

Ohio's Mumia Abu-Jamal

Jason Goudlock

On December 9, 1981, Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, showed no love for a young African-American activist named Mumia Abu-Jamal. Approximately one decade before the infamous videotaped police beating of motorist Rodney King, the Philadelphia police beat, shot, and framed Mumi Abu-Jamal for allegedly murdering police officer Daniel Faulkner. The beating and shooting of Abu-Jamal wasn't videotaped by anyone. Had it been, Abu-Jamal almost certainly would never have been convicted and sentenced to Pennsylvania's death row for a crime he didn't commit.

Wrongfully convicted, Abu-Jamal set out to exonerate himself. Three decades later, his determination and award-winning journalism, as well as a large base of international support, allowed Abu-Jamal to elude Pennsylvania's executioner when his death sentence was commuted to life in prison without the possibility of parole. It was an important victory, but his days of fighting won't be done until he is free.

Having written several critically acclaimed books,¹ and having a street outside Paris named for him, which stirred up a controversy, Abu-Jamal has become a legend among prisoners internationally. Countless unlawfully imprisoned men and women have been inspired by him to battle for their freedom. One such person in Ohio is the wrongfully convicted Siddique Abdullah Hasan, who was sentenced to death row in the mid-1990's for crimes he didn't commit during the infamous 1993 prison uprising at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville.²

As with Abu-Jamal, Hasan's true story has been suppressed, and because of this miscarriage of justice, his life hangs in the balance as Abu-Jamal's did for three decades. In the hope of exonerating an innocent man who lives on death row, as well as exposing egregious prosecutorial misconduct, I tell the story of Hasan, who is regarded by many of his peers as the Mumia Abu-Jamal of Ohio.

The Injustice of Siddique Abdullah Hasan

On Easter Sunday, April 11, 1993, the longest prison uprising in United States history began inside of the notorious Southern Ohio Correctional Facility (SOCF) in Lucasville. The uprising lasted 11 days. It began as a showing of unity among prisoners of all racial divides who were tired of the new prison policies enacted by Arthur Tate, the new SOCF warden, who cancelled the prison's literary and music programs and forced militant Black prisoners to share cells with White neo-Nazis. The uprising turned deadly as it failed to reach a resolution, and when the smoke cleared after 11 days, nine prisoners and one guard were dead.

The SOCF uprising ended without additional loss of life because of the mediating efforts of four prisoners who were leaders of inmate organizations and religious groups within the prison. Siddique Abdullah Hasan, the spiritual leader of the Sunni Muslims, was one of those prisoners.

At the time of the SOCF uprising, Hasan was a model prisoner living in an honor cellblock. He was approximately one year away from the possibility of making parole. He was not known as a troublemaker, and his reputation is supported by the fact that he used his influence to help bring an end to the violent uprising. But he was not commended for the role he played in preventing a massacre like the one at the

1971 Attica uprising. Instead, he was indicted on 15 felony charges, the most serious being the murder of the guard, Robert Vallandingham.

In the weeks leading up to the SOCF uprising, Hasan and his fellow Muslims had become targets of derision and harassment by the prison administration for refusing to be inoculated with a tuberculosis test that contained phenol, an alcohol that is a prohibited substance for Muslims under Islamic law. Warden Tate was not willing to consider alternative methods of testing or tuberculosis. So when the uprising began, Hasan apparently had a bullseye on his back, and when he became involved in the negotiating process, he became a target of prosecution by the state of Ohio.

With the uprising under control and Hasan criminally charged, the state brought in Special Prosecutors to make the highly publicized case against him. They contended that, while Hasan had not directly participated in the criminal acts he was charged with committing, he had orchestrated their commission. Having no material evidence to link Hasan to any of the charges, the Special Prosecutors built their case by coercing desperate-for-freedom prisoners to testify against Hasan. The prosecutors used under-the-table deals, trading testimony for outright freedom or significantly reduced sentences.³ The prosecutors were so determined to convict Hasan that they used a *doctored* audio recording (Tunnel Tape #61 with numerous secretly recorded conversations of prisoners made during the uprising by the FBI) to “refresh” memories of “forgetful” witnesses.

According to the Special Prosecutors, the audio footage on Tunnel Tape #61 allegedly contained incriminating conversations between Hasan and other prisoners about the killing of the guard, Robert Vallandingham. The tape actually contained a string of patched-together, spliced audio extracted from a series of conversations recorded throughout the course of the uprising and then edited and recorded on Tunnel Tape #61, giving the impression that Hasan had participated in conversations about criminal activity.

Hasan discovered the alterations on Tunnel Tape #61, and his attorneys promptly submitted a sample of the disputed recording to an expert in forensic audio analysis. The expert made a preliminary determination that there were “abrupt endings during ongoing conversations,” “discontinuity during ongoing speech on the tape,” and “changes in the background signature,” indicating the tape might have been electronically edited. Despite these findings, however, the court denied Hasan’s attorneys funding to pay for additional forensic analyses of the tape.

In addition to the denial of funding for further forensic analysis despite the fact that Hasan was charged with a capital crime, the court made other rulings that damaged his legal defense. His attorneys were denied the opportunity to get expert analysis of the “hypnotically refreshed testimony” presented by two witnesses for the state. From early 1994 until October of 1995 Hasan’s attorneys were denied adequate funding to hire an investigator. In early 1994 the trial court allowed just \$700 for Hasan’s attorney to hire an investigator. Then, over a year later, just 10 weeks before the trial was scheduled to begin, the court suddenly allocated \$25,000 for hiring an investigator. But there was only enough time left before the trial to interview a small sampling of the many witnesses and potential witnesses. Because of the timing, the money was not helpful when it was finally allocated.

Hasan’s defense encountered other problems in the representation of his various court-appointed attorneys and the venue for his trial. Legal scholars, the media, elected officials, and activists need to examine the wrongful conviction and death sentence of Hasan, as well as other men who were tried following the

Lucasville uprising—men such as Bomani Shakur⁴ (also know as Keith LaMar) and Gregory Curry⁵ who were scapegoated as a thorough study of the uprising and subsequent prosecutions reveals.

Hasan's case is now on appeal in federal court. He remains optimistic that he will one day be exonerated. To achieve this, he needs the support of the People. He has already been wrongfully convicted and sentenced to die, and without the support of the people he might be executed for crimes he didn't commit just as his cousin, the late Troy Davis was executed despite widespread and well-publicized doubts of his guilt.

The time to take action on behalf of Siddique Abdullah Hasan is *now*! If you want to participate in the struggle to exonerate him and to expose the injustice embedded in many other matters connected with the April 11, 1993, uprising in Lucasville, you can do so by contacting Hasan or one of his supporters at LucasvilleAmnesty.org and JusticeForLucasvillePrisoners.Wordpress.com.⁶

Jason Goudlock is a progressive writer embedded in the struggle against the repressive United States prison industrial complex. If you would like to offer him support on his quest to attain justice for Ohio old-law prisoners, you can contact him at the following:

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Learn more about Jason Goudlock and his struggle for freedom at freejasongoudlock.org.

Endnotes

- 1 Mumia Abu-Jamal is the author or co-author of the following books: with Dhoruba Bin Wahad and Assata Schakur, *Still Black, Still Strong* (1993); with Marc Lamont Hill, *The Classroom and the Cell: Conversation on Black Life in America* (1996); *Death Blossoms: Reflections from a Prisoner of Conscience* (1997); with Noelle Hanrahan and Alice Walker, *All Things Censored* (2000); with Kathleen Cleaver, *We Want Freedom: Life in the Black Panther Party* (2008); with John Potash, Fred Hampton, and Pam Africa, *The FBI War on Tupac Shakur and Black Leaders: U.S. Intelligence's Murderous Targeting of Tupac, MLK, Malcolm. . .* (2008); with Angela Davis, *Jailhouse Lawyers: Prisoners Defending Prisoners v. the USA* (2009); with Manning Marable, Leith Mullings, and Richard Allen, *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology* (2009); with Bryonn Bain and Lani Guinier, *The Ugly Side of Beautiful: Rethinking Race and Prison in America* (2013). All books are available at Amazon. Learn more about the story of Mumia Abu-Jamal at FreeMumia.com.
- 2 See Staughton Lynd, *Lucasville: The Untold Story of a Prison Uprising*, Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011.
- 3 See John Caniglia, "Lucasville killer testified, now he walks," *Plain Dealer* (September 4, 2006; National Section, page A1). Caniglia tells of the parole of Roger Snodgrass, an Ohio old-law prisoner who admitted to being involved in numerous heinous crimes committed during the SOCF uprising. Snodgrass was paroled by the same Ohio Parole Board that has refused to parole the author of "Ohio's Mumia Abu-Jamal. Jason Goudlock has been imprisoned for over 20 years as a first-time offender for aggravated robbery and felonious assault. (Learn more about Ohio's old-law injustice at FreeJasonGoudlock.org.)
- 4 As Keith LaMar, Bomani Shakur has published *Condemned: The Whole Story*, an account of the Lucasville uprising and his trial, conviction, and efforts to avoid the death penalty. *Condemned* is available at Amazon. More information about this injustice is available at LucasvilleAmnesty.org and JusticeForLucasvillePrisoners.Wordpress.com.
- 5 Gregory Curry is an Ohio prisoner who was wrongfully convicted and given a life sentence for alleged crimes in the Lucasville uprising. Learn more about his injustice at GregCurry.org and GregCurry.weebly.com.
- 6 To learn more about the injustice in the case of Siddique Abdullah Hassan, go to LucasvilleAmnesty.org and JusticeForLucasvillePrisoners.Wordpress.com. Hasan can be contacted via U.S. mail at this address:

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