

ASSATA
IS
WELCOME
HERE.



THIS IS THE TESTIMONY OF ASSATA
SHAKUR, FORMERLY JOANNE CHESIMARD,
WHO WAS ARRESTED ON THE EVENING OF
MAY 2, 1973, ALONG WITH SUNDIATA
ACOLI AND ZAYD MALIK SHAKUR WHO
WAS KILLED BY THE NEW JERSEY STATE
POLICE. ASSATA SHAKUR, WHO IS NOW IN
EXILE, IN CUBA, WAS A MEMBER OF THE
BLACK PANTHER PARTY AND OF THE
BLACK LIBERATION ARMY. HERE SHE GIVES
TESTIMONY REGARDING HER TREATMENT
AFTER BEING CAPTURED BY NEW JERSEY
STATE TROOPERS.

JUNE, 2017.

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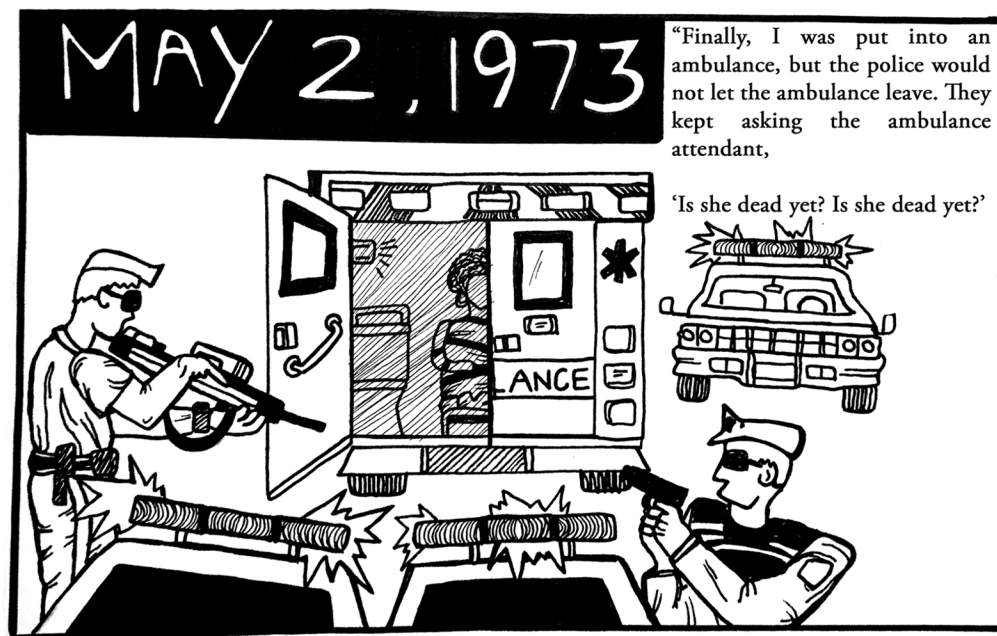
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ASSATA SHAKUR,
VISIT [HTTPS://ASSATATEACHIN.COM](https://assatatateachin.com).



Prisoner in the United States

ASSATA SHAKUR: On the night of May 2, I was shot twice by the New Jersey State Police. I was kept on the floor, kicked, pulled, dragged along by my hair. Finally, I was put into an ambulance, but the police would not let the ambulance leave. They kept asking the ambulance attendant: "Is she dead yet? Is she dead yet?" Finally, when it was clear that I wasn't going to die in the next five or ten minutes, they took me to the hospital. The police were jumping on me, beating me, choking me, doing everything that they could possibly do as soon as the doctors or the nurses would go outside. I was half dead – hospital authorities had brought in a priest to give me the last rites – but the police would not stop torturing me. That went on until the next morning, when I was taken to the intensive care unit. They had to calm down a little while I was there. Then they moved me to another room, which was the Johnson Suite, and they closed off the exit from the hallway. So they could virtually control all traffic in and out. It was just open season on me for about three or four days. They'd turned up the air conditioning so that I was freezing to death. My lungs were threatening to collapse. They were doing everything so that I would get pneumonia.

QUESTIONER: Did the medical staff participate or acquiesce to this treatment while you were under their care?



AS: Some of them did. The first night there was a doctor who was just as bad as the state troopers. He said: "Why did you shoot the trooper?" – He didn't know if I had done it or not, but he just jumped on me. Some of the nurses were very supportive; they could really see the viciousness of the police. One of them gave me a call button, so that I could call whenever the state troopers came in my bed. That way I was able to avoid being further beaten up. They had my legs cuffed to the bed, even though I was half dead and my leg was swollen. Some of the nurses protested the way they had my foot cuffed. It was really bleeding and sticking in the flesh.

Q: Is it your opinion that were it not for the medical staff, the police authorities would have murdered you in the hospital with the complicity and complicity of certain doctors.

AS: That's definitely a possibility.

Q: These members of the medical staff that showed human compassion towards you, were they Black or white, or both?

AS: Black and white. The one who gave me the call button was a German nurse; she had a German accent. Some of the Black nurses sent me a little package of books which really saved my life, because that was one of the most difficult times. One was a book of Black poetry, the other was Sid-dhartha by Hermann Hesse, then a book about Black women in white America. It was like the most wonderful selection that they could have possibly given me. They gave me the poetry of our people, the tradition of our women, the relationship of human beings to nature and the search of human beings for freedom, for justice, for a world that isn't a brutal world. And those books – even through that experience – a kind of just chilled me out, let me be in touch with my tradition, the beauty of my people, even though we've had to suffer such vicious oppression. Those people in that hospital didn't know who I was, but they understood what was happening to me; and it makes you think that no matter how brutal the police, the courts are, the people fight to keep their humanity, and can really see beyond that.

Q: How long were you at the hospital and how long did your state of medical deterioration last after your capture?

Q: Was your family in any way harassed or intimidated by state authorities during this whole period?

AS: Absolutely. First, let me say that the prison authorities try to make the visits as uncomfortable as possible. They build prisons in places where it's very hard to visit. Families have to spend hours in line, just waiting to get in, standing out in the cold. There are no facilities for them, often nothing to drink. When my daughter was tiny, my mother would bring her to visit me, and the guards would say: "She can't have milk. She can't have diapers." Just insane things to make life so much more difficult. My family was subjected to police harassment on every level. My mother had a heart attack because the police went to her job, they tried to storm the door. Surveillance cameras, phone bugs, devices, strange phone calls at all hours of the night playing forged recordings of my voice, all this stuff they suffered because they were my family. They couldn't just sit and have a conversation in the house, everything was being recorded.

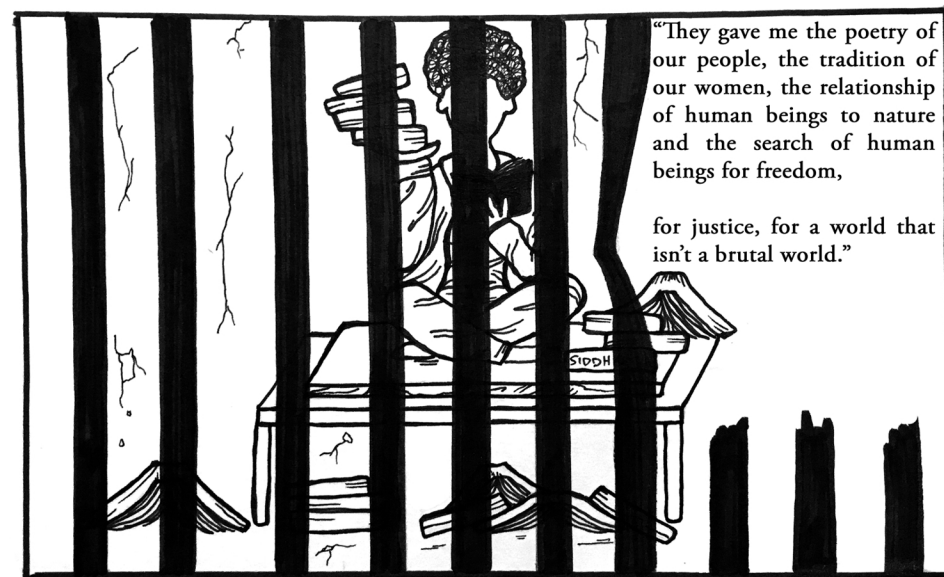
Part of the car's motor would fall off and then they would take it to the garage and see that it had been mysteriously sawed; tires would be slashed. Letters, all kinds of letters, from police agents, threatening letters – it was just an onslaught of harassment, meant to break them down and destroy our family unity, trying to turn us against each other, trying to scare them to death so that they would be afraid even to have a relationship with me. But it didn't work.

We survived it, and I think that our family is stronger as a result of that. We resisted together, and we struggled together, and that has made us – all of us – much more serious about who we are and about our love for each other.

Just finding one was a task in and of itself. Stanley Cohen had made some initial contacts and initial agreements with an investigator, and was en route to being able to deal with some of these experts and expose some of this tampered evidence – and the next thing I knew, he was found dead in his apartment. The cause of his death was never made public. The initial report said that he was a victim of trauma – but we never got the real cause of death, whether or not he was murdered. They finally said something about natural causes, but there never was a report of how he was killed. What we do know was that all of my legal records that were in his apartment were taken by the United States – no, by the New York Police Department – everything. They said that they took those – my legal records – as evidence. They didn't say evidence of what. Evelyn had to like a lawsuit to get those legal records back. Different records were missing; all the notes that referred to investigations of the case were never found.

Then, immediately after Stanley Cohen's death, the judge retracted the orders saying that the state had to help us pay for these experts. The city's order said that we hadn't gotten these experts in time, and therefore the order was no longer good. William Kunstler was one of the lawyers on the case, and so was Lennox Hines; the next thing we knew, both of them were cited for contempt. The judge held a hearing to get Kunstler thrown off the case, because he was trying to raise money so we could pay the experts. Instead of even being able to prepare my defense, my lawyers were put in a position where they had to prepare their own defenses and that went on through my whole time in prison. Evelyn Williams – who was also my aunt – was my lawyer. She was cited for contempt, she was smitten with it daily, she spent time in prison for contempt, for no reason at all. That happened to most of my lawyers, if not all of them: they were all threatened. Lou Meyers, a lawyer from Mississippi, said that he would rather try a million cases in Mississippi than try one in New Jersey, because New Jersey was the most racist place he's ever been in. But it wasn't just New Jersey, it was New York, it was every place that I went to trial in.

And it didn't happen just to me; this was something that was repeated across the board in all cases that concerned political prisoners; on every single case the lawyers were harassed, the prisoners received the worst treatment.



AS: I spent about two weeks at the Middlesex County Hospital. And then I spent another two weeks in the Roosevelt Hospital for the chronically ill. I had two bullet wounds – I still have one bullet in my chest. I was paralyzed in this arm. I had trouble breathing. And after I was released from the second hospital, it took me a couple of years to gain full use of my hand. I was not allowed physical therapy, or medical treatment in the hospital, we had to get a court order for simple things like a rubber ball so I could squeeze my hand and teach myself how to use it again. And the only kind of exercise that I was able to acquire was at the instructions of the nurses. I asked them, what can I do? I was acutely aware that the prison system would do everything possible to frustrate my getting well again. The nurses would give me a towel and even though I couldn't wring it up, they'd say: "Just try." So I would put my hand on top of it – and then the police would come and take the towel away, even though I was cuffed to the bed. I don't know what they thought I was going to do with the towel, but the towel wasn't the point. The point was to just do everything possible to make me suffer.

Q: So is your experience that you were not given any recuperative or rehabilitative therapy for the wounds that you suffered on May 2, 1973?

AS: I was given some, but I mean the state, the police, the DA's office, the FBI, I believe, did everything possible to frustrate my recovery.

Q: So you had to get medical therapy as a consequence of legal litigation.

AS: My lawyers went to court and said, she had one arm that's paralyzed, but I never got physical therapy. We were able to get one team to come in and examine me on one occasion, that was it. The prison doctor would just take my arm and say: 'Oh it's perfectly fine, You don't have a problem.' And his treatment for most things was laxatives.

Q: After the hospitalization came to an end, were you taken to a detention center or a prison?

AS: Yeah, I was taken to the Middlesex County workhouse. I was put in solitary. A cell which had a door or bars and outside was another big metal door. I was there from June until October-November, when I was taken to the Middlesex County Jail in New Brunswick, and put into a basement, in solitary again. It was a men's jail, and I was the only woman there. I was kept there until I was taken to New York to go on trial in December, 1973.

Q: You were confined to your cell approximately how many hours a day?

AS: Twenty-four hours a day.

Q: Were you allowed contact visits?

AS: The rules were that you could have contact visits with immediate family and lawyers, but the police kept entering our conversations. They would just ignore the fact that there were supposed to be client-lawyer privileges, or that it was a family visit. They would just be there and nothing we could do about it. Children were not even allowed to visit that prison and it was real sad. You'd just hear the children during the visiting hours screaming their parents' names, and they would be outside of the prison. You'd just hear these little voices, it was real painful.

Q: Were you aware at the time that there is a law in the U.S. that says that attorneys and clients have a right to confidentiality?

AS: Oh yes. They would incite these women constantly; they had their people moved to that building especially for that purpose, women who had no long-term sentences, no reason to be in that building, were sent there for the sole person of stirring up trouble. It got to the point where guards – Black guards – would say: "Don't go outside today 'cause they got something cooked up for you," I would always listen to what the guards had to say with a grain of salt, but in certain instances I found out that they were saying the truth.

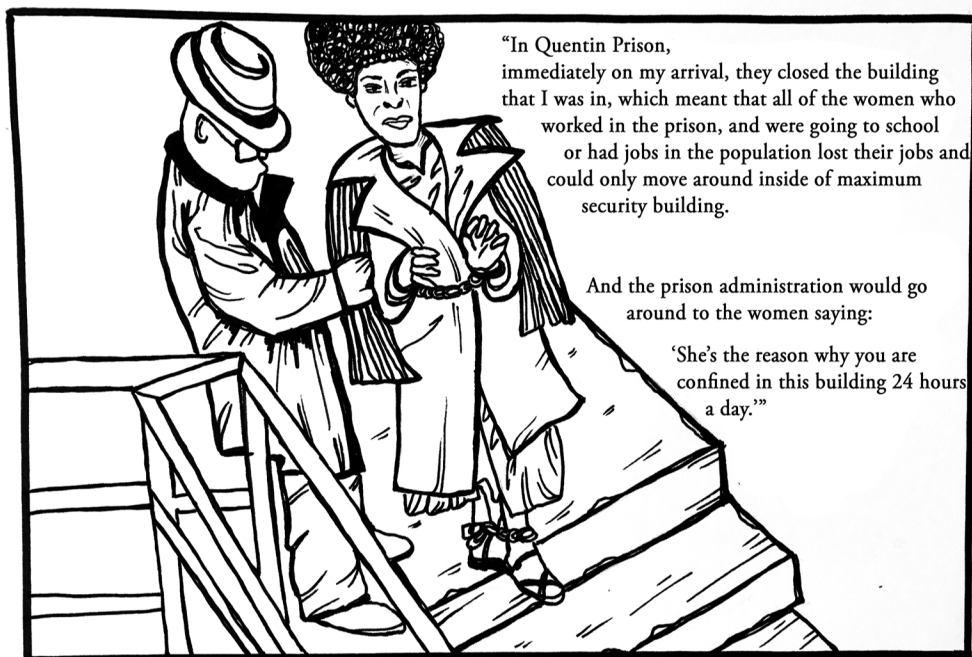
Q: According to the United States Constitution, everyone accused of a crime has the right to choose their own attorney, and if they do not have the funds to choose or to afford the attorney of their choice, they are then appointed an attorney by the court. This is the law of the land. The records reflect in your case, however, that one of your attorneys was mysteriously killed during the course of one of your trials. Could you explain to us the trial that you were attending, what happened, and what is known about that, how that impacted your ability to defend yourself?

AS: This happened in trial in Jersey. There was a consistent attack on my lawyers. They were being threatened with contempt, with being thrown off the case – that's the first thing. Stanley Cohen, who was murdered, was one of the lawyers on that case. There is a myth that someone who's accused of a crime has a right to a lawyer. The reality of it is that most people who have no money get lawyers who have no interest in their case, do no investigation, no work whatsoever. In my case, the state had millions of dollars at their command to prosecute me and we had no money whatsoever.

We need experts to mount a defense, ballistic experts, because so much of the evidence – the so-called physical evidence – was manufactured. Things that appeared on discovery reports then disappeared, then appeared again, and it was obvious that all the evidence was tampered with. So we needed a forensic chemist, an investigator, ballistic experts, and we had absolutely no money. Finally, after the lawyers whooped and hollered, the judge gave an order granting some assistance in paying for the experts, even though it's very difficult to find a ballistic experts or a forensic expert who doesn't work for the police, especially if you're being accused of murdering a police officer.

In Quentin Prison, immediately on my arrival, they closed the building that I was in, which meant that all of the women who worked in the prison, and were going to school or had jobs in the population lost their jobs and could only move around inside of maximum security building. All of the recreation programs women had been allowed to participate in – until I came – they lost all of that. And the prison administration would go around to the women saying: “She’s the reason that you’ve lost your job and are no longer able to get an education. She’s the reason why you are confined in this building 24 hours a day.” I could see that prison officials were trying to create a situation where the women would move on me. They had moved most of the women who had some kind of an insight as to what was going on to the other maximum security building, and had crowded the building where I was with women who were informers, who were tools of the administration or women who were just mad or who were absolute fools.

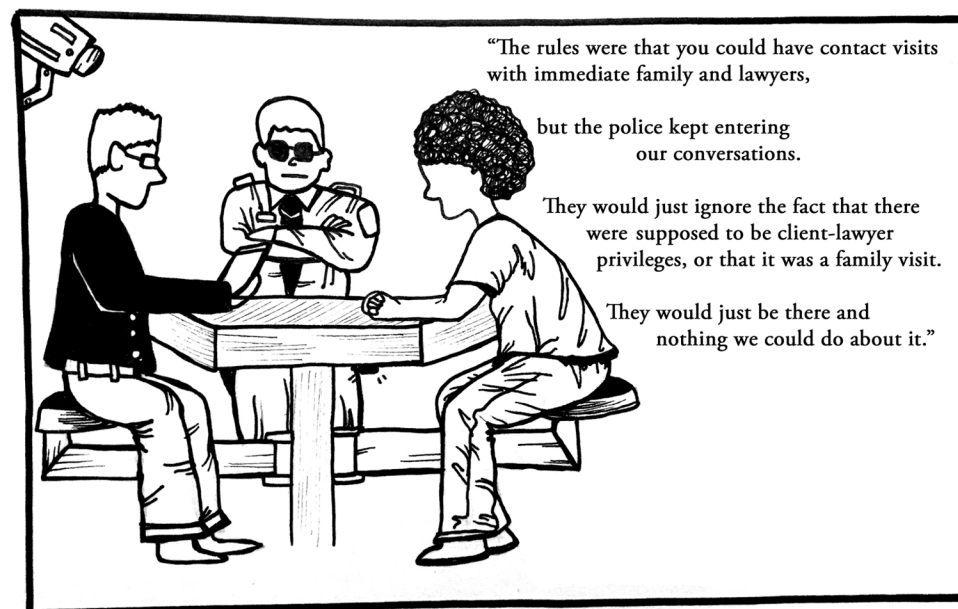
Q: So is it your view that the prison authorities tried to incline other inmates to physically attack you?



AS: Yeah. My lawyer (and aunt) Evelyn constantly protested the conditions, but she was talking to deaf ears. She went to court I don’t know how many times to have the lawyer-attorney visits respected, with the doors shut, but they were virtually in the room, and that room was bugged anyway.

Q: What do you mean by the term ‘bugged’?

AS: I mean that they had electronic listening devices where we would meet. The guards would come around and say: “We know what you’re saying.” It was their way of saying: “We’ve got it on tape anyway. So what?”



Q: In your view, did the combination of inadequate medical therapeutic attention and the lack of confidentiality with your attorney impede your ability to defend yourself against the many state charges that were subsequently brought against you?

AS: Absolutely. My lawyers had to fight for such elementary things that they couldn’t even deal with the case. The state resisted everything. Most of the energies they would normally be spending preparing for trial, they had to spend filing suits around the right for me to have a ball, to have medical attention, or even have food, which was the worst of any prison that I’ve been in.

The women protested the food, it wasn't just me that they brought this food to, but they said that I was the cause of the protest, even though I was held in solitary confinement and could only speak to the women if I climbed up to the top of the bars and talked out of these little holes. Our whole attempt to prepare for the trial was frustrated on every level.

Q: Did you suffer any disciplinary procedures as a consequence of that protest?

AS: I was already in solitary, so the only thing they could do was just harass me, make my life more difficult.

Q: Did the other women suffer any disciplinary procedure as a consequence of trying to communicate with you?

AS: There were threatened in terms of their court cases; they were told that I was a terrorist...I was accused of killing a New Jersey state trooper and the police claimed that they had to keep me in solitary for my own protection. But the women didn't believe that. They did every little thing they could to make me feel human.

Q: Could you tell us exactly what happened when you first went to court in your first trial? What were the charges that were brought against you and exactly how did the state deal with prosecuting you in this particular case?

AS: The first trial that I participated in was the New Jersey trial. They put in a whole lot of other charges like armed robbery – I was supposed to have robbed the police of guns – and then assault, and whole list of charges. But the main charges were murder of a New Jersey state policeman and wounding another one. We were on trial, we were in the jury selecting process.



The press were free to say anything and the police, the FBI, the CIA were the ones who were feeding the press information. No one ever asked me any questions and even attempted to deal with the fact that we were human beings, people who had a long history of struggle. It was just overwhelming, and people believed that. I had no contact with the other prisoners, no access to the legal library, no access to any of the other educational facilities, no outside recreation whatsoever. No – my family visits were held in a filthy, nasty place – a search room for the normal prisoners. And so we had to sit in this filthy – and it was just unbearably filthy – room and have our visits, what few visits I was permitted to have. Lawyers' visits also took place in that room. The other thing I talked about to the international lawyers was the fact that I had been sent to Alderson, West Virginia, which is a prison within a prison. Although I had no federal charges, there's this agreement called the Interstate-Contact Agreement, by which any person in order to settle their relationship with their family, with their community, can be shipped into the federal prison system anywhere in the country. Sundiata was sent to Marion prison, which is the worst concentration camp in the United States. Alderson was set up for the most "dangerous" women in the U.S., a maximum of 20. Two of them were Manson family women, one had been accused of attempted assault against President Ford, and the rest of the women – the overwhelming majority – were members of the Aryan Sisterhood, which is a fascist, Nazi organization. Even though the prisoner population in Alderson in general is overwhelmingly Black – Black, Latino, Asian – the control unit was all white, with the exception of me. I was there with thirteen or fifteen Nazis who wore swastikas embroidered on their jeans, who took pictures giving Hitler salutes. And I was there until the unit was closed down and I was shipped into the Hole...

Q: What is the Hole?

AS: The Hole is solitary confinement. It's punitive segregation. Even though I had not been accused of any disciplinary infraction the whole time that I was there, I was thrown into the Hole while they were deciding what to do with me. They didn't want me to be in the prison population, in any normal situation, so I had to stay in the Hole until they finally decided that they were going to ship me back to Quentin Prison.



AS: No. Male and female guards. In front of my cell, writing down everything, you know: 'Subject is now eating. Subject is now on the toilet. Subject is now reading' – everything I did they wrote.

Q: When you say "we," could you state exactly who –

AS: Sundiata Acoli and I were on trial together. We had the same charges and we decided that we would go on trial together. They didn't oppose that.

Q: Had you recovered from your wounds at the time?

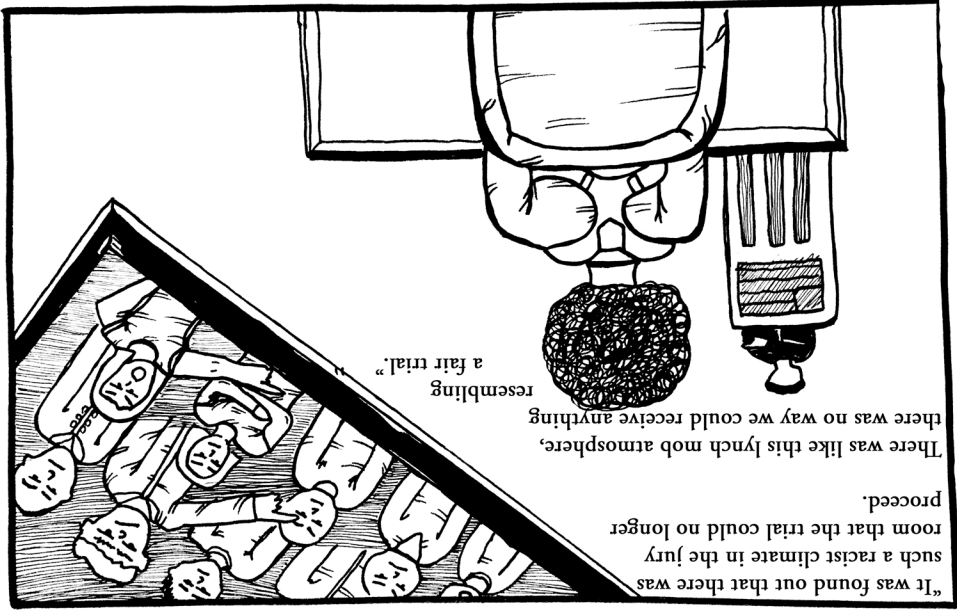
AS: I was still wearing a brace for the broken clavicle, but the problem was mainly my right arm. I was basically paralyzed. And I was a wreck. I'd broken out in a rash, I was very thin... Anyway, we started the jury selection process. And in the middle of it the trial was stopped. It was postponed until January, 1974.

Q: Why?

AS: Because it was found out that there was such a racist climate in the jury room that the trial could no longer proceed. There was like this lynch mob atmosphere, there was no way we could receive anything resembling a fair trial. So they gave us a change of venue to another county – Morris County – where we were supposed to resume the trial. Morris County happened to be 99% white and one of the richest counties in the state of New Jersey, as a matter of fact, in the whole country.

Q: What evidence was presented to indicate that there was a racist climate at that time?

AS: There was no evidence presented, but the press had been trying me for years. I was turned into a monster. They pictured this vicious woman that goes around terrorizing police, this madwoman essentially... They had created this whole mythology in order to destroy me. They started this whole mythology in order to destroy me. They started building this whole campaign in the press in 1970-71.



Q: You notice that there was a correlation between the information the police had in their possession and the information and the distortions in the press?

A5: It wasn't information. They just fabricated things, and fed them to the press. They would accuse me of having I don't know how many pending charges, and none of that was true. Anybody reading the paper would think that we had been convicted of committing so many crimes all around the country and never was there a mention that we'd never been found guilty of any crime.

Q: You said that the trial was suspended because you could not get an impartial jury panel. Did you have the opportunity to select a jury of your peers when the trial was recommenced?

A5: No. The jury selecting process was biased. Most of the Blacks who were prospective jurors were gotten rid of by the prosecution. Then, people who obviously were prejudiced, and obviously thought that I was guilty, were included in the jury. At the second trial in New Jersey there was a severance and I went to trial alone. The judge would say: "Well, can you put your opinion aside?"

Can you follow the law as I give it to you? Can you listen to my instructions and come to a verdict?" Even though a poll was taken that showed that 70% of the people of Middlesex County believed that I was guilty and had heard of the case through the media, the judge said it was a fair trial and there was no prejudice. I was tried and convicted by an all-white jury, a jury that was clearly prejudiced in favor of the prosecution. The jury was sequestered but the police and the jurors kept intermingling freely. The same thing happened in Sundiata's case. One of the black jurors in his case tried to really come forth but they beat her down. There was a real investigation of the way in which the police interacted with the guards, the court officers interacted with jurors while they were sequestered, and especially in cases where the defendant is charged with the killing of a police officer, that's a tool of influencing the jury.

Q: In December of 1978 your attorney, along with other organizations and groups, filed a petition in the UN Commission on Human Rights, alleging a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights in regard to prisoners in the U.S. Your case was one of those that were cited, and you were visited by a group of international jurists and attorneys. Could you tell us exactly what type of unit you were housed in and for how long and under what conditions?

A5: Well, I spent two and a half years – maybe more – in these prisons. After I was convicted in 1977 I was taken to Quentin prison for women for about a week, and after that I was transferred to Yardsville, which is an all-men's prison. Not a jail, a prison. They gave me a booklet: "These are the rules for the New Women's Unit at Yardsville Prison." I was the only woman in the New Women's Unit and they told me that I was going to be there for the rest of my life. They got a prison psychologist to testify that I was a hardened revolutionary and that no amount of time in solitary confinement would bother my mental health whatsoever. I was kept in this – it was like a cage – within a completely isolated section of the prison. There were two guards in front of the cell at all times, lights at all times.

Q: Were these female guards?