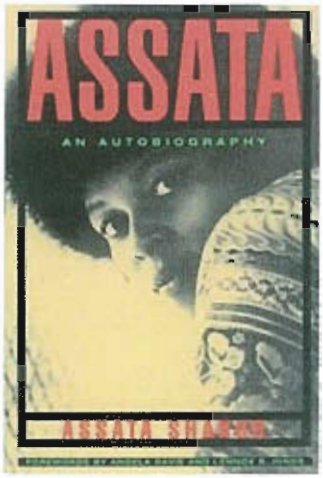
Remembering Assata

July 16, 2009 by Marc Lamont Hill



Today marks the 62th birthday of Assata Shakur, one of the great heroes in the Black Freedom Struggle.

Born in New York, Assata grew up in Wilmington, NC until she moved back to Queens in the 1960s. While attending City College, Shakur joined the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, where she helped establish breakfast programs and Saturday School, as well engage in political education.

On May 2, 1973 Assata Shakur, along with Sundiata Acoli and Zayd Shakur, were antagonized, brutalized, and framed by the New Jersey Police when they were charged with the murder of Trooper Werner Forester. Despite conflicting witness accounts and exculpatory medical evidence, Shakur was sentenced to life plus 33 years in prison.

Fortunately, with the help of her comrades and the ancestors, Assata was able to escape the belly of the beast in 1979 and emerge safely in Cuba, where she's been granted protection as a political prisoner. Despite the relentless efforts of the federal and state government, she remains safe in one of the last remaining *palenques* on Earth.
In 1987, Assata Shakur published *Assata: An Autobiography*, which brilliantly and beautifully details her life journey. Like the *Autobiography of Malcolm X, Soledad Brother,* and *Soul on Ice*, Assata's book quickly became required reading for a generation of "conscious" Black people.

After reading her autobiography, I was moved in ways that defy description. Her willingness to struggle, sacrifice, and literally lay down her life for the liberation of Black people left me inspired and humbled. From Assata Shakur I learned that "a wall is just a wall and nothing more than that," and that freedom, however elusive, is attainable if we continue to fight against the odds.

I'll never forget how I felt when I turned to the final chapter of her book and saw the word "Freedom" printed on the page. Although I'd seen the word a million times before, it had never quite looked the same before. Suddenly, "freedom" was infused with layers of meaning, purpose, and possibility that were previously unimaginable. At that moment, I made a commitment to freedom and social justice that I desperately hope honors the spirit of her struggle.

Mother Assata: I am eternally grateful for your life and example. I give thanks to the ancestors for you. I pray for your continued protection and pledge to support you and our people until I die.

In Beautiful Struggle,

marc

FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS!!!

Remembering Khallid Muhammad

February 26, 2008 by Marc Lamont Hill

Six years ago, Khallid Abdul Muhammad was taken from us far too soon due to a brain aneurysm.

Of course, many will remember Dr. Khallid for his anti-Jewish remarks at Kean College, his Congressional censure, his bitter departure from the Nation of Islam, or his contentious Million Youth March. I, however, will remember Dr. Khallid for what he truly was: mentor, teacher, and revolutionary hero.

I first met Dr. Khallid when I was a 16-year-old activist working in Philadelphia. Khabyr Haddas and Hiram Ashantee, two Philadelphia activists to whom I looked up, introduced me to Dr. Khallid when he spoke to a community group at the West Philadelphia YMCA. I was immediately inspired and emboldened by his oratorical brilliance and "take no prisoners" truth telling. For nearly a year after first meeting Dr. Khallid, I began to go by the name "Khalid" –as a sign of my deep admiration and love for him– and began to pay careful attention to his every word and action.

Eventually, I would move to Atlanta to attend Morehouse College. Fortunately, Dr. Khallid was also living in the area and would frequently visit the AUC campus to see his son, Khalfani. Whenever we'd see each other on campus, Dr. Khallid would give me a strong hug and talk to me for hours on end about religion, race, and revolution. I can remember one conversation in particular, where he and I debated the identity of Master Fard Muhammad for hours. Although I did much more listening than talking –mainly because I remained in appropriate awe of his brilliance– Dr. Khallid was aways willing to hear what I had to say and respond with genuine respect and concern.

As the years moved forward, Dr. Khallid and I moved in drastically different directions. He began to organize and mobilize the New Black Panther Party; I decided to leave the Ansaaru Allah Community and finish college. I began to organize within multiracial coalitions; Dr.

Khallid became an even more strident Black Nationalist. Although he and I had very different views on several key issues, we still had nothing but love for one another when we met up.

In the Winter of 2000, I bumped into Dr. Khallid and Hiram Ashantee at the Sixers-Lakers game. After giving me a hug and asking how I was doing, Dr. Khallid told me to catch up with him in New York as soon as possible. As we were departing, I wanted to tell him how much his life and work meant to me. Instead, for a reason that I cannot remember, I decided to save my words for another meeting.

Unfortunately, that would be the last time that I saw Dr. Khallid alive.

The thing that I remember and treasure most about Khallid Muhammad was his profound love for Black people. Although the media attempts to portray him as a hate monger, Dr. Khallid exuded a palpable love for Black people that permeated every aspect of his being. In all honesty, I did not truly understand what it meant to love Black people before I met Khallid Muhammad. After meeting him, I couldn't help but do anything else.

Although it is purely coincidental, I find great pleasure in knowing that the Barbershop Notebooks Blog was birthed on February 18, the day after Khallid Muhammad returned to the ancestors. While there is no doubt that Dr. Khallid's legacy is best honored through the fine work of Malik Zulu Shabazz, his successor as chairman of the New Black Panther Party, I believe that my work also follows in the tradition of Dr. Khallid's revolutionary struggle for Black liberation.

Although I believe that his death was an assassination rather than an accident –as Dr. Khallid would say, "another story for another time" — Dr. Khallid's legacy taught me that you can kill revolutionaries, but not revolutions. For that, I am eternally indebted and grateful.

I LOVE YOU AND MISS YOU DR.
KHALLID!!!