



LAUREN McFALLS / Associated Press

Maureen Faulkner, widow of the slain Philadelphia officer, talks to a graduate at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash. Faulkner was protesting the taped speech by Mumia Abu-Jamal, who was convicted in the killing.

At college, some students shun Abu-Jamal speech

A few walked out. Others turned their backs during the commencement in Washington state.

By Hal Spencer

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OLYMPIA, Wash. — A handful of students walked out of their college commencement yesterday and two dozen others stood with their backs to the stage to protest the inclusion of Mumia Abu-Jamal as a speaker.

"I feel what's going on here does not represent who I am and why I'm here," said Shawn Ward, one of the Evergreen State College graduates who walked out during the 13-minute taped address to about 800 graduates. He was joined by several police officers in dress uniforms.

One student protester had a replica of an electric chair and a sign reading: "A positive role model for Mumia."

The protesters included Maureen Faulkner, the widow of Philadelphia Police Officer Daniel Faulkner, who was 25 when he was shot dead near 13th and Locust Streets about 4 a.m. Dec. 9, 1981.

She said the participation in the commencement of Abu-Jamal, whose conviction for her husband's murder and sentence of death has been affirmed twice by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, was "not fitting for a graduation ceremony. A classroom, maybe, but not a graduation ceremony."

Evergreen permits its students to select commencement speakers. Abu-Jamal was among several people nominated for inclusion, and was selected along with other speakers at a meeting open to all students.

One student, Malka Fenyvesi, said Abu-Jamal was not invited to cause pain for Maureen Faulkner or "to create a lot of bad feelings," but rather to create a forum for a "marginalized segment of our society."

Abu-Jamal has been on death row since 1982. No execution date has been set. He is appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Abu-Jamal's jailhouse writings about the justice system — and efforts to win a new trial — have given him worldwide attention. A symbol for death-penalty opponents, he contends his conviction was due to a biased judge and an ineffective attorney. At yesterday's ceremony, some seniors wore yellow armbands to show support for him.

"Why was it right for people to revolt against the British because of taxation without representation and somehow wrong for truly unrepresented Africans in America to revolt against America?" the former Black Panther said in remarks played to several thousand people.

"For any repressed people, revolution, according to the Declaration of Independence, is a right," he said.

Abu-Jamal's participation prompted Gov. Gary Locke to cancel his appearance at the ceremony. Evergreen president Jane Jervis told the crowd before Abu-Jamal's remarks were played that people

should "be aware of the pain and outrage" of Maureen Faulkner and police officers, and of the right of diverse voices to be heard.

In Philadelphia yesterday afternoon, District Attorney Lynne M. Abraham stood at the spot where Faulkner was slain and lashed out at Jervis.

"I'm embarrassed she is the president of a college in the United States," Abraham said. "And I wonder where the board of trustees and the college's alumni association are."

She previously called Abu-Jamal's inclusion in the ceremony a "misguided and inappropriate decision."

"I can't contain my disappointment, my utter disgust, and my deep, deep sorrow," Abraham said yesterday, "that they have given this person the national publicity that should be reserved for only the best at graduations. President Jervis, shame on you."

Inquirer staff writer Linda Loyd contributed to this article.