

# Who is Mumia Abu-Jamal? And why does the government want to kill him?



Mumia Abu-Jamal was a **radio journalist** in Philadelphia, known as “the voice of the voiceless” during the years of the infamous racist mayor, Frank Rizzo. Mumia won a Major Armstrong Award for radio journalism, and was named one of Philadelphia’s “people to watch” in 1981 by *Philadelphia* magazine. He was president of the Association of Black Journalists in Philadelphia, and he had no prior criminal record.

In December of 1981, Mumia was **shot by a Philadelphia cop** when he intervened in a street incident where the cop was beating his brother with a flashlight. The police officer was also shot and killed, and witnesses saw other men run from the scene. Yet when police arrived, they beat the wounded Mumia before taking him to the hospital, and he was **charged with murder**.

Mumia’s brother and another eyewitness who say Mumia is innocent were harassed by police and driven out of town. Other witnesses changed their stories to implicate Mumia and were rewarded. The dead officer was holding the driver’s license application of a third man. But it was Mumia that the cops wanted.

Mumia had been a member of the **Black Panther Party**, and later a supporter of the MOVE organization. He was a vocal critic of police violence against the minority communities of Philadelphia, a city that was sued by the United States Department of Justice seeking to end the notorious brutality there. The FBI and Philadelphia police had hundreds of pages of surveillance files on Mumia, beginning when he was 15 years old, for his outspoken opposition to racism and police brutality.

People began to question the charging of Mumia, so two months after the shooting incident the police suddenly put forward the **phony claim that Mumia had “confessed”** in the hospital emergency room, but they had forgotten to mention it at the time or write it in their reports. The written reports and the emergency room doctor said Mumia made no statement.

Mumia was then **barred from most of his own trial** for protesting an unprepared court-appointed attorney who was later disbarred. Eleven peremptory challenges were used to knock almost all Blacks off the jury. Vital evidence was withheld from the de-

fense, and police were unable to establish that the fatal bullet came from Mumia’s gun.

The politics behind the frame-up was made clear when the prosecutor argued for the death penalty by reading to the jury revolutionary quotations from a published interview with Mumia from ten years earlier. The jury was told this is a **dangerous Black revolutionary**.

In the recent hearings for a new trial, a witness used against Mumia in his first trial came forward to say that she lied under police coercion. In retaliation, she was arrested in the courtroom as she stepped off the witness stand on an old warrant from another state. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court (5 of 7 justices endorsed for election by the Fraternal Order of Police) then ruled against a new trial. This takes place in the wake of **massive police scandals in Philadelphia**, where more than 300 sentences have now been reversed because they were originally obtained on the basis of police frame-ups.

For the last 17 years Mumia has been locked alone in a cell 23 hours a day, denied contact visits with his family. His confidential legal mail has been opened and reproduced by prison authorities. He was put into **punitive detention for writing a book *Live From Death Row***. Reporters are still prohibited from filming or recording interviews with him. As Jamal has put it, “*They don’t just want my death, they want my silence.*”

Mumia’s case concentrates the political atmosphere of the criminalization of Black men, the expanded death penalty, the political persecution of revolutionaries, and the gutting of defendants’ rights.

**We must stop Mumia’s execution!**