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## **ABOUT SUNDIATA ACOLI AND HIS CASE**

### **Overview**

Sundiata Acoli is a grandfather, father, mentor, educator, visual artist, poet and one of the oldest incarcerated persons in the U.S. At the age of 16, Sundiata enrolled at Prairie View A&M University as a math major. He served as a computer analyst in the defense industry in the state of New York. As a young man, he participated in the historic Freedom Summer voter registration campaign of 1964.

In 1973, Sundiata was sentenced to life for the first degree murder of a NJ state trooper. He has been eligible for parole since 1993 but has been denied eight times. He has not had a single disciplinary infraction in over 42 years. Since 2013, the Federal Bureau of Prisons has assigned him to teach its course, Avoiding Criminal Thinking, teaching younger men how to avoid recidivism. In fact, Sundiata has formally prepared hundreds of fellow prisoners for release.

### **About Sundiata**

Sundiata is now 85 years old and his health continues to decline. He contracted Covid-19 in 2020, requiring hospitalization and is experiencing post-Covid health complications; it exacerbated his cardiovascular disease, hypertension, emphysema, and glaucoma. He is also experiencing dementia.

### **Activities During Imprisonment**

Sundiata has had zero disciplinary infractions since 1980. He completed at least 100 different programs for self-improvement and vocational training. Sundiata has also participated in numerous programs designed to alter an inmate's perspective and modify his behavior, including Breaking the Cycle of Unproductiveness, Doing Time with

the Right Mind, Commitment to Change, Criminal Thinking, and Life Strategies. He taught the class Criminal Thinking for eight years to soon-to-be-released incarcerated people. The course teaches cognitive-behavioral tools to avoid recidivism.

Sundiata also has taken a course called Voices of Experience to become an inmate peer to assist newly incarcerated people with institutional and social coping skills. He has also been selected to be both a prisoner representative and a member of the Honors Unit program.

### **Life Before Incarceration**

Sundiata attended college at the age of 16, majoring in mathematics. After college, he worked as a computer analyst, working for NASA among other organizations, was a member of the Black Panther Party, and was active in voter registration efforts during the 1964 Freedom Summer. He is a father of two daughters and he has two grandchildren. He will live with his daughter and grandchildren in Brooklyn, New York, when released.

### **Remorse**

In his 2016 appearance before the full Parole Board, Sundiata said, *"I offer my deepest remorse and sincerest apology to Trooper Foerster's family for my crime and I hope it will be accepted in the spirit offered and provide them with a measure of solace and peace."*

### **Psychological Assessment**

In a previous evaluation, a licensed psychologist noted that Sundiata expressed regret and remorse about the involvement in the death of the state trooper and that she believed he changed over the years due to his age, participation in counseling, and also because the political climate had evolved, such that violence was no longer necessary to effect change.

Sundiata also stated to the doctor that he had no interest in being part of the Black Panthers, Black Liberation Army (BLA), or any derivative group. He further expressed regret about missing out on raising his daughters and not being a 'real father' to them. The psychologist also stated he would be expected to transition into the community if released.

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