
'His Truth is Marching On'

On 16 October 1991 the John Brown Society held its first annual Awards Banquet at the historic Fraunces Tavern in New York City on the anniversary of John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry. Founded by Larry Lawrence, a sympathizer of the Bolshevik Tendency, the John Brown Society is the first organization in the history of the American left to present a major award for courage and sacrifice in the struggle for black liberation.

A gold medal was presented to Robert F. Williams, the leader of an armed black self-defense group which resisted Klan terror in Monroe, North Carolina in the early 1960s, and for many years an expatriate fugitive from legal persecution at the hands of the American ruling class. A gold medal was also given to Geronimo ji Jaga [Pratt], a former leader of the Black Panther Party in Los Angeles, who has spent 21 years in jail on a framed-up FBI murder charge. A protest telegram was sent by the John Brown Society to Governor Pete Wilson of California, calling for the former Panther's immediate release. A silver medal was also awarded to Edward

Zwick, the driving force behind the movie "Glory." Also present at the banquet was Conrad Lynn, a famous black radical and civil-rights attorney.

Robert Williams came to New York to receive his award personally, accompanied by his wife, Mabel. Representatives of ji Jaga were present to accept the award on his behalf. In a moving acceptance speech, they said that the awarding of the medal would lift his spirits greatly. Geronimo ji Jaga wrote to express his thanks for the "special honor":

"I look forward to the day when the raw and real truths be finally and completely disclosed regarding the many sacrifices and full greatness of John Brown and his gallant efforts for the betterment of all Humanity."

In his remarks, Lawrence explained the purpose of the activities of the John Brown Society:

"We are here tonight to rejoice in great lives lived for great causes. Revolutionary fighters for justice...are the most important people in the world, and it is past time that these men and women should be honored."