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## AFENI SHAKUR LIVED A LIFE OF RESISTANCE

Until the end, the former Black Panther and mother of rap legend Tupac Shakur believed in her son, in independence, in revolution and evolution.

[http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2016/05/afeni\\_shakur\\_lived\\_a\\_life\\_of\\_resistance.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2016/05/afeni_shakur_lived_a_life_of_resistance.html)

By: Todd Steven Burroughs  
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Afeni Shakur

Afeni Shakur, who died Monday at age 69, always understood the idea of resistance.

In her 20s, she was a member of the Black Panther Party in New York City. When the authorities raided the group's headquarters and charged the Panthers with 156 different charges, including 30 counts of conspiracy, she didn't blink.

She fought, in jail and in the courtroom. She once told Vibe magazine that, as part of the group of prisoners then nicknamed "the Panther 21" (pdf), she had to battle prison authorities to receive "one egg and one glass of milk" per day. And without a law degree—with very little formal education, really—she defended herself against the charges and won. She and the other Panthers were acquitted after serving months in prison.

Out of that ordeal, a son was born in 1971. She named him Tupac Amaru Shakur. That story is now familiar to many. Hers is less so.

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Shakur told the actress Jasmine Guy, her friend and biographer, in the 2005 book *Afeni Shakur: Evolution of a Revolutionary*, that "[the] Klan came in and tried to impose a 10 o'clock curfew on the Indian and black community. Posted notices up about race mixing and basically wanted to control the Lumbees and treat them like [n--gers]." The Lumbees ran the Klan out of town. She said that incident, coupled with dealing with, and inheriting traits from, her "arrogant" and

“stubborn” father, was her introduction to what she would hold on to her entire life: “the rebellion, the need to fight back and the need to be recognized as different.”

So Williams became very different: She changed into a Northerner and, a little later, a Panther, with a new name, which means “lover of people” in the Yoruba language.

In 1997, a year after Tupac’s death, she talked to radio host Davey D about her Panther days:

I joined in 1968. When I joined, I wasn’t a student. I did not come off the college campuses like a lot of known Panthers did. I came from the streets of the South Bronx. I had been a member of the Disciples Deads, which would have been the women Disciples in the Bronx. ... What the Panther Party did for me, I used to always say, [that] it gave me home training. The Party taught me things that were principles to living, and those principles are the principles I think most Panthers have tried to pass on to their children and to anybody else that would listen to them. You know that one of those principles was like, “Don’t steal a penny, needle or a simple piece of thread from the people.” It’s just general, basic things about how we as individuals treat a race of people, and how we treat each other as a people! And those are the things I think the people recognize in Tupac. ...

We discovered, that within the BBP [sic], that is you try and live by these principles and you have attached to those principles a willingness and a desire to protect and defend your family and your people. ... Also, if you have a large mouth and you’re willing to speak openly about those things, that you are going to be the victim of all kinds of attacks. That’s basically what has happened to all of us.

W. Paul Coates, founder and director of Black Classic Press in Baltimore and a former Black Panther Party member there, told *The Root* that Shakur was part of that cadre of intelligent, strong female Panthers who took no guff, either from authorities or from male Panthers.

“They changed my understanding of what and who women were,” he said.

Coates described Shakur as a person of great intelligence who had “grace, but [the kind] like a force of nature.”

In the 2004 book *We Want Freedom*, a history of the Black Panther Party, former Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal wrote that many Panthers who worked with her “were struck by her utter brilliance and her radiant sense of self as she went about her daily duties.”

That self would resist poverty; the new fight was to keep her and her children alive. Coates remembered how the family struggled when they moved to Baltimore, back in the days when a very young Tupac would rap at the local Y.

When the revolution was gone, radical memories and ideologies didn’t pay the rent. Shakur, wrote Guy, “spent most of her life as an impoverished gypsy. In dire straits, she always stayed with her sister Glo, and dire straights were frequent.”

These were the days, contradictory ones, that Tupac would remember well and share with the world in his 1995 Grammy-nominated song, “Dear Mama”:

And even as a crack fiend, mama  
You always was a black queen, mama  
I finally understand  
For a woman it ain't easy trying to raise a man  
You always was committed  
A poor single mother on welfare, tell me how ya did it  
There's no way I can pay you back  
But the plan is to show you that I understand  
You are appreciated

Shakur told Guy that her house at the time in Stone Mountain, Ga.—ironically the birthplace of the modern version of the Ku Klux Klan—was “the best thing Tupac ever did for me.”

Guy wrote that Shakur also owned a 56-acre farm back in Lumberton. Farmed by members of the Lumbee nation, it was a site for poor people there to farm and sell their own produce. She told Guy that her family planted a tree for Tupac on his birthday every year in one of her two homes.

Shakur was in a new phase of life when she joined the ancestors Monday. Running her son Tupac’s estate, which reportedly is worth \$50 million and brings in \$900,000 a year, she was about to regain the spotlight later this year. Shakur was working on Tupac’s biopic, *All Eyez on Me*. She was one of the forthcoming film’s executive producers. Said Coates: “She became devoted to preserving a particular memory of Tupac. She lived inside of that.”

Her personal life had already made minor headlines: She had divorced Gust Davis, her husband of 12 years, earlier this year. Reportedly, they did not have a prenuptial agreement, which means that a battle over Tupac’s estate could be looming. According to her memoirs, her survivors would include her sister Glo, her daughter Sekyiwa and two grandchildren, Malik and Nzingha.

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Her passing in the year that the Black Panther Party is celebrating its 50th anniversary is a significant sociohistorical marker. It means that the Black Panther-era activists—trapped in black-and-white film footage and photos in their 20s, as young as Tupac was when he died—are now officially elders, staying with the People—their people—as long as they can. Her passing in the year that the Black Panther Party is celebrating its 50th anniversary is a significant sociohistorical marker. It means that the Black Panther-era activists—trapped in black-and-white film footage and photos in their 20s, as young as Tupac was when he died—are now officially elders, staying with the People—their people—as long as they can.