

Poem for  
Mumia Abu-Jamal  
and not for art's sake

Mumia (rhymes with "you-me-a") Abu- (rhymes with "taboo") Jamal (rhymes with "cabal") is a political prisoner on death row in the pennsylvania. he was a former black panther party member, community activist, and prize-winning journalist. the philadelphia cops knew him, hated him, pinned the murder of a cop on him, and now he's awaiting his execution. since you might not believe me, but you might care, read *Race for Justice* by Leonard Weinglass, his lawyer. otherwise at least remember his name so it can haunt you when they admit that he was framed twenty years from now: Mumia Abu-Jamal.

*stephen spender said after spain fell and franco politicized  
his shiny boots and wwii had a name and belsen and  
buchenwald and treblinka were put on the map, that for all  
his writing, all his aimed poesy, his pro-republican pen, his  
one talent solidly sent to the task of anti-fascism, for every  
line that was a kind of translation of "they shall not pass,"  
his writing did not save a single jew from the gas chambers*

what're we gonna do?  
FREE MUMIA!

what're we gonna do?  
FREE MUMIA!  
too many times, too many times  
this was déjà-vu, lord if it ain't  
the noose, the noose  
I've had my fill of this  
how many blacks dead since the last poem  
published about mumia abu-jamal? how many  
more years of death spread between the sentences  
of death? how many? how many?



we  
the urgent  
demonstrated  
in downtown vancouver  
victoria, seattle, everywhere  
we  
the urgent  
angry  
clipped the news and gleaned the times  
to see and disbelieve and steel ourselves  
when they announced the death date  
we  
comrades  
made it happen  
solidified the words into torches  
fashioned the baited breath into speeches

we  
can-  
not  
let  
him  
die  
!  
he made the magazine covers  
he made the braver tv shows  
krs-one wrote a song for him  
amiri baraka wrote a poem about him  
every nook and cranny of the ever  
splintered left  
had to admit his priority  
all this to save the life of one single man  
america's lone political prisoner  
at the hanging tree's roots  
strange fruit  
voice of the voiceless swallowed  
in the involuntary reflex of only hours  
left  
one single man

*notorious b.i.g. just died and before that tupac shakur died and before that eazy  
e died and the last poets had a poem a long time ago called "die nigga!" and  
niggas keep dying like the last poets said we don't know nothin else but dyin and  
ken saro-wiwa died and malcolm x died and he knew it was coming exactly like it  
did and martin luther king died and big surprise and there are the bones of fifty  
million or more on the bottom of the atlantic ocean that was before they invented  
the lethal injection and did I mention that mumia abu-jamal is fixin to die and I'm  
supposed to have tears left to cry?*

we burned torches  
the death penalty kills almost exclusively the poor  
we composed chants  
here in canada we have no death penalty any more  
we took it to the u.s. consulate  
the reform party would cull the bad guys from our midst  
we know this is political  
louis riel was a bad guy that canada killed  
we know this is political  
bad guys are the ones with bad ideas  
we know he must go  
free

we phoned  
bctv  
and told them there's a story brewin  
a bunch of anarchists and other concerned citizens  
are fixin to fuck shit up at the u.s. consulate  
'cause they're going to kill a man  
for having once been a black panther  
and for pointing out that poor people  
exist  
the news dude said, in classic form, "is he canadian?"  
we said, "nope"  
he hanged  
up

we lit torches that stayed lit in the rain  
we parted the darkness like a sea  
the cops fled to whatever cosiness there could be  
in a squad car (pigs don't swim)  
we burned the streets  
we stopped the traffic  
this happened  
for whatever good it does  
this happened  
someone didn't get to their date on time  
for the concern of abstract justice and one  
single man's politicized life  
maybe you were in that traffic jam  
wondering what those fuckers be complaining about this time  
maybe you were on your way to a poetry reading  
maybe you honked your sad solidarity  
maybe you snarled your late exasperation  
maybe you shook your fist  
maybe you raised your fist  
maybe you were the one who told me to get a job  
maybe you were the one who spit on my friend  
but if you were trying to drive through robson and granville  
after they announced his execution date  
motherfucker: you weren't going *nowhere*

they say he shot a cop  
the evidence is as thin as an fbi agent's bald spot  
like peltier and too many to mention before him  
(a better poem would be twenty pages of names)  
he was framed  
america has a habit of killing its dissidents  
especially the black ones  
but this one was gonna be neat and clean  
not in the streets like hutton or hush hush like newton  
or messy like malcolm or almost like assata  
mumia is to die in the full glare of official transcription  
mumia is to die on schedule  
mumia is to die alone, on his back, his last words caught  
in his throat

but his name was made truly global  
as global as capitalism is becoming  
as global as colonialism was  
as global as cnn's silence  
people from vancouver to amsterdam to bombay know his name  
and now  
you do too  
lefties of every shade  
knowing that it could be any one  
of us on the chopping block  
know what it's about:  
they kill niggers who read books and figure out  
how fucked up the world is  
and try to make it better  
be careful you don't aim a copy of *das kapital* at a cop  
they more or less can legally kill you for that

recently an ex-kgb agent stated  
that the rosenbergs (remember them?)  
never gave the soviets secrets  
about the bomb; they committed no treason  
but they are dead  
by the hand of the state  
because they were marxists  
because they were jews  
no other reasons  
they were framed  
it is now proven  
you can't call this a conspiracy theory

hate to say I told you so  
I truly do  
hate to say I told you so

and to the future:  
are you flipping through this years from now  
after mumia is dead? or did this play some small part  
in saving him? did the graffitti we spray painted  
or the traffic we stopped  
or the letters we wrote  
or the petitions we signed  
keep him from dying?  
look around  
for the next round  
of framing, sing  
the names of freedom  
malcolm, biko, martyrs' names  
sing well  
but torches  
got a kinda cooler cadence

