diet, as contraband.

“WE WANT ANSWERS, WE WANT THE TRUTH. ...

“JOHN AFRICA told system officials that they forcibly took innocent MOVE people from our home against our will, they took us into custody, took responsibility for us, so if we so much as stubbed our toe, its their responsibility and we’re holding them responsible.

“Merle died in the hands of this system, in the hands of system officials - meaning all those responsible for putting Merle and all innocent MOVE people in prison - and we are holding them all responsible.”--**MOVE Statement**

EDITOR’S NOTE: *Merle Austin Africa of the MOVE Nine (See our December 1997/January 1998 Issue, **Political Prisoners of the United States**) died mysteriously in prison on March 13th, 1998.*