Coming of Age: A New Afrikan Revolutionary

by Safiya Asya Bukhari

published by
Kersplebedeb and Spear & Shield Publications

ISBN 1-894946-18-9
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friend, our lost reverberates throughout the ages.

Gandhian moth, writer, comedist, sister and
Mother

embraces Islam.

a strong family spiritual tradition, Safiya came to
be a founding member of the National Movement for Free U.S. Political Prisoners and
Patriots, a web-based organization that
travelled throughout the country organizing people

In 1998, Safiya became the co-chair of the

the backs of enslaved Africans.

Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, states built on

composed of five states—South Carolina, Georgia,

founded the New Afrika, an organization working

Republic of New Afrika, an organization working

President in the Provisional Government of the

Presidency until her death. She also served as Vice

chairman of the New Afrika, an organization which she co-

formed the New Afrika, an organization which she co-

individual case and in 1992 co-founded the New York

suckers, and homemade pads, wore fact sheets on each

and made political prisoners-T-shirts, buttons, bumper

more politically about individual cases, designed

Producer Safiya Bukhari
We Mourn the Loss of

Dedicated, nationally known Black liberation fighter and longtime WBAI producer Safiya Bukhari (*Where We Live*, Thursdays, 8-9 pm) died in the early hours of the morning from complications due to prolonged illness. She was 53. Safiya joined the Black Panther Party in 1969 after witnessing a vicious police beating of another Panther standing on a Harlem street corner selling the Party’s newspaper. “I tell people straight up that it was the New York Police Department that made me decide to join the Black Panther Party.” She said, “In college I supported the war in Vietnam. I was so far to the right it was ridiculous. But by the time the summer of 1969 was over, in November, I was in the Party.”

A disciplined and dedicated revolutionary, Safiya went on to join the Black Liberation Army. She spent close to nine years in prison for clandestine actions on behalf of the BLA. After her release, Safiya dedicated her life to the freedom of her comrades she left behind, and used every means at her disposal. She

by Sally O’Brien, co-producer, co-host, *Where We Live*  
August 24th, 2003

COMING OF AGE: A NEW AFRIKAN REVOLUTIONARY  
by Safiya Asya Bukhari

Greek mythology tells the story of Minos, ruler of the city of Knossus. Minos has a great labyrinth (maze) in which he keeps the Minotaur, a monster half man and half bull, whose victims were boys and girls who would make it to the center of the maze and be killed when they came face to face with the Minotaur. If an intended victim chanced to survive the encounter with the Minotaur, they perished trying to find their way out of the many intricate passages. Finally, Theseus of Athens, with the help of Ariadne, Minos’ daughter, enters the labyrinth, slays the beast, and finds his way out by following the thread he had unwound as he entered.

The maturation process is full of obstacles and entanglements for anyone, but for a New Afrikan woman in amerikkka, it has all the markings of the Minotaur’s Maze. I had to say that, even though nothing as spectacular takes place in the maturation process of the average New Afrikan woman — it didn’t even happen to me — but the day-to-day struggle for survival and growth reaps the same reward in the end in ten thousand different ways. The trick is to learn from each defeat, and become stronger and more determined… think and begin to develop the necessary strategies to insure the annihilation of the beast…

I am one of a family of 10 children. My parents were strict and religious, but proud and independent. One of the strongest influences of my childhood was my mother constantly telling us to hold our heads up and be proud because We were just as good or better than everyone else, and to stand up and fight for what you believe to be right.

This essay first appeared in *Notes from a New Afrikan P.O.W. Journal*, Book 7 (Spear & Shield Publications, 1979).
An Update (1981)

Coming of Age

I could not get into the politics of the Black Panther Party, but I could volunteer to feed some hungry children. You see, children deserve a start.

I would pull my cuticles into this...

Black Panther Party had a Free Breakfast Program to feed the children. The Panthers decided to do what we could to help the children.

The Panther project is sort of a project which takes up on the less fortunate.

Even at this point, I think I see this as affecting me personally, only as cases, at an early age.

and we are that are started in infancy and last until death. In too many cases, the need to party with political programs.

I never was that political to begin with. The political scene in America has come full circle, and people are once again the political scene of the world.

Keeping me honest in the building was because I was „ posicion. The reason they were security, building... And go to court to do it. I used to make a joke about that.

I was released from the maximum security only in 2 days.

Office in 2 days.

Black woman shot in Champagne. Konrad Kegan will take

In my second year of college, I pledged for a sorority — it was here

I was back from a doctor.

In the town we were searching for „ American dream „!

We believed that with the right education we could make it — so

The sorority had decided to help „ disadvantaged „ children as one of

They were 10 years apart (going on 20) when they joined up in the beginning.

There was a lot of competition in my family. I had to be with 10 children.
victimized by the police and other agents of the government. They were frightened of the potential to wreak havoc that black women represented when black women began to enter into the prisons and jails in efforts to liberate their men. They were spurred into action when they were confronted with the fact that black women were educating their children from the cradle up, who the real enemies of black people are, and what must be done to eliminate this ever-present threat to the lives of black people.

During the last four years of my incarceration i've watched and didn't speak because i didn't want to chance alienating the "left," as black men and black women have fooled themselves into believing that We were "making progress" because (1) Patricia Harris, a black woman, is part of the u.s. president's cabinet, and (2) Andrew Young is the ambassador to the UN — failing to realize that it's all politics — amerikkkan style. And, twenty women of all races are working together for Women's Liberation. There is no real progress being made. As a matter of fact, one of Carter's best friends, Vernon Jordan, had to concede in his annual economic review, the State of Black Amerikkka, 1979, that "the income gap between blacks and whites is actually widening."

The sacrifices black women have made in search of black womanhood, like the sacrifices made by the people of Knossus in its efforts to slay the Minotaur, have been many, harsh and cruel — but We too can slay the beast (in our case, amerikkkan racism, capitalism, and sexism), and out of the ashes build a free and independent Black Nation in which We can take our rightful place as Women, Wives, and Mothers, knowing our children will live to be men and women, and our men will be allowed to recognize their manhood — support and defend their families with dignity.

TOGETHER BUILDING A FUTURE FOR OURSELVES!

Build To Win!

and you have to feed them for them to live to learn. It's hard to think of reading and arithmetic when your stomach's growling.

i'm not trying to tell the logic of why a Free Breakfast Program for children, but to show how i had to be slowly awakened into the reality of life and shown the inter-connection of things.

Every morning at 5:00 my daughter and i would get ready and go to the Center where i was working on the Breakfast Program — cook and serve breakfast, sometimes talk to the children about problems they were encountering and sometimes help them with their homework. Everything was going along smoothly until the number of children coming began to fall off. Finally, i began to question the children and found out that the police had been telling the parents in the neighborhood not to send their children to the Program because We were feeding them poisoned food.

It's one thing to hear about underhanded things the police do — you can ignore it then — but it's totally different when you experience it for yourself — you either lie to yourself or face it. i chose to face it and find out why the police felt it was so important to keep New Afrikan children from being fed that they told lies. i went back to the Black Panther Party and started attending some of their Community Political Education Classes.

It wasn't long after that when i was forced to make a decision about what direction i was going in politically, i was on 42nd street with a friend when we noticed a crowd gathered on the corner. In the center of the crowd was a Panther with some newspapers under his arm. Two police officers were also there, i listened to see what was going on. The police were telling the Panther he couldn't sell newspapers on the corner and he was insisting that he could. Without a thought, i told the police that the Brother had a "constitutional right" to disseminate political literature anywhere, at which point the police asked for my identification and arrested the Sister and myself, along with the Brother who was selling the papers.
First Encounter With the Police

I vividly recall the encounter, a night I'll never forget.

It all began on a quiet street, under the cover of darkness.

I was on my way home from work, heading to the police station.

Upon entering, I was surprised to see so many officers.

One of them approached me, asking if I had any identification.

I handed him my driver's license and answered some questions.

They then took me to a small room where I was questioned extensively.

The officers were keen on finding any possible evidence.

After hours of waiting, they finally let me go.

I was relieved, but also scared.

Since that day, I've been extra careful, always checking my surroundings.

I learned that the police are there to protect us, but we must also be aware.

Never underestimate the power of vigilance.

And remember, always stay calm and cooperative.

That night, I vowed to never let fear dictate my life.

I'm grateful for the encounter, as it taught me to be more cautious.

And now, as I reflect on that night, I know I made the right choices.
Trial and Imprisonment

On April 16, 1975, after a trial that lasted one day, we were sentenced to 40 years, and on April 17, I arrived here at the Virginia Correctional Center for Women at Goochland.

Directly following my arrival I was placed in the Max Security Building and there I stayed, until after being threatened with kourt action, they released me to general population. The day after my release to general population I was told that the first iota of trouble that I caused I would be placed back in the Max Security Building and there I'd stay.

At that point and for the next two years, my emphasis was on getting some medical care for myself and the other women here and educational programs and activities; the priority being on medical care for myself. Inside the prison I was denied it (the general feeling was they couldn't change hospitalization for fear I'd escape; so rather than chancing my escape, they preferred to take a chance on my life). In the kourts they said they saw no evidence of inadequate medical care, but rather a difference of opinion on treatment between me and the prison doctor.

The "medical treatment" for women prisoners here in Virginia has got to be an all-time low, when you got to put your life in the hands of a "doctor" who examines a woman who has her right ovary removed and tells her there's tenderness in her right ovary; or when this same "doctor" examines a woman who has been in prison for six months and tells her she's six weeks pregnant, and there's nothing wrong with her, and she later finds her baby has died and mortified inside her; or when he tells you you're not pregnant and three months later you give birth to a seven pound baby boy; not to mention prescribing Maalox for a sore throat and diagnosing a sore throat that turns out to be cancer.

In December of 1976 I started hemorrhaging and went to the clinic for help. No help of any consequence was given, so I escaped. Two months later I was recaptured. While on escape I was told by a doctor that I could either endure the situation, take pain killers, or have surgery. I decided to use the lack of medical care as my defense for the escape and by doing so do two things: (1) expose the level of medical care at the prison and (2) put pressure on them to give me the care I needed.

By the summer of 1970 I was a full-time Party member and my daughter was staying with my mother. I was teaching some of the Political Education classes at the Party office, and had established a Liberation School in my Section of the community. I had listened to the elderly while they told me how they couldn't survive off their miserly Social Security checks — not pay rent and eat, too — so they paid their rent and eat from the dog food section of the supermarket or the garbage cans. I had listened to the middle-aged mother as she told of being evicted from her home and sleeping on a subway with her children because the welfare refused to give her help unless she signed over all the property she had, and out of desperation, fraudulently received welfare. I had watched while a mother prostituted her body to put food in the mouth of her child and another mother, mentally broken under the pressure, prostituted her eight year old child. I had seen enough of the ravages of dope, alcohol, and despair to know that a change had to be made so the world could be a better place for my child to live in.

My mother had successfully kept me ignorant to the reality of the plight of New Afrikan (black) people in Amerikkka — now I had learned it for myself — but I was still to learn a harsher lesson: the plight of the slave who dares to rebel.

Turbulent Times

The year 1971 saw many turbulent times in the Black Panther Party, and changes in my life. I met and worked with many people who were to teach me and guide me: Michael (Cetewayo) Tabor of the Panther 21; Albert (Nuh) Washington, and "Lost One," who was responsible for my initial political education; Robert Webb. Cet taught me to deal principledly; Nuh taught me compassion; and Robert taught me to be firm in my convictions.

When the split went down in the Black Panther Party, I was left in a position of Communications and Information Officer for the East Coast Party. It wasn't until much later that I was to find out how vulnerable that position was.
Many of the members of the Party went underground to work with the Black Liberation Army (BLA). I was among those who elected to remain aboveground and supply necessary support. The murders of youths such as Clifford Glover, Tyrone Guyton, etc., by the police, and retaliation by the BLA with the assassination of pigs Piagentini and Jones and Rocco and Laurie, made the powers that be frantic, and they pulled out the stops in their campaign to rid the streets of rebellious slaves.

By the spring of 1973, Comrades Assata Shakur and Sundiata Acoli were captured, along with Nuh and Jali (Anthony Bottoms), and Twyman Myers was on the f.b.i.'s 10 Most Wanted list, and I was still traveling back and forth across the kountry trying to build necessary support mechanisms.

In 1972 I recognized the need for something other than myself to depend on. You see, in less than two years I’d aged to the point where I realized that nothing is permanent or secure in a world where it’s who you know and what you have that counts. I’d seen friends and loved ones either killed or thrown in prison, and associates that I’d once thought would never go back, turn states or go back into the woodwork. Nuh turned me on to Islam, which gave me a new security, sense of purpose, and dignity.

By 1973 I’d begun to receive a lot of flak from the police because of what they “suspected” I might be doing. Actually it was because I didn’t have a record; they couldn’t catch me doing anything, and I continued to actively and vocally support the BLA members... also my homework had been done so well in the community, that the community’s support was there, also.

Following the receipt of subpoenas to appear before a special grand jury investigating the BLA that was seated in New York in the spring of 1974, I went underground along with some other people, to function with the BLA.

On January 25, 1975, myself and some other members of the Amistad Collective of the BLA, went into the country in Virginia to practice night firing. We were to leave Virginia that night on our way to Jackson, Mississippi, cause I wanted to be there on Sunday to see someone. We decided to stop by a store before We went back to the crib We were staying at, so We could pick up some cold cuts to make sandwiches with so We wouldn’t have to stop at any restaurants. We drove around looking for an open store. When We came on to one I told the Brothers to wait in the car and I’d go and be right back.

I entered the store, went past the registers, down an aisle to the meat counter and started checking them for all-beef products, I heard a door opening and looked up to see two of the Brothers coming in — didn’t give it a thought — went back to what I was doing when out of the corner of my left eye I saw a rifle pointed toward the door in the manager’s hand. I quickly got into an aisle just as the firing started. Up to this point I had heard no words spoken. With the first lull in shooting, Kombozi came down the aisle toward me. He was wearing a full-length army coat. It was completely unbuttoned. As he came toward me he told me he was shot. I didn’t believe him at first because I saw no blood and his weapon wasn’t drawn. Then he insisted he was still, so I told him to lie down on the floor and I’ll take care of it.

Masai had apparently made it back out the door when the firing started, because just then he came back to the door and tried to draw the fire so We could get out. I saw him get shot in the face and stumble backwards out the door. I looked around for a way out, and realized there was none, and elected to play it low-keyed in order to try and get help for Kombozi as soon as possible. I was to learn that the effort was wasted. The manager of the store and his son, Paul Green Sr. and Jr., stomped Kombozi to death in front of my eyes.

Later, when I attempted to press counter-charges of murder against them, the Commonwealth Attorney called it “justifiable” homicide.

Five minutes after the shoot-out went down, the f.b.i. was on the scene and the next morning they held a press conference, saying I was notorious, dangerous, etc., and known to law enforcement agencies nationwide — and my bail was set at one million dollars on each count.