

# MUMIA

## LONG DISTANCE REVOLUTIONARY

A film by  
**Stephen Vittoria**

120 minutes, 5:1 Dolby Surround Sound, English, Documentary



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*“Inspiring! A powerful punch for freedom of expression and democracy.”  
— Film Critic Michael Fox*

## **Synopsis**

Before he was convicted of murdering a policeman in 1981 and sentenced to die, Mumia Abu-Jamal was a gifted journalist and brilliant writer. Now after more than 30 years in prison and despite attempts to silence him, Mumia is not only still alive but continuing to report, educate, provoke and inspire.

Stephen Vittoria's new feature documentary is an inspiring portrait of a man whom many consider America's most famous political prisoner - a man whose existence tests our beliefs about freedom of expression. Through prison interviews, archival footage, and dramatic readings, and aided by a potent chorus of voices including Cornel West, Alice Walker, Dick Gregory, Angela Davis, Amy Goodman and others, this riveting film explores Mumia's life before, during and after Death Row - revealing, in the words of Angela Davis, "the most eloquent and most powerful opponent of the death penalty in the world...the 21st Century Frederick Douglass."

## **About Mumia Abu-Jamal**

Mumia Abu-Jamal is an award-winning journalist and author of seven books. For the past thirty years he has been a resident of the Pennsylvania State Prison System. Twenty-nine of those years were spent in solitary confinement on death row. His books include *Live from Death Row*, *All Things Censored*, *Jailhouse Lawyers*, and *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party*. Prior to his incarceration, he was an award-winning broadcast journalist. In 1981, he was elected president of the Association of Black Journalists (Philadelphia chapter) and was a radio reporter for NPR. As part of a team of reporters at WHYY, one of NPR's premier stations, he won the prestigious Major Armstrong Award from Columbia University for excellence in broadcasting. His 1982 murder trial has raised considerable protest internationally. His demand for a new trial and freedom is supported by heads of state from France to South Africa, by the European Parliament, by distinguished human rights organizations like Amnesty International, city governments from Detroit to San Francisco to Paris, and by Nobel Laureates Nelson Mandela, Toni Morrison, and Desmond Tutu.

Abu-Jamal obtained his GED in prison in July of 1992; he earned his BA from Goddard College in January of 1996; he was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Law degree from the New College of California in May of 1996; in 1999, he earned a masters of arts degree from California State University Dominguez Hills with a major in humanities history and a minor in African-American literature.

His books are all in print, and include bestsellers. They have been translated into more than seven languages including French, Japanese, German, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. Mumia Abu-Jamal has written and broadcasted more than 2,000 essays from prison, including commencement addresses and lectures. He is currently serving a life sentence without parole at the State Correctional Institute at Mahanoy in Frackville, Pennsylvania.

## **What people are saying about Mumia Abu-Jamal**

*"Prison and government officials are trying to censor and silence Mumia Abu-Jamal. I stand as one of many Americans who believe that there is tremendous value in his voice being heard."* – Susan Sarandon

*"Solitary confinement is simply torture. It has been well known for a long time. It is savagery. Mass incarceration is an incredible crime. All of these things are a true international scandal. [Mumia's] is a striking case, but it is far more general. Maximum security prisons in the United States are horrendous. They make Guantanamo look like a vacation resort."* – Noam Chomsky

*"If Mumia Abu-Jamal has nothing important to say, why are so many powerful people trying to kill him and shut him up?"* – John Edgar Wideman, Professor, Brown University

*"A prophetic writer. Mumia refuses to allow his spirit to be broken by the forces of injustice; his language glows with an affirming flame."* – Jonathan Kozol, Educator

*"Mumia is a dramatic example of how the criminal justice system can be brought to bear on someone who is African-American, articulate, and involved in change in society. The system is threatened by someone like Mumia. A voice as strong and as truthful as his—the repression against him is intensified."* – Sister Helen Prejean

*"We join with Amnesty International in demanding a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal. We will not allow his voice to be silenced."* – Tom Morello, Street Sweeper Social Club

*"The first time I heard a tape of Mumia's radio broadcasts, it was the first time I fully understood why the government was so intent on putting him to death."* – Assata Shakur, former member of The Black Panther Party

*"Mumia Abu-Jamal offers us an important gift of insight and analysis and we must treasure it."* – Susan L. Taylor, Editor in Chief Emeritus, Essence Magazine

*"Uncompromising, disturbing...Abu-Jamal's voice has the clarity and candor of a man whose impending death emboldens him to say what is on his mind without fear of consequence."* – The Boston Globe

*"Abu-Jamal's words flow like the sap of trees, pulsing with energy and capturing the essence of life."* – Library Journal

*"An incisive critic of our criminal justice system...a rare and courageous voice."* – Martin Sheen

## **Filmmaker Bios**

### **Stephen Vittoria: Writer, Director, Producer, Editor**

*Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary* is Stephen Vittoria's current documentary and it opens in theatres this fall. His last film, *One Bright Shining Moment: The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern* won top honors at the Sarasota Film Festival as "Best Documentary Feature" and was released nationwide by First Run Features. In 1987, Vittoria wrote, directed, and edited his first film, the dramatic feature *Black & White*, starring Kim Delgado and Frank Vincent – a story about racism set against the backdrop of post-World War II America. In 1995, Vittoria produced, wrote, and directed *Hollywood Boulevard*, starring John C. McGinley, Jon Tenney, and Julianne Phillips – a dark and satirical look at the motion picture business.

In 1998, Vittoria wrote, directed, and edited the six-hour health documentary *Save Your Life – The Life and Holistic Times of Dr. Richard Schulze*, and then in 2005 he wrote, directed, and edited the television documentary *Keeper of the Flame* with journalist Linda Ellerbee and actor Wilford Brimley – a film that deals with the current ecological crisis facing American forests.

Recently, Vittoria was a producer on two feature documentaries by Academy Award winner Alex Gibney: *Gonzo: The Life & Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson* and *Magic Trip*. Vittoria is the founder and creative director of two Southern California production companies – Street Legal Cinema and Deep Image. One day, Steve hopes to play centerfield for the New York Yankees. He lives in Los Angeles (under protest).

### **Katyana Farzanrad, Producer**

Katy is a producer and director who divides her time between documentaries, narratives, industrials, and web series. Most recently, she has been story producing in reality television. Katy holds a BA from the University of Florida in Theater and an MFA in Cinema and Television from the University of Southern California.

### **Noelle Hanrahan, Producer**

Noelle discovered Mumia's voice in prison when she recorded him on death row at Huntingdon State Prison in July of 1992. These recording sessions inspired the controversial censored series on National Public Radio as well as Abu-Jamal's first bestseller, *Live From Death Row*. She has continued to amplify his voice for more than twenty years. She is an investigative journalist, private investigator, and director of Prison Radio. Noelle has edited Abu-Jamal's books *Jailhouse Lawyers* and *All Things Censored*, produced three of his audio CDs, and continues to produce and distribute his weekly radio commentaries and speeches (over 2000 have been recorded) to a worldwide audience. Ms. Hanrahan is a graduate of Stanford University (B.A.) and Boston University (M.A.).

## **Interviewees**

**Cornel West**, Philosopher, author, civil rights activist, and professor at the Union Theological Seminary

**Alice Walker**, Pulitzer Prize winning author, poet, and civil rights activist

**Angela Davis**, Professor, scholar, author, and political activist

**Rubin “Hurricane” Carter**, Former middleweight boxer and former Executive Director of the “Association in Defense of the Wrongly Convicted”

**Tariq Ali**, Novelist, journalist, filmmaker, and historian

**Ruby Dee**, Actress, poet, journalist, and activist

**M-1 aka Mutulu Olugbala**, Rapper, author, and activist

**Amy Goodman**, Author, journalist, investigative reporter, and host of *DemocracyNow!*

**Juan Gonzalez**, Columnist for the New York Daily News, journalist, investigative reporter, and co-host of DemocracyNow!

**Michelle Alexander**, Author and professor of law at Ohio State University

**Ramsey Clark**, Former US Attorney General and activist

**Giancarlo Esposito**, Actor and director

**Peter Coyote**, Actor, author, director, and screenwriter

**Aya De Leon**, Professor, writer, poet, and spoken word artist

**Terry Bisson**, Author and Mumia Abu-Jamal biographer

**Ramona Africa**, Activist, member of the MOVE Organization

**C. Clark Kissinger**, Activist and former National Secretary for Students for a Democratic Society

**Dave Lindorff**, Author and investigative reporter

**Dave Zirin**, Author and sports journalist

**Dick Gregory**, Author, comedian, and social activist

**Michael Parenti**, Author and historian

**Barbara Cox Easley**, Former member of The Black Panther Party

**Emory Douglas**, Artist and former member of The Black Panther Party

**Reggie Schell**, Former member of The Black Panther Party

**Pam Africa**, Activist and member of the MOVE Organization

**Frances Goldin**, Literary agent and activist

**Greg Ruggiero**, Editor of the legendary City Lights Books

**Heidi Boghosian**, Executive Director of the National Lawyers Guild

**James Cone**, Author and professor at the Union Theological Seminary

**Mark Lewis Taylor**, Author and professor at Princeton Theological Seminary

**Todd Burroughs**, Journalist, historian, and professor at Morgan State University

**Jerry Quickley**, Journalist and performance poet

**Johanna Fernandez**, Author and professor at Baruch College, City University of New York

**Linn Washington**, Author, journalist, and professor at Temple University

**Lydia Barashango**, Mumia Abu-Jamal's sister

**Ted Nace**, Writer, publisher, and environmentalist

**Mike Africa**, Activist and member of the MOVE Organization

**Tameka Cage-Conley**, Teacher, poet, and author

**Sonali Kolhatkar**, Radio producer and on-air host

**Greg Bridges**, Radio producer and on-air host

**Anita Johnson**, Radio producer and on-air host

**Stu Bykofsky**, Columnist, Philadelphia Daily News

**Karin Phillips**, Radio reporter

**Joey Vento**, Proprietor, Geno's Steaks in Philadelphia

**Gabriel Bryant**, Student at Temple University

**Tanay Harris**, Student at Temple University

**Benjamin Cuozzo**, Student at Baruch College

**Weldon McWilliams**, Professor at Cheyney State

**Teddy Robinson**, Radio engineer

## ***Making Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary***

The roots of this film reach back to another Street Legal Cinema/Stephen Vittoria film entitled *Murder Incorporated: Empire, Genocide, and Manifest Destiny*. Vittoria wrote 25 detailed questions and talking points for Mumia to answer and record regarding America's imperial history. The film is still in dormant production but Mumia's brilliant work on the film as a historian and critic of American exceptionalism became the genesis of *Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary*. In fact, some of the *Murder Incorporated* sessions are included in the current film.

For almost two decades, Vittoria was an ardent reader and long-time audience member for Mumia Abu-Jamal's books and recorded essays. After sharing Mumia's work with colleagues and friends and constantly getting back strong reviews that were usually accompanied by the question "Who is this guy?", Vittoria decided to begin researching and writing a long-form narrative structure for a new documentary film that would tell the story of Mumia Abu-Jamal: convicted murderer and brilliant journalist who speaks to the world from the depths of America's prison gulag.

Unlike any other film about Mumia Abu-Jamal, *Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary* does not deal with Mumia's case but rather his work as a journalist prior to and after incarceration on Pennsylvania's death row. "I wasn't interested in re-hashing the same polarizing standoff between those who want Mumia to fry and those who want him free," Vittoria states. "What interested me most as a storyteller was this Herculean feat he accomplishes with grace under extremely oppressive conditions. The fact that his words transcend prison walls and criss-cross the world is a great story and testament to his courage. Like Ramona Africa says in the film: When you're pushing the lie the truth is very threatening."

One of the more difficult tasks associated with the making of *Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary* was securing interview footage with Mumia. The State of Pennsylvania's Department of Corrections forbids the recording of prisoners in any of their facilities. This wasn't always the case. Numerous filmmakers and journalists filmed Mumia for various projects but as Mumia's voice and power began to take hold in the marketplace of ideas – ideas that underscored the tyranny associated with the prison industrial complex, the powers that be passed a blanket ruling unofficially known as the "Mumia Rule," which simply prohibited recording devices of any kind. So the producers, knowing that making a film without access to the main subject would be akin to making *Jaws* without the shark, began to seek out and secure the existing interviews with Mumia – all recorded before the winter of 1996. They were completely successful – tracking down every available visual record of Mumia recorded at either SCI Huntingdon or SCI Greene prisons in Pennsylvania. Those recordings are scattered throughout the film.

Vittoria also asked Mumia new questions about his life prior to and after incarceration. Mumia called in to the studios of Prison Radio where his answers were recorded by his long-time radio producer Noelle Hanrahan.

Reenactments in documentaries have not been a favorite technique of Vittoria's but the lack of access to Mumia coupled with his extraordinary living conditions pushed the filmmaker to employ this recreation for "artistic reasons." The audience deserves to know what life is like in solitary confinement for almost thirty years. Building the cell became an all-important element. The trick is to use it as connective tissue, not as a way to drive the narrative but as a way to allow the audience inside this man's hell. Quick shots, darkly lit, glimpses of this writer's claustrophobic concrete wall existence." Other similar moments in the film help to breathe life into Mumia's words as he describes topics like his mother's death and his initial invitation into the Black Panther Party.

Vittoria interviewed 51 different individuals who could speak about Mumia's career as a journalist, his life as a revolutionary, life as a prisoner, as well as his impact on social and political discourse around the world. More than 100 hours of interview footage exists and the producers plan on including highlights as an extra on the upcoming DVD and Blu-Ray. The production shoot covered thousands of miles: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Washington DC, northern and southern California, and finally London as well as Los Cabos, Mexico.

Post-production began in the spring of 2011 in Los Angeles. Picture was locked by the end of the year, followed by a rigorous schedule of graphic design by DesignPath, colorizing by Filmlook in Burbank, sound design at Sculptured Music in Los Angeles, the writing and recording of original scored music by Robert Guillory, the garnering of "Society" sung by Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam, and the final 5:1 Dolby Surround mix by Dino Herrmann – also at Sculptured Music in LA.

## Select Quotes from the Film

### Opening reading from “B-Block Days & Nightmares” by Mumia Abu-Jamal

GIANCARLO ESPOSITO

“Wrapped in the sweet, false escape of dreams, I hear the unmistakable sounds of meat being beaten by blackjack, of bootfalls, yells, curses; and it merges into the mind’s moviemaking machine, evoking distant memories of some of the Philadelphia Police Department’s greatest hits – on me. *“Get off that man, you fat, greasy, racist, redneck pig bitch muthafucka!”* Another dawn, another beating, another shackled inmate pummeled into the concrete by a squadron of guards.”

### From the introduction or “Who is Mumia?”

CORNEL WEST

Mumia how are you dealing with all of this darkness and despair and despondency and so forth. He said let me write about it, I’ll tell the truth about it, it’s a living hell, it’s a nightmare.

AMY GOODMAN

They have contained his body and they are trying to figure out how to shut him down entirely.

TARIQ ALI

They have moved heaven and earth to stop his voice being heard in the United States.

MIKE AFRICA

Anybody who has the ability to draw a crowd with their voice and then speak truth...oh my God.

TERRY BISSON

I know a lot of political prisoners and Mumia is locked down as hard as anyone I have ever met. But I’ve never met anybody that has such a warmth and such a sense of humor, and such a perspective on the world.

GREG RUGGIERO

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a revolutionary person. So he’s like a guerrilla in the jungle in a tent in the rain, writing to the community with next to nothing.

DICK GREGORY

He come through at a time that the technology was there, could go around the world...and one day we will find out that he was the voice of America – the voice of America is a fraud.

JAMES CONE

Powerful governments like to control, they love to control. And they love to silence people. They cannot silence Mumia.

LINN WASHINGTON

So, here we have somebody who defiantly says, “Yes, I’m not only a journalist, but I’m a revolutionary journalist, and no, I don’t agree with anything that you’re doing. And yes, I have an international platform to talk about your ills – interestingly enough a platform that I never use to talk about my own case.” They want him ground up.

ALICE WALKER

I know about the midnight hour. I know about the darkness. And I know about the terror. And I know how hard it is to maintain ones humanity in the face of injustice. We don't see his midnight hour, except sometimes in his writing.

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

We would not be who we are as African-Americans of this date were it not for the Reverend, the Prophet, Nat Turner – who brilliantly merged the religious with the political. Who didn’t just talk about the world to come but fought to transform the world that is. You know, he is honored and revered today – not because he could quote that Bible well, he could do that, but because he worked in the fields of life to get the slave master off of his neck, off of all of our necks.

### **About Philadelphia**

DRAMATIZATION

“There is not perhaps anywhere to be found a city in which prejudice against color is more rampant than in Philadelphia.” – Frederick Douglass, 1862

CORNEL WEST

No doubt that Philadelphia has a long history of very, very deep white supremacy. You remember the great WEB Dubois classic of 1899 the *Philadelphia Negro*. It’s the first sociology study of Black people in the history of the country. He reached the same conclusion that the great Frederick Douglass did.

LINN WASHINGTON

Philadelphia has a veneer of liberalism and this whole Quaker mystique. The reality is it has been this ruthlessly racist city - really from its inception.

### **About his mother’s death**

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

I thought she would live forever – that this woman who carried me, my brothers, and my sister, would never know death. For thirty years she smoked Pall Malls and Marlboros, yet still I thought she would live forever. When she died, of emphysema, while I was imprisoned, it was like a lightning bolt to the soul. Never during my entire existence had there been a time when she was not there. Suddenly, on a cold day in February, her breath had ended, and her sweet presence, her wise counsel, was gone forever.

### **About attending a campaign rally to protest George Wallace in 1968**

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

George Wallace was a candidate on the American Independent Party – very, very right-wing, although he probably wouldn't be considered very right-wing in terms of America's political context today, would he?

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

I remember being pummeled and being beaten to the ground and I remember looking around and I saw a pant leg and it was blue and had a stripe on it, so, it told me this was a cop. So doing what I was taught to do all my life I said, "Yo, help, police!" and I remember the guy walking over very briskly and his foot going back and kicking me in the face and I've always said thank you to that cop because he kicked me straight into the Black Panther Party.

### **About writing for the Black Panther newspaper**

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

For me, political life began with the Black Panther Party. When an older sister named Audrea handed me a copy of *The Black Panther* newspaper around the spring of 1968 my mind was promptly blown. It was as if my dreams had awakened and strolled into my reality... I joined in my heart. I was all of fourteen years old.

TODD BURROUGHS

I was astounded at the fact that at 15 years old he was essentially the same writer. The style was a little more dogmatic as a Panther. You know, because he's using all this Panther rhetoric, "Do Something, Nigger, Even If You Only Spit!" But, at core, it is the same black leftist analysis that he does at 56. And I was shocked at that.

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

A lot of people would tend to deprecate that kind of work – well, you weren't a professional journalist, or well you weren't a mainstream journalist. But consider this: the Black Panther newspaper at its height of publication, when I was working for it, sold over 250,000 newspapers every week all across the United States and we sold internationally. How can you write for or edit a newspaper that sells over 250,000 copies and not be considered utterly professional?

### **About COINTELPRO**

CORNEL WEST

The state is very clever in terms of keeping track, especially the courageous and visionary ones, the ones that are long distance runners. You can keep track of them, absorb 'em, dilute 'em, or outright kill 'em – you don't have to worry about opposition to 'em.

CORNEL WEST

Early on they zeroed in on Mumia Abu-Jamal. Now of course on one hand you have to say the

state understood that they had a very very special freedom fighter, they had a very special revolutionary. They knew that he was for real so they really needed to keep track of him.

### **About police brutality in Philadelphia and Frank Rizzo**

PETER COYOTE

Police brutality in the City of Brotherly Love reached horrific levels under the reign of Frank Rizzo...levels so outrageous that the federal government – for the first time in American history – filed a lawsuit in 1979 charging Frank Rizzo and three top officials with aiding and abetting police brutality.

RAMSEY CLARK

Well I tangled with him a few times when he was Chief of Police. In my opinion he was an unprincipled person with compelling prejudices that caused abuse of police power and harmed good people.

JUAN GONZALEZ

From the time that Mumia was about 15 years old, Frank Rizzo knew who he was. So did George Fencel, who was the head of the intelligence squad that kept track of radicals. And Fencel knew Mumia from A to Z... so the top people in the police department always knew who Mumia was and saw him as an enemy.

### **About Mumia's place in the pantheon of black writers**

NARRATION

"The voice of black journalism in the struggle for the liberation of African-American people has always proved to be decisive throughout black history. When you listen to Mumia Abu-Jamal you hear the echoes of David Walker, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Dubois, Paul Robeson, and the sisters and brothers who kept the faith with struggle, who kept the faith with resistance." — Historian Manning Marable

### **About the night Mumia was shot and arrested**

NARRATION

After recovering from his gunshot wounds and surgery, Mumia Abu-Jamal wrote an essay entitled "A Christmas Cage." In it, he describes the beatings he suffered at the hands of the Philadelphia police on the night of his arrest.

DRAMATIZATION

Nowhere have I read how police found me, lying in a pool of my blood, unable to breathe, and then proceeded to punch, kick, and stomp me – not question me. I remember being rammed into a pole or a fireplug with police at both arms. I remember kicks to my head, my face, my chest...but I have read no press accounts, and have heard tell of no witnesses...Where are the

witnesses to a police captain or inspector entering the wagon and beating me with a police radio, all the while addressing me as a "Black motherfucker?" Where are the witnesses...?  
(From "A Christmas Cage," 1982)

### **About life in prison**

AMY GOODMAN

I can't remember the first time I heard one of his essays but I know the one that has always stuck with me: *"Imagine living, eating, sleeping, relieving oneself, daydreaming, weeping, but mostly waiting in a room about the size of your bathroom. Now, imagine doing all those things, but mostly waiting, for the rest of your life. Imagine waiting, waiting to die."*

(From "A Bright, Shining Hell," All Things Censored, 2000)

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

It's almost impossible to communicate the reality of what life on death row is for someone who hasn't had that experience. In some ways, it defies description.

RUBIN "HURRICANE" CARTER

Prison is raw, naked violence...hatred and humiliation. Every day of my life in prison my life was threatened. Every day of Mumia's life in prison, his life is threatened.

CORNEL WEST

Most human beings would shrivel up...become very coarse in their consciousness and very hard in their hearts and very chilly in their souls...it has had the opposite effect on Brother Mumia Abu-Jamal.

### **About writing on Death Row**

JERRY QUICKLEY

Charles Bukowski said "no one worth a damn ever wrote in peace."

ALICE WALKER

My sense of Mumia is that he is working almost all the time. I mean he must work as much as I do and I work a lot.

JOHANNA FERNANDEZ

I think that writers above all need a room of their own and space and time to write. And Mumia has a room of his own and time and space to write.

TARIQ ALI

You know, the worst thing is that people get used to atrocities. I remember when I was in Vietnam during the war in the late 60s and I first saw the effects of American bombing and I couldn't function properly for a day or so, seeing dead children laying on the street and then the horrific thing is, I spent six weeks there and you get used to it. The first day you're shaken,

the next day you're not so shaken, you're always angry and so in a strange sort of a way a political prisoner in prison knowing he's there indefinitely, comes to terms with it, it's horrific!

### **About the prison industrial complex**

MICHELLE ALEXANDER

There are more African-American adults under correctional control today, in prison or jail, on probation or parole, than were enslaved in 1850 – a decade before the Civil War began.

JAMES CONE

See, you have to control a marginal population, a subservient, subhuman – as once thought – population, like black people, you have to control them. Slavery you could control them and define as property, but after the Civil War they're supposed to be free. Then you segregate them...and you lynch them. That's control.

MICHELLE ALEXANDER

Most criminologists and sociologists today will acknowledge crime rates and incarceration rates in the United States have moved independently of one another. You know incarceration rates – especially black incarceration rates – have soared regardless of whether crime is going up or down in any given community or the nation as a whole. So what does explain this? Well the answer is the war on drugs, a get-tough movement that was inspired not by drug crime or crime generally but instead by racial politics. The war on drugs was part of a grand Republican Party strategy known as the “Southern strategy” of using racially coded get-tough appeals on issues of crime and welfare to appeal to poor and working class whites, particularly in the south who were anxious about, resentful of, many of the gains of African-Americans in the Civil Rights Movement.

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

And also to provide a final solution to America's nagging problem of the black presence.

MICHELLE ALEXANDER

In the words of HR Haldeman, President Richard Nixon's former chief of staff, he quoted Nixon as describing the strategy this way, quote: “The whole problem is really the blacks, the key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to.” End quote. Well they did.

### **About the Nobel Peace Prize**

TARIQ ALI

When Obama got the Peace Prize from the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, 10,000 people in Norway demonstrated against the decision because Obama had just announced that he was going to escalate the war in Afghanistan, which he then proceeded to do after receiving the prize... I could have given them two candidates who are very deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize this year. One is, of course, Noam Chomsky, who has fought for peace all his life. And the other is Mumia Abu-Jamal. Now, that would have given people something to think about. If there

were any justice in the world, they would award him the Peace Prize next year but I'm prepared to bet you that they won't.

**About being a revolutionary**

“The first lesson a revolutionary must learn is that he is a doomed man.”

—Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense, The Black Panther Party

CORNEL WEST

In both dialogues I had with him, he said over and over again: “I am a revolutionary because of the love.” So when you love people you can't stand the fact that they are being treated unjustly.

GREG RUGGIERO

I think Mumia would agree with what Che said: "At the risk of sounding ridiculous, a revolutionary is guided by feelings of love and for love of the people."

CORNEL WEST

I think that's really what made him a revolutionary. That's why he is a long distance revolutionary. Most revolutionaries are not long distance.

ANGELA DAVIS

For all of these decades, he is a vibrant member of a community of resistance, a community of struggle. As a matter of fact, he's one of the most important contributors to that community.

JUAN GONZALEZ

What makes Mumia so threatening to many people in the United States is that he is still a revolutionary. And because he has been in jail for so long, the system has not had the opportunity to calm him down.

## **Cast**

### **Re-creations:**

Mumia (in the cell)	Troy Alcendor
Mumia's Mother	Brandy Scott
Audrea (Black Panther member)	Brandy Scott
Mumia's Daughter	Sydney Bloom

### **Onscreen Narrators:**

Ahsabi Monique Burris  
Lorin Becker  
Martha Boles  
Vanessa Born  
Rick Burns  
Rodney Charles  
Myles Cranford  
Eric Davis  
Gerald Emerick  
Adrian Germany  
Sheila Grenham  
Elija Hall  
Rachel Hasting  
DaJuan Johnson  
Howard McNair  
Christina Moses  
Marques Ray  
Eartha Robinson  
Rachel Robinson  
Halima Scott  
Tejah Signori  
Saro Solis  
Cornelious Jordan  
Jim Underdown  
Pranidhi Varshney

## **Credits**

**Written, Directed & Edited by**  
**Produced by**

Stephen Vittoria  
Stephen Vittoria, Katyana Farzanrad, and Noelle  
Hanrahan

**Cinematography & Editor**  
**Music Written & Performed by**  
**Sound Design & Re-Recording Mixer**  
**Production Design**

Erik Sorensen  
Robert Guillory  
Dino Herrmann  
Adam Redner

**Co-Producer**

Rikki Jarrett

**8mm Photography**

Skye Borgman

**Location Sound Mixers**

Ed Novick, Benjamin S.L. Wong, Johnpaul Golaski,  
Max Cooke

**Add'l Field Producers (NYC & Philadelphia)**

Marissa Costidis, Drew Williams, Shannon Vittoria

**Additional Camera & Lighting**

Alex Levin, Christopher Bauer, Skye Borgman

### **London Crew**

**Producer**

CreationVideo Ltd.

**Lighting Cameraman**

Mark Slocombe

David Steven Lee

**Teleprompting Los Angeles**

PC Prompting, Steve Graham

**Teleprompting San Francisco**

Ralph Kelliher

**Art Direction Services**

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**Panels from “The Great Migration” by Jacob Lawrence**

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Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

**“El Corredor de Los Silenciados”**

Ricardo Samaniego Mendoza: Project & Implementation

Helena Moguel Samaniego: Research & Visual Argument

**Mumia Abu-Jamal Artwork**

Seth Tobocman, Erik Drooker, Mac McGill, Angela  
Bocage, Menira Gilden

**Black Panther Artwork**

Emory Douglas,

**Animation**

Dmitry Borisov

## **The Art from the Film**

### **“The Great Migration”**

(Panels 1 & 3)

By Jacob Lawrence

The Great Migration illustrates the mass exodus of African-Americans who moved to the North in search for a better life. To include two panels from Lawrence’s historic series was an honor.

[2 images]

To see the entire series, click here

[http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration\\_series/](http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration_series/)

### **“The Life of Mumia Abu-Jamal,” “Mumia Shakes Hands with Death”**

By Seth Tobocman

Radical New York City artist Seth Tobocman created twenty-three panels that depict the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Tobocman’s unique style and strong narrative was a perfect fit for the film.

[24 images]

To learn more about Seth Tobocman, click here

<http://www.sethtobocman.com/>

### **“Street Cop,” “Flaming Fist,” “Mumia Abu-Jamal”**

By Eric Drooker

Eric Drooker (American painter, graphic novelist, and frequent cover artist for The New Yorker) has long supported Mumia Abu-Jamal. His stunning work in the film is no exception.

[3 images]

To learn more about Eric Drooker, click here

<http://www.drooker.com/>

### **“Flag,” “Mumia”**

By Mac McGill

One of New York City’s leading pen and ink artists, Mac McGill graced the film with two of his extraordinary works.

[2 images]

To learn more about Mac McGill, click here

<http://www.booklyn.org/artists/Mac%20McGill,%20N.Y.,%20NY.php>

### **“Stolen Lives,” “Reign of Terror”**

By Ann Erpino

California artist Ann Erpino has been fighting the corrupt machine since she picked up a paintbrush. Her surreal depiction of Mumia and American imperialism hold a dramatic and important place in the film’s narrative. Ann also appears in the film.

[2 images]

To learn more about Ann Erpino, click here

<http://www.annerpino.com/>

### **“Freedom,” “Power to the People”**

By Emory Douglas

Former Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party, Emory Douglas, also appears in *Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary*. His activist art and frontline thoughts help to capture the good fight waged by the Panthers.

[2 images]

To learn more about Emory Douglas, click here

<http://www.moca.org/emorydouglas/>

### **“El Corredor de los Silenciados”**

By Ricardo Samaniego Mendoza & Helena Moguel Samaniego

Moved by the struggle of Mumia Abu-Jamal, young Mexican artists Ricardo Samaniego Mendoza and Helena Moguel Samaniego created this installation entitled “The Corridor of the Silenced Ones” or “El Corredor de Los Silenciados.”

[2 images]

Lo más peligroso que puede existir para un sistema injusto, corrupto, ineficiente o represivo es la denuncia. La denuncia le abre los ojos al pueblo y politiza la vida diaria de las personas. He ahí la razón de que la libertad de expresión no pueda ser tolerada por aquéllos que temen que sus núcleos de poder se vean truncados ante el poderío del pueblo.

—Los Artistas

<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117949136/>



Thu., Jan. 31, 2013

## Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary

(Documentary)

By RONNIE SCHEIB

**Stephen Vittoria's docu about Mumia Abu-Jamal -- unrepentant commie cop-killer to some, political martyr to others -- makes no bones about its allegiance. "Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary" delivers a political discourse inspired by its subject and espoused by left-wing writers, actors, educators and activists, with the opposition represented only by man-on-the-street grumblings and vituperative Fox News coverage. Vittoria avoids discussing the crime for which Abu-Jamal spent 29 years in solitary confinement on death row, instead tracing the path of a brilliant journalist whose message cannot be silenced. Opening Feb. 1 in limited release, this passionate advocacy docu should spark debate.**

Part of Abu-Jamal's persuasive power flows from the specificity of his analysis of black history and his ability to see the struggle for freedom in larger, nonexclusive terms. Vittoria attempts to mirror that duality by presenting a contextual biography of Abu-Jamal and a forum for his ideas. For many of the film's interviewed admirers, like Alice Walker, Mumia's personal integrity is inseparable from his political acuity.

At age 15, Abu-Jamal was a founding member and communications secretary of the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Panthers, getting his start in journalism by writing for the organization's newspaper. Vittoria quotes Frederick Douglass in 1852, denouncing racism in the City of Brotherly Love, and calls on an array of more contemporary interviewees, including former attorney general Ramsey Clark, to attest to Philadelphia's heightened bigotry and rampant brutality under police chief Frank Rizzo.

It was under Rizzo's watch that Abu-Jamal started reporting on radio, his deep, persuasive voice and informed commentary winning devoted listeners; his analyses of current events, including the local war against John Africa's Philadelphia-based Move enclave, and the federal government's covert clash with the Black Panthers, attracted the animus of the police and the FBI. An on-camera Peter Coyote wryly fills in the narrative blanks in Abu-Jamal's story -- except as concerns the shooting of policeman Daniel Faulkner.

The docu doesn't become fully focused until Abu-Jamal is incarcerated and gains international attention, his trial disputed by organizations such as Amnesty Intl. and Human Rights Watch, his continued imprisonment the subject of protests in France, Germany and beyond. The Republican Party's attempt to condemn the French town of Saint-Denis for naming a street after Abu-Jamal furnishes some welcome comic relief.

In prison, a focused, likable Abu-Jamal gave interviews, many of which figure prominently in the docu (along with low-lit re-enactments of an actor portraying him writing in his cell), and penned a series of books on black history, the Black Panthers, jailhouse lawyers and the hell of prison -- all of which are lauded here by educators, writers and black activists like Cornel West, Angela Davis, Dick Gregory and Walker, and quoted by Giancarlo Esposito onstage.

Vittoria closely follows the government's desperate efforts to silence Abu-Jamal. His scheduled broadcast with Amy Goodman on NPR's "All Things Considered" was quashed; the film shows a C-Span clip of an outraged Sen. Bob Dole condemning NPR on the floor of Congress. In order to shut Abu-Jamal up and prohibit him from being contacted by journalists or broadcasters, the state of Pennsylvania denied those rights to all death-row prisoners.

Vittoria triumphantly heralds the Abu-Jamal's return to the political scene as a rallying cry for an alternate political discourse joyously shared by the film's community of interviewees.

[http://www.democracynow.org/2012/10/22/long\\_distance\\_revolutionary\\_new\\_documentary\\_tells](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/10/22/long_distance_revolutionary_new_documentary_tells)



MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2012

## "Long Distance Revolutionary": New Documentary Tells Untold Story of Mumia Abu-Jamal's Life Journey

The new documentary, "Long Distance Revolutionary: A Journey with Mumia Abu-Jamal," chronicles Abu-Jamal's life and work as a journalist, writer and public intellectual, even as he spent some 30 years on death row in Pennsylvania. In 1982, Abu-Jamal was sentenced to die for allegedly killing Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. He has always maintained his innocence. Then, last year, the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals set aside Abu-Jamal's death sentence after finding jurors were given confusing instructions that encouraged them to choose death rather than a life sentence. In January, prosecutors announced they would no longer pursue the death penalty against Abu-Jamal, and the imprisoned journalist was transferred to the general prison population. We air a clip from the film, out in February, and speak with director Stephen Vittoria. [includes rush transcript]

### Transcript

**AMY GOODMAN:** I wanted to switch gears now and ask you about the new documentary that you have just worked on called *Long Distance Revolutionary: A Journey with Mumia Abu-Jamal*. The film chronicles Mumia Abu-Jamal's life and work as a journalist, writer, public intellectual, even as he spent some 30 years on death row in Pennsylvania.

In 1982, Abu-Jamal was sentenced to die for killing Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner, always maintaining his innocence. Then, last year, the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals set aside Abu-Jamal's death sentence after finding jurors were given confusing instructions that encouraged them to choose death rather than a life sentence. In January, prosecutors announced they would no longer pursue the death penalty against Abu-Jamal, and the imprisoned journalist was transferred to the general prison population.

Well, in this clip from the film, *Long Distance Revolutionary*, we hear from some of the voices who have supported Mumia Abu-Jamal over the years. We hear from Rubin Carter, from Cornel West, Tariq Ali, Mike Africa, Greg Ruggiero, Linn Washington, James Cone, Ramona Africa and Dick Gregory.

**RUBIN "HURRICANE" CARTER:** Mumia Abu-Jamal is one of the lost souls of the revolution.

**CORNEL WEST:** Mumia, how are you dealing with all of this darkness and despair and despondency and so forth? He said, "Let me write about it. I'll tell the truth about it. It's a living hell. It's a nightmare."

**TARIQ ALI:** They have moved heaven and earth to stop his voice being heard in the United States.

**MIKE AFRICA:** Anybody who has the ability to draw a crowd with their voice and then speak truth? Oh, my god.

**GREG RUGGIERO:** Mumia Abu-Jamal is a revolutionary person. So, he's like a guerrilla in the jungle in a tent in the rain, writing to the community with next to nothing.

**LINN WASHINGTON:** So here we have somebody who defiantly says, "Yes, I'm not only a journalist, but I'm a revolutionary journalist. And, no, I don't agree with anything that you're doing. And, yes, I have an international platform—interestingly enough, a platform that I never use to talk about my own case." They want him ground up.

**JAMES CONE:** Powerful governments like to control. They love to control. And they love to silence people. They cannot silence Mumia.

**RAMONA AFRICA:** When you're pushing the lie, the truth is very threatening.

**DICK GREGORY:** He come through at a time that the technology was there, that could go around the world. And one day we will find out that he was the voice of America. *The Voice of America* is a fraud.

**AMY GOODMAN:** That's a clip from the new documentary, *Long Distance Revolutionary: A Journey with Mumia Abu-Jamal*, written, produced and directed by Steve Vittoria, coming to theaters in February. *Democracy Now!*'s Juan González and me, as well, also speak in the film. Juan will be introducing the film in November in New York City at DOC NYC.

The significance of what we have just heard and why you chose Mumia Abu-Jamal as your next subject for a film?

**STEPHEN VITTORIA:** Amy, unlike any other film, book, video, article written about Mumia, *Long Distance Revolutionary* does not deal with his case whatsoever. We mention it; it is not a focus of the film. The focus of the film is Mumia's life as a journalist, a writer, a historian, a revolutionary, both prior to incarceration and after incarceration, 30 years on death row. Now he's been in the general population for the last year or so. And that's what really interested me about Mumia. We know about the case. There has been plenty of pieces produced about the case. I didn't want to mine that information again. The forces that have been—that have been keeping Mumia where he is and put him where he is, they've had their narrative for 30 years. There is another narrative.

And the other narrative is that this was an incredible young man at 14, 15 years old that was a writer for the Black Panther newspaper. He was a reporter and a broadcaster for National Public Radio in his late twenties. He had an amazing career before December 9, 1981, when he was arrested and then later convicted for the murder of Faulkner. It's just an incredible story that they have kept under wraps, and they want to keep it under wraps because he has—he has transcended prison for the 30 years after. And people like Noelle Hanrahan, who is my partner on this film, she's been able to get his voice out from death row, a dark, dank hole on death row in Pennsylvania, and she's delivered it to the world. And he has had an amazing impact on social and political discourse the world over. That's what the film is about.

And the voices that you just heard, the outpouring of not only love but of intellectual respect and historical respect for Mumia Abu-Jamal, is absolutely incredible. And we capture it in this film. We talk a great deal about the ugly reality of mass incarceration in this country. Michelle Alexander is in the film, the author of *The New Jim Crow*, and she helps to frame how and why men and women like Mumia are where they are. And so, the film covers that arc of Mumia's life. And we're incredibly proud—Eddie Vedder from Pearl Jam offered us some music, which is just absolutely incredible. And we have a stellar interview cast. So, we're looking for to sharing what, quite frankly, is a brand new story with audiences all across the world.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Steve Vittoria, I want to thank you for being with us. *Long Distance Revolutionary: A Journey with Mumia Abu-Jamal* is the film. It's premiering at the Mill Valley Film Festival and coming to theaters in February. His 2005 documentary is called *One Bright Shining Moment: The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern*.

<http://movies.nytimes.com/2013/02/01/movies/mumia-long-distance-revolutionary-about-mumia-abu-jamal.html?ref=movies&r=1&>

# The New York Times

Movie Review

## An Insistent Voice From Behind Bars

### 'Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary,' About Mumia Abu-Jamal

By NEIL GENZLINGER

Published: January 31, 2013

Coverage of public discourse in the United States often makes it seem as if the only ideologies still in the game were the far right and the moderate everybody else. But "[Mumia: Long Distance Revolutionary](#)," a documentary by Stephen Vittoria, is proof that there are still outspoken champions of views too radicalized to qualify as left-wing: people distrustful of law enforcement, the political system, the justice system, the news media and the very notion that America is at heart the land of the free.

That isn't the film's intent, of course. Mr. Vittoria sets out to tell once again the story of [Mumia Abu-Jamal](#), who was convicted of killing a Philadelphia police officer more than 30 years ago, and to highlight the considerable writing he has done in prison over the decades. From that standpoint the film will appeal to one side of that [polarizing case](#) — the side that views Mr. Abu-Jamal as a political prisoner and victim of a racist system — and enrage the other.

The samples of Mr. Abu-Jamal's writings aren't generous enough to establish whether his is a singular voice or just a prolific one, with Mr. Vittoria instead letting the film wander considerably, to Frederick Douglass and recent American bombings overseas and everything in between.

But getting a concentrated dose of activists like Angela Davis and Dick Gregory, academics like Cornel West and Michelle Alexander, and the many other talking heads in this film is certainly a bracing change from the usual back-and-forth of the evening news.

<http://www.indypendent.org/2013/01/31/interview-stephen-vittoria-about-his-new-documentary-life-and-times-mumia-abu-jamal>

# THE INDYPENDENT

— a FREE PAPER for FREE PEOPLE —

## An Interview with Stephen Vittoria about his New Documentary on the Life and Times of Mumia Abu-Jamal

BY JOHN TARLETON

JANUARY 31, 2013

Did Mumia shoot the cop? Or was he framed by a racist criminal justice system? These are the central questions that have swirled around Mumia Abu-Jamal in the three decades since he became the U.S.'s most famous Death Row inmate following his arrest and conviction for the 1981 murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. In his new documentary film on Mumia that debuts in New York this Friday, director Stephen Vittoria (*The U.S. vs. John Lennon and One Bright Shining Moment: The Forgotten Summer of George McGovern*) looks to break new ground by passing over Mumia's legal battle. Instead, he takes the long view of the life and times of a man who became a Black Panther leader in his teens and later galvanized millions of supporters (and legions of detractors) from around the world with his writings and commentaries from Pennsylvania's Death Row.

**John Tarleton:** *Why did you make this film?*

**Stephen Vittoria:** When you wake up in a country that you realize is run by mass murderers, economic rapists and general run-of-the-mill racists and misogynist psychopaths, you start looking for some sanity. And for me the sanity came from a dark, dank hole on death row in the state of Pennsylvania's Department of Corrections and that was Mumia Abu-Jamal. We've made the unthinkable normal in this society and I think Mumia reminds us of that all the time.

**JT:** *When did you first become aware of Mumia?*

**SV:** It was probably the mid '90s when he first started to write and broadcast publicly. The first time I heard his voice, it was a little bit shocking, it was kind of like who is this? And he had this incredible baritone and it was immensely intelligent and very compassionate.

And then you find out that he's writing from death row with no computer, no library, no Internet, just the books that certain folks send to him that he's lucky enough to get. He cranks out some pretty incredible stuff. So I was inspired early on by his writings and his commentaries. And I guess his first book, *Live From Death Row*, was something that I remember I couldn't wait to get my hands on and read.

**JT:** *Throughout your movie you intersperse supporters of his reading passages from his works. What was the intention behind that?*

**SV:** I needed to bring to life his words. It has not been possible to bring recording devices into prison to interview Mumia since 1996. You have to come with other elements, other techniques to tell the story. I thought people like Ruby Dee and Cornell West and Giancarlo Esposito would work and even folks that aren't so well known that I chose in a general casting session to dramatically bring to life his words. I didn't want to just have talking heads. I wanted people to be able to go on this journey with him through his writing.

**JT:** *You also took time to tell the story of Mumia from his earliest days. The iconic image of him is of the man behind bars with long dreadlocks but you took the time to bring out more of his story.*

**SV:** Mumia is where he is in prison right now primarily because of the power structure, which is incredibly racist in the city of Philadelphia. He was greatly influenced by the repression he felt in Philadelphia, it's one of the reasons he broke out and joined the Black Panthers at a very young age. He was writing for them at the age of 15, 16 years old. He was on a journey early on and I thought it was important to bring to life what he and others like him had to go through. There were a lot of especially young black males in Philadelphia that were under the thumb of the Philadelphia Police Department and the prosecutor's office. To this day Philadelphia remains an incredibly racist city.

**JT:** *You had a previous film about George McGovern's 1972 Presidential campaign. Do you see any connection between that work and this one?*

**SV:** I do. George was a revolutionary within the system but a politician nonetheless. He was very, very different from the rest of his brethren in the Senate and he was probably the most anti-war candidate to ever win a major party nomination. I think it scared the shit out of a lot of people that he got that close to the White House.

Mumia is a classic revolutionary outside the system. I think the similarities are they both intensely wanted to change the system, Mumia from the outside, which is where I think change actually happens from, and McGovern from the inside. There's some similarities, there's a whole lot of differences.

**JT:** *What do you think Mumia's significance is at this moment in US history?*

**SV:** People really need a voice like Mumia or Arundhati Roy or Noam Chomsky or Howard Zinn when he was alive that takes on their shoulders the weight of people that are feeling the oppression. Mumia offers an alternative to a narrative that has become very stale. It's a voice we're not getting, by any stretch of the imagination, from the mainstream corporate media.

**JT:** *Describe your political trajectory.*

**SV:** I always grew up very, very radical, very much on the left of American politics. I had my period probably in the late '70s and '80s and into the early '90s where I absolutely was a political atheist and kinda took a Jack Kerouac Zen approach to things.

And I think the administration of George Bush and the post-9/11 madness that went on in this country reignited the pacifist in me, reignited the revolutionary edge of my beliefs. And it started

with the film about George McGovern but then quickly materialized ahead into more radical projects and Mumia's story.

**JT:** *Did you have cooperation from Mumia in developing this film?*

**SV:** We corresponded all the time, and I asked him if he wouldn't mind rerecording some of his writings from an audio standpoint, because he can call out on the telephone and we can hook up and get a fairly decent and clean recording. He recorded 15 or 20 short pieces for me that we used. We probably used five or six of them in the film, to kind of punctuate some things.

But as far as any cooperation or collaboration on the narrative or anything like that, no. As a filmmaker, I would never ask that of a subject. I wouldn't want to go there.

**JT:** *What was it like visiting Mumia?*

**SV:** It was pretty intense. They have him caged in a Plexiglas kind of a hermetically sealed room and I'm in a hermetically sealed room. There's sort of an opening on both side of the Plexiglas where our voices could go through.

It was an incredible meeting because in the back of your mind you expect him to be angry and bitter. And he's just, he has transcended that place. He puts his visitors at ease and he is very gregarious and very much himself. You get the sense that he also works incredibly hard in prison as a writer. He has a very specific regimen when he writes. He told me there's certain days he takes off and he'll exercise or read or do other things. And then there's days and hours that he absolutely has to write.

It's very much like a factory existence. I think that's one of the ways he stays sane is the sanity is in the writing. The same sanity I found in his writing I think he ends up giving to himself with his research and his writing.

Our visits were incredibly long – each time for like six, seven hours. No food, no water, we just rapped. And a lot of times it wasn't about political things, it was about goofy things and.. He's never been on a computer so he's very, very interested in what's available out there and how, what you can find online. Because when he went into prison, in 1981, it was typewriters and long nights in the library.

**JT:** *Does the meaning of Mumia's life change if he was in fact guilty of the shooting of Officer Faulkner? Does he have to be innocent of the crime to be a prophetic voice?*

**SV:** That's an excellent question. I don't think he has to be innocent of a crime. Hell, we've had American presidents that are responsible for two or three million deaths. It's like the old saying, kill one person, call it murder, kill a million, call it foreign policy.

I wholeheartedly believe in Mumia's innocence not only from my own personal connection to him but just from what I know of an incredibly skewed case. I believe him to be completely innocent. But does the body of his work and the body of his life change if December the 9th, 1981 actually did happen with him as a guilty party? For me, absolutely not. Maybe for other people it would. It's

probably very personal for everybody. But it would not change for me, although I know in my heart and in my mind that he's innocent.

**JT:** *You chose not to make this movie about the case. You wanted to go somewhere else?*

**SV:** Everything that's ever been done about Mumia, whether it's been a film, a video, a book, an article, has always been about the case. So as a filmmaker, I wasn't interested in mining twenty-five or thirty years of existing material just to regurgitate it back and come up with my own spin on it.

But from an aesthetic standpoint and from a storytelling standpoint there's a narrative to be told about Mumia's life as a journalist and a writer that's an incredible story. You have a young man coming up out of a very, very tough existence, growing up in the projects of Philadelphia and educated to the point where he's becoming a major reporter at the age of 28 for National Public Radio, for "All Things Considered", and that career is snuffed out. And then lo and behold, he continues the career under draconian and harsh conditions from prison.

**JT:** *Given how controversial how Mumia has been, was it difficult to get support for this project and also to find distributors?*

**SV:** It was not hard whatsoever. My production company, Street Legal Cinema, financed the film in its entirety so I didn't have any suits tied around my neck telling me what to do and what not to do, which is how I like to make films. That's the wonderful thing about documentaries is that the technology has democratized the process. So in the digital world people can tell stories that just 10 or 15 years ago would have been too expensive to tell and the gatekeepers at the door would never let these stories get out. My distributor, First Run Features, has a long history of distributing fiercely independent films, and they are strong supporters.

**JT:** *What do you think the future holds for Mumia? There have been comments from Mumia's opponents saying they hoped he would rot in oblivion in the Pennsylvania prisons now that his sentence has been commuted from death to life without parole.*

**SV:** They even went to the extent of saying that they would that someone in prison did the job that they were never able to do. That kind of sounds like a threat to me, but it seemed to fall on deaf ears as far as the authorities in Pennsylvania went.

Mumia is very, very well respected in prison by the other prisoners. They realize what he's done for them as a jailhouse lawyer and helping people fight the system and get retrials and submit briefs and change things.

I don't know what the future holds for Mumia. He's 58 right now and the powers that be are hell bent on keeping that man in prison. But there are a lot of people on the outside that continue to fight for Mumia's freedom, and I think that if they can catch a break and they can catch some mercy they might find some freedom.

I know Mumia will, to his dying breath, continue to fight for others, he will continue to write, he will continue to broadcast from prison until he can't do it anymore. I hope and pray that he sees the light of day at some point.

<http://sfbayview.com/2012/mumia-the-long-distance-revolutionary-an-interview-wit-documentary-producers-stephen-vittoria-and-noelle-hanrahan/>



## **Mumia, the long distance revolutionary: an interview wit' documentary producers Stephen Vittoria and Noelle Hanrahan**

**September 28, 2012**

**by People's Minister of Information JR**

"Long Distance Revolutionary," the new documentary about political prisoner and prolific writer Mumia Abu Jamal, will have its international premiere in the Bay Area on Oct. 6 and 8 at the Mill Valley Film Festival. There have been a number of documentaries done about the case of Mumia Abu Jamal, but this one puts his life at the center of the discussion.

Dick Gregory, Ramona Africa, Linn Washington, Johanna Fernandez, Angela Davis, Michelle Alexander, M1 of dead prez, KPFA's Greg Bridges and Michael Parenti are just a few of the many people who critique the often controversial commentaries and writings of former Black Panther and human rights activist Mumia Abu Jamal in this monumental cinematic feat. This is a film that you must see if you are trying to understand the political science that governs 21st century Amerikkka the ugly. Check out the words of producers Stephen Vittoria and Noelle Hanrahan ...

**M.O.I. JR:** Can you tell us a little bit about your documentary on the life of political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal? What is the name of it and what makes it different from all of the other Mumia documentaries?

**SV:** Unlike any other film, book or article produced about Mumia's struggle, "Long Distance Revolutionary" focuses on his dramatic life as a writer, journalist and, above all, as a revolutionary from Pennsylvania's Death Row. In the film, Rubin Hurricane Carter states that "Mumia is one of the lost souls of the revolution" – and I think that encapsulates Mumia best.

While almost every soul of that historic revolution has sold out, compromised, thrown in the towel or became a ruffian, Mumia – under harsh and inhuman conditions – has continued the battle for freedom, justice and the un-American way. In fact, there's no doubt in our minds, and in Mumia's mind, that this film is the definitive look at his life.

During the production process over the past three years, Mumia's help with regard to research, recording or re-recording interviews and commentaries was invaluable. Ultimately, the film is about one man's courageous fight against state repression as well as overt and systemic racism. It is a story of redemption.

**NH:** "Long Distance Revolutionary: A Journey with Mumia Abu-Jamal" tells the story behind the question: Why is Mumia Abu-Jamal the most famous political prisoner in the world? The film explores the genesis of his creative and legendary journalistic skills, as well as his dynamic intellect.

The film treats the incident at 13th and Locust in Philadelphia on Dec. 9, 1981, and his subsequent murder conviction as a detail that altered his life, but not as a defining moment. The film digs much

deeper. It traces his inspirations and reveals his lifelong dedication to the practice of reporting truth to power.

We see Mumia's growth and evolution from reporter to world-renowned public intellectual in the tradition of Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn and Arundhati Roy. As Cornel West states in the film, "Mumia shines a penetrating light on the myths of American history."

**M.O.I. JR:** Can you name some of the prominent people in the film and state why you thought that their commentary was relevant to the film?

**SV:** When I created the bible of questions for this film, I wanted to identify folks who truly intersected with Mumia's life both before and after incarceration – people like Reggie Schell, who was Mumia's captain in the Black Panther Party and remembers Mumia as an extraordinary mind and committed revolutionary even at the age of 15. And then there's Barbara Cox Easley, also a Panther with Mumia, and who was uniquely qualified to discuss the important roles women played in the party. Barbara offers a great first hand memory when she recalls: "When you ask the question about Mumia talking about women, he was never a chauvinist ... From the day he entered the party he was never a chauvinist."

I also wanted to include folks who intersected the same history as Mumia – the Black Liberation Movement, the antiwar movement and so on, people like Dick Gregory, Tariq Ali, Angela Davis and Cornel West. The arc of Mumia's narrative is the same arc as the struggle against war, against America's historic and ongoing imperialism, and ultimately the scourge of racism here and throughout the world. It was important to have these folks and others contextualize the history and Mumia's place in that history.

**NH:** Dick Gregory just nails it. He says "the technology was there, and his voice was carried around the world.... One day we will find out that he was the voice of America – the voice of America is a fraud." My goal as a radio producer has been to amplify voices that need to be heard. Dick's insights are remarkable and deeply moved me.

Michelle Alexander's historical accuracy also hit the mark. She cites without apology the origins and political motivations of mass incarceration. She exposes Richard Nixon's naked and stated goal to incarcerate and disenfranchise African American for political gain. This is one of the defining social issues of our day, the culture of incarceration. We have the most prisoners in the world and one in 46 Americans will do prison time. In fact, one in 99 are currently in prison.

**M.O.I. JR:** What was the creative process like? How did you edit all of the film that you collected to get to this story?

**SV:** As a director and filmmaker, I've always adhered to the exhaustive approach. The only way to get beneath the surface of a story and uncover the tangible texture of characters and events is to go beyond the norm. Push the interview process into parts forgotten or even obscure, because that's where the gold nuggets are – beyond the sound bites, beyond the lines that public people have down pat. Tell us something new, something different, something provocative.

I then edited each interview, and there were 40 or so, as if each interview is its own film, polishing and massaging until thoughts were cohesive and strong. And then all of the interviews are transcribed so I can begin doing a "paper" edit in order to work on the narrative structure. I want the interviews to resemble a seamless conversation about a certain subject or storyline. For me, the editing process is finally where the film is made. All other elements are incredibly important but the editing is where the story actually comes together.

**NH:** Honestly, the coming together of the production elements was magical. The content and the story are deeply compelling and frankly never before told. This is a feature length documentary that moves like a fast paced big screen Hollywood thriller.

One thing that makes the film unique is the commitment to digging up every available piece of footage and often information the state would rather have buried. That level of detail and the historical research gave the story traction. It was this material that runs as a counterpoint to the lie, which is the popular narrative that the state sponsored media tells every night.

In addition, we knew we had to honor the project by embracing quality every step of the way. This is a story that needed to be told with the most exacting production standards in order to reach beyond the censorship.

**M.O.I. JR:** In your opinion what makes Mumia Abu Jamal important as a journalist and writer?

**SV:** Pain, suffering and brutal honesty ... and because Mumia comes from the same courageous school of journalism and history that was so well defined by the iconic personas like Howard Zinn, I.F. Stone, Frederick Douglass and all the others who wrote from the point of view of the victims, the people who don't possess the wealth and own the guns, the people who struggle from the night side of the American Empire.

Also, Mumia's importance as a journalist and writer stems from his innate ability to clearly understand the myth and reality of American history. Mumia understands that this is a nation founded in genocide, nurtured through slavery, and ultimately sustained by imperial wars for power and profit. And he knows that the motivations of Manifest Destiny and white supremacy have existed since Columbus set foot on Hispaniola, and he knows that those motivations exist to this very day, right to Obama's murder spree, courtesy of predator drones and the American war machine.

And Mumia doesn't compromise. In the film, Michael Parenti says it best: "There's quite a number of eminent people on the left – I won't mention names, some of them very, very prominent, maybe the very top people too – that go so far about certain things, and they've got to flash their anti-communism to maintain their bonafides. Mumia doesn't do all that crap." More than one person defined Mumia's importance as a journalist in this spirit, although this answer by his biographer Terry Bisson was the most colorful statement: "Mumia has a built-in bullshit detector."

**NH:** I can't say it any better than Dick Gregory: "Mumia is the voice of America"; or Angela Davis: "Mumia is the Frederick Douglass of the 21st Century"; or historian Manning Marable: "The voice of Black political journalism in the struggle for the liberation of African American people has always proved to be decisive throughout Black history. When you listen to Mumia you hear the echoes of David Walker, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, and the sisters and brothers who kept the faith with struggle, who kept the faith with resistance."

**M.O.I. JR:** What has the pre-premier response been like?

**SV:** I love to share the film with people who care – that's why I made the movie. You wake up in a nation that's run by mass murderers, economic rapists and general run-of-the-mill racist sociopaths, so you start to search for some sanity as an answer, a rebuttal to the ravings and actions coming from inside the asylum, and as a storyteller and filmmaker I found that sanity writing and broadcasting from a dark, dank hole in America's prison gulag. His name was Mumia Abu-Jamal and his words were his weapon against the tyranny surrounding all of us.

And then you realize that Mumia's words are not a rebuttal to the insanity but rather his words completely eviscerate the insanity that passes for the status quo, the establishment, the spinmeisters who make the unthinkable normal. Ultimately, they philosophize disgrace.

So the response so far from people who we've shared Mumia's story with has been extraordinary – and it's not because of the film; it's because Mumia takes us to the heart of struggle. Greg Ruggiero, editor and publisher at City Lights Books, sums it up in the film this way: "I think Mumia would agree with what

Che said: 'At the risk of sounding ridiculous, a revolutionary is guided by feelings of love and for love of the people.'" I think the overwhelming response so far is also guided by love.

**NH:** Well, JR, you gave the film an A-! And I know you are a serious guy when it comes to revolutionary journalism. The response has been very strong from the market and the people. We realize that this film will be seen as controversial and certainly dangerous to those who want to protect the status quo.

There will be an intense reaction from all quarters – a lot of love and a lot of hate. The story arc of this movie will make some people uncomfortable. This film gives voice to Mumia. It pulls no punches when it comes to exposing the chilling reality of imperialism and the necessity and beauty of resistance.

**M.O.I. JR:** Where will it be screening? When?

**NH:** The world premiere of "Long Distance Revolutionary" will be at the 35th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival on Saturday, Oct. 6, at 12 o'clock noon at the Rafael Film Center in San Rafael. It will also be showing at the festival on Monday, Oct. 8, at 4:45 p.m. at the Sequoia Cinema in Mill Valley. You can get your tickets early, as these screenings could sell out. Here's the info:<http://www.mvff.com/buy-tickets>. Or by phone, toll free: (877) 874-6833.

**M.O.I. JR:** How can people see it if they don't make it to Mill Valley?

**SV:** We're excited because the film has garnered major theatrical distribution with First Run Features in New York City – a fiercely independent film distribution company. Not many feature documentaries make it into theatres – and that's a shame and a sign of the times – but First Run believes in this story.

We're in our fall festival run through the end of the year, beginning with Mill Valley and then traveling to the 35th Annual Starz/Denver festival and then the major European documentary festival in Copenhagen, CPH:DOX, followed by the great domestic doc festival, DOC NYC at the IFC Center in New York on Nov. 10.

Once the film opens in New York and Los Angeles early in 2013, it will then move to other cities and will enjoy numerous special screenings, limited engagements and a wide college tour. We're also excited that First Run plans an aggressive Video on Demand release concurrent with the theatrical release and followed of course by home video and broadcast.

**M.O.I. JR:** Can you tell people a little bit about your work with Prison Radio ([prisonradio.org](http://prisonradio.org))?

**SV:** I started working with Prison Radio and Noelle Hanrahan on a previous project with Mumia entitled "Murder Incorporated: Empire, Genocide and Manifest Destiny." The film is now on hold but not the project. Mumia and I have decided to write the book and we are now knee-deep in gore on this incendiary story about the genesis of the American Empire and its 500-year march across the planet.

But it all started because of Prison Radio's ability to connect the fledgling film idea with Mumia's brilliant take on the subject. In fact, that's the beauty and reality of Prison Radio: The hard work of this organization has almost single-handedly delivered Mumia's voice around the world. I contend that without Prison Radio, we would not know Mumia's work as intimately as we do.

Dick Gregory reflects on it this way: "He's struggling in there on Death Row for everybody else and there's somebody that saw this and said, man, you should do some writings." That was Noelle Hanrahan ... and the rest is history. Street Legal Cinema was proud to produce this film and become a part of that history.

**NH:** In 1990, I did a series of 13 one-hour radio shows called "You Can't Jail the Spirit," which focused on U.S. political prisoners. A key element of the series was the voices of prisoners themselves. We have brought hundreds of prisoner's voices to the airwaves, from Leonard Peltier to Lori Berenson. We believe in scaling and transcending the prison walls by amplifying prisoners' voices – that's our goal.

Twenty years ago, in July of 1992, Jennifer Beach and I traveled from California to the State Correctional Institution at Huntingdon in rural south-central Pennsylvania to record Mumia Abu-Jamal on death row. This recording session became Mumia's first Prison Radio broadcast.

We have worked on many of Mumia's books and produced more than 2,000 radio essays that air weekly on a worldwide basis. Prison Radio, a project of the Redwood Justice Fund, is a nonprofit media organization staffed by dedicated radio producers committed to bringing these voices to the airwaves.