

IMPRISONED INTELLECTUALS



AMERICA'S POLITICAL
PRISONERS WRITE ON
LIFE, LIBERATION, AND
REBELLION

Edited by

JOY JAMES

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This work is dedicated to those ancestors, elders, and youths who seek, struggle, and suffer for freedom; and to all who filter their desire to abolish slavery and social death through compassion for the fragility of life and love.

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Introduction

Joy James

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison.

—Henry David Thoreau

It is the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your time that there will be any fruit, but that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result.

—Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi

AMERICAN "PRISON NOTEBOOKS"

Antonio Gramsci, while imprisoned in Mussolini's Italy for his political beliefs and socialist activism, wrote in his *Prison Notebooks* that, "Every social group . . . creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields." For Gramsci, because everyone thinks critically and philosophically, everyone is an intellectual; but not everyone officially functions as such in society.¹

In a stratified culture, one may superficially assume that only professional intellectuals, recognized writers and pundits in the public realm, academics, and policy-makers constitute an intellectual formation. However, every group has an "organic" intellectual caste, one that functions as a vehicle to articulate, shape, and further the aspirations of its constituency.

Hence, the "public intellectual" encompasses the oft-forgotten "prison intellectual." That is, the imprisoned intellectual is a public intellectual who, like his or her highly visible and celebrated counterparts, reflects upon social meaning, dis-

cord, development, ethics, and justice. Prisons function as intellectual and political sites unauthorized by the state. Yet, when and where the imprisoned intellectual gives voice to the incarcerated or captive, those denied social justice and full democratic power on both sides of the concertina wire, then and there our stories of war and love shaping visions of freedom and fulfillment take on a new life—often a quite disturbing one.

In editing this volume of writings by imprisoned intellectuals, political prisoners in the contemporary United States, I gradually realized the impossibilities of filtering language in harrying and prophetic narratives. One cannot bring some definitive “academic” meaning to this collection, a gathering of words in resistance, words written by revolutionaries captured and detained—for days or years, decades or life—by the leviathan against which they rebelled. This is the leviathan to which most readers of this volume pledge their allegiance in some fashion or another—tithing to domestic and foreign policies that increase military and police powers, and concentrations of wealth and poverty. The rebels went to prison; and, passing through or surviving incarceration, they wrote as outlaw intellectuals with unique and controversial insights into idealism, warfare, and social justice.

When writing is a painful endeavor, marked by political struggle and despair as well as determination and courage, it is potentially transformative. Reading may also share (in an attenuated fashion) the impetus and ethos of the writing. Yet it will not necessarily compel the reader to moral and political acts. Author and academic Barbara Harlow cautions, “Reading prison writing must . . . demand a correspondingly activist counterapproach to that of passivity, aesthetic gratification, and the pleasures of consumption that are traditionally sanctioned by the academic disciplining of literature.”² An “activist counterapproach” to the consumptive indifference is infrequent, but it does occur. If the circulation of rarely referenced or vilified “resistance literature” reflects the growing public interest in incarceration sites, intellectual and political dissent for social justice, and the possibilities of democratic transformations, then collections such as this should spark new debates about “reading” and activism and political theory.

Reading and editing, from the bipolar lens of academic and radical intellectual, I see that the purpose of this work was to foster or force an encounter between those in the so-called free world seeking personal and collective freedoms and those in captivity seeking liberation from economic, military, racial/sexual systems. Like all good and necessary encounters, this one between writers and readers is provocative and elicits more questions than can be answered within the confines of a book—even an anthology of critique, confrontation, and radical risk taking.

DEBATES, DISOBEDIENCE, AND DISSENT

Amid the debates about “political prisoners” in the United States, one can distinguish between those engaged in civil disobedience who identify as “loyal opposi-

tion”—and by their very dissent affirm the institutions of American democracy—and those so alienated by state violence and government betrayals of humanitarian and democratic ideals that their dissent chronicles their disaffection, and at times insurrection.³ Such insurrection may also at times become (proto-)revolutionary.⁴

“Law abiding dissent” represents a political risk taking with broader social acceptance. This is largely due to its adherence to principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, widely shared moral values, and, sometimes, proximity to the very “corridors of (institutional) power” closed to the disenfranchised; such adherence spares dissenters the harshest of sentences. Although not emphasized in this volume, the narratives of influential political detainees offer important insights. For example, after being imprisoned for engaging in civil disobedience to protest U.S. military bombing practices on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. wrote:

I arrived at my difficult decision to join the invasion of Vieques only after I was convinced that its people had exhausted every legal and political avenue to secure their rights. In my 18 years as a lawyer and environmental advocate for the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Riverkeeper movement, I had never engaged in an act of civil disobedience. As an attorney, I have a duty to uphold the law. But I also had a countervailing duty in this case. The bombardment of Vieques is bad military policy and disastrous for public health and the environment. But the most toxic residue of the Navy's history on Vieques is its impact on our democracy. The people I met there are United States citizens, but the Navy's abusive exercise of power on the island has left them demoralized, alienated and feeling that they are neither part of a democracy nor the beneficiaries of the American system of justice.⁵

Kennedy narrates that upon returning for trial, he encountered Reverend Jesse Jackson who was in Puerto Rico to support his wife, Jacqueline, while she served a ten-day jail sentence for protesting against military violations. Upon informing the civil rights leader of Kennedy's expectant wife Mary's insistence that her husband not take a deal to delay his sentencing, Kennedy recalls that Jackson responded, “Suffering is often the most powerful tool against injustice and oppression. If Jesus had plea-bargained the crucifixion, we wouldn't have the faith.”

Unlike Kennedy, Jesse Jackson is a veteran of civil rights protest and civil disobedience. Leading demonstrations against domestic infractions such as “driving while black/brown” or “voting while black/brown,” the former aide to Martin Luther King, Jr., has for decades vocally criticized U.S. foreign policy and vocally supported Palestinian self-determination and the abolition of apartheid states. In the 1980s, in solidarity with Nelson Mandela⁶ and other South African political prisoners, Jackson encouraged U.S. citizens to trespass at the offices of South African government agencies. This civil disobedience, often by middle-class Americans, usually resulted in several hours of detention in city jails, and became seen as a “badge of honor” or rite of (political) passage. Such short-term (symbolic?) jailings prompt several observations. First, it is likely that it is not political incarceration per se that

is stigmatized but incarceration based on a refusal to suffer violence without resorting to armed self-defense; the choice of the latter surely leads to one's "disappearance" from conventional society and "respectable" politics. Second, even nonviolent conscientious objectors (COs) during World War II—who sought to "redeem" themselves as patriots by risking their lives as human guinea pigs in U.S. military medical experiments—and religious pacifists in the civil rights and antiwar movements that followed were disavowed once designated as "unpatriotic."

Consider that despite his adherence to Christian faith and Gandhian principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, Martin Luther King, Jr., lost considerable support and organizational funding from both white and black liberals after he publicly criticized imperialism (and capitalism) and the U.S. war against Vietnam.⁷ What is largely condemned in American political culture is not the risk taking that leads to incarceration but the radicalism that rejects the validity of the nation-state itself and the legitimacy of its legal and moral standing. How does one reconcile the proximity and distance between the law-abiding loyalist and the pacifist or militarist radical who appear in the same courts, often using similar legal arguments, but with very different political intentions and consequences seem to stand a world apart in their dissent?

Diverse worlds or parallel universes hover about this volume. Contributors disagree about strategy and morality ("nonviolence or violence") and politics ("loyal or revolutionary"). Toward a work such as this, one intended to raise queries, eyebrows, and passions, there appear many questions and debates—particularly for those informed about and disaffected by the criminalization of dissidents amid state criminality and abuse of (police and war) powers. Many debates seem to center on the question of what constitutes shared community, one in struggle for commonly held ideals of justice, individual freedom, collective liberation, and material well-being in civil society marked by growing state control.

Radical philosophers have argued that street and prison gangs are forms of "civil society" conditioned by the state and government apparatuses' manipulation of the drug trade, control of territory, and deployment of police repression. Philosopher Michael Hames-Garcia raises cogent questions about the relationships between the incarcerated and those in the "free world," asking, "how might one situate the specifically intellectual activity of organic prison intellectuals in relation to the state? To what kind of 'civil society' or 'counterpublic' are prison intellectuals directing their writings and how is this audience [readership] positioned in relationship to the state?"⁸

State conditioning is not the only force destabilizing progressive politics. The prison movement has grown immensely over the last decades. Yet, it still has its own internal demons to fight concerning coalitions and efficacy. Activists as "official representatives" can invoke the political prisoner-as-icon in order to derail external and internal criticisms of their strategies, and wield surrogate iconic powers in an uncritical fashion. This raises the question of whether the imprisoned—as political "dependents" relying upon those outside to garner support—might engage in self-

editorial censorship concerning the limitations of their allies. Such "self-censorship" and self-conditioning work both ways. The privileged academic might hesitate to criticize a progressive "folk hero" sentenced to life or death in prison, although, in a culture that widely disparages prisoners, the repercussions of academic criticisms seem to be fairly limited. This suggests additional queries about the nature of "parity" between political prisoners and their political allies: In theory and practice, the imprisoned intellectual can be ideologically "frozen" in or physically "freed" by the work of non-incarcerated academics and activists.

Scholar Dylan Rodriguez questions whether, given the constraints, an imprisoned intellectual can truly become a "public intellectual." Arguing that while in prison such writers are "disabled from meaningful participation in the interpretation and 'translation' of their works," Rodriguez references "radical/revolutionary intellectuals whose praxis is in irreconcilable opposition to the very historical and political logic of the 'public' (civil society) as it exists for the endorsement of their virtual (and biological) death." I both agree and disagree with this assessment. True, the general or mainstream public constitutes a mostly hostile or indifferent readership and respondent. Yet, there are multiple "publics" and varied "civil societies"; the "public sphere" is shaped, to varying degrees, by whoever enter as engagees. The intent of imprisoned intellectuals to influence "the public" in its multiple formations is a complicated proposition but a real endeavor. No monolithic "radical political prisoner" exists. Despite shared antiracist and anti-imperialist politics, U.S. political prisoners differ in identity, ideology, and strategy. Rodriguez, though, makes an essential point about how imprisoned intellectuals are "read": "[T]here is a rather widespread, normalized *disavowal* of the political and theoretical substance of the work generated by imprisoned radical intellectuals."⁹

This "abolitionist" assertion is further complicated if we consider how contemporary racism and penal captivity likely evolved from within a historical colonial-settler state built upon, and enriched by, anti-Indigenous genocide and African enslavement. Some contributors to this volume argue in their respective chapters that there is a "normalized disavowal" of the presence of (radical or independent) blacks or Indians in conventional "civil society." Hence, they call for some form(s) of independence or autonomy from what they view as an enveloping and destructive formation (what some have called an "empire"). The racially marked political prisoner tends to be most forgotten, and to serve the longest sentences. Some of the longest sentences and most violent punishments have been meted out to African and Native Americans in the Black Panther Party or American Indian Movement and their allies, and Puerto Rican *independentistas*. To rationalize the sentences and punishments by pointing to the advocacy or use of armed struggle or armed self-defense by some of the incarcerated ignores the fact that a number of those slain or incarcerated (for decades) were innocent of charges. Their innocence is attested to, as in the cases of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, who were slain, and Dhoruba Bin Wahad and Geronimo ji-Jaga (Pratt), who were finally released in the 1990s, by

the multimillion-dollar settlements paid out by the U.S. government, ostensibly for wrongful deaths and incarcerations.

It is assumed that some readers of this volume will be critical of the "prison industrial complex," and so, to varying degrees, self-identify as "abolitionists." The most militant wing of the twenty-first-century abolitionist movement will likely be that antiracist minority who argues that the abolition of the death penalty, and of (human rights abuses in) prisons and Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) detention centers, and of the widespread racial bias in sentencing, merely addresses the *symptoms* of a pervasive disease. Revolutionary abolitionists offer their own readings, drawing insights from contemporary battles and historical lessons (following the Civil War, Congress abolished slavery to sanction the convict prison lease system and sharecropping, new forms of legal servitude to be endured and fought by African Americans for one hundred years).

In the wake of the New York Police Department's brutality against people of African descent—viscerally recorded in the 1997 beating-rape of Abner Louima, and the 1999 firing of forty-one shots at Amadou Diallo—theorist Frank Wilderson, III, writes:

[I]f we are to follow [Frantz] Fanon's analysis [in *The Wretched of the Earth*], and the gestures toward this understanding in some of the work of imprisoned intellectuals, then we have to come to grips with the fact that, for Black people, civil society *itself*—rather than its abuses or shortcomings—is a state of emergency. . . . In "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy," [Steve] Martinot and [Jared] Sexton assert the primacy of Fanon's Manichean zones (without the promise of higher unity) even in the face of American integration. . . . this Manichean delirium manifests itself by way of the US paradigm of policing which (re)produces, repetitively, the inside/outside, the civil society/black world, by virtue of the difference between those bodies that don't magnetize bullets and those bodies that do. "Police impunity serves to distinguish between . . . those whose human being is put permanently in question and those for whom it goes without saying" (Martinot and Sexton, 8). . . . Whiteness then, and by extension civil society . . . must be first understood as a social formation of contemporaries who do not magnetize bullets.¹⁰

Whether pacifist or militarist, responding to violence and racism in domestic or foreign policy, these works will remain suspect and heatedly debated by many in the public realm. Fine. Our goal here was to ensure that they not remain largely overlooked or erased. Paradoxically, those most passionately seeking collective liberation—from racial or economic or military dominance—are those most likely to lose their individual freedoms. The captive/free dichotomy is a paradox rich in irony: imprisoned intellectuals, the most intensely monitored and repressed by the state's police apparatus, might in fact be those most free of state conditioning. Existing not merely as the output of "victims" of state responses to radical opposition, the analyses of imprisoned intellectuals both deconstruct dominant ideologies and

reconstruct new strategies for humanity. Their writings proffer reactive and proactive readings of struggle and freedom.

So the questions and answers continue. "How do you make the 'disappeared' (the captive rebel, the impoverished, the racialized, the addicted, the 'queer') reappear?" "When is a democracy not a democracy?" "Have slavery, surrogate forms of captivity, and social death¹¹ been reinstated through the Thirteenth Amendment?"¹² "To what degree does self-critique in liberation movements prevent radical responses to state and racial violence from becoming self-inflicted wounds?" This collection raises and addresses queries and explores the implications of responses.

TRACING A HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY

The United States has a long and terrible history of confinement and disappearance of those it racially and politically targets. Include those captives in slavery and on reservations, and it becomes a longer narrative of torture and resistance. W. E. B. Du Bois notes in *Black Reconstruction in America* how over 200,000 African Americans served in combat during the Civil War.¹³ Their ancestral line included Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and Harriet Tubman and their political lineage, John Brown. With the rise of lynching after the aborted Reconstruction era, investigative journalist Ida B. Wells, armed with a pistol, vigorously organized against racial terror in which as many as ten thousand whites attended "parties" that roasted and dismembered black victims. There has always been resistance. The colonized, subaltern, and subjugated have continuously fought genocide and social death, and in battle called upon progenitors for guidance, and, in failure, for forgiveness.¹⁴ Contemporary incarcerated writers and political theorists are no different. Housed in San Quentin, Vietnamese activist and author Mike Ngo writes of prisoners' forced complicity with authorities and his own shame in participating in the disciplinary machinery, alleviated when he finds comfort in conversation with slain prison writer, revolutionary strategist-turned-icon, George Jackson. For Ngo, if it does not destroy, imprisonment teaches power and political theorizing that emanate from intimacy with death: social, physical, sexual, emotional.¹⁵ Intimacy with death, whether one's own or those prematurely engineered by the voracious appetites of expanding military-corporate power, is written all throughout the following pages: death in resistance to the Klan; death through assassination; death in battles with the police; death in opposition to U.S. military incursions and interventions; death in execution chambers; death on street corners; and death to the very concept of blind civic obedience and patriotic fervor. This intimacy is accompanied by death's companion, life, and, if not the inevitability of political and military victory for the rebels (who, in the phrase of Black Panther Party [BPP] cofounder Huey P. Newton, seemed to court "revolutionary suicide"), the possibility of liberation and freedom, and the certainty of striving for it.

The endemic flight from death in American culture (via its fetishism of youth,

technology, and immortality tied to materiality and science) indicates a marathon of avoidance politics and censorship. The disappearance of the incarcerated and the inhumane punishment for rebels suggest that intimacy with the imprisoned, particularly political prisoners, will be embraced and known by only a few. For many “law-abiding Americans” are (or socially seem) embarrassed by a family member’s incarceration and the realities of political incarceration in their democracy. With some 2.5 million imprisoned or detained by the state, 70 percent of whom are African, Latino, Native, or Asian American, many families could claim this intimacy. Like families in denial, U.S. government officials fervently deny the existence of U.S. political prisoners. State employees do so by defining political militants as “criminals.” Yet, who is the “criminal” whose crime is his or her physical opposition to state criminality (as determined by United Nations conventions, human rights law, and non-apartheid-based morality)—crimes against humanity in warfare and profiteering, crimes against the poor, against the racially subordinate, crimes against children, against women?¹⁶ To address the issue of incarcerated intellectuals, one would have to examine the reasons for their incarceration; examine not just the acts of which they were accused and convicted (at times with court malfeasance), but their commitments. Perhaps discussions of political incarceration in the United States fail to register in conventional speech and education because of political ignorance and a moral reluctance to attain intimacy with life-and-death confrontations.

This volume, largely by writers incarcerated because of their legal or illegal, pacifist or violent resistance to repression, constantly references antiracism. African Americans constitute the greatest percentage not only of those incarcerated for crimes against private property, drug violations, and social violence, but also of those incarcerated for political acts (including armed struggle) in opposition to repression. As the largest contingent of (social and) political prisoners, African Americans tend to draw the longest sentences with fewer possibilities for clemency or parole. There is a specificity and temerity about black liberation struggles that relate to and infuse political prisoners in the United States. From enslaved insurrectionists to their multiethnic progeny, antiracism defines but does not dominate this collection. There remains the question(s) of gender, community, culture, art, spirituality. I read the connection of white anti-imperialists and peace activists, Puerto Rican *independentistas*, and Native American resisters through the black gaze. Hence, there are two sections to this volume, the first on black liberation, the second on internationalism and anti-imperialism. The importance of various struggles is not reduced to but is framed by the context of racial dynamics of state repression. Such a context raises another series of questions that also have no easy answers, ones that, hopefully, will be pursued in continuous, painstaking dialogue: “How and why do repressive conditions create a certain brand of intellectualism?” “What roles do the voices of incarcerated intellectuals play in moral and political thought and action, and social consciousness?” “What makes someone a political prisoner?” The

last question, being the “easiest” to answer, reveals the varied debates waged among those who acknowledge the existence of political prisoners in the United States.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

There is a continuum of debate on who or what constitutes a political prisoner. The debate wages among prisoners themselves and among the non-incarcerated. A political prisoner can be someone who was put in prison for nonpolitical reasons but who became politicized in his or her thought and action while incarcerated. Incarceration is inherently political, but ideology plays a role. If everyone is a political prisoner then no one is. Although the meaning of who is a political prisoner appears to be expanding to include more structural critiques of the state at large, I reserve the use of (a somewhat awkward term) “political-econ” prisoners for those convicted of social crimes tied to property and drug-related crimes and whose disproportionate sentencing to prison rather than rehabilitation or community service is shaped by the political economy of racial and economic privilege and disenfranchisement. As a caste, political-econ prisoners can and do develop and refine their political critiques while incarcerated. (For example, of the contributors to this volume, Malcolm X, George Jackson, and Standing Deer were incarcerated for social crimes against property or people, and politicized as radicals within the penal site; also, paradoxically, youths who renounced their gang memberships and social crime, in order to bring about social change through the Black Panther Party, would find themselves later targeted and imprisoned for their political affiliations.) Those whose thoughts of social justice lead to commitments and acts in political confrontation with oppression acquire the standing of political prisoners. For those who (continue to) prey on others in physical and sexual assaults on children, women, and men, “political prisoners” would be an obscene register; for they do not manifest as liberatory agents but exist as merely one of many sources of danger to be confronted and quelled in a violent culture.

Victimization by a dominant culture and aggrandizing state is not sufficient to qualify one as a “political prisoner.” Although the strategies vary concerning violence in resistance politics, if agency and morality are prerequisites shaping the political being, then we speak of a fragment of the incarcerated population, just as we would speak of a fragment of the non-incarcerated population. Here, our discussion centers on revolutionary and radical activists who also constitute intellectual formations influencing political contemporary culture. Some progressives assert that to construct an entity called “political prisoners” creates a dichotomy between a select group and the vast majority of prisoners, and thus in fact promotes a new form of elitism—the iconic prisoner. Yet, these men and women are different. They were different before their incarceration, marked by their critical thinking and confrontations with authoritarian structures and policies and violence. Also, they were and are treated differently by the state, often receiving the harshest of sentences,

relegated to solitary confinement or “lockdown” in control units so that they cannot “infect”—really infuse—other prisoners with their radical politics and aspirations for freedom.

Mondo we Langa (David Rice), incarcerated in Nebraska prisons for decades for a crime that he states he did not commit, one for which his attorneys argue that there is no physical evidence implicating him, writes in “Letter from the Inside”:

I know what I mean by “political prisoner”: someone who, in the context of U.S. laws and court system, has been falsely tried and convicted of a criminal offense as a means of ending his or her political activities and making an example of the person for others who are espousing, or might espouse, ideas that those in power would find offensive. By this definition, I might be the only political prisoner in this joint. But in a broader sense, most people behind bars could be considered “political prisoners,” inasmuch as the process of lawmaking, law-enforcing, and the criminal “justice” system are all driven by a political apparatus that is anti-people of color and anti-people of little economic means. At the same time though, many, if not most of the people who are locked up have acted in the interests of the very system that oppresses them and victimized people who, like themselves, are oppressed.¹⁷

Attorneys Michael E. Deutsch and Jan Susler describe in “Political Prisoners in the United States: The Hidden Reality” (1990) three types of political prisoners. For Deutsch and Susler U.S. political prisoners are

1. Foreign nationals whose political status or political activities against allies of U.S. imperialism (e.g., Israel, Great Britain, El Salvador) result in detention or imprisonment;
2. Members of U.S. oppressed nationalities (African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chicano/Mexicanos, and Native Americans) who are prosecuted and imprisoned for political activities in furtherance of their [liberation] movements. . . . Included in these groups are anticolonial combatants or prisoners of war (POWs)—members of national liberation movements who as part of clandestine organizations have employed armed struggle as a means to achieve self-determination and independence for their nation and upon capture have the right, under the Additional Protocols of the Geneva Convention and the UN General Assembly Resolutions, to POW status and not to be tried as domestic criminals; and
3. White people who have acted in solidarity with the liberation movements of oppressed nationalities or against U.S. foreign or domestic policies.¹⁸

Deutsch and Susler offer a useful categorization of political prisoners; however, the first category could be expanded to include nonresident or immigrant detainees awaiting deportation. Following September 11, 2001, the sweeps of noncitizens legally organizing for workers’ rights in Florida, mostly young people of South Asian origin, construct a new category—that of political prisoner awaiting deportation.

Although the United States has a history of deporting militants—Emma Goldman, Marcus Garvey, Claudia Jones, C. L. R. James—there appears a schism in alignment with “foreign” political prisoners housed in the United States and awaiting deportation to hostile nations and U.S. citizens who are political prisoners in other countries, as in the case of Lori Berenson, who has been incarcerated in Peru for years.¹⁹ In radical politics around incarceration and the “prison-industrial-complex” most of the strategies regarding political prisoners have focused on the release campaigns of those incarcerated for decades, and rightly so. However, preventive measures and strategies to counter the increasing ability of the government to “disappear” political prisoners (as was the case following September 11 when Attorney General John Ashcroft held Sundiata Acoli, Philip Berrigan (who died of cancer in December 2002), and Marilyn Buck as well as other political prisoners incommunicado) do not appear clearly defined by advocates of prisoners’ rights.²⁰

In its 2002 letter to Governor George Pataki and the New York State Parole Board, the New York Task Force on Political Prisoners states that in Europe, Africa, and the United States,

prisoners long incarcerated for their political beliefs and actions have been set free—and in their freedom, have given the world back some hope and dignity. The release, for example, of Nelson Mandela, who spent twenty-seven years in prison for revolutionary actions against [the apartheid government] . . . has proved a catalyst for healing and justice in South Africa.

Signatories, attorneys who work pro bono for the release campaign for political prisoners attest:

These prisoners’ convictions reflect as yet unresolved issues of civil, racial, and economic justice of the 1960s and 1970s, a time when thousands of people of all races, young and old, women and men, formed militant movements to demand fundamental social change. Their trials occurred during a time when their juries and the general public did not know that, in response to these movements, the government was engaging in illegal and unconstitutional acts—acts of infiltration and surveillance which, according to the government’s own documents, carried over into the legal arena. Foremost in the government’s campaign was the FBI’s now-infamous Counter-Intelligence Program [COINTELPRO], condemned by a 1975 United States Senate Committee which became known as the “Church Committee” [named after Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho), the committee’s proceedings were published in 1976].²¹

The legal challenges brought by the prisoners referenced in this letter have been denied, primarily due to the 1996 federal law drastically limiting prisoners’ access to *habeas corpus*. Heartbreakingly for their families and communities, some of these prisoners have repeatedly been denied parole because of their political views or offenses—despite the fact that they more than meet current parole standards. . . . Some of the actions for which these men were convicted were taken in response to severe social repression and government misconduct. Some convictions, for example, arose directly from the targeting of activists by COINTELPRO. Others sought to defend themselves

name, to liberate African American prisoners from the Marin County Courthouse, a failed endeavor that Newton would describe later at the seventeen-year-old's funeral as "revolutionary suicide."

One year before her 1972 acquittal of all charges, Davis wrote from her prison cell "Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation," which is published here as chapter three; this essay would appear in the volume she coedited with Bettina Aptheker, *If They Come in the Morning*. Also in that anthology, which has been out of print for some time, was first published this volume's chapters four and five, respectively by Huey P. Newton and George Jackson. In chapter four, "Prison, Where Is Thy Victory?" Newton distinguishes between types or classes of prisoners, reserving his highest consideration for the imprisoned who rebel against rather than acquiesce to domination and (racial) control. In "Towards the United Front," chapter five, George Jackson, self-identified militarist for liberation and a key theorist and proponent of armed struggle, argues for a multiracial formation, new relations of unity that transcend common divisions. The Black Panthers became the most confrontational of the antiracist radical groups of the late 1960s and early 1970s (following the disintegration of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]). Among the black militant formations, the Panthers developed some of the strongest allegiances with other racialized peoples, and the strongest ties with white radicals and revolutionaries.

The Panthers would also become the lightning rod for some of the government's most horrific forms of violent repression used against dissidents in the post-World War II era. In chapter six, former Panther Dhoruba Bin Wahad describes the deadly counterinsurgency program, COINTELPRO, initiated by J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Decades before the BPP emerged, the FBI had destabilized progressives with violent means; but its violence would operate with virtually no restraint until the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement (AIM) were destroyed. "COINTELPRO and the Destruction of Black Leaders and Organizations" (abridged) presents the scenario in which state violence against the Black Panther Party and its membership had become routine. Bin Wahad argues that any revolutionary movement coincides with a cultural movement, but a cultural movement will not empower its people unless it is politicized. COINTELPRO succeeded because it halted the political consciousness of the Black Panther Party that coincided with the cultural awareness of "Black Power." Through violence, manipulation of the media, and disinformation campaigns, the FBI engaged in a twofold attack on the dissemination of information by black revolutionaries, destabilizing the public support base of the movement and then removing its leaders from public discourse through imprisonment, exile, or death.

State malfeasance and criminality in which the FBI participated included anonymous letters to Martin Luther King, Jr., urging that he commit suicide before his marital infidelities were publicized; the extra-judicial killings or assassinations of Chicago Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in December 1969; and the many killings during 1973-1976 of indigenous activists at the Pine Ridge reser-

vation who aligned themselves with AIM. Such state violence provides a context and background for chapter seven, the excerpted "On the Black Liberation Army" (BLA) by Jalil Muntaqim. Muntaqim offers a brief historical snapshot of an underground military formation in battle with U.S. law enforcement, primarily on the East Coast. Although no theoretical justification for armed struggle appears in this succinct account of BLA activities, the historical trajectory of the COINTELPRO era of the early 1970s shapes the reasoning. Muntaqim's view stems from a different template than most, that of the slave insurrectionist, and so it shapes a unique worldview, one gazed upon, interacted with, but not fully experienced by the non-rebel or nonslave.

In chapter eight, "July 4th Address," a statement issued by former Black Panther and Black Liberation Army member Assata Shakur while she was in prison and on trial, evokes slave-turned-fugitive then abolitionist Frederick Douglass's 1852 "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July" address. One of the few women leaders of the Black Panther Party (whose leadership was not tied to an influential male partner), Shakur would also become active in the military underground via the Black Liberation Army. Her memoir, *Assata: An Autobiography*, functions in a manner similar to the memoirs of King, Malcolm X, Davis, Newton, and Jackson: it highlights turbulent and dangerous times and personalizes the struggles and failings of revolutionaries and revolutionaries-in-waiting. For example, Shakur writes in her memoir:

Some of the groups thought they could just pick up arms and struggle and that, somehow, people would see what they were doing and begin to struggle themselves. They wanted to engage in a do-or-die battle with power structure in amerika, even though they were weak and ill prepared for such a fight. But the most important factor is that armed struggle, by itself, can never bring about a revolution. Revolutionary war is a people's war.²⁶

Unlike Shakur, Safiya Bukhari-Alston has (to date) not written a full-length memoir; yet, like Shakur, she was one of the few women leaders in the Black Liberation Army. Her autobiographical narrative, "Coming of Age: A Black Revolutionary," chapter nine, describes conditions unique to women political prisoners. A unit leader while underground, Bukhari-Alston encountered sexism in the party (as did Assata Shakur).

In chapter ten, "An Updated History of the New Afrikan Prison Struggle" (abridged), former Black Panther Sundiata Acoli provides a continuum of African American resistance to captivity and incarceration (the unabridged text places the enslavement era as foundational in this resistance). Acoli presents the Black Liberation Army as a "New Afrikan guerrilla organization" with mobile strike teams. Guerrilla warfare was seen as an inevitable counterresponse to U.S. "low-intensity warfare" against militants and radicals. Some members of the BLA identify as "prisoners of war" or POWs, viewing themselves as captive liberation fighters. The

Republic of New Afrika (RNA) stated its independence from the United States in 1968. BLA combatants subsequently declared that the U.S. courts had no jurisdiction over them. Acoli's historical discussions of "gang" formations in prisons as part of the prison struggles provide insight into their political nature and functions both inside and outside of prison.

The idea of resisting all oppressive constraints—whether racism, sexism, heterosexism, or class/corporate privilege—is not uniformly shared in these essays. Women contributors tend to note sexism and heterosexism more so than the men in this volume, white women are more vocal about the rights of gays and lesbians than black women are, perhaps because the former are writing at a later date when gay, lesbian, and bisexual rights are more publicly espoused). Although they fought for a more inclusive democracy, centralized, nondemocratic decision making—steeped in either patriarchal politics or a Leninist model of democratic centralism—was routinely practiced by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Malcolm X's Nation of Islam (from which he was expelled in 1963–1964), Angela Davis's Communist Party USA (CPUSA) (from which she was expelled in 1991), and Huey P. Newton's faction of the Black Panther Party. A discussion of forgoing vanguard or elite formations and rigid fixations on a line of leadership is found in chapter eleven, "Anarchism and the Black Revolution" (abridged), by Lorenzo Komboa Ervin. In this chapter, Ervin, who organized with the BPP among other groups, is highly critical of what he perceives as its "Marxist-Leninist" rigidity and repressive authoritarianism. It is difficult at times to distinguish which Black Panther Party critics are referencing—East Coast or West Coast? Cleaver or Newton faction? Newton prior to or during drug addiction and criminal intrigues? Nonetheless, the BPP in general (as did political organizations such as the SCLC and CPUSA) embraced a wealth of contradictions that limited the agency and efficacy of its "rank and file."

What, then, constitutes leadership that can face and function against repressive state policies? Such issues are explored in chapter twelve, an essay by journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, "Intellectuals and the Gallows." This essay was written while Abu-Jamal was facing a sentence of death. It is one of the few pieces in this anthology that directly confronts readers as non-incarcerated intellectuals, exploring their confines in a Foucauldian carceral that restricts their own resistance to a state that oversees life and death.

Part II, Internationalists and Anti-Imperialists, begins with chapter thirteen, "Genocide against the Black Nation in the U.S. Penal System" (abridged) by Mutulu Shakur, Anthony X. Bradshaw, Malik Dinguswa, Terry Long, Mark Cook, Adolfo Matos, and James Haskins. The chapter focuses on African American emancipation, yet appeals to the international community; and so, it provides a bridge between the two sections of this anthology, emphasizing historical links between African American activism and the interplay of domestic and foreign policies. This essay's argument follows in a tradition established by African American radicals in the post-World War II era: William Patterson and the Civil Rights Congress in

1951 presented to the United Nations their antilynching petition "We Charge Genocide," and Malcolm X in the 1960s appealed to the United Nations for redress from lynching and white supremacist policies in the United States.²⁷ Chapter fourteen, "The Struggle for Status under International Law" by Marilyn Buck, revisits themes raised by chapter thirteen in its reflections on the use of international law to address U.S. domestic human rights violations. Situating Buck within the tradition of radical white antiracism and armed resistance, a tradition that dates back to and precedes John Brown's antislavery militancy, lesbian activist Rita Bo Brown describes the parameters of white activism in the 1970s and 1980s in chapter fifteen, "White North American Political Prisoners." In chapter fifteen, Brown provides a comprehensive view that encompasses a number of political formations. Chapter sixteen, "On Trial" (abridged), by former Vietnam veteran Raymond Luc Levasseur, chronicles the militancy of another white anti-imperialist who invokes international law and human rights conventions in antiracist struggles. Levasseur argued in his opening trial statement for the dismissal of criminal charges under International Law; he was acquitted of charges at the conclusion of his trial. Rejecting the domestic criminal charges brought by the government, he asserted a morality based on human rights and freedom fighters criminalized for their oppositional politics. Maintaining that the U.S. government/corporations committed crimes against humanity, Levasseur catalogues the acts that led to his organizational response through the UFF (United Freedom Front) and Sam Melville/Jonathan Jackson Unit. The series of bombings against military targets attributed to these formations occurred a number of years after the bombings attributed to the Weather Underground, the militant splinter group from the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

"Letter to the Weathermen," chapter seventeen, is a response by a Christian pacifist militant, Catholic priest Daniel Berrigan. Berrigan and his brother Philip, also a Catholic priest involved in activist resistance during the 1970s and 1980s and beyond, were heavily influenced by Martin Luther King, Jr., and the "peaceful" confrontation of state repression by the civil rights movement. Philip Berrigan would go on to cofound the Plowshares community where Michele Naar-Obed would become radicalized and, as a mother and peace activist, write the pamphlet excerpted here as chapter eighteen, "Maternal Convictions: A Mother Beats a Missile into a Plowshare." In "Maternal Convictions," Naar-Obed recounts her growing spiritual and political awareness for peace activism that entailed civil disobedience and illegal actions, and her multiple "short-term" incarcerations.

Women have varied responses in their resistance to U.S. militarism and warfare; not all of course are gendered as pacifist. "Dykes and Fags Want to Know: Interview with Lesbian Political Prisoners," chapter nineteen, was conducted in 1990–1991 by QUISP (Queer women and men United in Support of Political Prisoners). This interview focuses on Linda Evans, Susan Rosenberg, and Laura Whitehorn, women who spent years incarcerated because of their political beliefs and acts. Whitehorn completed her sentence and was released in 1999. Evans and Rosenberg were

granted presidential clemency by President Bill Clinton in 2001. In 1999, Clinton had granted clemency to eleven of fifteen Puerto Rican *independentistas* or nationalists who had been imprisoned for years (included in those receiving clemency was Elizam Escobar). Clinton's release of *independentistas* did not signal the end of imprisonment for advocates and agitators for freeing Puerto Rico from its status as a colonial possession of the United States. In chapter twenty, "This Is Enough!" educator José Solís Jordan, incarcerated in Florida and later placed under detention in Puerto Rico, writes of the historical struggle for Puerto Rican independence and autonomy and his own connections to this struggle.

The following essays speak of the nonmaterial, of the spiritual and transcendent, of autonomy from the political formation and from purely political identification and identity. Chapter twenty-one, "Art of Liberation: A Vision of Freedom" by artist Elizam Escobar, offers one of the more creative and imaginative discussions of roles, conflicts, and contradictions of the revolutionary who maintains an independence from the struggle itself via his or her connection through art. In chapter twenty-two, "Violence and the State" (abridged), Standing Deer recounts an attempt on the part of prison authorities to get him to assault AIM activist and political prisoner Leonard Peltier. Standing Deer's "conversion" is both political and spiritual, both rational and suprarational. It provides an introduction to the final essay by Leonard Peltier who offers new meanings for freedom and resistance in our final chapter, twenty-three, "Inipi: Sweat Lodge." Peltier's excerpt from his autobiography, *Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sundance*,²⁸ reminds us of the nonmaterial aspects of struggle and the spiritual dimensions of freedom.

CONCLUSION

So much of what is controversial in this collection will center on the issue of violence: the use of violence by the state to squash dissent and destroy dissenters; the use of violence by dissidents either in immediate self-defense, in military strategies for "nation-building," or to promote a political stance and commitment. Obviously state violence is not synonymous with the violence of the subaltern or oppressed or imprisoned. Most Americans are more familiar with (inured to?) state violence, particularly when it is directed against disenfranchised or racially or politically suspect minorities. Therefore, police or military violence against the "racially suspect," against the poor and immigrants, against prisoners, is not as unsettling as counterviolence against the police or military by the subaltern and incarcerated. Thus, George Jackson's militarist stance in *Blood in My Eye*²⁹ is more terrifying for the conventional reader than the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) torture manual for the School of the Americas.³⁰ Perhaps this is because the conventional reader assumes (*knows*) that state violence is never earmarked for the obedient and the law-abiding.³¹

No essay in this volume makes a sustained theoretical argument for armed resis-

tance to state violence—although several essays offer theoretical and religious justifications for nonviolent civil disobedience and dissent. The book that heavily influenced many of the activists whose writings appear here is Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon argues that the "native" (the colonized and racialized, here, the imprisoned) does not have to theorize or articulate the truth; she or he is the truth—the breathing, living embodiment of the contradictions, debasement, rage, and resentment and rebellion that mark the very conditions of oppression.³² Yet the "truth," or some approximation of it, can be spoken in critical encounters and dialogues with rebels seeking social justice.

The non-incarcerated's sense of security and our real and imagined distance from political prisoners shape the expanse between the law-abiding (reader) and the outlaw (writer). Yet, what if the issues of political prisoners are in fact the touchstones to what ails us: structural impoverishment, racial-sexual discrimination and violence, political disenfranchisement, war profiteering? In degrees of (imagined) separation, amnesic fatigue about state violence couples with outrage at extralegal challenges to domination. Despite stolid dichotomies, if liberation struggles for human rights—and against war and captivity—intersect, radical imprisoned rebels may in fact stand at Elegba's crossroads; if so, then the writings that follow illuminate bridges that span or buckle under the intimacies of death and life struggles.

NOTES

1. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1985), 5. Gramsci writes: "When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals. . . . although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist" (9).

2. Barbara Harlow, *Barred: Women, Writing, and Political Detention* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1992).

3. For descriptions and analyses of U.S. domestic and foreign policies that (violently) destabilized democracies, independence, and liberation movements see: Ward Churchill, *From a Native Son: Selected Essays in Indigenism, 1985–1995* (Boston: South End Press, 1997); Noam Chomsky, *The Culture of Terrorism* (Boston: South End Press, 1988); Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (Boston: South End Press, 1983); Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999); Joy James, *Resisting State Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Joy James, ed., *States of Confinement: Policing, Detention & Prisons* (New York: St. Martin's, 2002, revised paperback edition); Jerome G. Miller, *Search and Destroy: African American Males in the Criminal Justice System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

Also see: David J. Brown and Robert Merrill, eds., *Violent Persuasions: The Politics and Imagery of Terrorism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1993); Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars against the Black Panther Party and American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 2002, revised edition); Troy Johnson et al., eds., *American*

Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1935); and, Matthew Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866–1928* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

4. In its desires for freedoms guarded by institutions, revolutionary politics encompass and surpass insurrectionary politics. Rather than merely revolt against repressive hierarchies, laws, and customs, revolutionary politics seeks to build new structures and norms. Hence, revolutionaries are more feared than are insurrectionists by governing structures and elites. Just as insurrection is not inherently revolutionary, neither is crime or violence intrinsically proto-revolutionary: consider that capitalism in the Americas is rooted in the theft of land and labor and the mass murder of indigenous and African peoples.

5. Page 80. The nephew of President John F. Kennedy and son of Senator Robert Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., a senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, engaged in civil disobedience at Vieques, Puerto Rico, in 2001. Joined by actor Edward James Olmos and union leader Dennis Rivera, Kennedy protested the U.S. Navy having “saturated Vieques with thousands of pounds of ordinance—a total that eventually exceeded the explosive power of the Hiroshima bomb.” Arrested after illegally trespassing on the military site, the *disobedientes* were eventually sentenced to thirty days in Guaynabo prison. After citing the Navy’s civil and criminal violations of federal laws such as the Clean Water Act and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, Kennedy writes: “Our defense was based on the doctrine of necessity; a defendant cannot be convicted of trespassing if he shows he entered the land to prevent a greater crime from being committed. . . . we had engaged in civil disobedience for a single purpose: to prevent a criminal violation of the Endangered Species Act by the Navy that the federal court had refused to redress” (115). The presiding judge, admonishing that he was not interested in philosophy, dismissed the necessity defense.

As Kennedy’s attorney (and his sister’s father-in-law), former New York governor Mario Cuomo made the following argument at trial:

We ask the court to recall that this nation was conceived in the civil disobedience that preceded the Revolutionary War, the acts of civil disobedience that were precipitated by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, in the famous Sit-Down Strikes of 1936 and 1937, all through the valiant struggle for civil rights in the 1960s, and the movement against the Vietnam War. Always they were treated by the courts one way: not like crimes committed for personal gain or out of pure malice, but as technical violations designed to achieve a good purpose. (115)

See Robert Kennedy’s essay in *Outside*, October 2001, 80–84 and 114–16.

Of course, Cuomo and Kennedy would see violations that resulted in the loss of life (and liberty) as tragedies rather than as technicalities. Years prior to Kennedy’s trial, Mutulu Shakur and Marilyn Buck also unsuccessfully argued the “necessity defense,” appealing to international instead of U.S. standards.

6. There is insufficient space to address the ways in which political prisoners are at times burdened with the characteristics of prophets; hence their limitations in efficacy in the “free world” once they are released resonate so much more intensely. Activists, such as the slain leader Chris Hani, attempted to prevent the “marriage of Mandela-ism with liberalism.” With the African National Congress (ANC)’s acceptance of the apartheid government’s debt and its failure to nationalize and redistribute key resources and wealth, the observation

by some local South African activists that Mandela had “sold out the bush” resonated with the intense frustrations of an economically subjugated people.

7. Some accounts of the southern civil rights movement argue that pacifists were often provided protection from Klan and police violence by armed and organized African American men and women, such as those who formed the Deacons for Defense and Justice in North Carolina. See: Anne Moody, *The Coming of Age in Mississippi* (Laureleaf, 1997, reprint); Robert Franklin Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998, reprint); and Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

8. November 7, 2002, e-mail correspondence from Michael Hames-Garcia, editor’s papers. For further discussions analyzing incarceration politics, see: Michael Hames-Garcia, *Crucibles of Freedom* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

9. Dylan Rodriguez maintains:

“Free” activists (scholars, etc.) often appropriate the iconography of captive radicals/revolutionaries . . . and may even do so in critical and radical ways (for example, to introduce the discourse of “political prisoners/POW’s” to a public that cannot assimilate such a possibility in their midst). Yet, it is far more difficult for free people to engage the political work of radical prisoners in a manner that seriously informs their praxis. Of course, to do so would necessitate a far more urgent, even desperate attempt to translate the political dream (vision) of prison/police abolition into an antagonistic and accessible political-cultural practice. . . . 50 activists and critically informed students could read the anthology *through* this structure of . . . disavowal, such that the mundane pro-state progressivism (inherently white supremacist) of the CBO, non-profit, and academic sectors remains sacrosanct. To refuse the urgency of principled hostility and opposition to this civic and state formation is a virtual religious fiat of the current (post-civil rights) era of the alleged Left. (Dylan Rodriguez, September 2002 e-mail correspondence, editor’s papers.)

For another critical perspective on the “prison writer,” see Paul St. John, “Behind the Mirror’s Face,” in *Doing Time: Twenty-Five Years of Prison Writing*, ed. Bell Gale Chevigny (New York: Arcade, 1999).

10. Using historian Eugene Genovese’s statement “The Black experience in this country has been a phenomenon without analog” as the epigraph for his essay, Frank Wilderson, III, quotes from Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton, “The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy,” April 2002, www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~marto/paradigm/. Genovese’s citation is given as: *Boston Review* October/November 1993. See: Frank Wilderson, III, “The Prison Slave as Hegemony’s (Silent) Scandal,” in *Social Justice* (forthcoming).

11. For a discussion of the concept “social death” in a global and historical context, see: Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982). For contemporary analyses of “social death” within the context of U.S. racial and incarceration politics, see: Frank Wilderson, III, “The Prison Slave as Hegemony’s (Silent) Scandal” and Dylan Rodriguez, “‘Social Truth’ and Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals” in the forthcoming issue of the journal *Social Justice*.

12. The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution legalizes slavery for those duly convicted of a crime. In the convict prison lease system following the Civil War, African Americans, criminalized for their “blackness,” were worked to death in mines, fields, and forests in joint ventures between the state and private industries. For an analysis of the his-

tory of the convict lease system in the United States, see Matthew Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866–1928* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

13. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1935).

14. See Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981).

15. See Mike Ngo, under pseudonym "An Unknown Soldier," "A Day in the Life," prisoners' zine, untitled, January 13, 2000; also see Dylan Rodriguez, "Interview with Mike Ngo," in *Abolitionists: Imprisoned Writers on Incarceration, Enslavement and Emancipation*, ed. Joy James (forthcoming).

16. For details of U.S. foreign and domestic policies that instigated considerable warfare, destabilization, and death in the post-World War II era, see: Noam Chomsky, *The Culture of Terrorism* (Boston: South End Press, 1988); Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret War against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, revised 2002 edition); Joy James, *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender, and Race in U.S. Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

17. See Mondo we Langa, "Letter from Inside," *Nebraska Report*, May/June 1999, 9. For information on Wopashitwe Mondo Eyan we Langa (David Rice), see *Can't Jail the Spirit* (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 2002, 5th edition). Mondo we Langa was deputy minister of information for the Omaha, Nebraska, chapter of the National Committee to Combat Fascism, an organization affiliated with the Black Panther Party, and is serving a life sentence for the first-degree murder of a policeman. He was active in protesting police brutality against African American residents in Omaha. According to the Center for Constitutional Rights, we Langa was targeted by COINTELPRO and his conviction "was based on the testimony of a frightened teenager and on explosives allegedly found in [we Langa's] house." A Federal Court of Appeals declared the search illegal yet the Supreme Court "sustained the conviction holding that the Federal courts should not have reviewed the state court decision." See Center for Constitutional Rights, "Political Prisoners in the United States," September 1988.

18. This article was first published in the International Association of Democratic Lawyers *Bulletin*, January 1990, and reprinted in *Social Justice*, vol. 18, no. 3.

19. For information on Lori Berenson, see Rhoda Berenson, *Lori: My Daughter, Wrongfully Imprisoned in Peru* (New York: Context Books, 2000). For discussions of prisoners with the status of "illegal [non]combatants" following September 11, 2001, see: Amnesty International, "USA: Detainees from Afghan Conflict Should Be Released or Tried," AI Index AMR 51/164/2002, 1 November 2002; and Joseph Lelyveld, "In Guantánamo," *The New York Review of Books*, November 7, 2002.

20. See Anne-Marie Cusac, "You're in the Hole: A Crackdown on Dissident Prisoners," *The Progressive*, December 2001. *The Progressive* reports that on October 26, 2001, John Ashcroft signed the "National Security: Prevention of Acts of Violence and Terrorism," which was subsequently published in the Federal Register. Cusac writes: "Under the new rules, the Department of Justice, 'based on information from the head of a federal law enforcement intelligence agency,' will select certain prisoners for 'special administrative measures' [including isolation, denials of correspondence, telephone communication, visitations, and media interviews]."

21. Targets of FBI repression have been fairly varied, including Albert Einstein, because of his socialism and antiracist activism (Einstein worked with W. E. B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson; with the latter he cofounded an anti-lying organization), and John Lennon, targeted because of his antiwar activism. See, respectively, Frank Jerome, *The Einstein F.B.I. File* (New York: St. Martin's, 2002) and Jon Wiener, *Come Together: John Lennon in His Time* (New York: Random House, 1984) and "John Lennon versus the F.B.I.," *The New Republic*, vol. 188.

On October 10, 2001, Laura W. Murphy, director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Washington National Office, issued "Trust Us, We're the Government"; the statement details government malfeasance and illegal surveillance and harassment tied to COINTELPRO, in which "few members of any of the groups targeted by COINTELPRO were ever charged with a crime." It also makes reference to the 1976 Church Committee Senate report that concluded: "The Government has often undertaken the secret surveillance of citizens on the basis of their political beliefs, even when those beliefs posed no threat of violence or illegal acts on behalf of a hostile foreign power. . . . Groups and individuals have been harassed and disrupted because of their political views and their lifestyles." In 1986, a federal court determined that COINTELPRO was responsible for at least 204 burglaries by FBI agents, the use of 1,300 informants, the theft of 12,600 documents, 20,000 illegal wiretap days, and 12,000 bug days.

Alongside COINTELPRO, the ACLU notes the "STOP INDEX," where FBI computerized databases monitored antiwar activists; "CONUS" (Continental United States), which in the 1950s and 1960s "collected and maintained files on upwards of 100,000 political activists and used undercover operatives recruited from the Army to infiltrate these activist groups and steal confidential information and files for distribution to federal, state and local governments"; "OPERATION CHAOS" in the 1960s, where the Central Intelligence Agency engaged in domestic spying to destabilize the American peace movement; and "CISPES" harassment, in which the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) was targeted because of its opposition to President Ronald Reagan's support of paramilitary death squads in El Salvador. Murphy asserts that "the Bush Administration's defense of its new, and frighteningly broad, anti-terrorism bill is also being couched in exactly these terms [of trust for the government's use of police powers]. Unfortunately, history has also shown us that more often than not, these expansions of domestic surveillance powers are used to violate the freedoms guaranteed to the American public by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights."

22. Writing for clemency for Anthony Jalil Bottom (#77A4283), Herman Bell (#79C0262), Abdul Majid (#83A0483), Bashir Hameed (#82A6313), Robert Seth Hayes (#83A2280), Sekou Odinga (#05228-054), and David Gilbert (#83A6158) in the petition were attorneys Robert Boyle, Robert Bloom, William Goodman, Kathleen Cleaver, Jill Sofor, Elijah, Elizabeth Fink, Karl Franklin, Daniel Meyers, Charles Ogletree, Michael Tarif, Nkechi Taifa, and Susan Tipograph. *New York Task Force for Political Prisoners 2002 Petition*, editor's papers.

The USA PATRIOT (Provide Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) Act of 2001 permits the U.S. government to detain noncitizens indefinitely without a process at the discretion of the Attorney General; permits the government to conduct searches, seizures, and surveillance with lower levels of judicial review; and potentially criminalizes otherwise lawful contacts with groups engaging in politically motivated

(violent and nonviolent) illegal acts. See Nancy Chang, *Silencing Political Dissent: How Post-September 11 Anti-Terrorism Measures Threaten Our Civil Liberties* (New York: Seven Stories, 2002); *The USA PATRIOT Act: A Legal Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2002).

24. See Spike Lee's documentary *Four Little Girls* (New York: Forty Acres and a Mule/HBO Home Video, 1998).

25. Former Black Panther and Black Liberation Army member Jalil Abdul Muntaqim's "Religion and Revolution" offers an interesting perspective on the role of liberation theology and Christianity in the injunction for freedom; see Jalil Muntaqim, "Religion and Revolution"; and Jalil Muntaqim, *We Are Our Own Liberators* (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press, 2002).

26. Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill & Co.), 242–43.

27. See William Patterson, ed., *We Charge Genocide: The Crime of Government against the Negro People, A Petition to the United Nations* (New York: Civil Rights Congress, 1951).

28. Leonard Peltier, *Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sundance*, edited by Harvey Arden (New York: St. Martin's, 1999).

29. In September 1971, responding to George Jackson's killing by San Quentin prison guards and administrators and to dehumanizing and racist prison conditions, 1,500 African American, Puerto Rican, and white prisoners seized control of Attica, a maximum-security prison in New York. In 2001, the California-based media organization Freedom Archives produced *Prisons on Fire*, a CD of two audio documentaries commemorating the thirtieth anniversaries of the death of George Jackson and the Attica Rebellion. The CD consists of archival and contemporary interviews, music, and narration. Featured in part one of the narrative are: George Jackson; his seventeen-year-old brother, Jonathan, who was killed in the Marin County "takeover," and his mother, Georgia Jackson; former Soledad Brother Defense Committee leader Angela Davis; former Black Panther Party leader David Hilliard; writer James Baldwin; actor Harry Belafonte; and current or former prisoners David Johnson, Hugo Pinell, Luis Talamantez, and Sundiata Tate—the latter three were charged with the San Quentin rebellion following the death of George Jackson. Part two of the CD features the voices of former Attica prison leader Frank "Big Black" Smith; Attica activists' attorneys William Kunstler, Elizabeth Fink, and Michael Deutsch; L. D. Barkley (killed in the retaking of the prison, Barkley read the Attica Manifesto to the media); and Ruchell Magee (prison activist and participant in the 1971 Marin County escape in which Jonathan Jackson and prisoners James McClain and William Christmas and Judge Harold Haley were killed by guards). The *Prisons on Fire* audio documentary is available through Rowman and Littlefield and from Freedom Archives: cd@freedomarchives.org, www.freedomarchives.org.

30. For a critique of the School of the Americas, which officially closed in 2000 (but which human rights advocates say has simply been renamed and reorganized), see Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, *School of Assassins: The Case for Closing the School of the Americas and for Fundamentally Changing U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

31. Ralph Miliband writes in *The State in Capitalist Society* that in the United States people "live in the shadow of the state," as political actors attempt to influence or represent "the state's power and purpose" in order to obtain its support. A comprehensive theory of the state requires that we address economic, racial, and sexual as well as political, repression and disenfranchisement. Here, I use "state violence" as a descriptive term that denotes political-

economic and police violence based on nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and political ideology. The primary instruments and controlling interests in state violence are largely determined by corporate and police (para)military elites. Although Miliband distinguishes the state system from the political system of electoral parties and seemingly nonpolitical organizations such as religious and educational institutions, media, businesses and civic groups, it is not realistic to maintain a sharp division between the state and civil society, particularly in a racially driven or constructed culture. Without formally sharing in state power, social and ethnic groups can contribute to the erasure or validation of state violence and government misconduct. Frequently in the United States, where racial fears and hostilities are manipulated, state and civil society seem to speak in one voice regarding policing, punishment, and violence as the media, educational institutions, and private citizens are organized to further state hegemony in spite of their autonomy from state apparatuses. See: Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York: Basic, 1969); and Joy James, *Resisting State Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 6.

32. Fanon writes: "[T]he *fellah*, the unemployed man, the starving native do not lay a claim to the truth; they do not say that they represent the truth, for they *are* the truth." See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 49.