

INTRODUCTION TO "LETTERS FROM MTAYARI SHABAKA SUNDIATA"

The enclosures are excerpts of letters from Mtayari Shabaka Sundiata, a never-to-be-forgotten New African Freedom Fighter, during his incarceration in Greenhaven Prison from May 6, 1971 to March 1, 1977.

These letters give a gut-level insight into prison life--its miserable conditions, its warped harshness, its lonely isolation--but also reveals the uplifting potency of a warrior's love for his nation and people, ever mindful of the unrelenting war--both physically and psychologically, ~~against his people.~~

The six years of correspondence and visits with Mtayari in prison was an inspiring learning experience--learning not only about brutalizing prison life, but the essence of the struggle of New Afrikans--a war to win the most precious resource on Amerika's battleground--the minds and hearts of New Afrikan people.

Mtayari, an extraordinary teacher who read/studied/researched whatever he could get his hands on even behind-the-wall, and shared with others, was also a good listener who showed care and sensitivity to both political arguments and personal problems. His eagerness to know what was happening outside in the 'larger prison of American society' and the world at large (everything from the Vietnam War, struggles in Africa, the American Indian movement, Puerto Rican independence, President Obadele and the RNA 11--at that time in Mississippi's Parchman Parchman Prison, the deteriorating economic situation, the role of religion, Black culture, and etc., etc. issues of interest) were never seen in isolation but in relation to one another. His breadth, depth and scope was unbounded; his primary commitment, devotion and love was for his own people and nation; his political philosophy was revolutionary Black nationalism; his concern, encompassed the world.

He was a living heir of Malcolm's ideas.

In one of his letters he writes: "Revolution finds the seeds of its growth and the justification for its development in history. Revolutions make psychological use of the past for it plunges into the future. The role that the victims are destined to play is simply a matter of growth. Growth means to change. To change means revolution. And to resist change means death."

Mtayari knew explicitly what he was fighting for, who he was fighting against...and what the ultimate options would be. Malcolm once clarified it simply: "to prison or to the grave."

On October 23, 1981, Mtayari was captured and executed on the spot by the enemy; while his brother/warrior/comrade Sekou Odinga was captured, tortured and imprisoned. Both today symbolize New Afrikan manhood at its highest. Mtayari Shabaka Sundiata lived the New Afrikan oath to the fullest--giving his "total devotion, his total resource, and total power of his mortal life."

As an elusive freedom fighter who had no permanent home, no material wealth, no monetary gains, his letters from prison are the few remaining mementoes and reminders of his revolutionary nationalist spirit and strength that spurred him in his involvements--which will one day be recorded to be immortalized in New African history.

Mtayari LIVES as does Malcolm and all New African warriors (brothers or sisters) who have given their all--for to live in hearts that are left behind is not to die."

Mtayari Shabaka Sundiata, live like him!
Dare to struggle, dare to win!

Yuri Kochiyama