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Social Capital: Friend or Foe in the Lives of Two Prominent Incarcerated Individuals

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**Introduction**

“If certain folks historically have been elevated above others, their children, their grandchildren are going to be starting out, one, two, five, ten steps ahead,” he says. “Meritocracy … is as close to a lie as you can come.” (Wise, 2006)

In today’s world, leaders must be attuned with “the network relations that connect people” (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006, p. 419) At the heart of organization network theory are the actors. In their research on social networks, Balkundi and Kilduff (2006) identified at least four interrelated principles, including “the importance of relationships between the actors, embeddedness in social fields, the social utility of network connections and the structural patterning of social life” (p. 419).

In understanding how these social networks operate, it is not the characteristics of the individuals that must be noted but more so the relationships that they engage in and build. People tend to build relationships with those who are like them and are in their community or circles of influence. These ties are not commonly established with individuals they do not know but rather with those who are similar and are in proximity to their location. These networks consist of an exchange that often results in social, human, or financial capital. Leaders must understand the role of social connections and how they can either bring people together or isolate them because of their lack of networks. Leaders who understand the variety of networks that exist whether internal or external are more likely to have “expert power knowledge of and access to those few powerful others whose words and deeds control resource flows and business opportunities” (Burt, 2005, p. 121). The goal is not to use relationships as a tool to control or assert power but as an opportunity to distribute power to those who might not have access to the knowledge these relationships might offer.
Much of the literature in leadership and network theory is views the subject through a business lens that privileges profit and production as outcomes, yet relationships cannot solely be about profit and the exploitation of others. As leaders, it is important to note that relationships are critical in bringing individuals together to share perspectives, information, and resources. If the network is limited and does not take into account diversity and the life experiences of others, we miss out on truly becoming a society that positively impacts and transforms the lives of all.

The reality is that America’s “manifest destiny” legacy creates an individualistic view and blames others without taking into account the historical implications that may limit one’s ability to build networks that can create economic and social viability. Leaders must be aware of these dynamics, creating opportunities for dialogue and mentoring in order to provide a level playing field. The myth of meritocracy is such a part of the American belief system and work ethic, yet as responsible leaders it is critical to acknowledge how environments that allow silos and isolation of others who are different not only diminish the individual’s ability to perform successfully but also affects the organization’s capacity to excel.

This article evaluates the effects of social capital or the lack of social capital on two convicted felons, Bernie Madoff and Mumia Abu-Jamal, whose circumstances offer insights on how relationships and networks made a difference in the lives of these men who are both incarcerated but come from different religious, socio-economic, educational, and career backgrounds in the United States, along with other historical and social implications. As this case study demonstrates, leaders cannot take for granted the importance of individual and collective social capital and networks that can contribute to either positive or negative outcomes.
Social Capital and the Role of Social Network

French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) stated that “the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected” (p. 51).” This speaks to both the benefits and the pitfalls of social capital, as there are many people in the United States who do not have access to social networks to advance their opportunities through education and employment for whom social capital is thus limited or non-existent. According to Putnam (2000), this reflects the dark side of social capital in that “Social inequities may be embedded in social capital. Norms and networks are discriminatory or the networks socially segregated” (p. 358). He further states that how community is defined will determine “who is inside and thus benefits from social capital and who is outside and does not” (p. 358).

Dasgupta and Serageldin (2000) explored other aspects of the dark side of social capital.

There is a dark side to social capital…gangs and mafia use social capital as the foundation for their organizational structure. Cartels also develop social capital in their effort to keep control over an industry so as to reap more profits than would otherwise be the case. An authoritarian system of government based on military command and use of instruments of force destroys other forms of social capital while building its own. (p.176)

In the same manner that social capital has an ability to liberate it can also be used to help those with privilege and power to continue benefiting from the exclusion of others.

While definitions of social capital are numerous, all imply the involvement of individuals and/or networks who invest in a relationship that generally creates some type of benefit in the form of knowledge, association, or financial reward. Depending upon the need or focus, various types of capital are used in our day-to-day interactions to succeed. The challenge is that if individuals do not understand how to build the most basic relationships in order to excel both
personally and professionally, they are at a disadvantage, especially in a society dependent on human interaction.

According to Bourdieu, social capital is a resource “made up of social obligations (‘connections’), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital” (Bourdieu, 1986). Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti (1993) defined social capital as “consisting of trust, norms, and networks of a social organization that enable improvements to the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.” (p. 167) There are numerous other definitions that likewise demonstrate the role of individuals in the process of relationship building.

Sociologist James Coleman (1998) stated that social capital is not one thing but is contingent upon a variety of components, two of which include “social structures and the actions of actors in the structure…it exists in the relations among persons” (p. S98). Social capital allows an individual to initiate and generate transactions relationally for advancement and growth in one’s personal and professional life. According to Oh, Chung, and LaBianca (2004), “People and groups of people are connected to certain others (and not connected to yet others), and this pattern of connection creates a network of interdependent social exchanges” (p. 860). Networks offer information and resources which are often critical. In a positive aspect, social capital can assist an individual in obtaining contacts for job opportunities. In a negative light, knowing the right person can assist in obtaining illegal information that can be used for one’s benefit. For instance, individuals such as Raj Rajaratnam in the recent Hedge Fund scandal used his insider knowledge to create a scheme that cost individuals millions of dollars.

Social capital is often used for profit in U.S. society. There are so many networking events in cities across the United States designed to connect individuals with others who can help them in their business ventures. These events are often very homogenized and are not inclusive, which eliminates individuals from different socio-economic classes, backgrounds, and races. Without access to information and connections, it can be difficult to compete economically. Additionally, such a lack of access often means that organizations do not benefit from unique and diverse perspectives. According to Charles Tilly, “durable inequality among categories arises because people who hold power in reward- and punishment-allo‌​cating organizations solve pressing organizational problems with the distinctions involved, and multiple parties—not all of them powerful—then acquire stakes in those solutions” (http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/tic02/).

These networks can either hold opportunities or prevent others who are different from advancement. As Tilly (1998) has noted, “Large, significant inequalities in advantages among human beings correspond mainly to categorical differences such as black/white, male/female, citizen/foreigner, or Muslim/Jew rather than to individual differences in attributes, propensities or performances.”

Two concepts provide clarity on the practical application of social capital theory. According to Terrion (2006), the first critical concept is bonding, which involves connecting to those who are familiar. Connections can be established based on is similarities in terms of backgrounds, education levels, and socio-economic status. Everyone desires to belong and feel a sense of purpose. Bonding can occur between individuals but also connects groups. Terrion (2006) cited bridging as the second critical concept. Bridging consists of connecting with those who are different by developing relationships outside of the familiar network. Bridging is important because information can be received from this type of relationship that can benefit
both the heterogeneous and homogeneous communities. For many who are segregated due to race and/or socio-economic status, it is often difficult to have access to those relationships outside of the familiar network. Social capital often reinforces homogeneity because individuals tend to bond with those that are similar, which limits opportunities for bridging social capital. Tilly (1998) and many others reference the role of bonding and bridging in social networks, recognizing that issues such as race, class, and poverty can create additional challenges.

According to Blokland-Potters and Savage (2008),

Bridging social capital can simultaneously create bonding social capital as it defines those ‘insiders’ in comparison to ‘outsiders’ with whom bridges are made. Bridging and bonding social capital become two aspects of one and the same process. Weak ties do not guarantee bridges, and strong ties do not guarantee bonding. (p. 13)

Uphoff (2000) asserted that it is also important to recognize the impact of structural social capital and cognitive social capital on society. Structural social capital refers to the components that make up society, “the roles, rules, precedents, and procedures as well as a wide variety of networks that contribute to cooperation” (p.218) Cognitive social capital is the way in which individuals see themselves and their roles in society. These are ideas that are based on the cultural norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs that contribute to cooperative behavior (Uphoff, 2000).

Individuals that have a better understanding of how organizations, systems, and even relationships work are in a position to use their networks to create jobs, obtain business acumen, or even avoid certain outcomes that might otherwise be detrimental. In 1972, Bourdieu described social capital as connected to three dimensions of capital, each with its own relationship to class: economic, cultural, and social. Bourdieu’s concept of social capital emphasized conflicts and the power function in which social relations increase the ability to advance individuals’ interests (Siisiäinen, 2000). From the Bourdieuan perspective, social capital is a resource for alleviating
the social struggles that occur in different social arenas or fields (Siisiäinen, 2000). The
challenge of Bourdieu’s concept is that many individuals who are dealing with social inequality
do not have access to social networks that can alleviate the obstacles they face.

One way of bridging in order to increase access to networks of social capital is for
individuals to develop an identity based on their ability to “fit” into groups that they are valued
due to the ranking society gives to various individuals, communities, or socio-economic groups.
Belonging to a group can denote status, especially if the group is viewed as important.

The way an individual views self could either positively or negatively impact their ability
to build relationships effectively with those who are a part of the group or outside of the group.
It is even more challenging to build relationships with individuals associated with the “out-
group” if your primary group is viewed as less than and lacking value. In this way, social
identities create social categories that can define one’s ability to build social capital.

**The Concept of Privilege and Its Impact on Social Capital in the United States**

In this section, I will focus on “race” as one of the criteria of segregated networking and
unequal ability to develop social capital. According to Theodore William Allen (1975), the white
race is more than genetic but used as a tool for control and to maintain power in society. The
history of the United States is an example of a government designed for those in positions of
power whose privilege provided various benefits not available to those who were not of White
Anglo Saxon descent, land owners, or highly educated. Laws were created to not only enforce
their social class but to ensure that those social circles were not infiltrated by others. Even after
slavery, discrepancies existed in the form of Jim Crow laws. In existence from 1876 to 1965,
Jim Crow laws prevented African Americans from enjoying the same opportunities and rights as
Anglos in all areas of their lives such as transportation, housing, education, employment, and
voting. For example, in an 1892 article in the *New York Times*, a Louisiana Jim Crow law requiring railroad cars to be segregated for African Americans was upheld. In addition to Jim Crow laws impacting the lives of African Americans, women were also deprived of the opportunity to vote. As a result, a government was created that did not involve the majority of the population: women, Africans/African Americans, or Native Americans. America is still framed by those early principles and although there has been significant change through legislation to provide more opportunities for diverse populations, there is still inequity in access to social capital among those who are not in positions of power.

Having social networks can make a difference in one’s ability to go to college, obtain employment or even avoid severe jail sentencing. The justice system demonstrates the inequities that exist between those who have social capital and those who do not. According to the report *Prison Inmates at Midyear 2009, Statistical Tables* (2010):

- Black non-Hispanic males, with an incarceration rate of 4,749 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents, were incarcerated at a rate more than 6 times higher than white non-Hispanic males (708 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents) and 2.6 times higher than Hispanic males (1,822 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents)

- One in every 300 black females was incarcerated compared to about 1 in every 1,099 white females and 1 in every 704 Hispanic females.

Despite the fact that African Americans make up only 13% and Hispanics 16% of the total population in the United States (Humez, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011), these groups are incarcerated at a higher rate. In *The New Jim Crow* author Michelle Alexander (2010) stated that, There are more African Americans under correctional control today—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began. As of 2004, more African American men were disenfranchised (due to felon disenfranchisement laws) than in 1870, the year the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified.
prohibiting laws that explicitly deny the right to vote on the basis of race. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michelle-alexander/the-new-jim-crow_b_454469.html)

Employment is another area where the lack of access to social networks can result in the inability to climb the corporate ladder or even have the understanding of where the ladder might be located. The challenge for most people of color, especially African American males, can be explained in my opinion through the concept of sponsored mobility and contest mobility. Although many would like to believe that the concept of contest mobility is very prevalent in our society—that opportunities are available for all and exist freely—this is not often the case. In Giving Notice: Why the Best and Brightest Are Leaving the Workplace and How You Can Help Them Stay, authors Klein, Allers, and Mendoza (2008) evaluated the myth of meritocracy, which is the belief that if an individual works hard, they can get whatever they want. The book through case studies of actual corporate employees demonstrated that no matter how much education and experience an individual might have, there are embedded biases within organizations that can prevent growth and opportunities.

According to the Online Dictionary of Social Sciences,

Sponsored Mobility contrasted with contest mobility, to refer to a method of identifying people at an early age for social advancement and sponsoring, or supporting, them as they prepare for their rise to the top and then guaranteeing them a comfortable position. Similarly, those not so identified are not supported or given opportunity and thus are destined for positions at the bottom of the class structure. (www.sociologyindex.com/sponsored_mobility.htm)

In Race and the Invisible Hand, author Deirdre A. Royster (2003) shared the findings of her study on black and white males entering the job market in Baltimore. Even though black males had better school attendance and followed the prescribed route to gain successful employment, they were unable to obtain jobs. This study revealed the power of social networks that assisted individuals with gaining employment. Privilege can come in a number of forms,
including gender, sexual orientation, being able-bodied, and the law. It is particularly hard for African Americans to have access to job opportunities when they must deal with preconceived ideas about race, gender, and socio-economic status. At the same time, African Americans are not a homogeneous group. There are those with middle class positions and those who may have built the social capital necessary to help others.

Without an education, it is very difficult to obtain gainful employment. Those with college degrees are typically paid more than those who do or do not have high school diplomas. A college education can potentially offer opportunities for career stability and growth but without access to good schools and teachers during K-12 grades, the possibilities become limited. The Schott Foundation (2010) recently conducted a study entitled, Yes We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males, which reported that:

Out of the 48 states reporting, Black males are the least likely to graduate from high school in 33 states, Black and Latino males are tied for the least likely in four states, with Latino males being the least likely in an additional four states. Black females are the least likely in five states; American Indian/Alaskan Native female students in two states and American Indian/Alaskan Native male students in two states, with White males and Latino females being at the bottom in one state, respectively. To add insult to injury, Black Male students are punished more severely for similar infractions than their White peers. They are not given the same opportunities to participate in classes with enriched educational offerings. They are more frequently inappropriately removed from the general education classroom due to misclassifications by the Special Education policies and practices of schools and districts. By Grade 8, relatively few are proficient in reading and, finally, as a consequence of these deficiencies in educational practice, less than half graduate with their cohort. (p. 37)

The question of course is what do black women do differently to complete their schooling at higher rates than men? Although this paper is not focused on this topic solely, some would argue that socialization and views of others in positions of power toward black males and females are different and contribute to the level of difficulty to obtain an education in the United States.
Privilege is also apparent in income and wealth. According to Lipsitz (2006), “Young whites can often rely on gifts and bequests from family members for transformative assets that help build wealth ... One in four white families receives a bequest upon the death of a relative compared with only one in twenty black families” (p.108). Furthermore, “The median wealth of white households is 20 times that of black households and 18 times that of Hispanic households, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of newly available government data from 2009” (http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2069/housing-bubble-subprime-mortgages-hispanics-blacks-household-wealth-disparity). The study further to demonstrate the gaps as follows:

- African American households had just $5,677 in wealth (assets minus debts) in 2009 compared to white households with $113,149.
- White homeowners’ property declined from $115,364 in 2005 to $95,000 in 2009. The drop for African American homeowners was more significant—from $76,910 in 2005 to $59,000 in 2009.

According to Equity Blog (http://equityblog.org/2010/09/16/poverty-in-black-and-white-and-latino-and-asian/), African Americans, non-citizens, and Hispanics have the greatest poverty rates and experienced a decrease in income occurred for African Americans in recent years, thus illustrating the challenges that people of color, especially African Americans, face with respect to poverty.

In our society, people fail to take into consideration the impact of privilege. Privilege affects one’s ability to navigate in the world. For instance, wealth allows an individual access to resources and opportunities that are not available to others. Country clubs are an example of opportunities of privilege. In addition to being invited to join or having a family legacy of
membership, these clubs exclude individuals who might not have the relationships or the ability to pay the fees that are required for annual membership.

Privilege is not only having access to opportunities but the ability to have relationships that can reinforce and support this form of power. In Privilege, Power and Difference, Johnson (2001) notes the diversity wheel is used as a reference to show the many differences that individuals have in society, but it is the social construction of these differences that creates distinctions resulting in those who are marginalized and those who are not in categories that are viewed as less than. For those with privilege, many are unable to understand the benefits they have as a result of being in the “in-group,” (McIntosh, 1989). According to Law Professor, Stephanie Wildman (2005), “the term ‘privilege’ remains problematic, since privilege can connote a reward for an earned achievement. White privilege is not earned” (p.245 ). Wildman goes on to state that the distribution of products and services, labor, language, and even laws reinforce the role of privilege.

Privilege can help one build relationships with others who generally have access to resources or power. “Social capital can either keep an individual in a position of power or a lack thereof can limit opportunities and exposure. Bourdieu (1986) felt that those in power continued to recognize those who were in the same social class. “Thus, for the privileged class, it would be better to have a closed network so that the resources can be preserved and reproduced” (p. 34).

Bowles and Sethi (2006) explained the impact of social segregation and how it can affect the possibilities for social capital to thrive. The lack of social capital for a marginalized group can have extensive consequences, including a lack of financial resources. Lin (1999), creator of the social resources theory, argued that “access to and use of social resources (resources embedded in social networks) can lead to better socioeconomic statuses” (p. 35).
Analysis of Individuals and Outcomes due to Social Capital: Bernie Maddoff


Bernie Madoff was born on April 29, 1938, in Queens, New York City, New York, during the time of segregation in the United States. He grew up in the Far Rockway neighborhood which at the time was a primarily Jewish area.

He was a nobody poor boy from Far Rockaway who went to Hofstra and scrimped and saved $5,000 as a lifeguard and made his wife his bookkeeper. He worked his way through Roslyn, Long Island, until he caught the shiniest of brass rings and eventually rose to become the chairman of NASDAQ.[http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2009/01/madoff200901.print]

Although his parents, Sylvia and Ralph, were not wealthy, they had careers as stockbrokers, an influence that more than likely played a role in his future:

According to Securities and Exchange Commission documents from the 1960s, it appears that his mother had a brokerage firm called Gibraltar Securities registered in her name with an address in Laurelton. In 1963, the S.E.C. began investigating whether a number of firms, including Ms. Madoff’s, had failed to file financial reports and whether that required revoking their registrations. Early the next year, Ms. Madoff withdrew her registration and the S.E.C. dropped its proceedings against her. (Creswell & Thomas, 2009)

Bernie Madoff’s upbringing afforded several opportunities and privileges. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), children from middle to upper income families have an advantage educationally.

By the time children from middle-income families with well-educated parents are in third grade, they know about 12,000 words. Third grade children from low-income families with undereducated parents who don’t talk to them very much have vocabularies of around 4,000 words, one-third as many words as their middle income peers. [http://theindividualist.hubpages.com/hub/socio-economicfactorsofearlyliteracy]

Such statistics indicate that family income does contribute to educational achievement.
The community that Madoff grew up in was close knit and played a significant role in his upbringing. After graduating from high school, he attended Alabama University for a year and joined a Jewish fraternity on campus. He then transferred to Hofstra University, earning a degree in Political Science. Only attending Brooklyn’s Law School for a year, he decided to take his $5000 savings from his job of installing sprinklers and serving as a life guard to becoming a financier on Wall Street. It is important to note the significance of his gender because in the business of banking and financial sector (white) masculinity is a source of undeserved privilege. Madoff started his own small security investment business that eventually grew into an international firm with offices in the United States and London serving prominent individuals such as Jeffrey Katzenberg and organizations such as the foundations of Steven Spielberg and Elie Wiesel. As reported by Henriques (2008), “At one point, the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, a large sovereign wealth fund in the Middle East, had entrusted some $400 million to Mr. Madoff’s firm” (http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/20/business/20madoff.html?pagewanted=all). Madoff lived in a penthouse on East 64th street valued at $8 million dollars. His wealth provided him with the ability to travel all over the globe, nearly 50 Rolex watches, and impeccable homes with marble flooring. He owned a home in France and a mansion in Palm Beach, Florida, where he was a member of the local country club.

As Madoff built his business, nepotism was definitely a part of the wealth being shared within the family. Both of his sons worked in the trading section of the business along with Madoff’s younger brother, Peter, and Peter’s daughter, Shana, as well as Madoff’s nephew, Charles. (http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/13nyregion/13madoff.htm).
The article, “Informal Networks and White Collar Crime: Evidence from the Madoff Scandal” reveals that due to his Jewish heritage, Madoff was able to develop trust and cultivate relationships that he would later use to take millions from clients who were primarily Jewish. His clients thus may have had an “affinity bias” founded on their common Jewish background. This even extended to the relationships he had with the SEC. Despite the number of allegations and complaints filed prior to his fall, Madoff was able to avoid investigation. Owens and Shores (2010) noted that “Madoff was active in the Jewish community, serving for a time as the Treasurer of the American Jewish Congress and Yeshiva University” (p. 13). Additionally, Madoff was able to connect with Washington lawmakers and regulators due to his ties to the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association (SIFMA). He sat on the board of the Securities Industry Association that ultimately became SIFMA and was involved in a number of charitable and political activities. He donated to the Democratic Party, lymphoma organizations due to a relative being diagnosed with the disease, and several educational, health, and cultural organizations in New York City.

Growing up in a middle income family afforded Madoff access to New York’s Upper East Side, which in turn offered opportunities to build social, financial, and human capital. Through his networks and associations, he was able to build connections and relationships that he could later use and exploit for his Ponzi scheme. The opportunity to attend college and join a fraternity more than likely contributed to his network and provided knowledge and skills that were used to build his business. There are two areas of social capital that were at work in Madoff’s scheme: structural and cognitive.

The structural and cognitive forms of social capital must take into account the complex historical framework that has often benefited the privileged in society. Rules and roles (structural
dimensions of social capital) are often unspoken but create opportunities for collaboration that can exclude others who are not privy to the networks that could provide mutual benefit. Historically, people of color have rarely been in a position to shape the culture and ideology about money and wealth. As a result, opportunities to build relationships with those who have access to both are limited. The same holds true for a sense of comfort with norms, values, and cultural attributes underlying cooperative behavior relevant to achieving reciprocal gains. This constitutes the cognitive dimension.

Turned into the authorities after confessing to his two sons, Bernard Lawrence Madoff is currently serving a 150-year sentence in a federal medium security facility in Butler, North Carolina for the biggest Ponzi scheme in history in which he stole billions of dollars from investors. Yet the prison is not too shabby, offering luxuries even. “The physical space resembles a campus with landscaped yards and hedges shaped by inmates into giant globes...there’s no bars. There are windows...a gym, library, pool tables, chapel, a volleyball court and an Indian sweat lodge” (http://nymag.com/news/crimelaw/66468/index2.html). Madoff’s work in prison has included maintenance and cleaning the cafeteria, which pays less than $200 month. In prison, his high school sweetheart and wife, Ruth, would visit weekly and talk daily to him until his oldest son, Mark, hanged himself in his New York apartment on the second anniversary of his father’s arrest. They are now estranged. Despite being locked up, Madoff believes he is free, is revered and recognized by fellow inmates in the facility. He states that he will die in prison and has accepted this sentence as a result to the choices and decisions he’s made (http://abcnews.go.com/m/story?id=14823108).

The life experience of Bernard Madoff is a story of “rags to riches” opportunity. Using his education, networks, and privilege, Madoff was able to employ his social capital to build an
empire of exploitation that benefited his family. Madoff’s prison experience is different than that of many inmates around the United States. Perks such as enjoying recreational activities like a sweat lodge or weekly visits and daily phone calls is not comparable to other prisons. By way of contrast, I will review Mumia Abu Jamal’s sentencing and imprisonment.

**Analysis of Individuals and Outcomes due to Social Capital: Mumia Abu Jamal**

“I spend my days preparing for life, not preparing for death” (Abu Jamal, 2007)

Mumia Abu Jamal was born Wesley Cook in the projects of Philadelphia in 1954 the same year as the historic court case Brown v. Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas, a landmark legal decision responsible for integrating schools. Abu Jamal’s father died when he was only nine years old and his mother died a few years after he went to jail. At the age of 14, he became involved in creating a chapter of the Black Panther Party in Philadelphia after reading a newspaper from the organization. Abu Jamal then became a “radio reporter and president of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Association of Black Journalists…and supplemented his income by driving a taxi at night” (http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/oct/25/usa.laurasmith)

His name, Mumia, was given by a Kenyan High School teacher teaching African culture. The name means Prince and Abu-Jamal means father of Jamal in Arabic after the birth of his son Jamal in 1971. The Party allowed Mumia to express himself and find purpose and father figures who could fulfill his void of being fatherless. “Without a father, I sought and found father figures…in a period of utter void, taught me, fed me…many good men and women became my teachers, my mentors and my examples” (Abu-Jamal, 2001, p. 98). Abu Jamal dropped out of school and moved to the headquarters of the Philadelphia Black Panther Party offices where his duties included writing articles and distributing information on the party in addition to assisting with the breakfast program, working in other programs benefitting the community such as
protesting backed-up sewers, or providing information to others about the injustices that occurred in their city. As a result of his desire to speak out, he experienced constant retaliation by the police department and the FBI in the form of harassment that even caused fear through intimidation among friends and family members. According to Burroughs (2004), “More than 600 sheets of paper would be compiled on Cook from 1969 when he turned 15 until about 1974, the year of his 20th birthday” (http://www.tcnj.edu/~kpearson/Mumia/part3.htm) Because of public speeches and articles that were viewed as militant and supportive of the BPP’s agenda, he was listed on the FBI’s Security Index and targeted by the FBI’s Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO).

A March 1968 memorandum from the San Francisco Special Agent in Charge to Director J. Edgar Hoover stated that the Negro youth wanted something to be proud of, but he must be made to understand that if he turned to revolutionary views, he would become a “dead revolutionary.” (Cleaver, 1998, p.15)

After two years in the BPP, he left and became involved in another organization called the Black United Liberation Front. At the age of 17, Mumia became a father and a husband. Before the end of the decade, he fathered a total of three children and was married twice. He returned to high school and briefly attended Goodard College in Vermont in the early 1970s. He worked with a number of radio stations including a national public radio affiliate and earned the radio name, “the voice for the voiceless”. During his career he interviewed high profile individuals such as Bob Marley and Alex Haley. In his radio broadcasts he highlighted police brutality and supported MOVE members who were accused of killing a Philadelphia policeman in 1978. As Blank (1995) noted, “Mumia won in 1981 a prestigious Peabody Award for his
coverage of the Pope’s visit to America. Philadelphia Magazine named him one of the 81 people to watch in 1981” (Kudlac, 2007, p.75)

In 1981, Officer Daniel Faulkner stopped Mumia’s brother, William Cook, in a traffic stop. Across the street in his cab, he ran over to the incident. Shots were fired and both Abu Jaml and Faulkner were struck. Abu Jamal was wounded and sent to an area hospital while Faulkner died at the scene. Abu Jamal was charged with first degree murder. In the face of this threat, he demanded that MOVE leader John Africa represent him during the trial, but the courts would not allow it because Africa was not an attorney.

Despite trying to represent himself in court, the judge ordered that Mumia’s right to self-representation had been forfeited. Tests were not performed to determine if Abu Jamal had fired the weapon. Many believe that the crime scene may have been compromised. Prosecution expert witness Charles Tumosa said such tests were “unreliable…It doesn’t work” (Commonwealth v. Mumia Abu-Jamal aka Wesley Cook, 1982). Three witnesses stated that Abu Jamal was the shooter. It was believed that a .44 caliber bullet was removed from Faulkner’s brain and that Abu-Jamal’s gun was a .38 and the defense team’s own ballistics expert said the bullets were consistent with Mumia’s gun (Lopez, 2000). He was unable to hire experts to testify on his behalf since only $150 had been allocated for fees for their services (Cleaver, 1998).

Abu Jamal was convicted unanimously by the jury and sentenced to death. In 1995, the Governor of Pennsylvania, Tom Ridge, signed his death warrant. According to the hearing transcript, new witnesses were called who stated that the gunman was a passenger in Cook’s car. This testimony was viewed as not credible. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court and a petition for certiorari allowed Ridge to sign a second death warrant in 1999. Abu Jamal
pursued a federal habeas corpus review, stating that his representation was not suitable and did not properly defend him. He also felt that the judge was biased and that he did not receive a fair trial because of this. A court stenographer stated in a 2001 affidavit that the judge said, “Yeah, and I’m going to help them fry the nigger” (http://www.mumia.de/doc/aktuell/20010903mde02en.html). In addition, Abu Jamal claimed the jury was comprised of ten whites and two blacks, which made for a biased jury resulting in an unfair trial. In 2008, the U.S. Third Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the murder conviction but ordered new sentencing because the jury was improperly instructed (Mears, 2009). Since the trial, several witnesses have also recounted their testimonies. Despite this, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear his appeal and ordered the appeals court to review the death penalty decision (Vicni, 2010). After surviving two execution dates, Abu Jamal was given life in prison without parole instead of the death sentence by Seth Williams, District Attorney for Philadelphia in December 2011 (Williams, 2011).

Mumia Abu Jamal’s endurance for 30 years has received enormous public attention. Through his many essays and books from jail, he brought significant attention to the injustices of imprisonment in the U.S. criminal justice system that has garnered support around the world. Concerts along with personal support from celebrities have given a face to the issue of sentencing and death row in this country. Individuals such as Nelson Mandela and many others have condemned his sentencing, including former Philadelphia District Attorney Arlen Specter, who called the trial unfair. Mumia has used his imprisonment as a platform to express the disparities that exist in America from his attempts to provide commentary to NPR (which were cancelled but later released as essays) to commencement addresses at colleges such as Antioch in early 2000.
Questions have arisen about the entire case, contesting the fairness of the arrest, investigation, and trial. In 1979, the U.S. District Court charged that former Police Commissioner and then Mayor Frank Rizzo violated the rights of citizens, claiming that the mayor and 18 high-ranking officials either were involved in or committed “widespread and severe” acts of police brutality (http://www.dsl.psu.edu/civilrights/articles/frankrizzobio.html). Rizzo was accused of being generally hostile toward people of color. During the scandal, several police officers pleaded guilty to offenses in mostly black and poor north Philadelphia neighborhoods such as intimidating and beating witnesses, illegal searches, and framing the innocent (Blank, 1996).

The judge in Abu Jamal’s case, Albert Sabo, has been called the king of death row and has handed down more death sentences than any other US judge, ninety three percent of which were to people of color. Despite appellate courts reversing thirty four percent of these sentences due to errors Sabo either made or permitted by 1992 he had personally sentenced twenty percent of the convicts then on Pennsylvania’s death row. (Blank, 1969, p. 1629)

Because of Mumia’s involvement with the Black Panther Party, some critics of his imprisonment feel that his radical affiliations played a significant role in his treatment and sentencing. For example, a 12-year-old newspaper article in which as a teenager he quoted Mao Tse Tung was produced as evidence at the trial, an unrelated detail that nevertheless could have influenced the jury in their decision. Despite the fact that he had no prior convictions, it appears that Abu Jamal’s involvement in organizations such as BPP and the Black United Liberation Front or association with the group MOVE likely influenced the jury.

Because Mumia is poor, African American, and not educated by universities, he has not been afforded the same opportunities as those who are wealthy and/or educated. His legal counsel raised support through concerts and charitable donations. He spent more than 20 years
on death row, an experience referred to as the “Death Row Phenomenon” to describe the psychological and physical isolation inmates face in waiting to die. Without the public’s attention, Mumia’s case would have not been on the radar. Professor Jeffry Pokorak and researchers at St. Mary’s University Law School in Texas found that death penalty cases around the country are almost exclusively black males (98%) (Dieter, 1998). Ironically, it is interesting to note that the injustices in the case created awareness of Mumia’s plight, a form of social capital that has allowed him to be saved from the death penalty due to his supporters, unlike Madoff who has no supporters.

In the 1980s, the General Accounting Office reviewed studies on race and the death penalty and found that race of the victim influenced the likelihood of being charged with capital murder or receiving a death sentence, i.e., those who murdered whites were found to be more likely to be sentenced to death than those who murdered blacks (http://m.deathpenaltyinfo.org/node/245).

In addition to the disparities in the criminal justice system stacking the cards against his fate, Mumia’s lack of a father represented a further void. According to the National Fatherhood Initiative (McIntosh, 1989), children without fathers are five times more likely to be poor, with 38.4% of children in female headed households in poverty compared to 7.8% of children who live with both parents. Mumia is the father of eight children. His incarceration thus continued the cycle of children growing up without a father in the home to contribute financially, mentally, and emotionally to their growth. The National Fatherhood Initiative report continues to state that youth who never had a father in the household experience higher odds for being incarcerated. “A 2002 Department of Justice survey of 7,000 inmates revealed that 39% of jail inmates lived in mother only households” (McIntosh, 1989).
Table 1 contains a schematic comparison of each man’s experiences with the criminal justice system. Although Bernard Madoff and Mumia Abu-Jamal are both incarcerated for life, the process of their arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment were very different as a result of differences in their birth, circles of influence, education, and opportunities for advancement.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Madoff</th>
<th>Abu-Jamal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood as a child/ethnic background</td>
<td>Home in middle income, Jewish community in New York</td>
<td>Projects in poor area of Philadelphia, African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Father and mother in home</td>
<td>Father died at nine; single mother headed household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>Dropped out and returned later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Graduated from Hofstra University and attended one year of law school</td>
<td>Attended Goddard University briefly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Part-time writer, radio personality and taxi cab driver, author (in prison)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
<td>Millionaire</td>
<td>Poverty level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Involvement</td>
<td>Served on several boards of colleges and prestigious educational and cultural organizations</td>
<td>Black Panther Party, Black United Liberation Front, and supporter of MOVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First time offender/Age at time of offense</td>
<td>Yes; In seventies</td>
<td>Yes; In twenties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime committed/Sentence</td>
<td>Fraud on multiple counts; Ponzi scheme bilking individuals and organizations out of billions of dollars; Sentenced to life in prison</td>
<td>Murder of police officer; sentenced to death but revoked after 30 years to life in prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusers/Witnesses/Process</td>
<td>Reported by several individuals through the years but due to relationships with SEC, investigations were not thorough</td>
<td>Arrested immediately; Conflicting testimonies of witnesses and investigation questionable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorneys</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes; initially self-represented; limited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social capital played a major role in the lives and sentencing of both Madoff and Abu Jamal. Madoff benefited from an upbringing with both parents that afforded him a college education and one year of law school. He was an entrepreneur who built a multimillion dollar firm that was responsible for billions of dollars of assets. He was able to network and influence many rich and notable individuals for over 20 years. His involvement in charitable organizations and many boards, such as serving as the chairman of NASDAQ, provided him with access to individuals with resources. Even after returning much of the money that was stolen from investors, his wife was still allowed to keep $2 million dollars, while as late as the time of his incarceration his sons borrowed millions from their father. Mumia Abu Jamal did not have access to this type of wealth.

Mumia Abu-Jamal grew up in a single parent household with siblings in the projects. The Black Panthers became a father figure for him and he dropped out of high school. Even though he returned to school to receive his high school diploma, he still worked part-time jobs and even drove a taxi cab to support himself. Living in a poor area of Philadelphia also offered limited options. He did not have circles of influence that provided access to wealth and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Yes; two who were involved in family business and grew up with father</th>
<th>Yes; seven who grew up without father in the home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Circles of Influence</td>
<td>Connected to wealthy individuals</td>
<td>Circles of influence limited until after incarceration due to celebrity, national and international coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jail</td>
<td>Facility like a campus with Indian sweat lodge; could talk to wife daily and visit weekly; ability to interact with other inmates</td>
<td>Isolated in maximum security prison; limited family visits and could only connect occasionally with other inmates (primarily those on death row)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
individuals who were notable. His children have grown up without a father most of their lives and did not inherit any wealth. He was also plagued with racism, classism, and police abuse during a time of heightened racial tension that played a role in his incarceration.

The implications of the research for application to leadership identification and development demonstrates that those in positions of power must be sensitive to understanding the historical and cultural obstacles that individuals face in order to achieve upward mobility. Many individuals in the criminal justice system are truly a product of their environments and the role of relationships can be critical to one’s success or failure. The expression, “It is more who you know than what you know” can be critical to one’s success even in the outcome for those facing criminal charges. The examples presented here illustrate in detailed ways how the availability or lack of social capital can define a person’s ability to receive opportunities. Background, race, socio-economic class, gender, education, sexual orientation, and employment can create an advantage or disadvantage in an individual’s outcome in building relationships.
References


