

HANDS OFF ASSATA CAMPAIGN
OFFICIAL STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO MAY 2, 2005
ANNOUNCEMENT OF
\$1 MILLION BOUNTY OFFER FOR THE RETURN OF ASSATA
SHAKUR AND LISTING HER AS A DOMESTIC TERRORIST

On May 2nd the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the New Jersey Troopers publicly announced a \$1 million bounty for the capture of Assata Shakur. May 2nd also marked the 32nd anniversary of the fatal shootout on the New Jersey Turnpike that resulted in the deaths Trooper Werner Foerster and Zayd Shakur, and left Assata Shakur and Sundiata Acoli wounded.

For years the New Jersey Troopers have held an annual commemoration ceremony for Trooper Werner Foerster in early May. Each year the local New Jersey papers print several stories about the events of May 2, 1973 that took place on the New Jersey Turnpike. Periodically various New Jersey officials have issued different statements sometimes accusing Assata and at other times accusing her co-defendant, Sundiata Acoli, of killing Foerster. Sundiata at age 68 continues to languish in prison 32 years later, having been denied parole repeatedly.

Assata Shakur is a mother and grandmother, author and artist. She is politically astute and intellectually sharp. She is warm, humble and spiritual. Years ago, the FBI labeled Assata “the heart and soul of the Black Liberation Army”. They issued all sorts of defamatory statements about her. As a result she was hunted like an animal by law enforcement agencies all over the country, as were many other Black Panther Party and BLA members. She has been used by the FBI as a symbol in various ways to further their political objectives.

Convicted of murder for the death of a New Jersey State Trooper in 1977, Assata has been living in exile in Cuba. She is not convicted for any other incident or crime. In 1998 the New Jersey Troopers petitioned Pope John Paul II as he prepared for his historic visit to Cuba and meeting with President Fidel Castro. They wanted him to pressure President Castro to return Assata to the United States. The Pope flatly turned down their

request but did advise then President Clinton that the United States needed to end the senseless and inhumane blockade against Cuba.

Former New Jersey Governor, Christie Todd Whitman, curried political favor with the state's police when she announced a bounty of \$25,000 for Assata and later doubled it to \$50,000. She was duly rewarded by President Bush who appointed her in 2001 to be the head of the Environmental Protection Agency. The bounty was quietly increased by the FBI to a million dollars as it crept around the country looking for relatives, friends and associates to enlist in its scheme to kidnap Assata and return her to the United States. Time and time again, the FBI offered them a million dollars for their services. To some, they stated that there was no limit to how much they would pay for Assata's return.

The obsession shared by the New Jersey State Troopers and the FBI for Assata is highly unusual unless you examine the larger political picture and international affairs. Since the victorious Cuban Revolution in 1959, the United States has engaged in an ongoing campaign to assassinate President Castro and overthrow the Cuban government. No fewer than 23 assassination attempts have been documented. Then in 1961 the failed Bay of Pigs attempt by President John F. Kennedy to invade and overthrow President Castro brought international embarrassment to the United States. The Bay of Pigs debacle was one of many government attempts to bow to the wishes of the powerful Miami based Cuban exile community. This is the same power base that Florida Governor Jeb Bush answers to and his brother, George W., is beholden to for the 2000 and 2004 "election" results.

Since the rise to power of Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez in 1998, the United States has greedily watched as political links developed between Cuba and Venezuela. What does Venezuela have that the United States wants? Oil! What does Cuba have that the United States wants? It occupies a strategic geographic location that would enable the United States to militarily control the Caribbean. Of course Cuba also has the tenacity to show the people of the world that there is another way to exist. It is possible for education and health care to be guaranteed to every citizen. It is possible for every citizen to have a home and most importantly, hope for the future. It is a sovereign nation with the right to grant asylum whenever it sees fit. Equally important is that the

majority of the Cuban population is of African descent. The significance of this fact is not lost on the other Third World nations around the globe.

The United States' CIA has boldly intervened in Venezuelan affairs and aided in the failed coup there in 2002. Bitter to admit defeat, the United States continued to look for ways to provoke a confrontation with President Chavez. They found it in Luis Posada Carriles. In fact, Posada provides Bush with a two for one shot at Chavez and Castro. For many years Posada has been a CIA operative. He is wanted in Venezuela for his role in the 1976 shoot down of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 civilians including the national fencing team. He escaped from prison there. In 1998 he claimed responsibility for planning attacks on various Cuban establishments including the 1997 bombing of a tourist hotel that resulted in the death of an Italian tourist and the wounding of 11 others. In 2000 Posada was arrested in Panama for plotting to murder President Castro during the Ibero-American summit being held in that country. He was convicted and sentenced to eight years. In November 2004, the outgoing Panamanian President, Mireya Moscoso, pardoned Posada allegedly in exchange for \$4 million paid by a Cuban American. Money talked and Posada walked, disappearing from public view for several months.

In March 2005, he surfaced in Miami. His lawyer, Eduardo Soto, admitted a few weeks later that Posada was in Miami as he filed his petition for political asylum. House of Representative William Delahunt (D-Mass) stated recently, "I can't imagine how one could defend a terrorist where there exists overwhelming evidence that he was responsible or a co-conspirator in blowing up a civilian airliner." To many the revelation that Posada is in the country is shocking. But they were apparently unaware that his co-conspirator, Orlando Bosch, has been living comfortably in Miami for at least the past two years. The revelation of Posada's presence in the United States set off a tidal wave of international and domestic criticism including accusations of political hypocrisy. President Castro called on President Bush to return Posada to Venezuela. Many demanded that the United States not allow Posada to remain in the country.

But the role of Bosch and Posada as terrorists is indisputable. They plotted, murdered, bombed innocents and bragged about it. So what could Bush do? He tried denying that Posada was in the country but Posada's lawyer had already said that he was. Things went from the sublime to the ridiculous. Roger Noriega, the top State Department

official for Western Hemisphere affairs, claimed he didn't know if Posada was in the United States. That revelation didn't impress many people.

Meanwhile President Castro issued a series of statements about Posada's presence in the United States and accused Bush of harboring of a terrorist. His comments grabbed the attention of the local media and hit a sympathetic nerve. It was impossible to explain Posada's presence in the United States after the numerous public statements Bush had made about terrorists. Perhaps the most memorable of these is "If you harbor a terrorist, you are a terrorist." Things were getting very ugly very fast for Bush.

However, the timing couldn't have been better since the anniversary of the New Jersey Turnpike incident was fast approaching. Here was an opportunity to "save face" and take another stab at Castro. A miserably transparent attempt to deflect attention from the political embarrassment of Posada's presence developed overnight.

In the blink of an eye, Assata was suddenly placed on the domestic terrorist list. How very convenient. Now Bush could aim a similar accusation at Castro, harboring a terrorist.

Turning back to Assata and her 1973 chance encounter with Trooper Foerster on the New Jersey Turnpike, it can hardly be labeled a terrorist act or plot no matter how you characterize the facts. No doubt she and her companions did not plan on the events of May 2, 1973. They didn't plan or provoke any encounter with the police nor did they brag about Trooper Foerster's death.

Who defines a terrorist? What actions define a terrorist? Is it a politically manipulated designation used to further the agendas of the present administration? While there is certainly no agreed upon definition of 'terrorism' even the U.S. State Department's self-serving definition that it involves "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets" rules out the incident on the NJ Turnpike which was - by all accounts - initiated by the troopers in a state notoriously known for racial profiling on the Turnpike.

Assata stands convicted of one criminal act, the murder of Trooper Foerster. The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs reports that the FBI identified 785 assailants in the killing of law enforcement officers between 1993 and 2002. Should we expect that the next political announcement will be that those 785 individuals have also

been placed on the domestic terrorism list? Is murder of a police officer the criteria? If so, then should we expect the list to increase by at least 785?

Perhaps, the commission of a heinous act makes one a terrorist. That would certainly get Bosch and Posada on the list, so it can't be that. What about the joint team of FBI agents and Chicago police that murdered Black Panther leaders, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, in their sleep during in a pre-dawn raid at their apartment? Will they be named as terrorists? When now, Reverend, then Mayor, Wilson Goode ordered the bombing of the MOVE headquarters located at 6221 Osage Avenue in Philadelphia in 1985 that killed 11 people including 5 children, and resulted in the destruction of the entire neighborhood, including 62 homes, was that an act of terrorism? Can we expect to see his name added to the list? Were the New York City Police Officers who shot and killed the unarmed grandmother, Eleanor Bumpers, during an apartment eviction, terrorists? They murdered her. Maybe the members of New York's finest that fired 41 bullets at unarmed immigrant Amadou Diallo will have their names added to the list of domestic terrorists. Will the names of the convicted abortion clinic bombers be added to the list? Were the officers who beat, assaulted and sodomized young Abner Louima terrorists? What about the soldiers who shot unarmed detainees in Guantanamo?

In this political era we find the terrorism label abused and manipulated. It is an outrage that this government would offend the sensitivities of the American public by labeling Assata as a terrorist.

In 1976 the Senate Select Subcommittee headed by Senator Frank Church of Utah issued its report on the activities of the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). That Program was aimed at destroying any political dissent in the country. Among its targets were Rev. Martin Luther King, Kwame Ture' (f.k.a. Stokely Carmichael) Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, the Black Liberation Army, the New Left, the Weather Underground, the American Indian Movement, the Puerto Rican independence movement and the Communist Party. Led by J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI left no stone unturned and no dirty trick untried. Part of this campaign was to criminalize legitimate political movements and individuals. The FBI maimed, murdered and imprisoned hundreds of political activists. The Report concluded that "Many of the techniques used would be intolerable in a democratic society even if all the targets had

been involved in violent activity, but COINTELPRO went far beyond that.” The condemnation of the FBI practices temporarily limited its activities.

However, in 2001 the FBI was able to publicly reinstitute all the previously condemned COINTELPRO practices under the guise of the Patriot Act. Increased surveillance of political organizations and individuals began. Harassment, arrest, incarceration and intimidation of political activists have once again been restored as “acceptable” police practices.

This recent labeling of Assata as a terrorist is done as part of the broader campaign to demonize and criminalize political dissent and resistance. This agenda was begun by the previous United States Attorney General, John Ashcroft. All over the country FBI agents started questioning and harassing past and present political activists. In courtrooms and filed documents, the FBI and U.S. Attorneys began referring to domestic political activists as terrorists. The label has far reaching implications. The First Amendment is in serious danger and so is anyone who dares to exercise their rights under its protections.

The convergence of Posada’s entry into the United States and the otherwise inexplicable labeling of Assata as a terrorist fit well into a much broader politically motivated scheme. Her name must immediately be removed from the list and the bounty offer rescinded.