



Assata Olugbala Shakur



*Love is contraband in Hell,
 cause love is a acid
 that eats away bars. But you, me, and tomorrow
 hold hands and make vows
 that struggle will multiply. The hacksaw has two
 blades. The shotgun has two barrels. We are pregnant
 with freedom. We are a conspiracy. It is our duty to
 fight for our freedom
 It is our duty to win
 We must love each other and support each other.
 We have nothing to lose but our chains.*

— Assata Shakur, An Autobiography



Quick Facts

- * Born in 1947
- * African-American writer and activist
- * Author of *Assata Shakur: An Autobiography*

Biography

Assata Olugbala Shakur (birth name JoAnee Deborah Byron, married name Joanne Chesimard) was born on July 14, 1947. Shortly after her birth, her mother and father divorced. Consequently, Shakur lived with her mother, her aunt, and her grandmother and grandfather (Lula and Frank Hill), in Jamaica, New York. At the age of three, she moved with her grandparents to the house where her grandpa was raised in Wilmington, North Carolina.

Shakur’s grandparents opened up a business on their beachfront property. Her early childhood was spent working for her grandparents in the restaurant and on the beach. Her grandfather instilled in her a love of reading, and she spent a great deal of her time reading to satisfy her lively imagination.

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Assata Olugbala Shakur

Biography continued

After returning to live with her mother and stepfather in Queens, Shakur began her political education. She began to confront issues of racism and discrimination she was experiencing (*The Washington Post*). When she was in her early teens, her mother and stepfather divorced. Soon afterward, Shakur ran away from home and began to search for answers to her questions about the world in which she lived. At the age of seventeen, she dropped out of high school and officially moved out of her mother's house.

In the late 1960's, Shakur became involved with the controversial Black Panther party and her political problems began. Between 1973 and 1977 Shakur was indicted ten times and stood trial for two bank robberies, the kidnapping of a drug dealer, attempted murder of several police officers, and the murder of a New Jersey state trooper (*The Washington Post*).

In 1973, on the New Jersey Turnpike, Shakur and her two friends - Malik Zayad Shakur and Sundiata Acoli - were stopped by state troopers because of a shattered headlight. When stopped, the trooper had said they were "suspicious" because they had Vermont license plates. The troopers made the three exit the car with their hands up. All of a sudden, shots were fired. Not much is known about who did what -- but in the end, state trooper Werner Foerster and Malik Shakur were killed. Shakur and Sundiata were charged with the death of trooper Foerster. The subsequent trial contained many flaws, including racial injustice by the jury and admitted perjury by the trial's star witness.

With the help of some of her "comrades," Shakur escaped from prison in 1979. In 1987, she published her first book, simply titled *Assata Shakur: An Autobiography*. Shakur had been missing for eight years until she published the book, at which time she established her whereabouts in Cuba, where she was granted political asylum. The U.S government, under the lead of New Jersey governor Whitman, is actively trying to extradite Shakur on charges of killing state trooper Foerster.

In the book, she tells her side of the story, describing her upbringing, her reasons for becoming a revolutionary, and the events before, during and after the shooting of trooper Foerster. The book is also complemented by many poems written by Shakur. For Shakur, "she who struggles," the struggle is not over. Though in Cuba, she is still an active voice in the struggle for equal rights in America.



Assata Olugbala Shakur

Biography continued

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