The struggle of late hip-hop rap icon Tupac Shakurs godmother, Assata Shakur (Joanne Chesimard), is still alive and well. Grass roots movements and activists all over the country are letting their voices be heard. Here is an open letter that was recently sent to the Mayor of Trenton, New Jersey Doug Palmer from Mae Jackson, Director of Art Without Walls.

An Open Letter to the Mayor of Trenton, New Jersey Doug Palmer

August 25, 2005

Dear Mayor Palmer:

Let me introduce myself by saying that ASSATA SHAKUR is my sister, friend, and comrade in the struggle for human rights of all oppressed people. When three “Freedom Fighters” boldly took action in 1979 and entered the Clinton Correctional Facility and liberated Sister ASSATA from the chains and shackles of her jailers, I rejoiced. I was proud to be apart of a generation of young African Americans that were courageous and committed enough to go up against America and didn’t give a damn about odds.

Others, and I, along with my late sister/comrade Ann Evans placed a half –page ad in the New York weekly, “The Amsterdam News”, affirming our love and support for Sister ASSATA and the compatriots who risked their lives. We didn’t back down then, and we don’t back down now.

The Advertisement in the Amsterdam News read: *“Run, ASSATA, Run, Stay Strong and Stay Free”, *reflecting the slave song for those who had escaped.*

*Throughout the Black communities on the East Coast -- Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and New Jersey the ad from the Amsterdam newspaper was cut out and taped to the windows in the homes of a generation of youth who were politically astute. The message was clear, and concise, plastered on lamp poles and any other available space stating, *“ASSATA IS WELCOME HERE.”*

Now that you know who I am, and I certainly have a clue as to who you are. We can in the words of Brother/Minister Malcolm X, “talk shop.”

At the annual U.S. Conference of Mayors in Chicago, Illinois, June 10th, 2005 you stepped in on the international affairs committee discussion on the” normalization of relations with Cuba”, placing ASSATA SHAKUR on the agenda; opposing relations with “communist Cuba”, until ASSATA SHAKUR (Joanne Chesimard) is returned to the United States of America.

You have taken it upon yourself to provide leadership by becoming the premier “Black Elected Bounty Hunter;” assisting the Justice Department in breaking its’ own laws. Arrogantly and purposely ignoring the fact that ASSATA was granted political asylum by President Fidel Castro 28 years ago. Are you even aware that on any given calendar day the United States of America grants political asylum to those who defect from Cuba and other communist countries without interference?

The illegal war that is being carried out by America in Iraq has led to the captivity and imprisonment of hundreds of Iraqi citizens, swept up (stolen) from their home land; held in captivity in Guantanamo in the exact same manner and fashion that over seas Africans were stolen from the Mother land, held captive on plantations, first, in the southern states of democratic America. Your willingness to “hunt” ASSATA down in light of this country’s history of “kidnapping” is reminiscent of those “house niggas” during slavery that loved their masters more than they loved themselves, or freedom.

ASSTA SHAKUR is no different than Sister Harriet Tubman. She did not ask to come here. In fact, if memory serves me right, it was the USA government that said to the young dissenting youth of the 60’s who raised their voices in protest- *“Love it (America) or leave it”.* With a few good friends ASSATA left it. What else is a slave to do?

I am not here to argue ASSATA’s case. I am here to say that the many critical domestic problems facing the mayors of the USA, and especially Black mayors of urban cities, one would think the focus would be placed upon solving “some” of the more basic problems of the people you and others were elected to serve.

ASSATA SHAKUR is not your constituent's problem. If ASSATA were returned from Cuba tomorrow (under your advocacy) it would not change the racist policies that rule the construction unions (among others) in Trenton, New Jersey, that keep people of color out. Nor would the "return" of ASSATA have an impact on your city and state high unemployment rate among Black adult males and poor youth of every color; or provide health care for the hundred of thousands of uninsured Jersey residents. Nor would her "illegal slave captivity" solve Trenton's youth gang problem in your city. You tell me what purpose would the "illegal kidnapping of ASSATA SHAKUR" benefit the people of your city. I do however suspect that it would benefit your political career.

A million dollar bounty split three ways between you, the USA government and a hired mercenary reminds me of the auction block:

"Bid 'em in, bid 'em in...

I don't have to wonder about how much they paid the slave to sell the slave, I think I know.

Hands Off ASSATA,

Mae Jackson