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# "We Are the Revolutionaries": Visibility, Protest, and Racial Formation in 1970s Prison Radicalism

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation analyzes black and Puerto Rican prison protest in the 1970s. I argue that prisoners elucidated a nationalist philosophy of racial formation that saw racism as a site of confinement but racial identity as a vehicle for emancipation. Trying to force the country to see its sites of punishment as discriminatory locations of repression, prisoners used spectacular confrontation to dramatize their conditions of confinement as epitomizing American inequality. I investigate this radicalism as an effort to secure visibility, understood here as a metric of collective consciousness. In documenting the ways prisoners were symbols and spokespeople of 1970s racial protest, this dissertation argues that the prison served as metaphor and metonym in the process of racial formation. A concept and an institution, the prison was embodied in protest, hidden in punishment, represented in media, and known in ideas.

This dissertation examines the multifaceted mechanisms by which social movements attempt to effect change through creating new ways of knowing. I examine prison visibility through two extended case studies. First, I study a coterie of radical black prisoners centered in California and revolving around militant prisoner author George Jackson. Through appeals to revolutionary action as racial authenticity, this grouping—which included Angela Davis, Ruchell Magee, and the San Quentin 6, as well as the Black Panther Party and others—described black prisoners as slaves rebelling against the confinement of American society writ large. The second case study addresses the successful decade-long campaign to free five Puerto Rican Nationalists imprisoned for spectacular attacks on U.S. authority in the 1950s. Understanding colonialism as a prison, U.S.-based Puerto Rican nationalists in the 1970s (including the Young Lords, the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional, the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional and others) defined the freedom of these prisoners as a necessary step toward national independence. Through strategies of visibility, black and Puerto Rican prison radicals used collective memory to overcome the spatial barriers of confinement. Such memories were recalled through a wide range of tactics, from bombs to bombast, from alternative media to community organizing, as prison radicals fought to control the terms of their visibility.

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“WE ARE THE REVOLUTIONARIES”:  
VISIBILITY, PROTEST AND RACIAL FORMATION IN 1970s PRISON RADICALISM

Dan Berger  
A DISSERTATION  
in  
Communication

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania  
in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
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History

“We are the Revolutionaries”:

Visibility, Protest, and Racial Formation in 1970s Prison Radicalism

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Daniel Berger

In memory of Marilyn Buck (1947-2010) and Lolita Lebrón (1919-2010)

*Humble heroines and historical giants*

For Claude, Donna, Laura, and Rob

*Giants of the heart, spirit, and intellect*

And for db

*The biggest giant of all*

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## ABSTRACT

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Dan Berger

Dissertation Supervisor: Barbie Zelizer

This dissertation analyzes black and Puerto Rican prison protest in the 1970s. I argue that prisoners elucidated a nationalist philosophy of racial formation that saw racism as a site of confinement but racial identity as a vehicle for emancipation. Trying to force the country to see its sites of punishment as discriminatory locations of repression, prisoners used spectacular confrontation to dramatize their conditions of confinement as epitomizing American inequality. I investigate this radicalism as an effort to secure visibility, understood here as a metric of collective consciousness. In documenting the ways prisoners were symbols and spokespeople of 1970s racial protest, this dissertation argues that the prison served as metaphor and metonym in the process of racial formation. A concept and an institution, the prison was embodied in protest, hidden in punishment, represented in media, and known in ideas.

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## PREFACE

This project culminates more than six years of graduate school, more than two years of focused research and writing. Its origins lie in a dozen years of voluntary engagement I have had with the prison. As a sixteen-year-old high school junior and new activist, I was looking for guidance from social justice activists more experienced than myself. I did not know where to find them in the suburban South Florida area where I had recently moved with my family. Ultimately, I found them in prison. Through reading various alternative newspapers, I came across groups that described themselves as supporting U.S. political prisoners—mostly veterans of the antiracist, Black Power, anti-apartheid and anti-imperialist social movements of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. These longtime activists had been in prison longer than I have been alive. To my parents' chagrin, I began writing several of them. They became my teachers and my friends, and I became a prison activist.

I did not initiate such correspondence out of any particular concern with the prison. I was, rather, interested in broader historical lessons and ideas about contemporary strategy. Over the years of such relationships, however, I began to think about the space of the prison. Ostensibly overseen and regulated by the government, the prison is not a public institution but an expression of state power. It has a vested interest in invisibility that is maintained by at least three factors: geography, weaponry, and ideology. Geographically, prisons are not located in the urban areas from which most prisoners come. Rather, they are located in remote, desolate locations at great remove from most people. By weaponry, I mean both the walls and wires that comprise the



physicality of the prison as well as the guns, clubs, chemicals and other such tools that guards carry in which to enforce confinement. Finally, the prison is sustained through ideology: the public conception of who is in prison and why. The visibility of this ideology, its salience in mass society, keeps the prison invisible as an institution by justifying incarceration.

To think about the prison for its invisibility invites consideration of visibility as an oppositional strategy. By visibility I mean both public attention and mass consciousness—that is, both what people see and how they interpret what they say. I use visibility to describe both a general condition and a process, the means and mechanisms that different collectives use to gain attention and shape consciousness. Seen in this light, visibility is a concern to a variety of groups, entities, and institutions. Yet it has special meaning for dispossessed and disenfranchised communities, whose experience of inequality is mediated by the confluence of sight and consciousness. For these groups, visibility is the struggle for dignified control of representation. As with any representational schema, the achievement of visibility is partial and unfulfilling. Yet the process of seeking it is crucial in the development of self-making, of subjectivity.

As the prison exaggerates invisibility, it invites exaggerated forms of visibility. These come through the critique of the prison as both a metaphor and a material institution, both of which help people make sense of race through the prison. Indeed, the prison as an institution is often prelude to the metaphoric prison of restrictive social relations.

The metaphoric use of prisons owes to what Houston Baker calls the black “public sphere of incarceration.”<sup>1</sup> Baker uses this term to describe the strategic use of the

jail cell by Southern civil rights activists in the 1960s who used civil disobedience (including the attendant state punishment) to draw attention to the horrors of segregation. But this black public sphere of incarceration was broader than just the Southern civil rights movement. Black Power figures such as Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver, both formerly incarcerated, made use of the prison to indict white supremacy and describe black radical subjectivity. Both men, and others, defined all of society as a prison, with black and other people of color being always already confined by racism and colonialism. There were two competing interpretations of this ubiquitous confinement. One view, strongly identified with the Black Panther Party, held that all of society was imprisoned—some were held in maximum security prisons and the rest of us walked around free in minimum security. The other view held that, as Bob Dylan sung in 1971, “some of us are prisoners and the rest of us are guards.”<sup>2</sup> Both views held that America itself was a prison. Both views also emphasized black and Puerto Rican communities as the most acquainted with the metaphors of imprisonment. Black and Puerto Rican racial formations shared an experience of colonial citizenship, diasporic mobility, and racial oppression from the institutions of policing, schooling, and housing.

There were material reasons for the emphasis on black and Puerto Rican people in the critique of pervasive confinement. The 1960s witnessed growing mass incarceration as a result of the government’s response to radical social movements (especially the Black Power movement) and as a result of the war on crime. The latter battle took place in major cities that were, as a result of the unfolding process of white flight, disproportionately black and Puerto Rican. At the same time, the dynamic movements among black and Puerto Rican militants influenced the sprawling prison population. As a

result, beginning in the late 1960s and lasting throughout the 1970s, black and Puerto Rican prisoners became visible as leading participants in a slew of riots, strikes, and cultural productions (books, poems, newspapers) that emerged from within American prisons.

This dissertation focuses on two examples of prison radicalism in the 1970s. The first concerns George Jackson and the orbit of black radical prisoners that surrounded him, centering mostly but not exclusively in California. At the age of 18, Jackson was sentenced to serve between one year and life in prison for participating with a friend in a \$70 gas station robbery. The length of his sentence, owing to his previous run-ins with the law, was to be determined by the discretion of the parole authorities. Jackson became increasingly militant throughout his time in prison, being tutored by other prisoners in Third World Marxism. Jackson then tutored others in politics, as well as in fighting techniques—both of which, he maintained, could foster multiracial prisoner unity against the state while first providing a means through which black prisoners could defend themselves against violence by white prisoners and guards. In January 1970, Jackson and two other black prisoners were charged with killing a white guard in retaliation for another white guard having killed three black prisoners days previously. Recognizing his eloquence, Jackson's attorney collected his letters and published them as a book, *Soledad Brother*, to draw attention to the case. The book displayed Jackson's eloquence, including his passionate calls for full-scale confrontations with the system. Several celebrities endorsed Jackson's case, which helped draw attention to the cases of other prisoners, associates of Jackson, who also faced charges for their alleged fights with guards. Most famously, a promising young professor named Angela Davis became publicly entangled

with Jackson. A vocal supporter of the Soledad Brothers, Davis was briefly a prisoner as she faced charges for having supplied Jackson's younger brother with the guns he used in an August 1970 assault on a California courthouse.

Even though Jackson only lived for a year of his public visibility, his symbol continued to motivate black prison radicalism throughout the 1970s. Jackson established what may, somewhat playfully, be considered the three Rs of black prison radicalism: writing, riots, and rituals. Jackson's eloquence and literary success, building on other notable texts of the era written by former prisoners, created an interest in other prison authors. Writing and similar modes of cultural production were central to prisoner visibility within some mainstream circles. Writing established legitimacy as both a path to redemption and to political involvement. Jackson eloquently sounded calls to arms against racism, capitalism, imperialism. His militancy, in words and allegedly in deeds, inspired similar acts of violence by supporters. Perhaps most famously, prisoners at Attica Correctional Facility in western New York launched a hunger strike in response to Jackson's death in August 1971, which ultimately resulted in a four-day riot three weeks later—the most dramatic prison riot of the dozens that occurred in this time period. In addition to violence, Jackson's eloquence also exposed alternatives—or more accurately resistance—to the totalizing world of the prison. Jackson identified some of the mechanisms he used to resist what Michel Foucault would later call the governability of the prison, its attempt to colonize its subjects into docile figures.<sup>3</sup> As a result, black prisoners and others increasingly developed rituals to combat the prison of white supremacy. These rituals included prisoner-made media to rebuild a sagging radicalism, prisoner-initiated petitions to the United Nations in search of redress, and the prisoner-

created holiday of Black August to inculcate self-reliance, study, and exercise as constituent features of prison radicalism. Out of the figure of George Jackson, then, prison radicalism moved from the material prison to its metaphoric salience.

The second case study concerns five Puerto Rican Nationalists, members of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, who were imprisoned in the United States since their spectacular attacks on symbols of U.S. authority in the 1950s. One shot at President Truman in 1950, the other four opened fire inside the Congress in 1954. The five were largely forgotten about until the 1970s, when a revival of Puerto Rican independence organizing resurrected both revolutionary nationalism as an oppositional framework and the prisoners as national symbols. This new generation of nationalists was the first generation to have been raised if not also born in the United States as a result of Operation Bootstrap, the U.S.-backed industrialization of Puerto Rico that saw massive migration to the United States beginning in the 1940s. In this second case study, I examine the development of prisoner visibility from the outside-in—through the discourses and practices of the young Puerto Rican militants outside of prison who turned to the Nationalists and related Puerto Rican prisoners to make sense of being Puerto Rican in the United States. These organizers made use of the prison as a metaphor to understand the U.S. colonization of Puerto Rico, as well as the issues Puerto Ricans faced in American cities (principally, New York and Chicago). The greater circulation of the metaphoric use of the prison, the more Puerto Rican militants paid attention to the prison as an actual institution—and to prisoners as the bridge connecting the ways Puerto Ricans experienced the prison as both metaphor and materiality. The Nationalist prisoners became symbols that connected U.S.-based Puerto Ricans to an island of which they

often had little to no experience; indeed, the island took on a reified import as a symbol of the liberation struggle as much as an object of it. The prisoners therefore served as mnemonics for activists to feel connected to Puerto Rican national history and nationalist opposition. The Nationalist prisoners were symbols of Puerto Rican racial and diasporic identity. The campaign that formed around them moved from the metaphoric prison to its materiality—and ultimately to the release of the five, all of whom were freed by presidential commutation by 1979.

These case studies reveal three modalities of visibility: physical, political and cultural. Physically, violence and spectacle determine visibility in response to the isolation of invisibility. In both black and Puerto Rican prison radicalism, violence, especially its spectacular performance, emerged as a central tactic. On August 7, 1970, seventeen-year-old Jonathan Jackson interrupted a trial at the Marin County Civic Center and armed three prisoners there in a dramatic attempt to free prisoners and draw attention to his brother's plight. Shortly before San Quentin guards killed most of the group, a photojournalist happened upon the rebels. One of them declared "We are the revolutionaries. Take all the pictures you want." This sentiment described the logic underpinning a variety of political violence directed at the prison in the 1970s. It suggested a spectacle that was self-conscious of its politics and its sensationalism. It was shocking not, as in other examples of spectacular violence, because of its gratuity—the revolutionaries did not dismember the hostages—but because of its political aims. Violence was, in other words, an unexpected political form and therefore shocking. Similarly, performative displays of (in)visibility could be found in the Puerto Rican example, where militants adopted clandestine mechanisms in an effort to make the

Nationalist prisoners more visible by making themselves invisible. These and other examples studied here reveal the trap of visibility generated from violence. To paraphrase Walter Benjamin, violence cannot destroy invisibility—it can only reveal it.<sup>4</sup> Violence therefore achieved public attention but had no special hold on mass consciousness. These physical acts of visibility also expose macro trends of population movement: violent spectacles marked the prison as a place and revealed the changing racial demographics of different urban locations (namely, in this study, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York).

Politically, visibility was both a form of exposure that placed a magnifying glass over certain people or issues, or a means of obfuscation that established a hall of mirrors. Visibility was often both exposure and obfuscation simultaneously, focusing some people's attention while diffusing that of others. The more compelling narrative won out, making visibility a highly material political contest. Prisoners turned to revolutionary or anticolonial nationalism in an attempt to establish a base of power. Prisoners and prison activists used nationalism to establish a collectivity that was at least discursively if not materially on par with the American nation-state that they said confined them, both through white supremacy and the prison. This use of nationalism sought visibility not just for the prison but for prisoners as symbolic heroes and martyrs—spokespeople for the sublimated nation.

This political contest of prison visibility takes place through a battle for narrative supremacy, which makes cultural inquiry especially vital. In particular, prisoners were made visible through the tools of memory. As with other memory work, prisoners were constructed through narrative as symbols and events inflected with racial meaning. While

memory is primarily understood to be at play as a result of temporal distance, the spatial remove of confinement renders prison activism a form of memory work. This use of collective memory transpired on two levels: remembering the prisoners and what prisoners remembered. Outside of prison, people remembered prisoners through rituals and stories. These narratives that shifted over time—such that, for instance, George Jackson entered the 1970s as an innocent hero and left the decade as a criminal thug while the five Nationalists went from being forgotten figures to returning to Puerto Rico as national icons. The prisoners participated in this memory process through making visible their own collective memories of slavery and colonialism, as well as of liberation. Activists on both sides of the prison walls invoked the memory of things they may not have experienced in battles for narrative supremacy.

Prisoners won and lost these battles throughout the decade as they intervened in public debates and contributed to race-making in the 1970s. Their actions and understandings, their context and challenges, expose the fault lines prevalent in this pivotal era of recent history. This dissertation chronicles some key fights in this struggle for visibility while also analyzing the development of the narratives themselves. The prison emerged as Jim Crow fell, two systems of racialized control reflective of their political and cultural economies. By understanding how the most despised and dispossessed populations fought their way into public consciousness, I hope to contribute to more nuanced conceptions of visibility, protest, and racial formation in the United States.



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<sup>1</sup> Houston Baker, “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere,” in The Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Bob Dylan, *Lyrics, 1962-2001* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. 273,

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, translated by Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995 [1977]).

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion in Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). See also Walter Benjamin, translated by Peter Demetz, *Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978).

## INTRODUCTION: The Racial Specters of Prison Visibility

“If the spectacle of the lynched black body haunts  
the modern age, then the slow disintegration of  
black bodies and souls in jail, urban ghettos, and  
beleaguered schools haunts our postmodern times.”

– Hazel Carby<sup>1</sup>

This project is an interdisciplinary effort to historicize and theorize prison radicalism at what was arguably its most visible era, at least in postwar America (and I use the word deliberately here to mark the United States as both a concept and a place). The prison is both a concept as well as an institution. Drawing from archival examinations of prison antagonisms, I describe the prison as a regime of racial projects. It is a conceptual tool that people used, and continue to use, to make sense of the personal and collective constrictions they experience as a result of their identities. But it is also a highly material site of punishment, one that has been growing in ubiquity and severity since the 1960s. This project is grounded in prison radicalism of the 1970s, in which the metaphoric and the material often fused. My analysis utilizes an elastic notion of space: I describe the spatial dimensions of the prison as embodied in protest, hidden in punishment, represented in media, and known in ideas. This combination makes the prison a vital site of inquiry for History, Ethnic Studies, and Political Science, and I use paradigms from these disciplines alongside those of American Studies, Communication, Cultural Studies, and Political Geography. A focus on visibility as a struggle over what is

publicly seen, visually and conceptually, guides this study as a theoretically grounded work of history.

### Race, Radicalism and the Prison in the 1970s

The dramatic movements for civil rights and empowerment in the mid-twentieth century coincided with the steady rise of what we now label mass incarceration. As coterminous developments, civil rights and mass incarceration can be seen as parallel phenomena constructing the late modern American body politic. Each one is entangled with gendered racial formations. Through the first project, the country witnessed the greater participation of black and Latino people in the mechanisms of formal political power (from voting to holding office), the lifting of de jure segregation, the official castigation of open racism, and dramatic displays of group empowerment. The second project—initiated partially in response to the first—yielded massive disenfranchisement of the same newly incorporated populations, wreaked havoc on the structures of kinship and community, curtailed employment options, and enlarged an institution that routinely uses racism to enact divisions and carry out violence against populations castigated in the public mind but hidden from the public view. Through a mixture of spectacularity and invisibility, both projects contributed to different perceptions of identity, legality, and governance that were fought over in diverse sites across the country and around the world.

Despite their simultaneity and long-term impact, the projects of rights and reaction do not have parallel results. Especially since the 1980s, the United States has witnessed an unprecedented spike in prison construction and the number of people

incarcerated. With more than 2.3 million people in prison at the start of the twenty-first century—one in 100 Americans and one in nine African Americans—the United States currently incarcerates more people both proportionally and in absolute numbers than anywhere else on the planet.<sup>2</sup> The growth since the 1960s of what Marie Gottschalk calls the carceral state extended and dispersed the mechanisms of control throughout society. The spreading practices of discipline and punishment could be found in the massive numbers of people being incarcerated for longer periods of time as a result of less serious offenses. It could also be seen in heavily militarized policing practices, increasingly closed off housing developments for both the poor in the ghetto and the rich in the gated community, and the ubiquitous technologies of surveillance.<sup>3</sup>

As this dissertation argues, the prison also provided a target of political opposition. Notwithstanding the prison's purpose as an institution of incapacitation, prisoners have a lengthy history of radicalism, in this country as in many others. Centuries of slave rebellions and the consistent tumult that marked the first jails in the United States demonstrate the oppositional practices that accompany sites of confinement.<sup>4</sup> Resistance to slavery and to the prison merged in the opposition to the convict leasing system that took hold after the dismantling of Reconstruction.<sup>5</sup> Prior to the period under examination in this study, prisons in the 1950s witnessed a series of conflagrations across the country. As prisoners fought against their conditions, they were mindful of their public representation: during a 1952 riot in New Jersey prisoners hung a banner outside a window reading "Tell the Truth. We Have Radios in Here."<sup>6</sup> In response to a spate of riots, the *New York Times* declared 1952 "the most explosive year in American prison history." This claim was undermined by the sit-down strikes that

occurred throughout the country's prisons in 1953.<sup>7</sup> It was proven incorrect by the revolutionary upsurge that seized American prisons in the 1970s.

While the broad fear of crime, later made slightly more specific with a focus on drugs, provided the general threats needed to embark on a domestic war, the strength of prison radicalism was a potent challenge to the existing order. Declaring war within American cities saw the state organize its own practice of visibility to counteract the embarrassing visibility of prisoners capturing national attention to protest not just their conditions but the oppression pervading American society. During and in the immediate aftermath of the civil rights movement, the prison was a hermeneutic of race-making: it was a conceptual device that black, Puerto Rican, and white radicals (among others) used to engage, understand, and challenge racial hierarchies. Such arguments racially coded the prison as a specific site of black and Puerto Rican militancy. This move marked the prison as an extension of the city. Indeed, the prison and the city were vital sites where racial meanings were mobilized and mitigated in the 1970s United States as a result of migration and mass incarceration.<sup>8</sup> As mutually constitutive sites of black and Latino racial formation, the prison and the city invoked a sense of ubiquitous confinement. Their union in the discursive framing of the political geography of race in the United States articulated radicalism and repression as coterminous features of racial formation. This perspective provided fertile space for prisoner visibility and connected the organizing of prisoners with the work being done by activists outside of prison.

The explicit articulation of confinement and protest as interconnected dimensions of race-making made prison protest in the 1970s, unlike that of the prior generation, as a revolutionary antiracist enterprise. As scholars are only beginning to track, prison

radicalism in the 1970s constituted a vital element of racial mobilizations of that era—especially for Black Power, but also, as I will argue, for Puerto Rican independence.<sup>9</sup> Prison radicalism facilitated and consolidated the formation of identities. All identities are in some way constructed through difference, and the prison magnified difference as a result of its fortification and its geographic remove from public view. Identities become real in part through the attachment of embodied performance and discursive practices to markers of difference. By attaching subjectivity onto pre-existing discourses, collectives create and recreate identities.<sup>10</sup> In both connotation and denotation, the prison enforces difference through the ubiquitous threat of violence and geographic isolation. The prison delineates between free and unfree, which makes it a powerful metaphor for groups seeking to name the confining conditions they faced.

While the most visibly salient dimension of prison protest, race was not the only facet of identity around which collectives made the prison visible. Using similar discourses of confinement, radical feminists and gay activists also targeted the prison as a site which represented and reproduced patriarchy, sexism and homophobia, while naming those systems as metaphoric prisons. The metaphoric visibility of the prison described a regime that confined the racially marked body at all times and in all places. Pat Halloran of the Free Our Sisters Collective defined the prison as a ubiquitous component of patriarchal power. “For women, to be outside the walls of a jail is in some sense an allusion. ... We must work not only to break down the stone walls that enclose some of our sisters, but to break down the barriers of written and unwritten laws that would call us criminal if we refuse to be slaves.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet race remained the most visible component of prison protest in the 1970s. The centrality of race to this initiative is not surprising, not only because prison radicalism garnered momentum through and alongside racial protest in cities and towns around the United States. As a state institution of social death through which many black activists passed, the prison conjured the history of American chattel slavery. The language of slavery shaped prison radicalism, as is clear from Halloran's quote above. So even as other groups made the prison visible, they did so in a discourse that bolstered its visibility as a site of (especially black) racial formation, with all its explicit and implicit gendered claims. Radicals on both sides of the walls articulated race and prison as mutually constitutive institutions of confinement that afflicted racially marked collectives. Activist prisoners fashioned a collective identity through articulating a critique of the disciplinary violence they faced in prison with a critique of racial hierarchies in society more broadly. Prison activists, in the prison and on the street, invoked the prison as a material, metaphoric and metonymic institution in the production and reproduction of racial violence.

This organizing has been largely absent from scholarly examinations of the prison. The few existing studies of prison radicalism in and since the 1970s have focused on prisoner writings. These valuable works have recovered, aggregated, and analyzed prisoner narratives. Scholars have mined these works, convincingly arguing that prisoners are organic intellectuals whose prolific theorizing shapes our understanding of race, democracy, gender and power. In addition to centering the intellectual production of prisoners, this scholarship has drawn from prison writing to conceptualize protest, violence and the state.<sup>12</sup> But these studies have not situated prisoners, their writings or

their actions, in the social movements of which they were a part and to which they contributed. I envision this project as an intellectual and social history, one that shows the context in which dissident prisoners emerged as political leaders and critical theorists. Their imprisonment and campaigns for their release catalyzed diverse mobilizations. Their experience shaped how subsequent generations understood racial formation and the role of the prison in society.

Prisoners attempted to use an insurgent visibility to challenge the invisibility of their isolation. They did so through explicitly racial claims, both indicting white supremacy and celebrating blackness and Puerto Rican identity. Supporters magnified these claims, solidifying a persistent linkage between race and the prison. Visibility provided some of the public engagement that incarceration sought to deny. Out of this, prisoners and prison activists theorized racial hierarchies and race itself as a situation of confinement, while defining specific racial identities as liberating forces. Resisting invisibility, though, was not simply a practice of making oneself seen, whatever the costs or however the means. Invisibility is certainly an imposition of power—but visibility, its pursuit as well as its achievement, is also a practice of power, from below as well as above. The prison exists at the periphery of visibility: it must be seen for its foreboding architecture and totalizing power to achieve their potency. This need for visibility, something inherently partial and unfulfilling, is shared by those who want to strengthen the prison walls and those who want to raze them.

Prison radicals, as I argue in the following chapters, named invisibility as their enemy. Their racial formations, often articulated in nationalist idioms, sought visibility to expose the violence that took shape amidst the shadows of state power. Invisibility also



informed the strategies, tactics, and political logics of prison radicalism. Beyond the use of clandestine tactics by some prison radicals, invisibility was an inevitable result of the attempt to publicize prisoners as symbolic figures, the icons and metaphors of nationalist opposition. Prison walls limit the possibility for sustained dialogic interaction between prisoners and others. This physical remove constitutes a form of invisibility that persists even when prisoners become widely recognized symbols. It invited the construction of heroes, figures powerful enough to at least symbolically break through prison walls. This iconic labor utilized heroism in fashioning a prideful racial identity that could be mobilized in service of political activism. Yet these were malleable heroes, capable of becoming other people's villains through the same plane of in/visibility that drew sympathetic attention from others. Even the most visible icons remain at least partially invisible to the extent that iconicity can obscure seeing human beings in all their complexity. Indeed, authenticity often accompanies the construction of icons as either good or bad.

Prisoner radicalism politicized the prison as a way to make visible a critique of state power through emphasizing its capacities for repression through the police and white supremacy. Bryan Wagner argues that black thought and cultural practice increasingly responded to the police, as both an abstract notion of power and a material practice of power, following the abolition of slavery. In Wagner's analysis, "the police power" refers not to an institution but a regime of racialized punishments.<sup>13</sup> The prison similarly structured the political culture of post-Jim Crow racial projects. Institutionally, this period witnessed the rise of a deeply racialized mass incarceration that included an expanded criminal code that increased the number of people being arrested and the length

of their sentences. It saw the construction of hundreds of new prisons, as well as a dramatic build-up of police power nationwide, each one steeped in the latest technological developments of surveillance and control. It was in this time that the prison became entrenched as the solution to America's fragile political economy. The growing reliance on incarceration and its racially disproportionate impact constitute what David Theo Goldberg has described as "the threat of race." Unlike earlier racial projects that viewed racialized groups with curiosity or as a source of labor exploitation, Goldberg argues that race since the 1960s has been increasingly treated as a threat: something to be contained and removed from society altogether. While, as Wagner and others argue, blackness has always been defined as a threat to the public order, mass incarceration treats this threat as something too dangerous to allow public contact. Instead, this threat, identifiable in the bodies of black and Latino people, must be removed from society.<sup>14</sup>

Prison radicalism manifested across the country and via an array of tactics in the 1970s. Emerging from a climate of racial militancy and protest, responding to wars foreign and domestic, prisoners sought to advance their demands through visibility by whatever means were available. The most well-known form of prison militancy in this time period were riots. Gottschalk counts 132 riots in American prisons between 1967 and 1972; in 1972 alone, there were forty-eight such disturbances, the highest in any year in U.S. history.<sup>15</sup> These riots were accompanied by other militant actions taken on behalf of prisoners. They joined a veritable cottage industry of publications by prisoners and former prisoners in this time, including essays, memoirs, plays, and poetry.<sup>16</sup> Such texts, alongside smaller printings of prisoner testimonials by leftist publishers as well as investigations into prison conditions by the nascent black and Latino political

establishment, increased the visibility of the prison as a site of political struggle. This visibility focused especially on black masculinity as the carceral subject.

### Keywords of Prison Radicalism

A number of theoretical concepts drive my analysis in the following chapters. Perhaps the five most significant are sketched below: racial formation, protest, spectacle, the prison, and visibility.

*Racial Formation* is a paradigm that studies the realness of race by examining the racial practices and policies that influence people's lives. Racial formation treats race as "an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" that is produced and reproduced through diverse practices of class, gender, geography, and sexuality.<sup>17</sup> It investigates race as well as racism. Racial formation emphasizes the multiple, conflicting investments in race that pervade racially differentiated social groups. This perspective traces the race-making activities found in the contestation between social movements and the state, between collectives and institutions. Collective mobilization by explicitly racialized groups draws power by applying knowledge to craft identities. According to Omi and Winant, "Racially based movements have as their most fundamental task the creation of new identities, new racial meanings, new collective subjectivity."<sup>18</sup> This subjectivity often takes shape in struggles against racism, yet cannot be separated from broader attempts to delineate boundaries of group identity. Racial formation always engages visibility, and in complex ways. Race itself has often been identified through visual (i.e., physical) cues, and visual culture has been central to the circulation of racial imagery.<sup>19</sup> White supremacy has historically

secured its power by promoting racist ideologies through spectacular displays of race that deny the subjectivity of those racialized as not white. The gap between a hypervisibility of race and a self-determining racial subjectivity has sparked numerous efforts by black, Puerto Rican and other racialized populations to control the frameworks through which their visibility has transpired.<sup>20</sup>

*Protest* is a broad term that describes a range of political antagonisms. Protest is the vocal and physical demonstration of dissent. As such, protest knows no ideological grounds, yet this study, as with many others, emphasizes protest in its manifestations on the left. Protest encompasses both spectacle and organizing. Organizing, in this context, can be thought of as a process of fostering relationships among people, developing the leadership of others to act on their behalf, and building the capacity of people to have their needs met. Such organizing makes demands on established institutions and creates parallel institutions or practices.<sup>21</sup> Organizing seeks to make visible ideas and relationships in the process of attempting to create social change. This elastic conceptualization makes protest a vital component of social movement efforts to change institutions, identities and ideologies. Among its goals, then, protest aims to make thinkable what was previously unthinkable.<sup>22</sup>

*Spectacle* can be thought of as the practice of politics in and through the “mediascape.”<sup>23</sup> While proponents may hope to render ideas visible, political spectacle first makes visible events and bodies. As political scientist Murray Edelman notes, these spectacles intersect with the news media in a process that “continuously constructs and reconstructs social problems, crises, enemies, and leaders and so creates a succession of threats and reassurances.”<sup>24</sup> I use spectacle to refer to dramatic acts of rupture or

resistance that attempt to capture public attention, often by appealing to journalistic conventions that prioritize the sensational. Violence is the most obvious example of spectacle. But it could also be found in celebrity and diverse forms of cultural production that proliferated during (and since) the 1970s. In the case of prisons, spectacle was one of the few mechanisms available through which prisoners could pursue visibility. Yet spectacle was also fundamental to the ways prison administrators and other government officials sought to re-inscribe the salient power of the prison. The meanings of spectacle, negotiated by diverse collectives, did not necessarily correspond with its intended usage. Because they lack an a priori political affiliation, and because the ruptures are interpreted through prevailing conceptions and concerns, spectacles aiming to dramatize injustice may instead bolster retributive claims. As a result, spectacle, as with visibility more generally, are malleable forces that can work in ways contrary to the intent of their crafters.<sup>25</sup>

*The prison* is a condition of incapacitation that functions through confinement.<sup>26</sup> This use of captivity is an imposition of state power that has been intimately connected throughout U.S. history in the production and reproduction of racial oppression, especially against the black body. The prison is an exaggeration of the coercive power present throughout society. The prison constitutes a racial state of emergency, through which U.S. sovereignty attempts to permanently realign juridical norms and moral standards. From emergencies emerge opportunities; they are productive as well as repressive. Dramatic shifts in law and policy can be read as acts of violence aiming to control how—or whether—lives are lived. These “exceptional” moments and declarations construct threats to the populace in order to maintain and consolidate state

sovereignty.<sup>27</sup> Through wars on crime and drugs, successive presidential administrations since the mid-1960s have enacted increasingly austere measures for the state purpose of controlling deviance. Such wars have normalized repression as a response to social problems and bolstered the state capacities to incapacitate. States of exception enshrine bare life, a condition where one is prevented from experiencing any but the most minimal facets of being alive, as a legally justified category. On the other side of this liminal position is a further entrenched sovereign power attempting to legitimate itself through having its priorities accepted and internalized by the populace.<sup>28</sup> The coercive condition of confinement mandates a rethinking of normative conceptions of political action or civic status.

*Visibility* refers to the ways ideas and identities are publicly seen and interpreted. It is a measure of collective consciousness; as such, visibility exists at different thresholds for different interpretive communities. Visibility describes the contradictory terrain in which ideas and identities are displayed, performed, debated, challenged, and interpreted in public arenas. It uses the media but is not reducible to publicity. Visibility uses articulation, by which I mean both the act of giving voice and the union of two potentially disparate forces.<sup>29</sup> It includes both modes of seeing and the strategies that pursue being seen.<sup>30</sup> As a process of public contestation, visibility unites protest, racial formation, and opposition to the constraints of confinement. Conditions of bare life proceed through their removal from public consciousness, making visibility an often utilized strategy of protest for those facing social death. An exploration of visibility must therefore keep in tension its dialogic opposite, for visibility always signals invisibility.

## Studying the Most In/Visible of Places

This project traces prison protest through a rich series of formal and informal archives. My archival sources include numerous collections housed at ten university or professional archives in California, New York, Texas, and Washington, D.C. There is no central repository for prison protest; materials are scattered throughout various collections of assorted social movements or involved individuals. I relied most on archives in the regions near the prisons or prison activists I study and those that specialize in the identity-based social movements under consideration. Diverse media of the 1970s—newspapers, books, magazines, movies, music—provided a crucial archive in evaluating the structures of feeling in that period. Some of these materials were housed in traditional archives, and I relied on databases to examine additional news items. While not the most essential element of this project, close readings of several key cultural texts from the time period also proved generative.

Prison protest of the 1970s has not yet achieved significant attention in the historical record, and the period is recent enough that there are few established meta-narratives about it. As a result, participants in the movements I examine here were as vital as the university librarians whose help I utilized. I was fortunate to be given access to several private collections in California, Illinois, and New York. This access owes to my longstanding but voluntary engagement with the prison—namely, my correspondence with various political prisoners since I was a teenager. It was through these men and women that I first learned about apartheid and the contras, Puerto Rico and the prison. They were the first older, experienced activists I met, and so I turned to them for help navigating complex questions of strategy and politics. These friendships, formed over the

past dozen years through letters and visits and the occasional phone call, provide part of my entry point for thinking about the recent history of political radicalism. They also introduced me to a political community: the friends and families and former codefendants of the men and women with whom I had befriended. As with millions of others, I became part of a social network that passed through the prison (even if mine had the benefit of being a deliberate choice).

This network has provided a crucial element of my historical research since I began an undergraduate senior thesis, which later became a book, on the Weather Underground. Having written that book added further credibility when I set out on this project. While I concentrated on archival research, several people involved in prisoner organizing in the 1970s were willing to speak with me on account of my previous work or because people I know from that context were willing to vouch for me in the current endeavor. Indeed, although I learned a great deal from them, I conducted these oral histories—with prisoners, former prisoners, and longtime prison activists—only after veterans of those movements, people I knew through previous research, insisted that I do so and then made the arrangements for me to have access to these subjects. As is true of ethnographic research, these relationships facilitated my access to oral histories and to private collections. None of these people, those I interviewed or those who coordinated these oral histories, sought to control or determine the outcomes of the oral histories. People were concerned that I “get it right,” and they identified oral histories with key participants (including, in one case, someone I knew in a different context but whose prison activism I was unaware of) as a crucial contribution to my ability to assess this history. My interest in the interviews, as well as my track record of having respectfully



interviewed people from a controversial clandestine organization of that time period, was enough to satisfy people's concerns. Asking little in return, this network of friends and associates showed the prison to be a productive, if indirect, archive.

I interviewed eleven figures involved in black and Puerto Rican prison activism, mostly Puerto Ricans. The small number of studies on Puerto Rican organizing makes such oral histories a necessary step to filling out the historical record. Likewise, the dearth of material on black prisoner organizing in the late 1970s also informed my decision and choice of interviews. Nine of these interviews were conducted in person in Chicago, Mayagüez, San Juan, San Francisco, and the California Medical Facility of Vacaville Prison. The latter was, due to official policy, not recorded. The others were. I conducted two interviews via correspondence: one through email with a former prisoner involved in the black nationalist prison organizing I describe in chapter 3. The other was done through the postal service with a Puerto Rican political prisoner currently incarcerated in Indiana. Several of the people I spoke with have never given interviews about the experiences I describe here. These interviews were of great importance in learning more about the mindsets, actions and reflections of 1970s prison activists. However, these respondents are no more visible in the text than various figures who I met only in the pages of archival documents. Further, time constraints necessitated that I limit the number of interviews I could conduct. Certainly, there is a need for more such oral histories with a wider variety of people—prisoners, former prisoners, and prison activists—than I was able to do in a project primarily focused on archival analysis and conceptual argument.

This trust also gave me access to several privately maintained archives in moldy basements, dusty attics and crowded living rooms. These private collections informed the dissertation overall, although they were especially valuable in analyzing Puerto Rican radicalism. While few have studied black prison radicalism, the prison is still acknowledged briefly as a site of protest in the growing body of works that study this period. There is, in contrast, a general paucity of materials on Puerto Rican radicalism in the 1970s. Whereas the few existing studies of prison radicalism in the 1970s often leave out the vital role played by Puerto Rican independentists, the few existing histories of the Puerto Rican independence movement in the United States mention only in passing its campaigns dealing with prisoners. Yet the prison was a critical institution in the development of Puerto Rican activism in the 1970s. Defined as a newly “awakening minority” in the 1970s, Puerto Rican militants harnessed a burgeoning visibility to draw attention to the prison as a metaphor for Puerto Rican subjection—both on the island and in the United States. This visibility led activists into contact with actual prisoners, who they then publicized as representatives of the nation.<sup>31</sup>

I envision this project as a contribution to both black studies/ Africana Studies and to Puerto Rican Studies, among other fields, but the nature of this contribution differs as a result of the amount of scholarly material already published in each area. Thus, this study adds to the growing subfield of Black Power Studies by focusing on prison activism as a premier site of activism and racial formation in the height and waning days of the Black Power movement. It adds a comparative dimension to this scholarship as well, by noting the interactions between black and Puerto Rican militants that proceeded through the prison and its visibility. At the same time, this project helps contribute to

establishing a deeper historical record about Puerto Ricans in U.S. history. While the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico has been well established, the political projects Puerto Ricans have used to challenge this condition have been far less examined. This will undoubtedly change in the coming years, and I hope this project can be a small contribution to the effort of analyzing Puerto Rican grassroots politics, with its attendant racial formations shaped by diasporic migrations and colonial citizenship. These features of diaspora, colonization and confinement—each with its own specific history—bridged the political projects of black and Puerto Rican racial formation in the 1970s.

#### Chapter Overview

The bulk of this project is split between two sections: the first explores black prison radicalism and the other studies Puerto Rican prison organizing. This organization is not meant to juxtapose or imply a rigid division between the two. Rather, I use it to analyze the different ways prison radicalism engaged visibility in racial formation. Cumulatively part I, “America the Prison,” (chapters 2 and 3) chronicles how visibility engaged publicity and invisibility from inside the prison looking out. In part II, “Honor and Sacrifice,” (chapter 4), I examine how the pursuit of visibility articulated publicity and invisibility from outside the prison looking in. The section titles are derived from quotes of well-known figures—Malcolm X and Pedro Albizu Campos, respectively—whose sentiment reveals the political logics underpinning the pursuit of visibility taken up in each section.

The chapters in both sections traverse the decade of the 1970s. They are organized around notions of publicity and memory, slavery and invisibility, silence and visibility. As well, the chapters all analyze protest activity, popular culture, and political thought. Visibility proceeds through exposure and obfuscation—sometimes in turn but often simultaneously. As a result, I examine visibility and the prison looking out from inside the prison and looking in on the prison from the outside. I am concerned with the visibility both of the prison and of prisoners. This visibility emerged from both inside the prison and outside it, with a logic and sense of racial identity shared by adherents in diverse locations. The prison's walls cloak a culture of violence and promote a popular suspicious fascination with prisoners. In the 1970s this visibility could be a hall of mirrors—a confounding torrent of images that worked against a cogent narrative—or it could be a magnifying glass, an attention so concentrated that it shifted public consensus.

While all of the chapters address the cases of particular prisoners, this work is especially the province of chapters 2, which follows California prisoner/author George Jackson, and 4, which studies the campaign to free five Puerto Rican Nationalist prisoners. All of the chapters study the collective action of prisoners and their supporters in a broader historical and conceptual context in which racial formation is inseparable from the gendered and national claims that give it meaning. The postwar migrations of black and Puerto Ricans out of the U.S. and global South into the urban North and West created new regimes for policing these racialized populations. Simultaneously, these migrants carried with them and created memories of dissent. I argue that the social death of confinement makes prison radicalism an exercise of collective memory: prisoners are recalled through visual and print culture, they enter public consciousness as symbolic

figures, and their visibility provides access to broader histories and notions of group identity. The diverse work of prison activism constructs and seeks to popularize prisoners as mnemonics of oppositional sentiment. As a result, I analyze poems and protests, books and bombs, trials and tribulations.

Through an examination of the prison in 1960s political culture, chapter 1 lays the historical foundation for the visibility of prison radicalism in the following decade. I argue that the prison increasingly occupied public attention through the complex intersection of civil rights organizing (in which jail was a frequent outcome of protest activity), cultural celebrations of outlaws, and knowledge production on criminal delinquency as an outgrowth of racialized poverty. I explore how these factors increasingly merged throughout the 1960s a nascent visibility of the prison and its internees. I pay particular attention to the Black Panther Party as the organization that crystallized this prison visibility as the vehicle of black racial formation. Its work provided the frame for much of the prison protest that followed, from Puerto Ricans and whites as well as from other black activists. The Black Panthers synthesized the metaphoric use of confinement, popular within black radical vernacular, with specific campaigns against incarceration and for the freedom of particular black prisoners. As civil rights protest used the Southern jail to dramatize segregation, Black Power activists pointed to the prison as proof of how far the U.S. government would go to quash dissent. This focus shifted public attention from the jail to the prison, from the respectable black female or male student protestor in rural Mississippi to the dangerous black male prisoner in urban California or New York. It placed prisoners at the center of black protest, thereby giving prisoners a great deal of influence in the creation of popular conceptions

of blackness. This effort also responded to popular social science texts that implied the disproportionate imprisonment of black and Puerto Rican youth owed to their licentious criminal deviance. The growing visibility of prisoners on the outside coincided with and emerged from burgeoning protest inside of prisons and the popularization of prisoner writings. This chapter examines several of these efforts, including Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968) and Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* (1967) as foundational texts that articulated black or Puerto Rican racial formation through the prison.

Chapter 2 examines visibility in relation to mass publicity as a struggle over knowledge and narrative. This chapter studies imprisoned militant George Jackson. In prison since 1960, Jackson became well known in 1970 as a spokesman of the growing dissent in California prisons. His visibility came from both his legal predicament (he faced the death penalty on charges of, with two others, having killed a guard) and his literary success (his book of prison letters became a bestseller). Both attributes, his alleged violence and his celebrated eloquence, contributed to the contours of his visibility. He argued for violence as the rupture grand enough to interrupt the imposing silence of confinement, a task taken up most dramatically by his 17-year-old brother, who was killed along with three others in a dramatic raid on a California courthouse to free prisoners in August 1970. The death of Jackson's brother and, in another blood bath a year later, of Jackson himself generated greater spectacular violence by the state aiming to restore its power in fact and in the public imagination. George Jackson—his life, writings, and iconic saliency—was the launching point through which the contours of black prison radicalism became visible. This organizing defined power as a synthesis of racial identification and structural institutions. Such representations crafted narratives of

black subjectivity by reifying heroic action and appealing to collective memories of slavery as an ever-present feature of black life in America. The specter of authenticity interpellated the visibility of black prisoners in several social imaginaries, working against the sincere expression of alternate subjectivities. I argue that the prison served as metonym for the confinement of white supremacy while blackness was both a marker of oppression and a source of liberation. This chapter tracks the George Jackson narrative from the high point of his visibility as a revolutionary subject in the early 1970s through the incidents and posthumous constructions of him later in the decade that used his figure to indict prison protest as criminally inauthentic.

Chapter 3 studies prisoner efforts to control their visibility as a mechanism of representation. This chapter emphasizes multiple sites of prison protest, including self-produced prisoner newspapers, prisoner protest rituals, and the different trials of prison activist Angela Davis, prisoner Ruchell Magee (the only surviving participant of Jonathan Jackson's failed raid) and of six San Quentin prisoners, all comrades of George Jackson. Each arena, from the trials to the dissident newspapers, became fertile grounds on which prisoners attempted to gain control of their visibility as self-representing subjects. I examine the ways slavery, newly visible in 1970s structures of feeling, informed black radical critique of the prison. Prisoners fought to define themselves as slaves, using visibility to both indict the prison and argue that it ought to be understood as an extension of black subjugation. Black radical prisoners described themselves as slaves, rather than as workers or even as abolitionists, to focus attention on their condition of social death. In court, black prisoners asserted their subjectivity by struggling to act as their own attorneys. This effort was an attempt at self-making—it sought to remove intermediaries

and allow the prisoners to speak for themselves. It was also an attempt to undercut the sanctity of the court, as prisoners contravened the established decorum. The self-activity of prisoners sought to repurpose the visibility of public trials into a critique of the prison and its panoptic eye. I conclude the chapter by examining the ways prisoners turned to black nationalism to overcome their invisibility at the end of the 1970s. I focus on the Republic of New Afrika, an organization whose concept of black racial formation held that slavery and ensuing centuries of confinement created a new political subject: the New Afrikan, who was said to be best represented in the form of the black prisoner. By the late 1970s, New Afrikan politics infused black prisoner rituals of self-reliance, including the production of several prison newspapers and contemplative protests that sought to portray two centuries of uninterrupted slave resistance.

In chapter 4, I turn my attention most fully to Puerto Rican prison activism. I argue that the prison first entered Puerto Rican radical thought as a way to visibly imagine the conditions of Puerto Rican barrios and of the island's colonial status relative to the United States. Harnessing the metaphoric impact of the prison and its existing visibility, Puerto Ricans used it as a concept to challenge their invisibility in American cities and place themselves within and against American racial conceptions. For some Puerto Rican activists, the prison became a tool of restoration: its visibility helped them conceptualize diasporic identity and, through particular prisoners, provided connections to a nationalist history that had been obscured. Activists' pervasive use of the prison to make sense of Puerto Rican experience ultimately led them into contact with actual prisoners. This connection melded the metaphoric usage of the prison with its material manifestations, especially in the form of five members of the Puerto Rican Nationalist



Party that had been held in U.S. prisons since their spectacular attacks on U.S. authority in the 1950s. The campaign to free the Nationalists, I argue, made the prisoners visible as beacons of national independence, tethering the prison to Puerto Rico's political future. This articulation revived a nationalist history among U.S.-born Puerto Ricans, some of whom then adopted similarly spectacular tactics in the form of public occupations, clandestine bombings, and dramatic silences in the face of U.S. legal authorities. Ultimately, this connection between the visibly confined prisoners and the invisibly elusive militants turned invisibility into a resource in the pursuit of a broader visibility for anticolonial nationalism.

### The Spectacle of the Real

Studies of 1960s radicalism have often juxtaposed patient organizing against the bombastic spectacle. This pairing has described various historical phenomena as mutually exclusive: civil rights versus Black Power, Students for a Democratic Society versus the Weathermen, and so on. This binary approach argues that activists fell in love with the mass media image of themselves and courted publicity rather than people or policies. Bravado and confrontation replaced door knocking and face-to-face conversation.<sup>32</sup> More recent works on Black Power, as well as a new interest in Puerto Rican studies, have complicated this analysis, describing a wide range of community organizing initiatives that lay behind the militant attire and strident rhetoric.<sup>33</sup> In complicating the received wisdom, however, this revisionist history still upholds the division between spectacle and organizing. It argues that behind an overly performative display of politics, "real" organizing could still be found. While this approach is historically more valid and

intellectually more nuanced than the stark juxtapositions in earlier scholarly literature, theoretically it still forecloses analysis of a vital terrain of political action.

In this dissertation, I attempt to bridge the gap between the real and the spectacular in the historiography of 1960s-era protest.<sup>34</sup> As various works in the study of symbols and signs have shown, spectacle is a frequently utilized component of political reality.<sup>35</sup> It was an especially necessary political outlet for some who were spatially and juridically removed from normative conceptions of political actors. While prisoners are perhaps the best example of this category, the growth of various political movements said to mark the 1960s era can be mapped through spectacular eruption against civic denial. The 1960 sit-ins at Greensboro that launched a new wave of militancy in the civil rights movement, the 1967 armed seizure of a federal courthouse in New Mexico that dramatized Chicano land claims in the American Southwest, the 1968 protest against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City that put forth a feminist challenge to sexual objectification, the 1969 riot at the Stonewall Inn in New York that created a political visibility for gays and lesbians and transsexuals—all of these and numerous other, now canonical exemplars of 1960s militancy, each utilized spectacular displays of power. These spectacles identified demands and demonstrated politicized identities. Behind each action lay a wealth of largely unseen organizing and relationship building that made such demonstrations possible.

That organizing also structured how different groups and institutions responded to the spectacle. But in each case the use of spectacle pushed movements into public debate and visibility, out of which they tried to raise awareness, change policy, embolden community, and withstand repression. Spectacle was a tactic and a terrain of politics,

especially for historically marginalized populations. As Nikhil Singh argues in his astute evaluation of the Black Panthers, “it may be that the revolts of powerless people are always at first ‘theatrical,’ self-inflating, and bombastic. Lacking a significant purchase upon the ‘real,’ they inevitably appear unanchored, self-referential, and unintelligible to those who witness them for the first time. In retrospect, this may appear as weakness and even failure, though it is always impossible to fully calculate these effects, or what might happen within more favorable conjunctures.”<sup>36</sup>

Battles over the prison necessarily engage the polarities between margin and center, inside and outside, just and unjust, known and unknown, legal and illegal—and, of course, visibility and invisibility. Through struggling over visibility and the means of representation, prisoners and their allies attempted to dramatize political questions and create adequate solutions. Campaigns focused on the prison and on particular prisoners tried to make the prison visible so as to connect resistance and repression in a dialectical relationship that defined incarceration as a state mechanism to uphold colonial and racial hierarchies. As such, the prison symbolized, however briefly, what was wrong in and about the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> For the contemporary statistics, see the Pew Center on the States, “One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008” February 28, 2008 (accessed March 3, 2008). Available at [http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/report\\_detail.aspx?id=35904](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/report_detail.aspx?id=35904). More generally, see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010); Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in an Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2000); and Loic Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Crisis, Surplus, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Marie Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: The Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2006); Jonathan Simon, *Governing Through Crime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For the law and order backlash, see Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Steven M. Teles, *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement: The Battle for Control of the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Rebecca M. McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Scott Christianson, *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1998). Noel Ignatiev describes the fluidity of racial categories at Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Jail in the early 1800s; see *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 44-51.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: the Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London: Verso, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> A picture of this banner is printed in Peggy McGraw and William McGraw, *Assignment: Prison Riots* (New York: Henry Holt, 1954), p. 115. For more on prison riots of the 1950s, see Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, pp. 169-174; Larry E. Sullivan, *The Prison Reform Movement: Forlorn Hope* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), pp. 44-76.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Heather Ann Thompson, “Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Decline, Crisis, and Transformation in Postwar American History,” unpublished manuscript in author’s files, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> For studies of the racial politics of urban space at this time and since, see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Yo Mama’s Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton:

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Princeton University Press, 2006); Steve Macek, *Urban Nightmares: The Media, The Right, and the Moral Panic Over the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> See Heather Ann Thompson, "Black Activism Behind Bars: Toward a Rewriting of the American Civil Rights Movement," unpublished manuscript in author's files; Heather Ann Thompson, *Attica!* (New York: Pantheon Books, forthcoming); Lee Bernstein, *America is the Prison: Art and Politics in Prison in the 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Alan Eladio Gómez, "Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972" *Radical History Review* 96 (Fall 2006), pp. 58-86.

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall, "Who needs 'identity'?" in Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman, eds., *Identity: A Reader* (London: SAGE, 2000), pp. 15-30.

<sup>11</sup> Pat Halloran and Free Our Sisters Collective, "Free Our Sisters!" *The Anvil*, volume 1, number 3 (August – September 1971), p. 7, in Eldridge Cleaver Papers, Carton 4, Folder 33, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. More generally, see Regina Kunzel. "Lessons in Being Gay: Queer Encounters in Gay and Lesbian Prison Activism." *Radical History Review* 100 (2008), pp. 11-37; Daniel Burton-Rose, "The Anti-Exploits of Men Against Sexism, 1977–78," in Donald F. Sabo, Terry A. Kupers, and Willie London, eds., *Prison Masculinities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), pp. 224–229.

<sup>12</sup> Cf., H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Writing in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century America* (New York: Penguin Press, 1998); Michael Hames-Garcia, *Fugitive Thought: Prison Movements, Race, and the Meaning of Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Barbara Harlow, *Barred: Women, Writing, and Political Detention* (Hanover, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 1992); Joy James, ed., *Imprisoned Intellectuals: America's Political Prisoners Write on Life, Liberation, and Rebellion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Joy James, ed., *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005); Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power After Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 29; Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, pp. 6-8. Goldberg's analysis builds on Gilmore's discussion in *Golden Gulag* of imprisonment as incapacitation.

<sup>15</sup> Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>16</sup> These included texts by a coterie of antiwar, Black Power and racial-nationalist radicals. For an overview, see Bernstein, *America is the Prison*.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986), p. 68. The literature here is immense. Cf., John L. Jackson, Jr., *Harlem World: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Michael Hanchard, *Party/Politics: Horizons in Black Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Wahneema Lubiano, "Black Nationalism and Black Common Sense: Policing Ourselves and Others," in Wahneema Lubiano, ed., *The House that Race Built* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), pp. 232-252.

<sup>18</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, pp. 85-86. See also Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Algernon Austin, *Achieving Blackness: Race, Black Nationalism, and Afrocentrism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: NYU, 2006); Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Seeking the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*; Elizabeth Abel, *Signs of the Times: The Visual Politics of Jim Crow* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

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<sup>20</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1995 [1952]); James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995 [1985]); James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International: 1963); James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1972); W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994 [1903]); Wahneema Lubiano, "Don't Talk with Your Eyes Closed: Caught in the Hollywood Gun Sights" in Mae G. Henderson, ed., *Borders, Boundaries, and Frameworks* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 185-201. My reading of DuBois draws on Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> This definition builds heavily on Payne's explication of the "organizing tradition" in the civil rights movement. See Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995). See also Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Stokely Carmichael with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture]* (New York: Scribner, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 55. See also Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998); James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> The term "mediascape" comes from Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 7: 295-310. Appadurai identified five "scapes" characterizing the contemporary moment; besides the media, he referred to the flow of capital, populations, technologies, and ideologies. While Appadurai developed his analysis relative to globalization, I use it here to refer to an earlier period because it is a useful analytic for thinking about media as a variegated terrain both structured and contingent, and open to being reworked by others for purposes different than originally intended.

<sup>24</sup> Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Harvey Molotch and Julian Lester, "News as Purposive Behavior: On the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents, and Scandals" in Stanley Cohen and Jock Young, eds., *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media* (Beverly Hills: SAGE, 1981), pp. 118-137; Jane Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon* (New York: The New Press, 2007); Bruce D'Arcus, "Protest, Scale and Publicity: The FBI and the H. Rap Brown Act," *Antipode* 35:4 (November 2003), pp. 718-741; Bruce D'Arcus, *Boundaries of Dissent: Protest and State Power in the Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1997); Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Slavoj Žižek, "'I Hear You with My Eyes': or, The Invisible Master," in Renata Salaci and Slavoj Žižek, eds., *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 90-126. See also the sources referenced in note 14.

<sup>26</sup> Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*. For a foundational analysis of the technologies of imprisonment, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995 [1977]).

<sup>27</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 257.

<sup>28</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Agamben, *State of Exception*. For an explication of these ideas applied to the Guantánamo detainees, see Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), pp. 50-100. As Hardt and Negri note, however, there is no absolute position of bare life, since

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humanity is “endowed with not only histories of suffering but also capacities to produce and the power to rebel.” See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 53.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the concept of articulation, see Stuart Hall, “On postmodernism and articulation: An interview with Stuart Hall, edited by Lawrence Grossberg,” in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 131-150; Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal* (London: Verso, 1988); Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora,” *Social Text* 19:1 (Spring 2001), pp. 45-73; Andrea Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Jennifer Daryl Slack, “The Theory and Method of Articulation” in Morley and Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall*, pp. 112-129; David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> My thinking on the contingency of visibility owes to the communication scholars who have demonstrated the contingency of images and journalism. These scholars have emphasized that journalistic practice is a crisis-driven exercise in normativity. That is, journalism presents through narrative form disorder in the world in a way that suggests order has been restored, if only because the event has been reduced to a story. See, for instance, Richard Campbell, *60 Minutes and the News: A Mythology for Middle America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); David L. Eason, “On Journalistic Authority: The Janet Cooke Scandal” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3 (1986), pp. 429-447; Daniel C. Hallin, *The “Uncensored War”*: *The Media and Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); John Hartley, *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1996); John Hartley, *Understanding News* (London: Methuen, 1982); John Pauly, “Rupert Murdoch and the Demonology of Professional Journalism” in James W. Carey, ed., *Media, Myths, and Narratives: Television and the Press* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1988), pp. 246-261; Barbie Zelizer, “Journalism Through the Camera’s Eye” in Stuart Allan, ed., *Journalism: Critical Issues* (London: Open University Press, 2005), pp. 167-176; Barbie Zelizer, “Journalists as Interpretive Communities,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10 (1993), pp. 219-237; Barbie Zelizer, “The Voice of the Visual in Memory,” in Kendall R. Phillips, ed., *Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), pp. 157-186. My thinking also benefited from Foucault’s discussion of a regime of practices, Williams’ categorization of latent and emergent cultures, and Singh’s theory of subaltern visibility. See Nikhil Pal Singh, “The Black Panthers and the ‘Undeveloped Country’ of the Left” in Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1998), pp. 57-105; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 121-127; and Michel Foucault, “Questions of Method” in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 73-86.

<sup>31</sup> See the articles in John R. Howard, ed., *Awakening Minorities: American Indians, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1970), pp. 123-189. For a rare, in-depth examination of Latino prison radicalism, see Juanita Díaz-Cotto, *Gender, Ethnicity, and the State: Latina and Latino Prison Politics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> For influential examples of this scholarly approach in studies of the civil rights and Black Power movements, see Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom* and Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995 [1981]). For an influential study that makes a similar argument with regards to the New Left, see Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley, 1980). For a critique of both the historical and normative problems of organizing through symbolic currencies, see Adolph Reed Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> This literature is vast and growing. For a historiographic overview, see Peniel E. Joseph, “The Black Power Movement: A State of The Field,” *Journal of American History*, 96:3 (December 2009), pp. 751-776. For some of the many influential texts comprising this revisionist trend, see Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006); Self, *American Babylon*; Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts*

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*Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Winston A. Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960-1977* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Devin Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics, 1965-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008); Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Davarian L. Baldwin notes the need to reinsert politics into the performative. “Protests [by 1960s activists hearing contemporary academics] that ‘it wasn’t performance, it was real’ does suggest that we have too much culture and not enough politics in our current cultural politics.” See Davarian L. Baldwin, “‘Culture is a Weapon in Our Struggle for Liberation’: The Black Panther Party and the Cultural Politics of Decolonization,” in Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams, eds., *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 292.

<sup>35</sup> While such studies have noted the political import of spectacles, they do not evaluate them similarly. They have described spectacle as both an elite strategy of control and a grassroots form of resistance. For the former, see Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (New York: Semiotexte, 1988); Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York: Semiotexte, 2007); Jean Baudrillard, *Utopia Deferred* (New York: Semiotexte, 2006); Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press); Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (New York: Verso, 2005); Doug Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2003); Susan Sontag, “Regarding the Torture of Others,” *The New York Times Magazine* (May 23, 2004). For the latter, see Stephen Duncombe, *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (New York: The New Press, 2007); Christine Harold, “Pranking Rhetoric: ‘Culture Jamming’ as Media Activism,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21: 3 (2004), pp. 189-211; Joseph Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam: How to Reverse America’s Suicidal Commercial Binge—and Why We Must* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2000). For an ethnography of spectacle as both grassroots political violence and grassroots performance, see Daniel M. Goldstein, *The Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). See also D’Arcus, *Boundaries of Dissent*.

<sup>36</sup> Singh, “The Black Panthers and the ‘Undeveloped Country’ of the Left,” p. 90.



## CHAPTER 1: Public Spheres of Incarceration in the 1960s

“The white controlled space of criminality and incarceration was transformed into a public arena for black justice and freedom [during the civil rights movement]. ... Jail, thus, became a primary associational and communicative site for the freedom struggle.”

– Houston Baker<sup>1</sup>

In dramatically different ways, president Lyndon Baines Johnson, revolutionary Huey P. Newton, and singer Johnny Cash each helped make the prison a defining feature of American political culture by 1968. The politician, the performer, and the Panther each politicized the criminal justice system, most notably the prison, in the course of advancing broader goals, whether political or artistic. Their success in doing so owes as much to the structures of feeling in the United States during the 1960s as it does to any contribution or circumstance particular to these or other individuals. Indeed, each one is best seen as conduit more than creator. Nevertheless, each man helped usher in developments that, by 1970, had instantiated a social movement that targeted the prison as an institution, identified prisoners as political and cultural leaders, and used California’s prison system in particular as the launching point for a critique of the institutions of America’s racial order—with the prison metonymically representing society writ large.

The roots of prison radicalism in the 1970s owe to a combination of factors emanating from the political cultures of the 1960s. A deeply racialized notion of “law and order” colonized the realm of official policy amidst widespread urban revolt and a social science that decried the impoverished culture of black and Puerto Rican communities. Simultaneously, numerous cultural productions, centrally music and memoir, challenged these conservative tropes by celebrating the outlaw and developing a narrative of the prison as a site of personal salvation or political redemption. Finally, growing protest movements originating among black and Puerto Rican dissidents utilized the prison as both a metaphor and a descriptor of the oppression they faced in a system of racial capitalism. This chapter provides an overview of each of these separate though interrelated arenas. I begin by examining the growing war on crime as manifested through policy and popular social science and challenged by public protest. I then focus on the Black Panthers as the dominant organization that cast racial protest against incarceration as both a site and a situation. The articulation of race and confinement as mutually constitutive forces owed to a variety of factors, however, including the self-organization of prisoners and the publication of several memoirs by former prisoners who transformed themselves into writers and activists in prison. I argue that the simultaneity of prisoner protest and narratives by former prisoners contributed to a growing visibility of imprisonment. I conclude with an examination of popular culture in the making of prison visibility.

At the dawn of the 1970s, policy, protest and culture each converged on the location of the prison as a site of racial formation and political contestation. These conflagrations developed out of their own logic but cannot be seen as independent of one

another. Similarly while these phenomena grew throughout the 1970s to involve both black and Puerto Rican activists, they should not be viewed as exactly coterminous. For while the political frameworks had much in common, the timeframes of black and Puerto Rican protest in the United States differed. The black freedom struggle grew steadily over the twentieth century, especially following World War II, to become the defining modality of political opposition in the United States. This organizing culminated in the dramatic visibility of civil rights and Black Power in the 1960s. Seeing them as distinctive phenomenon on their own terms, historians have demonstrated that the two are best seen as part of one black freedom struggle that often exhibited a shared set of strategies that included self-respect, self-defense, and self-determination, along with formal equality.<sup>2</sup> Dramatic spectacles accompanied each iteration of black activism, from the hoses and police dogs of the Southern sheriffs to the presidential decrees, from the urban riots to the performative display of weapons. Black activism was a dominant fixture of public awareness throughout the 1960s.

Such was not the case with Puerto Ricans. Despite massive protests on the island throughout the 1960s, Puerto Ricans living in the United States did not form an identifiable social movement as Puerto Ricans until late in the decade.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, Puerto Ricans had been politically active since even before they began to migrate en masse to the United States during the U.S.-backed industrialization of the island in the late 1940s. The Puerto Rican Nationalist Party retained an active presence in the United States from the 1930s until the mid-1950s, when widespread repression imprisoned, exiled or sent underground many Nationalist activists. Afterward, Puerto Ricans remained involved in a variety of neighborhood issues and increasingly became involved in the civil rights

movement. As Sonia Lee shows, Puerto Ricans became involved in civil rights activism led by blacks, a process that led them to emphasize what was distinctive about Puerto Rican history and experience. In New York, for instance, black and Puerto Rican parents collaborated to improve public housing and city schools throughout the 1960s. In short, the multiracial effort for civil rights forced the issue of defining Puerto Rican identity for the growing number of Puerto Ricans who were living in the United States. A self-consciously defined movement among Puerto Ricans focused on “Puerto Rican issues” or organizing explicitly as Puerto Ricans began in the late 1960s and thrived throughout the 1970s, a time in which the black freedom struggle largely contracted.<sup>4</sup>

The racial formations embedded within black activism and Puerto Rican activism overlapped and informed each other but were not simply parallel phenomenon. The different timeframes of developing political protest owed to the different histories embedded within black racial formation as compared to that of Puerto Ricans. Yet both groups interacted in the ghettos of especially New York and Chicago as a result of migrations—both from the rural South and from the island of Puerto Rico—caused by political economic concerns. Both groups confronted similar targets, including police brutality, racist stereotypes and economic marginality in various cultural texts. In so doing, both became associated in the national imagination with “urban problems.” While prevailing stereotypes therefore associated such “urban problems” with criminality, black and Puerto Rican activists sought to refocus attention on the prison. This effort, which sometimes celebrated crime, utilized the prison as a heuristic through which to understand the confinement of racial oppression and celebrate the potential for resistance among even the most desperate of conditions.

While this chapter provides a cursory overview of both black and Puerto Rican racial formation in the context of social mobilization, I concentrate mostly on the black freedom struggle. Owing to the two decades of visible civil rights organizing that often passed through the jail cell, the black freedom struggle raised the issue of prisons most forcefully in the 1960s, and it was black racial identity that became most heavily associated with imprisonment. Blackness provided the normative starting point for thinking about incarceration in the 1970s. In the first part of the dissertation, I extend this analysis through George Jackson and the black prison radicalism of which he was a part and helped spawn. I explore Puerto Rican prison activism in greater detail in part II of the dissertation.

#### Crime, Delinquency and the Cultural Codes of Imprisonment

Dogged by years of urban rioting and growing opposition to the war in Vietnam, Lyndon Johnson declined to run for re-election in March 1968. He continued to wish for order in America's streets, reflecting his support for legal civil rights and his opposition to street protest. The war on crime he launched in 1965, against the advice of several of his advisors who feared that it was politically foolish to embark on an unwinnable war, was a noticeable capitulation to the law-and-order politics that Barry Goldwater had advocated in his failed 1964 presidential bid. While not as well noticed or funded as Johnson's other big domestic war, the war on crime was, in Johnson's view, part of the war on poverty. He called the war on poverty "a war against crime and a war against disorder."<sup>5</sup>

Johnson's articulation of crime and poverty revealed a problem that would dominate both policy and social science. It was a fine line and slippery slope between conceiving of crime as a problem of poverty and conceiving of poverty as a bastion of crime. And to the extent that the war on poverty was also aimed at being an element of Johnson's commitment to civil rights, the articulation of crime and poverty was dependent on gendered notions of race. As Laura Briggs argues, designating "the poor" as a category distinct from the working class "made race into class, and class into immorality. In so doing, it made it possible to respond to race-based calls for social and economic justice in terms of sex—both gender and sexuality."<sup>6</sup> Two social science studies, published within a year of each other, described poverty as a pathological condition by which black and Puerto Rican families were, through controlling or licentious women, trapped in subjugation. Both studies cast themselves as calls to action in the context of the war on poverty, thereby articulating poverty with delinquent black and Puerto Rican families.

While the studies shared a basic ideological thrust, they are not indistinguishable. The first, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965), was an official report by the U.S. Department of Labor, commonly called The Moynihan Report after its chair, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. In *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York* (1966), anthropologist Oscar Lewis attempted to define for a wider audience (the 700-page book was published by Random House) the psychological problems that kept impoverished a substrata of poor people, new residents of the United States. As an official report released at the height of black protest against state policies and practices, the Moynihan Report attracted far more attention as a

controversial text than did Lewis's study.<sup>7</sup> Still, *La Vida* became a popular text of Puerto Rican life amidst their growing migration to the United States. Writing during massive Puerto Rican migration to the United States but without much visible organizing by Puerto Ricans, Lewis won the National Book Award in 1967. *La Vida* was the most well-known in a series of books about Puerto Ricans that had appeared at the time, attempting to understand the new migrants.<sup>8</sup> Black people had been publicly under the national microscope for far longer than Puerto Ricans, and so the tenets of Moynihan's text were already being fought over throughout society. Whereas Moynihan positioned his report as an objective outside study, Lewis proclaimed his intent "to give a voice to people who are rarely heard... [and] to bridge the gap in communication between the very poor and the middle-class personnel—teachers, social workers, doctors, priests, and others—who bear the major responsibility for carrying out the anti-poverty programs."<sup>9</sup> Lewis structured the narrative as if a collection of autobiographical reports, prefaced by lengthy third-person introductions, by sixteen Puerto Ricans (mostly women) in one family, spread between San Juan and the Bronx.

Urban theorists had long been interested in the slums, from sociologists such as Robert Park and William Whyte to observers such as Jane Jacobs. While Lewis can be seen as a contemporary of these other scholars, his interests were both bigger and smaller. Unlike Jacobs or Whyte, who theorized the city as a form, Lewis proclaimed that large-scale phenomenon could be understood by examining a much smaller unit: the family. Focusing on the family, also unlike his contemporaries and immediate predecessors, Lewis examined two cities and how a newly diasporic population moved between the two. *La Vida* also racialized its urban residents, whereas earlier theorists assumed a

normative whiteness or were, at most, interested in European ethnics (e.g., Whyte's classic 1943 study, *Street Corner Society*, analyzed Italians in Boston). By examining the psychology and sexual practices of racialized migrant women between Puerto Rico and New York, Lewis helped introduce the United States to Puerto Ricans as an unruly urban population. *La Vida* was arguably the biggest cultural text since *West Side Story* (1957 musical; 1961 movie) to deal explicitly with Puerto Ricans, and both texts viewed this newly visible population through the valence of delinquency. What *West Side Story* narrated through youth gangs, *La Vida* did through prostitution.

Despite their differences, then, both Moynihan and Lewis shifted the focus away from structural inequity to moral failings. For instance, while Lewis wrote that he did not wish to blame the victim, he also declared that eliminating the *culture of poverty* was a far greater challenge than eliminating poverty itself. These pathologies were described primarily as the problems of black and Puerto Rican women: they were unfit and unwed mothers, they were promiscuous and of poor morals. Their hypersexuality led them to have too many children; this alone perpetuated the culture of poverty, although the culture was said to be replicated through more conscious activities as well. In attempting to assist the war on poverty in its treatment of the populations it was meant to uplift, Lewis and Moynihan both brought delinquency to the fore. In the mid-1960s, this delinquency was not framed as an issue of imprisonment but as one of reproduction: the racialized urban woman improperly raising her multiple children. However, the articulation of race and delinquency through gendered pathologies of poverty invited a highly racialized construction of criminality in the national imagination.



This specter of criminality was most readily attached to black radical movements and to the city as the physical terrain in which such delinquency prevailed. In 1968 President Johnson signed into law two bills that expanded police powers over the city. Both laws referred to black protest and urban unrest. The Civil Rights Act of 1968 became official in April, two weeks after Johnson announced he would not seek re-election, and included an antiriot provision that was included to stem Black Power militants. (It was referred to as the H. Rap Brown Act, in honor of the fiery president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee whose speeches had compelled Congress to draft the bill.)<sup>10</sup> A larger law-and-order bill came in June when Johnson signed the Safe Streets Act. It was massive crime control legislation that included gun control and expanded police powers in another bid to quell rioting. Johnson's begrudging support for the bill gave credence to the growing conservative challenges to the Great Society's inability to govern the growing lawlessness.<sup>11</sup>

Seizing on Goldwater's rhetoric and the growing conservative backlash, Richard Nixon made "law and order" an increasingly salient part of his successful presidential attempt. The former vice president succeeded in using an expanded criminal justice apparatus as a code through which to harness white reaction against militant black radicalism, antiwar activists, and the ostensibly "permissive" culture of American liberalism.<sup>12</sup> Once elected, he proved that his commitment to such politics was not mere rhetoric. Two months after Nixon took office, his Justice Department charged eight radical activists with conspiracy to travel interstate "with the intent to incite, organize, promote, encourage, participate in, and carry out a riot" at the 1968 Democratic National

Convention in Chicago.<sup>13</sup> It was the first usage of the antiriot provisions included in the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

### Conspiring for Change: Sight, Silence, and Repression

Already by 1968, conspiracy charges against radical activists had become common enough to generate a vernacular in which the Chicago 8 and subsequent trials easily fit. In this idiom cases were labeled by city and number: the Camden 28, Harrisburg 8, LA 13, New York (or Panther) 21, Oakland 7, Seattle 7, and others. Whereas the city plainly signified the site of struggle, the number represented more than the sum of those facing trial. Rather, as activists tried to build support for groups facing charges, the number of defendants could be understood as representative of the broader whole from which they were chosen. The number, to supporters, signaled those whom the state had selected as metonyms of the movement overall: eight antiwar activists, thirteen Black Power militants, and so on—all members of larger collectives engaged in political activism, yet successful enough in their organizing to be targeted. The individuals on trial, therefore, stood in for the broader collective from which they were drawn. These collectives were increasingly described in racial terms, as in the Los Siete de la Raza (seven Chicanos charged with the 1969 murder of a police officer in San Francisco), a process that grew as attention increasingly focused on activist prisoners themselves and not just those facing prison.<sup>14</sup> Defendants in these political trials were said to be representatives of the movements and causes from which they came, encouraging supporters to see their fates bound up with those standing trial. The fact that such conspiracies were said to emerge from diverse sectors of society, Catholic pacifists and

hippie students and Black Panthers, was used to demonstrate the representative as well as the exceptional status of those facing legal charges. It was a synecdochic struggle, in the sense that defendants or prisoners were elevated to the status of movement representatives, even leaders, by virtue of both the organizing they were involved in and the fact that they now faced repression. From here, it was a short step to arguing that people facing repression were representative precisely because they faced repression. This step, a sort of synecdochic universalism, came to mark the prison(er) as a site of racial formation.

In addition to helping codify a vernacular of political conspiracy, the Chicago 8 also identified a political stance in relation to the hallowed halls of American justice. The six-month trial (September 1969 – February 1970) was often a self-parody of the generational and cultural clash raging between young leftists and the establishment, as seen through the two Hoffmans: Yippie activist/defendant Abbie defined the courtroom as a venue for political theater, saying “Our role in the court is to destroy its authority, and the next generation will come along and destroy its power.”<sup>15</sup> Hoffman and fellow Yippie Jerry Rubin were particularly vocal in this regard, although other defendants joined in the act. Tom Hayden remembered that the defense placed a picture of Che Guevara and the National Liberation Front flag on its table to create “a ‘liberated zone’ right in front of the jury’s eyes.”<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the other Hoffman, Judge Julius, was a septuagenarian, member of Chicago’s elite, and a conservative jurist. He routinely cited the defendants and their attorneys for contempt of court, leaving them all with extra prison time and thousands of dollars in fines by the time they were convicted. (The Appeals Court overturned the convictions and dropped the fines in November 1972.)

Most dramatically, however, Judge Hoffman had Bobby Seale, Chairman of the Black Panther Party and the only nonwhite defendant, bound and gagged in October 1969 when Seale vehemently demanded to act as his own attorney and called Hoffman a racist. Seale's case was severed from the rest shortly thereafter.<sup>17</sup>

The image of Seale handcuffed to a chair with a cotton cloth stuffed in his mouth became a potent symbol of the government's escalating attacks against the Black Panther Party in particular, and radicals and people of color in general. Supporters routinely used variations on the image in drumming up support for Seale when he was on trial with eight other Black Panthers for the murder of a suspected police informer in New Haven, Connecticut.<sup>18</sup> More than a particular case, however, the symbol of Seale silenced by the state conveyed a deeper political message about government repression. The state, through its criminal justice system, was attempting to prevent political activists, especially militant black ones, from having a voice. The struggle, then, was not "just" about the issues involved, the particular demands raised, but a confrontation about the right to speak and the ability to be heard, a battle over the *means* by which issues were raised and resolved. It was, in short, a battle over visibility. This battle was not just about *whether* to be seen and heard—the shackled or subservient black body has long been visible in American history—but about the terms on which visibility transpired. Black radicals fought to procure visibility as a form of self-determination. They identified the government as a barrier to this task, an obstacle to political and social emancipation. The repressive capacity of the state, evident through policing, prosecuting and imprisoning, threatened to invisibilize black self-determination, just as capitalism promised to exploit black labor.

The specter of enforced silence shaped the radical political imagination of the late 1960s. Radicals feared being silenced and, as Seale's treatment in a Chicago courtroom demonstrated, for good reason. Members of the Black Panther Party, initially the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, found themselves increasingly harassed by police since the group's October 1966 founding. Street distributors of the group's newspaper, the *Black Panther*, often found themselves arrested on petty charges, as did other members of the group. By the time Judge Hoffman had Seale gagged, police had killed several Panther members in California, Illinois and elsewhere. Violent altercations with other black organizations, later shown to be provoked or orchestrated by the FBI, also led to several Panthers being killed in this time period.<sup>19</sup> In the context of this violence, several leaders of the group found themselves in prison or facing serious charges. Recognizing that publicness was essential to combating imposed silence, the Panthers spoke of sight and voice as tools of insurgency. The group's leaders faced repression for having "exposed" the venality of the system and so it was the task of supporters to "see" them. To see them meant to know about them and their cases, and presumably therefore to know or at least learn about the underlying political issues. Seeing also meant supporting their efforts to defeat legal charges by attending court sessions or protests. While Panther leader Huey Newton awaited trial, Eldridge Cleaver organized a rally not far from the county jail cell where Newton was confined. "Held in the shadow of the Alameda County jail ... the theme of the rally was 'Come See About Huey,'" explained the Panther's Minister of Information. He argued that such sight was life saving, especially from black people, since they were the idealized political subject.<sup>20</sup> Cleaver's logic held that the

visibility of black subjection would be a source of unity and mobilization for black people, who the Panthers had already defined as a vanguard force.

This insurgent form of seeing not only saved the lives of those most immediately facing silencing; it was also said to be the necessary strategy for preventing such repression to colonize all of society. If, as Debord and the French Situationists argued, capitalist spectacle colonized everyday life, the Panthers suggested that people could train themselves to see in a way that undermined the reach of oppressive systems.<sup>21</sup>

Fundamentally, this response necessitated that people make themselves aware of those the government would silence or disappear through the criminal justice system. Through parallel forms of surveillance, by activists seeing the government's actions, people could deploy visibility against the invisibility of state repression. Speaking of Bobby Seale, Illinois Panther chairman Fred Hampton defined working for Seale's release, seeing him, as being of the utmost importance. "So we're going to see about Bobby regardless of what these people think we should do, because school is not important and work is not important. Nothing's more important than stopping fascism, because fascism will stop us all."<sup>22</sup> Sight, in this construction, was inextricable from action: to see about Seale meant to actively confront fascism. Hampton therefore extended Cleaver's suggestion that visibility would be a source of unity by articulating sight with embodied struggle. For both men as for the political defense tradition more broadly, sight was an issue of hearts, minds and feet. "Seeing" prisoners or those facing repression was a narrative strategy aiming to elicit affective support for prisoners, conscious critique of the government, and embodied action motivated by the feeling of solidarity and the idea of opposition.

The rise and fall of the Black Panthers coincided with the national attention given to the publicity and concentration of violence against black radical organizations. The legal victories ending segregation in the mid-1960s displaced the Ku Klux Klan and backward Southern sheriff as the primary obstacle to black freedom in the national imagination. And yet, as the body count of Black Panthers and the spread of urban rebellions testified, black subjection endured. The theatricality of Black Power protest, which combined community organizing with spectacular displays of militancy, worked to make blackness remain *nationally* visible. As a result, many activists articulated racism and state repression as mutually constitutive dimensions of enforced silencing. To fight racism mandated resisting repression, which was to confront the state's power.<sup>23</sup> Black activists and others defined the fight against state repression, embodied in those social movement leaders facing criminal trials, as instrumental to the national future. According to the Black Student Revolution conference in 1970: "In the wake of this racist repression it becomes clear that black people are engaged in a life and death struggle of national salvation. It is only natural for black people to be concerned and motivated by what is happening to Bobby Seale and the New Haven Panthers and other black political prisoners, here in dying racist Amerikkka [sic]. Black students have always felt the importance of working with the Black Panther Party and understood that the outcome of our struggle lies in the ability to free all of our political prisoners."<sup>24</sup>

Black students weren't the only ones that challenged the political persecution of Bobby Seale and other members of the Black Panther Party. The May 1970 National Student Strike, ostensibly sparked by the invasion of Cambodia and the killing of four students at Kent State by the National Guard, had as its first demand that "the U.S.

Government end its systematic repression of political dissidents and release all political prisoners, such as Bobby Seale and other members of the Black Panther Party.” Only after that did the strikers demand troop withdrawal from Southeast Asia, an end to the war, and an end to university complicity with the war. By May 22, the National Strike Information Center reported that 100 schools were on strike for the three demands.<sup>25</sup>

### Carceral Leadership

Such altercations with the criminal justice system had, paradoxically, helped spur the Black Panthers to national prominence. The Panthers, in fact, grew precisely because they turned the repression they faced into a source of their organizing. This work particularly centered on Huey P. Newton, co-founder and Minister of Defense of the Black Panthers. Newton was arrested in Oakland on October 28, 1967, after an altercation that left him and a police officer wounded, and another officer dead. Black Panther Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver, a former prisoner turned journalist for the radical weekly *Ramparts*, used Newton’s legal predicament to build a campaign for Newton’s freedom that could spread the organization’s politics. “Free Huey” became not just a demand bearing on a legal case but an extension of the Panther’s 10-point program for socialism and an end to white supremacy.<sup>26</sup>

The campaign to spare Newton from prison and possibly the death penalty was perhaps the largest such effort for a black man since the Scottsboro case in the 1930s.<sup>27</sup> As the precedent illustrates, leftist activists have long attempted to turn trials of radicals into political contests. Rebecca Hill argues that the Black Panthers joined the two dominant defense traditions in American history, labor and anti-lynching. Both sets of



campaigns, Hill argues, “have worked primarily through appeals to public opinion in the media, used stories of terror and heroism to build alliances across lines of class and race, and have been formative in the creation of radical political identities. They are united in proposing an alternative argument about power in contrast to the predominant liberal theories of the relationships between minorities and majorities or the interests of the individual in relation to the prerogatives of a state, assumed to represent the community as a whole.” The Panthers extended these traditions and popularized them in the valence of Black Power that drew “white radicals into solidarity with carnivalesque attacks on the ‘pig’ in support of a Black ‘lumpen’ revolution.”<sup>28</sup>

The “Free Huey” campaign preoccupied the Panthers and garnered a significant amount of media throughout 1968. Thousands of people attended rallies for Newton held on his birthday in Oakland in February 17, 1968, and in Los Angeles the following day. In addition to raising money and garnering significant press coverage, the rallies brought together several high-profile black militant activists, including Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and James Forman. Each man was a leading, well-known figure within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which had played a leading role in civil rights organizing in the South since its 1960 founding. At the Oakland rally for Newton, however, they were introduced as “honorary” members of the Black Panthers. Their titles, beyond aggrandizing the Panther stature as the vanguard black political organization in the country, conveyed the message that the struggle to free a black prisoner could unite all black people, along with some whites and other people of color.<sup>29</sup> And if this coalition could not free its prisoners, it would bring down the system responsible for their incarceration. The SNCC leaders repeated the slogan that Panther

leaders had used, saying that Newton must be freed or “the sky’s the limit.” In defending this slogan, Forman offered a formula for calculating how political status calibrated to retaliatory violence. Should Forman be killed, he said his own “assassination” should be met with “ten war factories destroyed, fifteen blown-up police stations, thirty power plants destroyed, . . . one Southern Governor, two mayors, five hundred racist cops dead. Now this is no theatrics,” Forman argued, saying that the price for Brown and Carmichael was higher because of the threats that have already been made against them. As the Black Panther Minister of Defense and as a black man facing the death penalty, Newton merited the highest level of retaliation should he be killed. Thus, Forman said, “the sky’s the limit” for avenging Newton.<sup>30</sup>

Although Newton was already a leader of the Party, the campaign to free him elevated his status to almost mythic proportions. In writings and speeches Cleaver proclaimed “the genius of Huey P. Newton,” suggesting that the government wanted to kill Newton because of his intellectual prowess.<sup>31</sup> Cleaver’s fealty to Newton at this time extended nearly to the realm of self-sacrifice in assuring visibility for Newton; when Cleaver was facing a return to prison for violating his parole, sparing Newton the death penalty remained his stated priority. “[H]elping Huey stay out of the gas chamber was more important than my staying out of San Quentin, so I went for broke. TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, the works.”<sup>32</sup> Cleaver used the attention focused on his possible return to prison to build support for his defense, Newton’s defense, and the promotion of the Black Panther Party. The “Free Huey” campaign nationalized the Panthers, helping spread the group to cities and towns across the country. It was one of several events involving the Panthers that made the group a mainstay in American media between 1968

and 1972.<sup>33</sup> Panther posters and signs featured Newton, Seale, and other imprisoned leaders, proclaiming them political prisoners. A picture of Newton's face, stern and determined under a black beret, adorned the front cover of each issue of the *Black Panther* newspaper during his incarceration, and calls to "Free Huey" and other political prisoners appeared regularly as well.<sup>34</sup>

When Newton's trial began on July 15, 1968, more than 2,000 people staged a rally outside the Alameda County Superior Court demanding his release. Newton was convicted in September and sentenced to serve between two and fifteen years. In what would become a common refrain two years later with the Soledad Brothers and other dissident prisoners, the Panthers described Newton as guilty first and foremost of being black.<sup>35</sup> Newton overcame this guilt through embracing it and continuing to remain visible. He continued to issue Panther decrees and grant media interviews from prison until he was released on appeal in August 1970.<sup>36</sup> His ongoing prominence and eventual release showed his supporters that prison was perhaps not the total institution many had thought it to be: the campaign for his freedom kept Newton in public consciousness while he used various media to remain a visible presence. Further, Newton's statements from prison were militant and uncompromising. On March 1, 1968, for instance, Newton issued "executive mandate number 3" that required all members of the Black Panther Party under threat of expulsion to acquire the skills and equipment necessary to "defend" one's household and families from police incursion.<sup>37</sup> Newton made this call to arms in response to an armed police raid on the house of Black Panther Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver. In doing so, he showed that prison walls could not keep out news of fellow radicals or their tribulations, just as he raised from a jail cell the possibility of

armed defense to protect the Panthers' most visible spokesman and media personality. Newton further demonstrated his ability to remain a leader inside: from prison he was not only giving interviews but issuing official proclamations requiring those under his command to use violence against police in self-defense if necessary. Newton was, of course, limited in what he was able to say and the amount of access he had to media or other public outlets from prison—realities not lost on supporters, who decried, for instance, the “close scrutiny” from prison officials that makes it “not possible for him to communicate his political thoughts.” Yet the fact that Newton still managed to issue some statements or give some interviews from prison contrasted both the real efforts to limit his public profile and those on the left who proclaimed Newton’s invisibility.<sup>38</sup> Further, that several of his public statements dealt with issues of violence and self-defense displayed a certain brazen style implying that the prison could not restrain a militant spirit or forestall what some now viewed as an inevitable people’s war.

A visible revolutionary when imprisoned, Newton’s release on appeal after being convicted for the death of a police officer signaled to some the quickening pace of revolutionary transformation. Especially given that the movement to support him had fostered a collective identification with Newton as an individual, supporters looked upon Newton’s freedom by marveling at his body and calling for more revolutionary action.<sup>39</sup> This process circulated nationally, helped by the pictures of Newton upon his release that were printed in the *Black Panther* newspaper and appeared on television, among many other sources. In New York, the Minister of Information for the Young Lords Organization, a Puerto Rican group modeled after the Black Panthers and which imported the Panthers practice of political defense to its own work in the barrios of New York

City, penned an article in the organization's newspaper on Newton's freedom. The article was written as an imaginary conversation between two (or more) unknown, unnamed but presumably Puerto Rican characters. The dialogue celebrated Newton in almost messianic terms, the return of an apostle against white supremacy and state/police violence. The imagined interlocutors used Newton's appearance on television upon release as a sign that "[s]hit's gonna start happenin' now" and "these pigs is in trouble." These messages were conveyed more through what Newton did and what he represented than through anything he said. His body spoke louder than his words. "First thing, he didn't say nothin'. He took his shirt off. That brother got a body on him look like he been working out off bull meat for two years." In celebrating Newton's release, Yoruba Guzman, the author of this imagined conversation and who served as its narrator, cautioned readers against thinking that "Huey can make a revolution alone." That Guzman felt compelled to issue such a warning shows the extent to which some radicals had so placed their hopes in a leader both captivating and captive. So much so, in fact, that Guzman also issued a warning against the police, arguing that revolutionary violence against the specters of imprisonment could be done in celebration for Newton's release. In this logic, radicals need not save such violence for retaliation but could use it to embolden further action. "Want to celebrate Huey's release into the prisons of the street? Let's get ourselves together here. ... Say 'Hi, brother,' to the music of pigs' bodies kissing the pavement as they drop dead from double-o buckshot in the back."<sup>40</sup>

No one followed the suggestions of Guzman's imagined protagonists. Despite his encouragements to the contrary, such acts of violence against police were relatively rare and generally occurred in retaliation rather than celebration. Yet the dialogue is revealing

for the political logic of militancy embodied in the black radical prisoner. The jocular and strident rhetoric exposed a solidarity defined by its violent opposition to the state's capacity to repress. Accompanying this discourse for groups such as the Panthers and Young Lords was an equally brash physical performance—what Eldridge Cleaver called a “projection of sovereignty, an embryonic sovereignty.”<sup>41</sup> Their rhetorical bluster and physical attire, complete with sunglasses, leather jacket, beret and most centrally a gun, was a form of semiotic warfare. French novelist and playwright Jean Genet, a vocal and prominent supporter of the group, argued that the Panthers' skillful use of images created its success as well its downfall. “The Black Panthers attacked first by sight,” he argued.<sup>42</sup> Such semiotic challenges were necessary because black people in America lacked a base of land to call their own. As a result, the group needed another venue for political challenges, and they found it “in people's consciences. Wherever they went the Americans were the masters, so the Panthers would do their best to terrorize the masters by the only means available to them. Spectacle. . . . But spectacle is only spectacle and it may lead to mere figment, to no more than a colorful carnival; and that is a risk the Panthers ran.”<sup>43</sup> Genet's admiration for the Panthers led him to sneak into the United States (he was denied a visa) to give lectures and raise funds on their behalf. He recognized the power of their symbols, even as he said that such gestures paled to the real acts. Genet implored his listeners to support the Panthers. The Panthers, he argued, had the moral force to compel a wholesale abandonment of American institutions and norms in favor of fighting the racism embedded in the state as a repressive entity. “And if it becomes necessary, I mean if the Black Panther Party asks it of you, you ought to desert

your universities, desert your classrooms, in order to speak out across America in favor of Bobby Seale and against racism.”<sup>44</sup>

Challenging the criminal justice apparatus as fundamental to American power made the prison both a discursive field as well as a material institution. In writings and speeches, Newton and other Black Panthers challenged the prison as a place and a symbol. Materially, Newton wrote that prisons would not squelch revolutionary energy. “The prison cannot be victorious because walls, bars and guards cannot conquer or hold down an idea.”<sup>45</sup> Symbolically, the prison represented all forms of oppression and confinement. Such reasoning held that the prison was a value-laden institution intent on confining ideas threatening to the status quo. This line of thinking also predicted the prison’s failure to achieve its mission. Simultaneously, this approach defined structural inequity as itself a form of confinement: the prison was the defining feature of an unjust regime. The growing interactions between radical social movements and the criminal justice apparatus led many to define repression as constitutive of the United States itself, at least as far as black people were concerned. As New York Panther Zayd Shakur wrote, “America is the prison” because “[p]risons are really an extensions of our communities.” People “live at gun point” in both places, Shakur argued.<sup>46</sup> A pamphlet by the Bay Area Prison Solidarity Committee extended this metaphor by defining prison as “a ghetto in itself where people’s everyday problems are magnified and aggravated by hired guns and hired wardens who hold immediate power over life and death.”<sup>47</sup> Out of this rhetoric emerged a discourse that defined prisons as “maximum security” and designated the rest of the United States as “minimum security.” In helping instantiate this position, the Soledad Brothers Defense Fund and Soledad House declared that the “brothers inside the

prisons (maximum security) are struggling just as courageously as the brothers and sisters in minimum security (outside the prisons).”<sup>48</sup> After traveling to China in 1971, Huey Newton “told reporters he had asked ‘Chairman Mao Zedong ... to negotiate with Prison Warden Nixon for the freedom of the oppressed peoples of the world.’”<sup>49</sup>

If all the country was a prison, the prisoner emerged as the idealized political subject. This twofold critique of imprisonment positioned imprisonment as a ubiquitous enemy (at least for black and other nonwhite people) to be vanquished (at least by black and other nonwhite people). If, as numerous theorists have suggested, social movements create new conceptual space, this emphasis on the prison as a structuring feature of black life served to make black prisoners conceivable as political subjects.<sup>50</sup> Freedom, in this analysis, was at least partially a question of consciousness since incarceration was a persistent reality, a political geography, of being black in the United States. In other words, racism meant that all black people were incarcerated. Confinement structured their presence in the United States. The prison, therefore, was a palimpsest on the urban environment or wherever black people could be found. It was central to any conceptual map of black bodies and activism. While constructing the prison as an ever-present force, this discourse also elaborated possibilities for resisting its grip. Short of a sweeping revolution in politics, culture and economics, “freedom” was to be found in practices rather than in sites. This position troubled previous notions of freedom and its opposite(s). For this reason, Robert Scheer could say that Eldridge Cleaver’s prison writings were written in the “leisure of Cleaver’s forced confinement” whereas his post-prison essays and speeches were prepared “on the run” in the fugitive stance of black political struggle.<sup>51</sup> Cleaver also declared the prison to be more a condition than a



place—saying, for instance, that “one continues to go back to prison until he gets his shit together, and then he refuses to go back.”<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, Cleaver distinguished more carefully between prison and the streets when he faced a return to San Quentin in 1968.<sup>53</sup>

Describing repression as both a tangible obstacle and a metonym for the racial regimes of U.S. capitalism moved the locus of attention within the defense tradition from the courtroom to the prison cell. This shift in location brought activists in contention with issues of visibility. The courtroom presumes public availability, even if its décor—armed guards, the elevated bench at which sits the sanctioned arbiter—is clearly oriented toward re-inscribing hierarchies of governance.<sup>54</sup> Still, the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution guarantees public trials where people may confront their accuser. The public is invited to witness trials; to facilitate this witnessing, journalists are welcome to report on these legal proceedings. They can do so without having to ask for prior permission. The prison, meanwhile, carries no expectation of or provision for visibility. No constitutional amendments legislate its activities, much less its openness. It guarantees only silence and order, both messages being reinforced by thick walls policed by armed guards. More than that, however, this message of the prison’s unavailability to the public was delivered through the remove of such institutions from the density of urban space. In its geographic isolation, the prison remained present and potent as a concept but physically at a remove from most people.

To focus on the prison as a site was to engage the way invisibility accompanied injustice. Earlier iterations of political defense concentrated their efforts on defeating “frame-ups” in the courtroom and in the streets, and these sites continued to be productive ones within the Black Panther defense tradition. However, they were not the

only such sites. The Black Panther Party, and the militant Black Power movement of which it was a central element, defined the prison as their target. In doing so, they included both the brick-and-mortar institutions and the systems of racial capitalism that upheld them and were ultimately held to be synonymous. One can in fact trace the growing importance of prison in black radical thought through the evolution of the Panthers. The group's founding document, its 1966 ten-point program elucidating "what we want, what we believe," demanded "freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county, and city prisons and jails" because "they have not received a fair and impartial trial."<sup>55</sup> Such positions were familiar to anarchist and communist political defense campaigns.<sup>56</sup> But as successive Panthers found themselves in jail or facing serious charges, the Panthers' concern extended beyond fair trials to more directly challenge the prison as an institution. Newton's imprisonment crystallized this opposition, and the group eventually challenged imprisonment as a component of the repression all black people faced in the United States. By 1972, the Panther's program called for "the elimination of all prisons and jails in the U.S., and trial by a jury of peers for all persons charged with so-called crimes under the laws of this country." It was the "oppressive conditions which are the real cause" of black imprisonment, making all trials under U.S. rule inherently unfair.<sup>57</sup>

While its initial critique of the criminal justice system focused on trial rather than imprisonment, the Black Panthers from its founding viewed "criminals" and prisoners as a vital political subject. The group was inspired by psychologist and revolutionary Frantz Fanon's discussion of colonization and resistance. Fanon documented the psychological impacts of colonization and upheld violence as a necessary aspect of removing it. He also

identified the “lumpen proletariat” as the cutting edge of political struggle among colonized people. Dismissed by orthodox Marxists as a parasitic class isolated from the means of production, the lumpen, Fanon argued, was at the forefront of resistance in colonized cities. “For the lumpen-proletariat, that horde of starving men, uprooted from their tribe and from their clan, constitutes one of the most spontaneous and the most radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people. . . . So the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed and the petty criminals, urged on from behind, throw themselves into the struggle for liberation like stout working men. These classless idlers will by militant and decisive action discover the path that leads to nationhood.”<sup>58</sup> Denigrated in traditional Marxist thought, the lumpen emerged as a reified political subject for Third World revolutionaries such as Fanon and the Black Panthers. These radicals made economic marginality visible in a positive light. The people Moynihan and Lewis described as trapped in a pathological culture of poverty were, to the Panthers and similar groups, people whose distance from the political establishment and isolation from means of production made them potential recruits for the revolution. Such an approach challenged Marxist and liberal orthodoxy of political subjectivity while attempting to rearticulate the characteristics attached to a denigrated population. This elevation of the “lumpen” as criminal overlapped not only with a cultural celebration of the outlaw, as I discuss later in this chapter, but also the emphasis that 1960s social movements placed on alienation as a celebrated mode of political subjectivity. Rossinow argues that alienation supplanted exploitation and marginalization within the white New Left’s conception of political subjectivity. With the Black Panthers, alienation was part of rather than juxtaposed

against exploitation and marginalization. The three factors could be thought of as a triad explaining the political, economic, and social dimensions of black radical critique.<sup>59</sup>

This attempted redefinition was deeply spatialized. Located primarily in urban areas, the Black Panther Party formed at a time when other black radicals, noting the concentration of black people in urban environments, were also defining the city as their battleground. In Detroit, for instance, black communist autoworker James Boggs wrote that “the city is the black man’s land.”<sup>60</sup> The Panthers looked to the lumpen as their favored recruits, including people that white society and the black middle class had long castigated as the dregs of society. The Panthers called them “the brothers on the block,” and defined them as their most valuable members. Under Cleaver’s tutelage, with Party members, especially its leaders, facing jail time, the Black Panther dictum to organizing the “brothers on the block,” increasingly included those in the cell block as well as on the city block. Cleaver’s experience as a former prisoner gave him the presumed authority to organize brothers from block to block. The *Black Panther* newspaper claimed that most Panthers “were street and prison educated.”<sup>61</sup> As Fred Moten argues in an analysis of Fanon, this deployment of political criminality also engages questions of political authenticity, and I will explore in detail in the following chapter the ways both supporters and detractors of black prison radicalism in the 1970s analyzed the movement through a valence of authenticity.<sup>62</sup>

### Riots, Narratives, and the Publicity of Incarceration

Such declarations of affinity with the incarcerated emerged from what Houston Baker calls the “black public sphere of incarceration.” Beginning in the 1950s, Baker

argues, black activists succeeded in turning “white policing and surveillance”—the mechanisms of the criminal justice system—into a site of struggle, “a public arena for black justice and freedom.”<sup>63</sup> In Baker’s analysis, jail was the fulcrum of black visibility breaking open the segregationist stranglehold on black life in the South. Such spectacles, which of necessity passed through the jail cell, moved the “liberation struggle ... from ‘invisibility’ to legal civil rights victories.”<sup>64</sup> Jail was a rite of passage for activists in both the grassroots and upper leadership, including Martin Luther King, whose “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963) became one of the hallmark texts of the civil rights movement. From a Southern jail cell, King criticized liberal cowardice and upheld direct action as a necessary response to racial injustice. Jail was a worthy sacrifice in the broader struggle, a spatial consequence of the movement’s tactical commitment to civil disobedience. But it was not the institution itself that especially preoccupied King or other civil rights demonstrators at this time. Jail revealed the absurdity of the segregationist South. The use of civil disobedience to challenge the Jim Crow regime turned what has traditionally been among the most taboo locations, the jail cell, into a vehicle to make public black oppression, commitment and subjectivity. This strategy of the bigger civil rights organizations trafficked in middle class notions of respectability; it required dignified, well-dressed women and men, some of whom were religious leaders, to break segregationist laws—including by risking arrest for exercising their constitutional rights to vote or utilize public space and institutions—and submit to short periods of incarceration in often brutal Southern jails.<sup>65</sup>

In the wake of legal victories, notably the Voting Rights and Civil Rights acts of 1964 and 1965, black protest was articulated in an increasingly strident manner. Such a

move accompanied a growing national tendency to examine questions of race and racism in the urban North and West rather than limited to the South.<sup>66</sup> This shift in national attention also created space for other groups to begin to occupy national attention in matters of race and protest. These included Chicanos in the Southwest and Puerto Ricans in New York and Chicago. Riots were crucial to this burgeoning awareness of racial tensions. Since the 1965 riot in the Watts section of Los Angeles, California occupied a central place in the nation's racial imaginary. The riot, which resulted in thirty-four deaths and caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damage, opened a new theater of racial protest. Sparked by an incident of police brutality, Watts rioters and sympathizers argued that the police as an institution was at the crux of black oppression. The riot also catalyzed a growing action orientation among black militants that did not stop at nonviolence. As one participant in the Watts riots declared, "We won, because we made them pay attention to us."<sup>67</sup> In Chicago the following summer, a riot in the Puerto Rican neighborhood on the northwest side of the city fulfilled a similar purpose. Although the issues were familiar—the Division Street Riot, as it was called, was sparked by the police shooting of a young Puerto Rican man (who was, incidentally, a former prisoner), amidst the backdrop of routine police brutality in the impoverished neighborhood—this was the first riot attributed to Puerto Ricans in the United States. It therefore contributed to marking Puerto Ricans as a visible population with concrete grievances. Echoing the sentiment of Watts participants, professor José Acevedo estimated that because of the Division Street riot, "our presence [as Puerto Ricans] was felt in the City of Chicago."<sup>68</sup> There were material changes as well, including changes in police hiring practices to recruit more Latinos to the job. These material changes accompanied a new purchase on

publicity, identifiable through media coverage and subjectively important to those whose street protests were motivated in part by feeling unheard. Riots helped instantiate a linkage between violence, visibility and victory. Indeed, the visibility of the violence on Division Street in June 1966 owed to its relative newness: in a time of widespread urban rioting, it was the black ghetto rather than the Puerto Rican barrio that loomed large in the public imagination. The new visibility also included making Chicago, not just New York City, as a site of Puerto Rican residence, poverty, and discontent.<sup>69</sup> Riots created ruptures that made ongoing processes of racial formation visible and therefore newly contestable. They were a response to racialization as well as a contribution to it.

Riots provided a rupture from the mundane that focused attention on issues that communities faced. Organizations stepped onto that terrain to determine how people and institutions understood and responded to the underlying issues. The spectacular mix of symbolism and community organizing, famously displayed by the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, were the most dramatic organizational responses. Both organizations emerged soon after riots and with close proximity to them—the Panthers began in Oakland in 1966 and the Young Lords began in Chicago in 1968. Yet both organizations quickly spread across the country through programs that combined community service with militant confrontation. Significantly, both groups called for the release of political prisoners, in which they included all black and Puerto Rican prisoners. Imprisonment was one of the core issues facing their communities, along with substandard housing, education and healthcare. I explore the work of these organizations in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

In the wake of conflagrations publicly understood as racial disturbances, these organizations crafted narratives that critiqued confinement in a myriad of forms. As I argue in the following chapters, their confrontations with the restrictions imposed by racial and economic disparities ultimately led them to focus more explicitly on the prison as a material institution and on prisoners as both real people and symbolic figureheads. This task was facilitated by the growth of prison narratives throughout the 1960s. Through autobiographical writings, these texts problematized the prison. In their eloquence, these texts also argued, implicitly and explicitly, that prisoners possessed the capacity to be redeemed as political actors. These texts became increasingly identified with black authors and questions of race, even though the first nationally known prison writer was white and not especially concerned with race. Several years before the Black Panthers came into existence, anti-death penalty activists and the proto-New Left rallied around the case of Caryl Chessman. Chessman was convicted and sentenced to death in 1948 on “seventeen counts of robbery, sex perversion, and attempted rape.”<sup>70</sup> Chessman proclaimed his innocence and pointed to several irregularities in his trial. From prison, he penned a memoir: *Cell 2455 Death Row* appeared in 1954 and became a fast success. The publisher rushed the printing so that the book would appear before Chessman’s originally scheduled execution date, May 14, 1954. The success of the book helped win him a legal appeal. Chessman, now a best-selling author, published two more books in the next three years: *Trial by Ordeal* (1955) and *The Face of Justice* (1957). The books netted him a great deal of publicity and finances, which he used to hire lawyers to appeal his conviction. But to no avail; Chessman was executed on May 2, 1960. As Eric Cummins writes, “Reporters from around the world crowded into and around San Quentin prison”



on the night of Chessman's execution, as demonstrators held a vigil at the prison gates and as far away as Uruguay.<sup>71</sup> This public concern over the execution, including efforts of demonstrators to be physically proximate as a display of solidarity, marked the start of a new phase of interest in prison politics among the growing sense of activism in the Bay area—dynamics that, I will show, increased as the notion of prison(er) visibility achieved prominence in the early 1970s.

Other popular prison narratives emerged throughout the 1960s, including *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965, published posthumously), Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968). Read together, these texts exhibit a similar story arc: each one chronicles upbringing amidst urban poverty, experiences of racism and an explicit search for a positive racial identity in the context of an assumed framework of masculinity, and a personal/political redemption that comes during the author's incarceration for criminal acts.<sup>72</sup> While none of the books describe life in prison in great detail, the prison is a necessary setting in which each one transforms himself into a self-actualized, racially conscious man. The prison therefore emerges as a step on the ladder out of poverty, usually to a position of political radicalization. Such descriptions, in line with the widespread metaphoric use of the prison to connote oppression, made the prison visible as a conduit of transformation rather than as its own site. The explicitly stated concern of each author, however, was not the prison but racial oppression. Much as the city serves as the prominent setting for the author's upbringing, exposure to white supremacy, and descent into crime, the prison serves as the setting for the author's redemption, transcendence of racism, and ascent into political action.

Scholars have examined the texts by Malcolm and Cleaver alongside a host of other black prison narratives, including those of George Jackson, Huey Newton, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Stanley Tookie Williams, to argue for what such narratives reveal about the political thought of black protest as it changes spatial locations—from the South to the North, the streets to the prison.<sup>73</sup> Such valid arguments should not obscure reading these texts alongside their Puerto Rican (or other) counterparts. Due in large part to *Down These Mean Streets*, Thomas was a leading figure in what became the Nuyorican literary renaissance in the 1970s. Published a year after *La Vida* and the Division Street riot, *Down These Mean Streets* contributed to a growing visibility for Puerto Ricans as a distinct racialized group. The text had all the elements of the classic prison narrative—racialized poverty, criminal activity, incarceration, and redemption. Its similar attributes and the time of its publication put *Down These Mean Streets* on par with *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Claude Brown’s *Manchild in the Promised Land* (both published in 1965). Harlem featured prominently in all three as the racialized home for nonwhites whose temporary involvement in criminal activity marked their social isolation and civic disenfranchisement. Yet the black identity in *Down These Mean Streets* is explicitly Puerto Rican. Thomas squared off against both light-skinned Puerto Ricans and African Americans, attempting to forge a Spanish-inflected, proudly *borinquen* black identity, a distinctly Puerto Rican blackness.

In defining Puerto Ricans within the American racial landscape, the book was also a product of the existing racial schematics that had limited space for Puerto Ricans but could not conceive of a pan-Latino identity. Throughout the book, Thomas recounts his struggle to define himself as a dark-skinned Puerto Rican where whiteness was an

unattainable identity and “Negro” did not capture his experience. To those who called him a Negro, Thomas insists that he is Puerto Rican. Yet he only mentions in passing that he is half Cuban; he does not try to theorize or integrate his father’s heritage into his own identity claims, even though his parents were married and his father was an active part of his life. His identity formed in relationship to his mother and her background, and the demographics of the neighborhood in which he grew up. As such, Thomas’s narrative, like *La Vida*, sees identity formed and reproduced in relation to the Puerto Rican mother. In its tale of redemption, *Down These Mean Streets* repeats and refutes other aspects of *La Vida*. It describes the barrio through its individuals, rather than its institutions, and both narratives are replete with sexuality and Spanish slang. Whereas Lewis concludes his tome with the culture of poverty continuing in another generation of Puerto Rican migrants to New York City (especially the Bronx), Thomas ends his text triumphantly redeemed in Harlem. With a headline that implicitly endorsed Lewis’s negative and totalizing assessment of Puerto Rican life, the *New York Times* titled its review of Thomas’s book “One Who Got Away.”<sup>74</sup>

While he struggled to define a Puerto Rican identity as distinct from being black, Thomas’s text takes shape through sites common to narratives of black racial formation. Much of *Down These Mean Streets* takes place in Harlem—in the predominantly Puerto Rican section, often called “Spanish Harlem,” although Thomas refers to it only as Harlem. He speaks often of Harlem’s characteristics, both of its streets and its residents. Fleeing his family’s move to Long Island, Thomas even traveled South to understand race with and alongside blacks. While there, Thomas chronicled the sexual terrors of the Southern racial regime, including rape, segregation, and the fear of miscegenation.

Thomas was sometimes treated as a “Negro,” while at other times able to be treated differently. He is highly migratory throughout the book but within the boundaries of the United States, clearly marking Puerto Rican as an identity formed within American racial hierarchies and their sectional particularities. His understanding of race proceeded through the formative spatial locations and sexual fears that have marked blackness. But the pervasive use of Spanish slang and colloquialisms sets the text apart from Cleaver’s or Malcolm’s. The *New York Times* review of Thomas’s book argued that blacks and Puerto Ricans both spoke the language of the street, but Puerto Ricans had an additional barrier because they also spoke Spanish. At the same time, the review praised the book as a “linguistic event” for its use of Spanish and English. It also honored Thomas for making visible “those captive Americans of Spanish descent and tradition, the Puerto Ricans of Spanish Harlem.”<sup>75</sup> Thomas’s visibility was bound up in exposing the prison in which all U.S.-based Puerto Ricans were said to have lived.

Like Cleaver and Malcolm, Thomas transformed himself in prison. Central to the each author’s personal shift while in prison was the Nation of Islam, which had been recruiting prisoners throughout the 1950s. Malcolm X was arguably the most well-known leader and spokesman for the Nation throughout much of the 1950s until his departure from the group in 1963. Cleaver and Thomas, meanwhile, both joined and left the Nation while in prison. The Nation emphasized the prison as a vital place to recruit, especially since its founder, Elijah Muhammad, served time in prison for refusing to fight in World War II. The NOI’s turn to the prison coincided with greater organized discontent inside prisons across the country. Prisoners began self-organizing for expanded rights, including visitation and media access, as well as an end to guard abuse. Prisoners also began to

utilize lawsuits as another avenue to secure these rights. Imprisoned members of the Nation of Islam were heavily involved in this work, and the organization outside also provided support for dissident prisoners. Recruiting among prisoners also helped build the Nation on the outside, as prisoner recruits found the religious organization to be a supportive part of their re-entry into society upon release. It also altered the culture inside many prisons. For many black men, the Nation provided a base of racial solidarity and collectivity for black prisoners, one of the few forms of organization available inside. Even where the prison officials tried to forbid the group from meeting, adherents pressed authorities and filed legal challenges to secure religious freedom. The Nation initiated several landmark lawsuits in this period relating to prisoners' religious freedom. Additionally, Nation members in prison also protested guard violence against Muslim prisoners. In 1967, for instance, Black Muslims at San Quentin launched a work strike to protest a guard who had killed a Muslim prisoner.<sup>76</sup>

Despite its role in introducing black racial consciousness and organization as a component of prison radicalism, the Nation of Islam eschewed politics. As activism in prisons grew, especially as activists found themselves incarcerated for various activities undertaken in relation to social movements, Black Muslims avoided political fights or left the Nation to challenge prison authorities directly. Eldridge Cleaver had been a leader of the Nation of Islam while at San Quentin and at Folsom, two of California's largest and most notorious prisons. He joined while serving time for assault with intent to murder, stemming from a rape, and moved up the ranks of the organization. Malcolm X was the greatest boost to Cleaver's recruitment efforts inside. Like Cleaver would later do, Malcolm connected his history of incarceration with the racism endemic to the United

States. “If you’re black, you were born in jail, in the North as well as the South,” he told listeners on more than one occasion.<sup>77</sup> To the performative dimensions of the mid-1960s black public sphere, enacted through nonviolent civil disobedience, Malcolm’s view added a conceptual and discursive analytic of racism. He proposed a theory of white supremacy as a form of repression that did more than segregate or restrict civil rights. Rather, Malcolm defined racial oppression as an always already present form of violence in black American life.

This view also resonated with black prisoners, who, according to Cleaver, “look[ed] upon themselves as prisoners of war ... that their imprisonment is simply another form of the oppression which they have known all their lives.”<sup>78</sup> For Cleaver and other black prisoners, it was the politics and not the religion of Malcolm X that they found so appealing. When Malcolm began to more sharply differentiate between the two in the last year of his life, several of his followers followed suit. Cleaver distanced himself from the Nation after Malcolm’s censure and eventual departure. Cleaver left the Nation around the time Malcolm was assassinated on February 21, 1965, and the group diminished in influence in American prisons as the rising tide of black militancy exerted a greater pull.<sup>79</sup> Cleaver left prison in December 1966, looking for alternate modes of political action. He also left prison a writer.

In an effort to find at least spiritual redemption if not physical release, Cleaver turned to writing while in prison. He began communicating with a radical attorney in the Bay area, Beverly Axelrod. Impressed with his literary merits, Axelrod showed Cleaver’s letters to editors at *Ramparts*. The magazine, a Catholic publication with growing influence in the New Left, published some of his letters and articles in 1966, and its

editors joined a list of other well-known critics and writers, including Maxwell Geismar and Norman Mailer, in calling for Cleaver's release. Axelrod argued that his literary talents alone merited his release.<sup>80</sup> Cleaver walked out of prison in 1966 and immediately joined the staff of *Ramparts* magazine. He also joined the Black Panther Party, although he kept this association secret for fear of being sent back to prison. It was a short-lived secret. Cleaver's influence in the Panthers grew, especially as other leaders found themselves jailed.

His biggest notoriety, however, came when he published a book of his prison writings. *Soul on Ice* ranges from literary criticism and foreign policy analysis to love letters he sent to his lawyer. The book is a raw and angry display of black masculinity. In it, Cleaver defines the black freedom struggle as an effort to reclaim manhood: he challenged James Baldwin for displaying "self-hatred" by being insufficiently masculine and described his use of rape as a form of revenge, first against black women as a way to practice for his real target, white women.<sup>81</sup> Much as Piri Thomas utilizes some of the tropes found in the work of Oscar Lewis, so too does Eldridge Cleaver continue Daniel Moynihan's objectification of black women. Moynihan bemoaned their place as head of too many black families. *Soul on Ice* chronicles a shift in its author's view of black women. In the opening essay Cleaver describes black women as so powerless as to constitute sexual target practice. The last essay, an open letter addressed "To All Black Women, From All Black Men," describes women as queens—of a past African glory and a future black urban triumph. Indeed, Cleaver ends the book by urging black women to "put on your crown . . . and build a New City on these ruins" (p. 210) of America. Both the letter and the book, however, have as their explicit aim restoring black masculinity

from a white supremacy that castrates them literally and psychologically. Masculinity was his challenge to the gendered pathology of racist discourse.

*Soul on Ice* is not a linear memoir but a collection of essays and letters. The redemption of its author is more implicit than in the earlier texts, which describe literal or figurative moments of conversation. Cleaver's redemption is found first in his eloquence as a cultural critic and political analyst, and second in the fact that he has been released, even if the book's contents were all written in prison. Critics praised the book for its honesty and literary skill, and it had sold more than a million copies by 1970.<sup>82</sup> Its success made Cleaver a national spokesman of Black Power and black (male) rage. He continued to use that attention to build support for Newton's release, the Black Panther Party, and, by 1968, his presidential candidacy through the Peace and Freedom Party. Through newspapers and television, he sparred with Ronald Reagan, especially when Reagan tried to prevent Cleaver from teaching a class at the University of California at Berkeley. Cleaver fled the country in November 1968, after a judge ordered him to return to prison for his part in an April shootout with Oakland police following the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. Police killed a seventeen-year-old Black Panther in the incident. Cleaver took up residence first in Cuba and then in Algeria, establishing the International Section of the Black Panther Party and continuing to be a sought-after figure.<sup>83</sup>

In writings and speeches, Cleaver continued to extend Malcolm X's description of blackness as a site of incarceration. He developed this point directly through his experience as a former prisoner. In *Soul on Ice*, he noted that the metaphoric and the material dimensions of black incarceration would soon meet. "It is only a matter of time until the question of the prisoner's debt to society versus society's debt to the prisoner is



injected forcefully into national and state politics, into the civil and human rights struggle, and into the consciousness of the body politic. It is an explosive issue which goes to the very root of America's system of justice, the structure of criminal law, the prevailing beliefs and attitudes toward the convicted felon."<sup>84</sup> By 1970, Cleaver's prediction had indeed come true as a national phenomenon. Even before then, evidence of a growing prison movement could be seen. *Soul on Ice* hit the bookshelves on February 28, 1968—two weeks after San Quentin prisoners went on strike.

### Prisoner Activism Becomes Visible

Narratives by former prisoners published in the mid- to late-1960s contributed to introducing the prison as an institution of vital importance to contemporary experiences of race. These texts did so without making the prison their central concern. Yet their publications created space for the activism that had been building inside prisons to break through the walls into the broader public landscape. In addition to the new space available to talk about prisons, prisoners themselves had been steadily more oppositional. This activism had been going on with the Nation of Islam since the 1950s but building in scale and quantity such that the Nation was, by 1968, one of several contending factions within prison. Word of prison activism passed through a few sympathetic outsiders who worked in the prison, media reports (first through the underground press and ultimately being picked up by traditional media), and popular culture. These forces coalesced in California, especially the San Francisco Bay Area, and then projected onto the country overall.

In particular, San Quentin became an iconic image in the late 1960s. It was one of a handful of prisons across the country whose visibility served as a mnemonic device through which the public began to understand prisons. Particularly after the closure of Alcatraz in 1963, San Quentin was one of the most emblematic prisons of the California prison system, which had been praised as a national leader in corrections policy since World War II. Like Alcatraz, San Quentin was a high security prison located near San Francisco. Its proximity to the city contributed to Quentin's visibility: it was close both to one of the New Left epicenters and to a major media hub. San Quentin was, therefore, the place where *San Francisco Chronicle* reporters conducted their three-month investigation of life inside California prisons in 1971.<sup>85</sup> Tension had long permeated San Quentin, both racially between black and white prisoners and politically between prisoners and guards (who were almost all white). Prisoners initiated a newsletter six months after guards killed a prisoner to end a fight in the yard. *The Outlaw* was a one-to-four-page—it varied by issue—stenciled newsletter that printed prisoner grievances and mocked the prison administration. When prison officials tried to shut it down, prisoners sent the text to outside supporters who “had it mimeographed and mailed back into the prison.” Prisoner clerks in the mailroom received the contraband and distributed it to “key cells in each cell block during timed intervals.”<sup>86</sup> *The Outlaw* called for the February 1968 strike as a “Convict Unity Holiday.” The ten demands of this holiday included parole reform, better food and living conditions, increased wages, moving convicted child sexual offenders to mental institutions.<sup>87</sup>

News of the proposed strike reached the outside due to a UC Berkeley graduate student who was doing interviews at San Quentin. He saw the proposal and informed

several newspapers in the Bay area. Only one was interested: the *Berkeley Barb* was one of the most well-known and widely read underground newspapers of the era, a counterculture publication that reported on the various political movements that called the Bay area home. The *Barb* promoted the strike in advance, printing the prisoners' grievance list alongside news of the strike on its front page, and reprinting *The Outlaw* as a special insert. The *Barb* touted its "exclusive" story, writing that this incident was the first time prisoners can "tell their plans and purposes to the public in advance of their action, before the official version is spoon-fed to the mass media."<sup>88</sup> As a result, prison authorities gave *Barb* readers in their custody 29 days in solitary confinement. (According to the *Barb*, a similar punishment awaited those caught with a copy of *The Outlaw*.)<sup>89</sup> The *Barb* described its own coverage of the strike as a vital ingredient in what the prisoners were trying to accomplish: "Their only weapon is to make their story known, hoping that public opinion will pressure honest state legislators to make a thorough investigation of the California prison system, without favoritism to the entrenched bureaucracy."<sup>90</sup> A *Barb* reporter also confronted Warden Nelson during a public lecture he gave the night before the strike, challenging the prison's censorship of radical literature.<sup>91</sup>

The *Barb*'s primary audience was outside of prison, and its coverage helped bring more than 400 people to the gates of San Quentin for the February 15 strike. The Grateful Dead brought their instruments, amplifiers and a generator. Along with the Phoenix and members of Country Joe and the Fish, the Dead performed a free concert on a flatbed truck for the strikers inside and the protestors outside. Twenty percent of the San Quentin prison population, about 700 people, went on strike that day, going back to their cells

rather than to their jobs. Prisoners hearing the makeshift concert learned of the possibility for inside/outside collaboration. Seeing their concerns matter to activists outside of prison, 75 percent of San Quentin's prisoners (more than 2,600 people) went on strike the next day and for the rest of the week. The Peace and Freedom Party provided a bus to transport musicians and demonstrators to the gates of San Quentin on February 15; its members continued to hold sympathy protests everyday at noon for the duration of the strike.<sup>92</sup> Protesting in front of the prison visibly connected the institution to its spatial location. By the early 1970s, it was a regularly utilized tactic of prison protest. Its prevalence frightened authorities that the visible challenge to incarceration would lead radicals to attack the prison militarily. As a result, San Quentin officials devised an emergency plan to shut down the roads leading to prison if necessary to prevent a "storming of the Bastille."<sup>93</sup>

Both prisoners and the prison administration saw the strike's visibility as its greatest asset. As a result, *The Outlaw*, as the most identifiable voice of prisoner dissidence, became the site of a power struggle: the warden tried to shut it down while prisoners used it to agitate further. It continued publishing after the strike, lampooning San Quentin Warden Louis "Red" Nelson, who had transferred to Folsom prison several people he suspected of being behind the publication. The barriers to organizing in prison included the isolated structure of prison life as well as the violent racial divisions among prisoners. Prisoner organizing needed to overcome both in order to press for redress. Publicity, including through *The Outlaw*, was a crucial venue for naming these barriers. That summer, the anonymous editor/writer called for another "unity day" that August. This time, prisoners stayed in their cells on a weekend, effectively boycotting voluntary

activities rather than labor. This tactic made it harder for prison officials to discipline the dissidents, and gave the strikers a symbolic victory. It showed a certain tactical sophistication, whereby prisoners were able to flex a collective muscle while circumventing reprisals.

In calling for the August strike, *The Outlaw* argued that overcoming the racial barriers of the prison were central to accomplishing such coalition. “We permit them to keep us at each others['] throats. A handful of us are calling for UNITY [sic]. This is for a purpose. We want to crush this empire that has been erected on our suffering. ... The time has once again come to speak of UNITY. Not partial UNITY. Not meaningless nor simless [sic] UNITY, but whole and purposeful UNITY. A UNITY that includes every man wearing blue denim, a UNITY that includes every man that is aware of the need to overthrow the CDC [California Department of Corrections] if we are to ever again be dealt with as man and not as chattle [sic].” Such unity, the author argued, would ensure that outside supporters would take up the prisoners’ message and embarrass the prison regime.<sup>94</sup> That is, if prisoners united across racial lines, they could more adequately press for their demands while allies outside of prison confronted the institution itself. Publicizing the barriers prisoners faced, then, was aimed both at other prisoners and at outside supporters, who reprinted and distributed *The Outlaw* through the underground press. The explicit call for multiracial unity appealed to prisoners’ desire to be heard by outsiders, using the possibility of popular support as an incentive—a carrot to confront the stick of the guards.

The two strikes frightened the prison administration. In response, officials called for greater surveillance of the various Left organizations and periodicals, especially

among blacks, Chicanos and students. Specifying these groups identified who prison officials saw as both influences on and audiences of prisoner visibility. Prisoners were already limited in their media access, and San Quentin officials were still searching for the furtive editor of *The Outlaw*. But Associate Warden James Park reasoned that officials could curtail prison activism by monitoring those who supported it—and therefore gain insight into the political thought that was inspiring rebellious prisoners—with the ultimate aim of eliminating an audience for prisoner visibility. Irrate and impressed by prisoners’ organizing, Park argued that the two strikes at San Quentin “demonstrated, perhaps for the first time in American penal history, that outsiders could conspire with prisoners to cripple the normal operation of a prison.”<sup>95</sup> Park called for a new administrative strategy to combat spreading dissension in California’s prison system, including the Left’s influence. He correctly predicted that people on both sides of prison walls would see disturbances in prison as “but one tactical event in a larger strategy of social revolution.”<sup>96</sup> This revolutionary impulse in prisons, he said, was being heavily influenced by the “racial and ethnic consciousness” among black and Chicano political movements and by the “youth revolt ... in all industrialized nations.”<sup>97</sup> Park was particularly concerned about the role of publicity in what he called “the new prison rebellion.” Looking to the 1968 strikes, he identified “the underground press and radio” as initiators of this publicity that other media outlets would then pick up. He encouraged prison administrators to monitor the underground press, study the revolutionary thinkers prisoners were reading (who he specified as Franz Fanon, Che Guevara, Malcolm X, and Mao Tse-Tung), and keep tabs on Black Power and Chicano organizing.<sup>98</sup>

While prison officials encouraged greater surveillance, radicals practiced greater spectacle. Throughout 1968, both prisoner organizing and campaigns supporting radicals facing charges articulated racism and confinement as mutually constitutive. Between the Panthers and the prisoners, California was central to the deployment nationally of prison as site and symbol of racial formation and contestation. The following year, a different kind of occupation in California showed that prison walls could not keep determined activists *out*, even if they kept prisoners *in*. An ad hoc group calling itself Indians of All Tribes occupied the infamous prison island of Alcatraz beginning on November 20, 1969. They stayed there until June 11, 1971. Once the highest security prison in the country, Alcatraz, located off the coast of San Francisco, had been closed since 1963. The occupiers reasoned that only through seizing a physical prison, even a closed one, could the daily imprisonment of Indian life be made visible.<sup>99</sup> The occupation was a mixture of well-scripted protest and chaotic spontaneity. Liberated Alcatraz was home to a motley crew of militants and hippies, a gathering of the disaffected from among many Indian tribes. The group included several veterans, who kept the Coast Guard from docking at the island. The occupation generated international media attention. Berkeley's KPFA radio station gave a half-hour show to an Indians of All Tribes spokesman five days a week. The program was called "Radio Free Alcatraz" and re-broadcast by other Pacifica stations across the country.<sup>100</sup> A steady stream of donated food and supplies sustained those now voluntarily living on the rock. Richard Oakes, one of the spokesmen for the occupiers, called the prison a symbol of hope. Once again, the metaphor was the message: according to scholars Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Warrior, "Indians held a brilliant, astonishing metaphor—a defiant, isolated Rock surrounded by foreboding seas,

a reservationlike [sic] piece of real estate with stark conditions, and a prison that represented the incarcerated spirit of Indian people everywhere.”<sup>101</sup> A flyer in support declared “Alcatraz is not an island . . . Alcatraz is an idea” (ellipsis in original.)<sup>102</sup>

The Alcatraz occupation extended what was becoming a familiar connection: the young Indians made racism visible through dramatizing the space of confinement. Emphasizing the spaces of constraint invited greater attention to those who occupied them—voluntarily in the case of Alcatraz, involuntarily in the case of residents of ghettos, barrios, reservations, and actual prisons. At the same time, the Alcatraz occupiers attempted to turn the space of confinement, represented by the most famous prison in America, into a space of freedom by the mini-commune they created. This effort initially appeared successful, only to be deemed a failure as the occupation continued: resources and patience diminished on the island, and support among outsiders, including the media, decreased as the months wore on. But the audacity of the action continued to inspire other militants. From liberating prison territory, some extrapolated a belief that prisoners themselves could be liberated from the shackles of the state.

The always-brash Eldridge Cleaver, made more strident by the success of *Soul on Ice* and his position as spokesman for the Black Panthers and candidate for the Peace and Freedom Party, discussed being temporarily released from prison for his role in an April 1968 shootout as if it was a personal decision rather than the result of a legal victory. “I would never allow anyone to place restrictions on my freedom of opinion or expression,” he said in a press conference after being freed on bail following two months in prison.<sup>103</sup> His flight from the country that fall and his role subsequently in establishing the Black Panthers internationally, signaled a further declaration of Cleaver’s ability to trump the



state's attempt to incarcerate him. Cleaver first helped make prisons visible with his writings. Now he tried to turn his legal predicament into proof that radicals had more power, including international, than the American criminal justice system could muster. His wife, Kathleen Cleaver, told the press that the Panthers would not let the government jail Eldridge.<sup>104</sup> She also argued that her husband deserved support precisely because he “initiated almost single-handedly the now massive support campaign for Huey P. Newton.” In other words, Cleaver deserved support against political repression because he was a talented organizer against political repression.<sup>105</sup> This line of reasoning established repression as an ever-expanding cycle: those who fought it, faced it. Fighting it meant to enlist public support by making visible the institutions and victims of state repression. It involved naming a set of juridical practices as state violence and attempting to develop a shared consciousness around that fact through promoting that narrative.

At the same time, however, fighting repression also meant constructing possibilities for resistance. Doing that required some sense of empowerment—for if the state was as massive and violent as the narrative of repression held, political activists needed to believe that their movements were strong enough to overcome such systems. Particularly in the late 1960s, such empowerment was to be found in a heroic masculinity that could, as the Alcatraz occupiers demonstrated, turn the space of confinement into one of liberation. In his defense of Cleaver, *Ramparts* editor Robert Scheer wrote that even if Cleaver were to be re-imprisoned, he had attained a freedom that transcended captivity. He noted also that Cleaver so troubled “white America” because he had been so public a figure.<sup>106</sup> As with Cleaver's depiction of the jailed Newton, Scheer argued that Cleaver faced persecution for eloquently and visibly articulating the grievances of black

people everywhere. Transcending the confines of prison, however, was not purely discursive. Rather, it was embodied through spectacular actions where people physically evaded imprisonment. Cleaver's successful escape from the country led to increasingly dramatic tactics in the effort to break out of what he dubbed the prison of "Babylon" America. Indeed, the articulation of racism and confinement increasingly defined liberation in international (and internationalist) terms, such that escaping prison could only happen when one fled the United States in favor of a Third World country. On the international stage, the use of spectacle against confinement bolstered the status of late 1960s American social movements. Through embodied acts of liberation, radicals in the United States practiced an insurgent sovereignty: they demonstrated their own power, as well as their critique of existing power relations, through the freedom of prisoners.<sup>107</sup>

By 1970, for instance, several Black Panthers had hijacked airplanes to Cuba rather than face criminal charges, and the Weather Underground helped the high priest of LSD, Timothy Leary, escape from a minimum security prison in San Luis Obispo, California, and take up refuge with Cleaver in Algeria.<sup>108</sup> The antiwar movement also utilized such dramatic action, if without the use of violence. Beginning in 1967, prominent antiwar activists traveled to Vietnam at the invitation of the National Liberation Front to bring home captured American soldiers. The NLF released several American POWs in the custody of the U.S. antiwar movement because it recognized the NLF's political authority while the U.S. government did not. It was in part a public relations move: the American antiwar movement and the NLF could both claim to be doing their part to care for American soldiers against the callous government, who continued to send young men into danger for a battle they would not win. It provided

visibility to the NLF and the American antiwar movement as the only ones with the best interests of soldiers in mind. The move also lent the antiwar movement a sense of international diplomacy in the service of freeing the incarcerated. Prominent antiwar activists such as Daniel Berrigan, William Sloane Coffin, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Howard Zinn, and others led these missions to bring back captured American soldiers. Over the next five years, the NLF freed several POWs in groups of three that antiwar activists ferried back to the United States.<sup>109</sup> As Natasha Zaretsky shows, the POW issue became ever more strategic to those who supported the war as well. In an effort to rebuild support for the war as a site of national unity, and to recapture the antiwar movement's momentum earned by liberating prisoners, Nixon increasingly used the need to rescue American POWs as a tautological rationale for continuing the war. POWs in popular culture, including through memoirs and POW/MIA paraphernalia, aided this endeavor.<sup>110</sup> In retrospect, such actions showed imprisonment to be a more contested terrain than partisans realized at the time.

### The Prison in Popular Culture

Prison did not become a salient site of contestation through avowedly political means alone. The 1960s counterculture celebrated criminality in the form of a romanticized “outlaw” image, cultivated in popular films of the era such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *Cool Hand Luke* (1967), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), and *Easy Rider* (1969). These movies featured young, attractive actors whose characters robbed banks, sold drugs and otherwise disrespected traditional authority. They may not have gotten away with it, but they had a good time flouting the law in the process.<sup>111</sup>

These films built on longstanding cultural celebrations of outlawry and individual rebel-heroes. The biggest difference in these late 1960s iterations was the countercultural style found among the protagonists. Unlike the political movements examined above, the outlaw in these cultural texts was not black or Puerto Rican but white. Therefore, these movies had greater cache among the white New Left and counterculture than they did among people of color. But, as with the bravado found in *Soul on Ice*, the swagger of the cinematic outlaws of the late 1960s celebrated a heroic masculinity of the anti-hero. Movies and memoir—and, as I will argue presently, music—provided visible, popular narratives of a rebellious heroism to be found among people previously written off as degenerates: rapists and robbers specifically, or “the prisoner” generally as a figure. As with the Panthers’ embrace of the lumpen, these cultural texts created visibility for reinterpreting criminality as heroism or rebellion.

While these films rewarded an idealized criminality, other popular culture products focused attention specifically on the prison. This cultural visibility of prison arrived from a surprising source: country music. In 1968, singer Johnny Cash fulfilled a longstanding dream of his by recording a live concert at California’s Folsom prison. Cash had wanted to record an album in prison since the early 1960s, but it was not until 1968 that Columbia Records agreed with the singer’s unusual proposal. The arrival of Bob Johnson, who had produced such rebel troubadours as Bob Dylan and Aretha Franklin, at Columbia was most immediately responsible for the company granting Cash’s request, although John Hayes argues that films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* and Merle Haggard’s hit singles about prison life also contributed.<sup>112</sup> The album appeared in May 1968—a time when students at Columbia University fought with police in an attempt to shut down their

university one month after they had completed a student strike, and when nine antiwar activists from the Catholic left were arrested for burning draft records with napalm in Catonsville, Maryland.<sup>113</sup> While *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison* was the first recording of a prison concert, it was not his first in-house show at the big house. Cash and his band had performed thirty concerts at various prisons in the ten years preceding the Folsom concert, including other concerts at Folsom.<sup>114</sup> Other, less well-known artists also performed concerts in prisons across the country; such concerts were routine in 1960s prisons. Releasing the concert as an album, however, changed the meaning of Cash's performance. The prisoners were both audience members for and minor participants in the album. While hardly insurgent, such visibility nonetheless interrupted the social death of incarceration by showing prisoners emotive positively. The clapping, laughing, and cheering of prisoners gives the album its authenticity as being a live recording while also showcasing prisoners as, literally, an active audience.

Folsom was picked as the site to record an in-prison concert in large part because of Cash's 1955 song "Folsom Prison Blues." The song was an intertextual amalgamation of a B-movie Cash saw while stationed at an Air Force base in postwar Germany, *Inside the Walls of Folsom Prison*, and the song "Crescent City Blues" by composer Gordon Jenkins. (It was also plagiarized: the tune of Cash's song was identical to "Crescent City Blues.")<sup>115</sup> The song was released as a single in 1955 and became his first Country Top Five Hit. But it achieved newfound fame following the 1968 concert, which made Cash popular as a crossover artist, successful beyond his niche country music fans. His rebellious image, epitomized in the prison concert, led the *New York Times* to label him the "first angry man of country singers."<sup>116</sup> Cash cultivated this image in the concert with

songs expressing yearning, heartbreak, and gallows humor. He implied, both at the concert and in the album's liner notes, that he had been in prison himself, although his skirmishes with the law were minor and never amounted to more than a couple of days in jail (never prison). Cash ventriloquized prisoners to account for his own feelings of confinement, a phenomena that, as I will argue in the next chapter, would grow in prevalence in the 1970s. "I think prison songs are popular because most of us are living in one kind of prison or another," Cash told a reporter, "and whether we know it or not the words of a song about someone who is actually in prison speak for a lot of us who might appear not to be, but really are."<sup>117</sup>

Cash's attempt to speak for or represent prisoners was not entirely symbolic. The last song on the album made Cash a ventriloquist for at least a particular prisoner, as he performed "Greystone Chapel," a song written by Folsom inmate Glen Sherley. This song, like the concert itself, made visible confinement as an oppressive force while positioning the confined man as a creative being endowed with potential to contribute to society. The concert made prisoner voices central to prison visibility, and provided evidence of their capacity to be cultural producers. According to Hayes, "In the Folsom show, Cash depicted himself in solidarity with the prison audience—not a benevolent crusader seeking their uplift, not a moralist reprimanding them for their crimes, but rather 'one of them,' a fellow prisoner giving utterance to the host of human longings retained by those whom the social order had cast out."<sup>118</sup> The concert marked a cultural iteration of what radicals would perform in a more overtly political register in the years to come. And yet, Cash's performance as "one of them" was mitigated by the corporate structures that turned his concert into a commercial product. Appealing to prevailing stereotypes of

prisoners as violence-crazed men, Columbia Records added applause in the post-production editing to what became one of Cash's most famous lines, "I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die."<sup>119</sup> Thus, even as the album depicted prisoners as active in the realm of culture, it surreptitiously showed that they were not the sole authors of their cultural participation. It further troubled the establishment of cultural authenticity: the album's realness owed to what seemed to be the genuine interaction between Cash and his audience of prisoners, an interaction that turned out to be subject to the ideological constrictions of prisoners as violence-crazed.

The country star returned to the California prison system the next year to record another live album. Due to the popularity of *At Folsom*—the album became a best-seller and rocketed the singer to mass popularity—*Johnny Cash At San Quentin* was recorded not only for an album but also by video by Granada TV from England. Whether due to his growing fame or the added cameras, Cash's style was more brash this time around; he courted the prisoners' applause and jeers by his taunts of the guards. He cursed. He angrily stuck up his middle finger to the video cameras.<sup>120</sup> In the second concert, Cash displayed that he was "one of them" in a way that conjured an image of prisoner life through overly affected gestures of vulgarity. He was greeted with as much applause as in the more restrained concert at Folsom. As with Cash, the prisoners' performance could also be due to the presence of cameras or their own growing visibility. *At San Quentin*, both performer and prisoner acted more in line with the rebellious image circulating about them both. There were also some continuities with the *Folsom* concert, and he displayed an almost pious restraint in performing a gospel song and telling listeners about his faith and his recent trip to Israel. And, as with *Folsom*, Cash still sung of travel and a

desire for mobility to the captive men at San Quentin. Yet he also played songs that more stridently claimed the mantle of outlaw than he did in the Folsom concert. One song, “Wanted Man,” which Cash co-wrote with counterculture singer Bob Dylan, described a man wanted in cities and towns across the country. Yet this wanted man remained free—an elusive outlaw, whose ego, like that of Bonnie and Clyde, grew with the expanding list of cities where he was wanted for unspecified crimes.

As with the *Folsom* album, Cash sang a song named after the prison at which he was performing. “Folsom Prison Blues” follows a classic blues trope of longing—here, a prisoner’s yearning for freedom and mobility. The song “San Quentin,” however, is more country than blues. It strikes a more strident posture in challenging the institution itself, and Cash introduced it by saying that he knew that whatever possible disagreements they may have, he and the prisoners shared in the sentiments that the song expressed: “San Quentin, may you rot and burn in hell/ May your walls fall and may I live to tell/ May all the world forget you ever stood/ And the whole world will regret you did no good/ San Quentin, you’ve been living hell to me.” Prisoners demanded an instant encore of the song. The video recording of the concert reveals an almost all-white audience cheering and jeering alongside Cash throughout. Cash’s performance was equally successful on the outside: *At San Quentin* sold even more copies upon release than *At Folsom* and topped the *Billboard* charts for four weeks.<sup>121</sup>

Johnny Cash’s two live prison albums transformed the country singer, briefly, into a prison activist. Cash demonstrated that contact with prisons could transform otherwise nonpolitical or even conservative figures—Cash was an ardent supporter of Richard Nixon—into anti-prison activists, however briefly. His first prison concerts in



the 1950s were charitable efforts for the prisoners. But after *Folsom* and the positive response he received for it, including from prisoners in different parts of the country, Cash became more critical of the prisons as an institution. “I didn’t go into it thinking about it as a ‘crusade,’” he told one writer. “I mean, I just don’t think prisons do any good. . . . Nothing good ever came out a prison.”<sup>122</sup> He continued performing at prisons throughout the country and received a lot of requests from other prisoners asking him to play at various institutions.<sup>123</sup> Cash donated \$10,000 each to the Inmate Welfare Fund at Folsom and San Quentin in 1969, although muckraking journalist Jessica Mitford later revealed that such funds were pilfered by the administration.<sup>124</sup> He helped Glen Sherley, who wrote the song “Greystone Chapel” that Cash used to close his Folsom concert, get out of prison and find work as a musician. (Not necessarily in that order: Sherley recorded a live album at Vacaville prison before his release.) Along with Sherley, Cash testified at the U.S. Senate in 1972 in support of prison reform.<sup>125</sup> Cash’s indictments of San Quentin also provided inspiration to prison activists. At the release party for George Jackson’s book *Soledad Brother*, held at the gates of San Quentin where Jackson was then incarcerated, one of the attendees yelled at the prison gates ““Like Johnny Cash said, “San Quentin, I hope you rot; you never did no good.”””<sup>126</sup>

The concerts expressed solidarity with prisoners and made prisoners visible as consumers and, in a limited capacity, artistic creators. The selection of prisons in which to record albums, Folsom and San Quentin, also proved prescient in terms of the insurgency growing within the California prison system (and these prisons specifically). The concerts demonstrated that prisons were a vital theater of politics. The most prominent political actors in this theater, however, were not typical country music fans,

not the mostly white men who can be seen in the video version of *At San Quentin*. Indeed, the overwhelming whiteness of the audience was not true of the prisons in which he was performing, much less of the burgeoning prison movement that included people on both sides of the walls. Cash made no mention of race in any of his songs or his liner notes, so his identification with his imprisoned audience cannot clearly be said to transcend the bitter racial divisions that defined prison life. In the context of the ongoing racial violence between black, white and Chicano prisoners that characterized the California prison system, Cash's declaration before performing the song "San Quentin" that he was there "to do what *you* want me to do and what I want to do" rather than the what the record company wanted, can be seen as an expression of solidarity with captive white men struggling not just for freedom from but for agency within the prison system. This declaration could be seen as a further celebration of rebellious individualism against the confines of prison regulation. It was not a pronounced political stance. Yet even in Cash's race-blind approach to a historically white fan base in the racially polarized world of prison, the act of identifying with prisoners at all contributed to making prisoners visible in a political culture that had, by 1969, converged public interest on the prison: its meaning, its practices, and its captives.

### Seeing the Prison in the 1960s

Beginning in 1968, there was a four-year period of collective disturbances in American prisons—riots or rebellions, depending on one's perspective—much as the preceding four years saw the spread of urban riots.<sup>127</sup> The shift was not just coincidental. As urban riots put the spotlight on cities while politicians discussed the Great Society

programs to facilitate their uplift, so too did prison riots provide a rupture in the mediascape while Richard Nixon and others increasingly invoked “law and order” as the solution to the nation’s ills. Disturbances in the city invited studies of the character of its darker residents; Moynihan and Lewis each attempted to describe black and Puerto Rican pathologies to help the war on poverty address the criminal delinquency of those it pledged to uplift. Similarly, the visibility of political dissidents and the prison itself proceeded through the cultural texts produced by former prisoners and others celebrating criminal outlawry. The amalgamation of political protest and cultural production cracked the hermetic seal of incarceration. Such publicity owed heavily to the widespread use of nonviolent civil disobedience by the civil rights movement in the early 1960s. However as the country began to focus more on black protest outside the South, the urban North emerged as a central site where politics and culture converged on the prison.

By 1970 the prison had become one of the premier sites of black protest, not just the preordained consequence of it. The various projects described above initiated a shift in visibility from the activist facing trial to the prisoner facing persecution. Prison was now a new beginning of political contestation; it was neither off limits nor out of sight. It could no longer count on invisibility as a mechanism of its control. In response, radicals championed greater spectacularity to further undermine institutions of domination while officials strategized for greater surveillance. Both approaches appealed to visibility as a mechanism determining the exercise of power. The first defined visibility as an attempt at publicity, whereas the second called for a targeted visibility of control. Both approaches recognized that visibility was intimately connected to how diverse publics understood

prisons and prisoners—and, through them, how society understood racial formation and the meaning of America.

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<sup>1</sup> Houston Baker, “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere,” in The Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008); Peniel Joseph, *Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008). For a critique of the “long civil rights era” approach, see Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, “The ‘Long Movement’ as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies,” *Journal of African American History* 92 (2007), pp. 265-288.

<sup>3</sup> César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007), pp. 179-266. See also Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); José Ramón Sánchez, *Boricua Power: A Political History of Puerto Ricans in the United States* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), pp. 96-128.

<sup>4</sup> Sonia Lee, “‘Proud to be Maladjusted’: Puerto Ricans, Black Americans, and the Building of a Latino Civil Rights Movement,” unpublished manuscript, in author’s files, quoted with permission.

<sup>5</sup> Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 179. My discussion of Moynihan and Lewis is indebted to Briggs’ astute reading of these texts. For an alternate examination of the importance gender and sexuality play in Puerto Rican migration, see Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> For a sampling of the debate at the time, see Lee Rainwater and William Yancy, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967). For a more recent analysis, see James T. Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America’s Struggle Over Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Other contemporary studies include C. Wright Mills, Clarence O. Senior and Rose Kohn Goldsen, *The Puerto Rican Journey: New York’s Newest Migrant* (New York: Harper & Brother Publishers, 1950); Oscar Handlin, *The Newcomers: Negroes and Puerto Ricans in a Changing Metropolis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); and Elena Padilla, *Up From Puerto Rico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958). Michael Harrington also discusses Puerto Ricans in his book, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Touchstone, 1997 [1962]).

<sup>9</sup> Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1965), p. xii.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce D’Arcus, “Protest, Scale and Publicity: The FBI and the H Rap Brown Act,” *Antipode* 35: 4 (2003) pp. 718-741.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of the liberal involvement in starting the war on crime, including the Safe Streets Act of 1968, see Flamm, *Law and Order*. See also Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 1999). For more on Johnson and civil rights, see James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 524-561.

<sup>12</sup> Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Jon Wiener, ed., *Conspiracy in the Streets: The Extraordinary Trial of the Chicago Eight* (New York: The New Press, 2006), p. 14. More generally, see John Schultz, *The Chicago Conspiracy Trial* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009). Six of the Chicago 8 were well-known organizers—Rennie Davis, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and Bobby Seale—and were also charged with inciting violence in addition to conspiracy. The other two men, Lee Froines and John Weiner, faced additional charges for instructing others how to make “incendiary devices.”

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<sup>14</sup> The case, along with that of Huey Newton and later George Jackson, was a touchstone of Bay Area prison radicalism in 1969-70. See Marjorie Heins, *Strictly Ghetto Property: The Story of Los Siete de la Raza* (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1972).

<sup>15</sup> Hoffman can be heard to utter this remark in the part-documentary *Chicago 10* (Paramount Home Entertainment, 2008). See also Abbie Hoffman, *The Autobiography of Abbie Hoffman* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2000); and Jonah Raskin, *For the Hell of It: The Life and Times of Abbie Hoffman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Peter Richardson, *A Bomb in Every Issue: How the Short, Unruly Life of Ramparts Magazine Changed America* (New York: The New Press, 2009), p. 168.

<sup>17</sup> See Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1991). Dave Dellinger, the least theatrical of the Chicago 8 defendants—who was, not coincidentally, the oldest of the group—was also the only one who tried to place his body between Seale and the bailiffs after the judge ordered Seale gagged. The other defendants vocally protested but did not try to physically intervene; Dellinger was, of course, unsuccessful in stopping the bailiffs from carrying out the judge's order.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the New Haven case, see Yohuru Williams, *Black Politics, White Power: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Black Panthers in New Haven* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008). The primary variation to this drawing is one of Seale bound but not gagged, strapped in an electric chair. Both versions appeared in several left-wing publications and flyers used in the campaign for his release.

<sup>19</sup> Cf., Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004); Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2009); Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*. (Boston: South End Press, 1988); Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers* (Boston: South End Press, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> Eldridge Cleaver, "Affidavit #1, I am 33 Years Old," in Robert Scheer, ed., *Eldridge Cleaver: Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* (New York: Vintage/Ramparts, 1969), p. 9. On page 12, Cleaver describes his April 6, 1968, arrest and writes that only the presence of black witnesses spared his life at the hands of police who had killed a seventeen-year-old Panther named Bobby Hutton and shot Cleaver in the leg. This rhetoric, imploring supporters to "see," continued to be used in building support for Newton. For example, a flyer announcing a demonstration in support of Huey Newton was titled "Come see about Huey." It appears in David Hilliard, ed., *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service, 1967-1980* (New York: Atria Books, 2007), p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> Cf., Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 2006); Ken Knabb, ed., *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> From a speech Hampton gave, shown in *The Murder of Fred Hampton* (Chicago Film Group, 1969).

<sup>23</sup> This articulation, in fact, helps shape contemporary definitions of racism as, in Gilmore's phrasing, "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death." See Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> Black Student Revolution Conference, May 15, 1970, press release, Harlem Black Panther Party (hereafter HBPP), Folder 21, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

<sup>25</sup> The demands are printed in *National Strike Information Center Newsletter*, number 8, May 12, 1970, p. 1. The number of strikes adhering to the demands appears in issue 12, May 22, 1970, pp. 2-4. That issue also included two-and-a-half pages of material about the Panthers to bolster the solidarity dimension of the strike. Both issues can be found in HBPP, Folder 22. The strike demands were formulated in New Haven, where Seale, Ericka Huggins, and seven other Black Panthers were then facing trial. More generally on the student strike, see George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987), pp. 117-174.

<sup>26</sup> This description of Newton's arrest and the campaign for his freedom builds on Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), pp. 205-240.

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- <sup>27</sup> For more on Scottsboro, see Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979 [1969]).
- <sup>28</sup> Rebecca N. Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law: Anti-Lynching and Labor Defense in U.S. Radical History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 2, 3.
- <sup>29</sup> For more on SNCC, see Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). For more on Carmichael, see Stokely Carmichael with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure)* (New York: Scribner, 2003).
- <sup>30</sup> James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997 [1972]), p. 526.
- <sup>31</sup> Eldridge Cleaver, ed., *The Genius of Huey P. Newton* (San Francisco: Black Panther Minister of Information, [n.d., circa 1969], in HBPP, Folder 6.
- <sup>32</sup> Cleaver, "Affidavit #1, I am 33 Years Old," in Scheer, ed., *Eldridge Cleaver*, p. 8.
- <sup>33</sup> See Edward P. Morgan, "Media Culture and the Public Memory of the Black Panther Party," in Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams, eds., *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 324-373.
- <sup>34</sup> Once it appeared on the cover, Newton's picture remained. Upon his release from prison, he feared threats to his leadership from other members of the party and moved to make his position more secure and unimpeachable. By 1972, he added "Supreme Commander" to his title. For personal reflections on his leadership style, including his post-prison paranoia, see David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1993) and Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992).
- <sup>35</sup> This perspective saturated the defense efforts for Newton. See, for instance, American Whites for the Defense of Huey P. Newton, "Who is Huey P. Newton?" circa 1969, and The Black Panther Ministry of Information, *Bulletin* numbers 1 and 2, both in New Left Collection (hereafter NLC), Box 56, Folder: Black Panther Party, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.
- <sup>36</sup> See, for instance, his essays in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak* (New York: De Capo Press, 2002 [1970]), pp. 39-75.
- <sup>37</sup> The mandate is reprinted in Reginald Major, *A Panther is a Black Cat* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 2006 [1971]), pp. 294-295.
- <sup>38</sup> The quotes are from Scheer, "Introduction," in Scheer, ed., *Eldridge Cleaver: Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, p. xxxi.
- <sup>39</sup> Robert Reid-Pharr, *Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire, and the Black American Intellectual* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), pp. 121-145.
- <sup>40</sup> Yoruba, "Huey's Out to Stay!" *Palante* volume 2, number 9, August 15, 1970, p. 10. In the middle of the page, next to a well-circulated picture of Newton holding a pump-action shotgun with a bandolier across his chest, the article included an excerpt of the Young Lords' political platform that called for "freedom for all political prisoners!"
- <sup>41</sup> Eldridge Cleaver, "The Land Question and Black Liberation" in Robert Scheer, ed., *Eldridge Cleaver: Post-Prison Writings and Speeches* (New York: Ramparts/Vintage, 1969), p. 67. For a compelling analysis of how this "projection of sovereignty" marked the Panthers as an organization, see Singh, *Black is a Country*, pp. 174-211.
- <sup>42</sup> Jean Genet, translated by Barbara Bray, *Prisoner of Love* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003 [1986]), p. 246.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99. Genet's ambivalent relation to the political uses of spectacle shares something in common with those who castigate Black Power or other expressions of radicalism through spectacular acts. Reed, for instance, argues that Black Power was little more than a media event, and Gitlin challenges the white New Left for courting media attention, which then led activists to embrace grander and more foolish tactics. See Adolph L. Reed, Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 72; Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: The Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1980). Genet, however, remained more loyal to the Panthers, seeing such spectacles as necessary, if inevitably limited—

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more by the forces of racism and state violence, in his mind, than by media routines. Indeed, he argued that “the Panthers were heading for either madness, metamorphosis of the black community, death or prison. All those options happened, but the metamorphosis was by far the most important, and that is why the Panthers can be said to have overcome through poetry.” Genet, *Prison of Love*, p. 100.

<sup>44</sup> Jean Genet, “May Day Speech,” in Jean Genet, edited by Albert Dichy, translated by Jeff Fort, *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Huey Newton, *To Die for the People* (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1999 [1972]), p. 220.

<sup>46</sup> Zayd Shakur, “America is the Prison,” In G. Louis Heath, ed., *Off the Pigs! The History and Literature of the Black Panther Party* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1976), p. 274.

<sup>47</sup> Prison Solidarity Committee, *From Soledad to San Quentin* (San Francisco: n.d., circa 1972), p. 3, in Tony Platt, private collection.

<sup>48</sup> “The Soledad Brothers” flyer, prepared by the Soledad Brothers Defense Fund and Soledad House (circa 1970), in NLC, Box 41, Folder: Soledad Brothers.

<sup>49</sup> Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 204.

<sup>50</sup> Cf., Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

<sup>51</sup> Scheer, “Introduction,” *Eldridge Cleaver*, p. xxix.

<sup>52</sup> This quote serves as the epigraph to Lee Lockwood, *Conversation with Eldridge Cleaver: Algiers* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1970).

<sup>53</sup> Cleaver, “Playboy Interview,” in *Eldridge Cleaver*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>54</sup> Michel Foucault, ed. by Colin Gordon, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

<sup>55</sup> The program is reprinted in Foner, ed., *The Black Panthers Speak*, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> For an overview, see Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*.

<sup>57</sup> The March 19, 1972, Black Panther platform and program, from Huey P. Newton Foundation Papers, Series 2, Box 4, Folder 2, Green Library, Stanford University. Although the Panthers rejected wholesale the possibility that the United States could produce a fair trial for any black person, the group did not propose abolishing prisons in general. In addition to its 10-point program, the Panthers had eight “points of attention,” which included one point detailing the party’s commitment to “not ill treat captives if we have to take them.” See “Committee/ History Black Panther Party,” in HBPP, Folder 1.

<sup>58</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), pp. 103-104. For a critique of the Panthers’ reliance on the lumpen, see Chris Booker, “Lumpenization: A Critical Error of the Black Panther Party,” in Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1998), pp. 337-362. The lumpen was one of several identity constructions in black discourse at the time. For diverse applications in the realm of prison narratives, see Douglas Edward Taylor, “Hustlers, Nationalists, and Revolutionaries: African American Prison Narratives of the 1960s and 1970s,” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> See Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). See also Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, pp. 265-314, for a discussion of the outlaw in black folk culture.

<sup>60</sup> James Boggs, *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker’s Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970) pp., 39-50.

<sup>61</sup> *Black Panther*, November 1, 1969, in HBPP, Folder 1.

<sup>62</sup> Fred Moten, “The Case of Blackness,” *Criticism* 50: 2 (Spring 2008), 177-218.

<sup>63</sup> Baker, “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere,” pp. 18-19.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.

<sup>65</sup> Noting the black middle class elements of this civil disobedience strategy is not to deny the risks activists embraced by violating the segregationist order. Several people were killed for trying to register to vote,



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much less engage in nonviolent civil disobedience. In jail, many activists faced severe beatings by guards or by prisoners often acting on the directives of guards. Likewise, spotlighting such nonviolent actions as a strategy of the civil rights movement does not suggest that nonviolence was the only available or utilized strategy among black activists in the South. Indeed, the question of violence often broke down along class lines, as black professionals were more likely to be ideologically committed to nonviolence than the sharecroppers. The latter group often owned weapons, for hunting if for not also self-protection. There were many examples of self-defense and public display of weapons among black Southerners in this time period. Cf., Lance Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Simon Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007). For an example of the violence civil rights activists faced in prison, see Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 50-59.

<sup>66</sup> Acknowledging that the North and West grew to occupy a larger place in the national racial imaginary of race and black protest should not be read as a sign that such protest was not always already ongoing in the North and West. For an overview spanning much of the twentieth century, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008).

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, p. 666. For more on Watts, see Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: De Capo Press, 1997).

<sup>68</sup> Mervin Mendez, "A Community Fights Back: Recollections of the 1966 Division Street Riot," in *Dialogo 2* (1997), available online at <http://chicago.indymedia.org/newswire/display/72578/index.php>. See also Gina M. Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Andrew J. Diamond, *Mean Streets: Chicago Youths and the Everyday Struggle for Empowerment in the Multiracial City, 1908-1969* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Lilia Fernández, "Latina/o Migration and Community Formation in Postwar Chicago: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Gender, and Politics, 1945-1975," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2005).

<sup>69</sup> Pérez notes that the Division Street Riot shifted the racial formation of Puerto Ricans in Chicago away from "model minority" to a problem population; see Gina M. Pérez, "An Upbeat West Side Story: Puerto Ricans and Postwar Racial Politics in Chicago," *Centro Journal* 13: 2 (Fall 2001), pp. 47-71. The starkness of her assertion is surely overstated, but it is true that the riot provided new visibility for what would become a growing Puerto Rican "problem." See also Karen Serwer Secrist, "Construyendo Nuestro Pedacito de Patria: Space and Dis(placement) in Puerto Rican Chicago," (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 2009). More generally see Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>70</sup> Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, p. 34.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60. See also Theodore Hamm, *Rebel and a Cause: Caryl Chessman and the Politics of the Death Penalty in Postwar California, 1948-1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>72</sup> This trope can also be found in another contemporary autobiography: Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965). The site of Brown's transformation, however, is not prison but a reformatory school—which he likens to prison, including through several escape attempts (some of them successful).

<sup>73</sup> See H. Bruce Franklin, *The Victim as Criminal and Artist: Literature from the American Prison* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Taylor, "Hustlers, Nationalists, and Revolutionaries"; and Lisa Marie Corrigan, "Re-imagining Black Power: Prison Manifestos and the Strategies of Regeneration in the Rewriting of Black Identity," (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2006).

<sup>74</sup> Daniel Stern, "One Who Got Away," *New York Times*, May 21, 1967, p. BR1.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 44.

<sup>76</sup> See Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, pp. 63-92; Christopher E. Smith, "Black Muslims and the Development of Prisoners' Rights," *Journal of Black Studies*, 24: 2 (Dec. 1993), pp. 131-146; John Pallas and Bob Barber "From Riot to Revolution," in Tony Platt and Paul Takagi,

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eds., *Punishment and Penal Discipline: Essays on the Prison and the Prisoners' Movement* (San Francisco: Crime and Social Justice Associates, 1980), 146-155.

<sup>77</sup> An audio recording of one such speech, "Black Nationalism Can Set us Free," is available <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/malcolm-x/we-have-no-freedom.mp3>.

<sup>78</sup> Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), p. 58.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 59. See also Eldridge Cleaver, "The Decline of the Black Muslims," in Scheer, ed., *Eldridge Cleaver*, pp. 13-17.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, p. 212. For more on Cleaver's writings and celebrity, see Eldridge Cleaver, edited by Kathleen Cleaver, *Target Zero* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Richardson, *A Bomb in Every Issue*, 68-74; and Jane A. Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

<sup>81</sup> See Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, pp. 3-17, 60-63, and 97-111.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*, p. 212.

<sup>83</sup> See Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*; Cleaver, *Target Zero*. Cleaver's flight became a source of added publicity and danger. See Lockwood, *Conversation with Eldridge Cleaver* and Scheer, "Introduction."

<sup>84</sup> Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, p. 59.

<sup>85</sup> The series, an attempt to contextualize the greater visibility prisons had by that time garnered, featured reporters taking temporary jobs as prison guards to describe routines in prison. The stories can be found in Box 44, Folder 1, Jessica Mitford Papers, Series III: Kind and Usual Punishment, 1963-1973 (hereafter JMP), Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>86</sup> Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, pp. 116-117. Cummins quotes several people, including both prison officials and former prisoners, who said *The Outlaw* garnered little respect or trust inside.

<sup>87</sup> *The Outlaw*, reprinted in *Berkeley Barb* volume 6, number 4 (January 26- February 1, 1968), pp. 8-9, from JMP, Box 44, Folder 1.

<sup>88</sup> James A. Schreiber, "San Quentin Cons to Strike," *Berkeley Barb* volume 6, number 4 (January 26- February 1, 1968), p. 1.

<sup>89</sup> Schreiber, "San Quentin Cons to Strike," p. 1; Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, p. 118.

<sup>90</sup> Schreiber, "San Quentin Cons to Strike," p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> James A. Schreiber, "Barb Scribe Zaps 'Big Red,'" *Berkeley Barb* volume 6, number 7 (February 16-22, 1968), p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, pp. 117-118; "San Q Rocks—Freemen Back Cons as Prison Seethes," *Berkeley Barb* volume 6 number 6 (February 9-15, 1968), p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, p. viii.

<sup>94</sup> *The Outlaw*, July 1, 1968, p. 1, in JMP, Box 44, Folder 1. In the 1970s the California Prisoners Union called its newspaper *The Outlaw* in partial tribute to the crude San Quentin mimeograph. This subsequent iteration of *The Outlaw* also preached interracial unity against the prison regime, specifically in regards to its efforts to organize unions of prison laborers to press for redress.

<sup>95</sup> James W.L. Park, "'Power to the People,'" December 1968 speech, p. 2, in JMP, Box 36, Folder 2.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-9. Three years later, Park still pointed to the underground press to "see how the techniques of the militant radicals are now being used against the prison system." As evidence, he pointed to rock bands playing concerts at San Quentin's gate. See Kenneth Lamott, "The San Quentin Story: The Prisons are Getting a Tougher Class of Convicts," *New York Times Magazine*, May 2, 1971, p. 83.

<sup>99</sup> For more on the Alcatraz occupation, see Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, "Holding the Rock: The 'Indianization' of Alcatraz Island, 1969-1999" in Van Gosse and Richard Moser, eds., *The World the 60s Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), pp. 219-241. The 1969-1971 occupation was the second such action of the 1960s. On March 8, 1964, forty Indians seized Alcatraz for Sioux Indians because the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 "granted the tribe surplus federal land," including abandoned properties such as the newly closed Alcatraz. See Paul Chaat Smith and

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Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996), p. 10.

<sup>100</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, p. 71.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 34. For a general overview of the occupation, its demographics and downfall, see pp. 1-83.

<sup>102</sup> Support for Alcatraz Indians, flyer, Social Protest Collection, Reel 23, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>103</sup> Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, p. 152. This statement likely referred not only to his incarceration but to his public battle with Ronald Reagan over whether Cleaver would be allowed to teach an experimental sociology course at the University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>105</sup> Kathleen Cleaver, "Release Eldridge Cleaver," pamphlet in International Committee to Defend Eldridge Cleaver Vertical File, Tamiment Library, New York University. Prior to Cleaver's flight, a range of prominent figures, including James Baldwin, Bertrand Russell, Susan Sontag and Jean-Paul Sartre, signed on to a petition that Cleaver should not be returned to prison.

<sup>106</sup> Scheer, "Introduction." Much as Cleaver had implied of Newton, Scheer argued that Cleaver was being targeted because of the potency of his ideas. It was shootouts with police, not either men's ideas, that the government said was behind their prosecution. FBI documents declassified since then show that the bureau was, in fact, afraid of how popular each man was and how much their philosophies of Black Power resonated with others. The claim had additional weight with Cleaver, given that the California Adult Authority, the parole board at the time, had repeatedly threatened Cleaver to violate his parole and return him to prison should he continue to be a public spokesman for and leader of the Black Panther Party. His parole officers had already warned him to refrain from making speeches or appearing in the media. Cleaver described having to choose between playing dead or going back to prison. See Cleaver, "Affidavit #1, I am 33 Years Old," in Scheer, ed., *Eldridge Cleaver*, p. 7.

<sup>107</sup> For a similar analysis in regard to the Black Panthers, see Tim Lake, "The Arm(ing) of the Vanguard, Signify(ing), and Performing the Revolution: The Black Panther Party and Pedagogical Strategies for Interpreting a Revolutionary Life," in Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams, eds., *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 306-323.

<sup>108</sup> Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (AK Press, 2006), pp. 138-139. The Weather Underground had been driven by principles of antiracism and defined by a counterculture ethos. Leary's escape was a combined effort with a group of semi-clandestine hippies. Several members of the Weather Underground recall being confused why a group dedicated to antiracist solidarity would help Leary escape; they remember being told by leaders of the group that, since Leary was in a minimum security prison, helping him escape would be good practice for ultimately helping black prisoners escape. No such plan ever materialized within the group. Weatherman, as it was initially called, readied itself for such a task, if metaphorically, prior to going underground. A popular tactic in the group's early months was to try to gain recruits by busting into high school or community college classrooms, tying up the teacher, and lecturing the students about war and racism. Because they saw themselves as freeing students from the cruel confines of an illegitimate education system, Weather activists dubbed these actions "jailbreaks." See Berger, *Outlaws of America*, pp. 100-101. For one example of Black Panther hijackings, see William Lee Brent, *Long Time Gone* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2000).

<sup>109</sup> For personal anecdotes from antiwar activists who were involved in these missions, see David Dellinger, *From Yale to Jail: The Life Story of a Moral Dissenter* (Marion, SD: Rose Hill Books, 1993), pp. 237-256, 402-407; and Tom Hayden, *Reunion: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1988), pp. 220-241. See also Michael B. Friedland, *Lift Up Your Voice Like a Trumpet: White Clergy and the Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements, 1954-1973* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998). The freed soldiers were not necessarily antiwar, and were in any event still in the employ of the U.S. military. As such, some were returned to service upon returning to the United States. All of them were removed from the custody of their antiwar couriers upon returning to this country. American antiwar activists had met with POWs in Vietnam since at least 1965, relaying messages back to the men's respective families. Actress and antiwar activist Jane Fonda famously visited Vietnam, during which time she met with several POWs, although she was not

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part of a mission to bring them home. She was criticized for saying that the Vietnamese had not tortured any POWs and for having her picture taken by an anti-aircraft gun.

<sup>110</sup> Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 25-70. The connection between soldiers and prisons was demonstrated in another way as well: several GIs who refused to fight in Vietnam or agitated against the war at their bases found themselves in the stockade facing charges. These cases also served to articulate opposition and confinement in the context of war.

<sup>111</sup> Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>112</sup> John Hayes, "Man of Sorrow at Folsom," *Radical History Review* 98 (2007), p. 130.

<sup>113</sup> For more on Catonsville see Daniel Berrigan, *The Catonsville Nine* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004). For the Columbia strike, see Jerry L. Avorn, *Up Against the Ivy Wall: A History of the Columbia Crisis* (New York: Atheneum, 1968); and Stefan M. Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

<sup>114</sup> Michael Streissguth, *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison: The Making of a Masterpiece* (Cambridge: Da Capo, 2004), p. 41. Musicians often played prison shows in the 1950s and 1960s. While imprisoned in Leavenworth, Raúl Salinas wrote for the prison newspaper about some of the concerts that occurred there. See Louis G. Mendoza, ed., *raúlsalinas and the Jail Machine: My Weapon is My Pen. Selected Writings by Raúl Salinas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 54-60.

<sup>115</sup> Hayes, "Man of Sorrow at Folsom," p. 131; Streissguth, *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>116</sup> Tom Dearmore, "First Angry Man of Country Music," *New York Times*, September 21, 1969, p. 32.

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Streissguth, *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*, p. 20.

<sup>118</sup> Hayes, "Man of Sorrows in Folsom," p. 133.

<sup>119</sup> Radio stations, meanwhile, thought the line was too violent in the context of Robert Kennedy's and Martin Luther King's assassinations. They edited it out before broadcasting it. See Streissguth, *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*, pp. 89, 137-138.

<sup>120</sup> In the liner notes of the 2000 edition of the album, Cash writes he did so because the cameras crowded him on stage. See Johnny Cash, "The Bird" in *Johnny Cash at San Quentin* (Sony Music, 2000) liner notes, p. 8.

<sup>121</sup> Streissguth, *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*, pp. 156-157. *At Folsom* remains a more respected album, however. The album ultimately sold more than 6 million copies, according to Streissguth, *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*, p. 160. It also anchors the 2006 biopic of Cash, *Walk The Line*. Cash's success in prison albums also inspired others to try similar efforts. In 1971, B.B. King released a live album recorded in Chicago's Cook County Jail, and jazz artist Archie Shepp commemorated the police killing of prisoners and guards at Attica in his 1972 album titled *Attica Blues*.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Streissguth, *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*, p. 42.

<sup>123</sup> Hayes, "Man of Sorrow at Folsom," p. 130; Streissguth, *Johnny Cash At Folsom Prison*, p. 163.

<sup>124</sup> Jessica Mitford, *Kind and Usual Punishment: The Prison Business* (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 226-227.

<sup>125</sup> Streissguth, *Johnny Cash At Folsom Prison*, pp. 162-164.

<sup>126</sup> "Soledad Brother Party: Champagne Flows Outside Quentin," (San Rafael) *Independent Journal*, October 16, 1970, p. 21.

<sup>127</sup> Gottschalk writes that there were fifteen prison riots in 1968, up from five the year previously. The number of riots reached a plateau at forty-eight in 1972. Marie Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: The Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 178-179.

Part I: America the Prison

“Don’t be shocked when I say I was in prison. You’re still in prison.

That’s what America means, prison.”

Malcolm X

## CHAPTER 2: George Jackson and the Black Condition Made Visible

“Blackmen [sic] born in the U.S. and fortunate enough to live past the age of eighteen are conditioned to accept the inevitability of prison. For most of us, it simply looms as the next phase in a sequence of humiliations. Being born a slave in a captive society and never experiencing any objective basis for expectation had the effect of preparing me for the progressively traumatic misfortunes that lead so many blackmen to the prison gate. I was prepared for prison. It required only minor psychic adjustments.”

– George Jackson<sup>1</sup>

“When he was alive he was our hope,  
but why worry over a hope that’s dead?”

–Ralph Ellison<sup>2</sup>

By 1970 the growing visibility of prison as a site of political conflict had increasingly centered on black protest in California. This expanded attention reached across the globe and owed to several factors, including grassroots organizing, literary production, and violent action. This visibility was principally concerned with discovering

and interpreting the basis for the political subjectivity of black prisoners. Observers and supporters alike argued that discursive militancy and physical confrontation revealed a racially inflected notion of genuine political subjectivity. In so doing the prison emerged as a vital site, and confinement as a vital practice, in the creation of post-civil rights conceptions of blackness. A concern with authenticity provided part of the narrative trope of prisoner visibility. There is no innate reason why a concern over political subjectivity need be expressed through the prism of authenticity. Yet the constraints of prison visibility, which recalls systems of invisibility even in its mass publicity, generated concern with the putative realness hidden by institutional opacity or personal duplicity.

I argue in this chapter that the use of authenticity through which to interpret prisoner visibility worked against the sincere expressions of prisoners' subjectivity. The clash of sincerity and authenticity, as racially inflected evaluations of prisoners' political character, made visible a narrative of trauma. By the end of the 1970s, "the prison movement," as proponents dubbed it, commanded fewer supporters and even less attention. With former activists recanting their support for prisoners or acceding to the climate of law and order, the prison receded in visibility. This ebb of visible support for prison activism changed the symbolic valence of the prison as well. Yet, authenticity continued to structure the consequent analyses of prisoners' actions and impacts. While activists continued to describe antiblack racism as a prison, other commentators, as I argue below, used the prison to signify the constraints of privilege and to castigate prison radicalism as inauthentic rebellion. This shift marked a new visibility in the articulation of race and confinement using some of the same concepts that had given rise to an earlier visibility, only now imbued with an opposite meaning. Each iteration of visibility was

accomplished through the availability and believability of narratives about black prisoners. New evidence about these prisoners and their actions accompanied, often in a secondary manner, a shift in collective consciousness. Thus the narratives established by prison radicals were reworked and re-imagined but not transcended as visibility reflected and produced new structures of feeling. Prisoners continued to generate public concern over their “real” or “true” selves.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which prisoners emerged as revolutionary leaders of racial protest. As with other movements, prison radicalism spawned various forms of collective action, ranging from violence to literature, that were at the same time heavily endowed with symbolic significance. Prison radicals on both sides of the walls described prisoners as symbols embodied with deep political meaning. This social movement battled on the terrain of collective memory, even as it dealt with people who were still alive. Physical separation and the lack of proximity removed prisoners to a certain level of abstraction and mnemonic representation. To make them visible, prisoners needed to be reduced to symbols that could be recalled through memory and media. This recall depended on making visible narrative depictions *of* prisoners more than direct personal contact *with* prisoners, even as the concept of “prisoners” needed to be symbolically represented by specific prisoners involved in specific, current legal disputes. That is, narratives about prisoners, their political mettle and meaning, created their public image more than direct contact with them. The visibility of these narratives was attached to specific individuals who were said to represent prisoners in general. This use of narrative also contributed to the spread of radicalism within prisons. Huey Newton, for instance, spoke of “meeting” George Jackson by reputation of his intellectual



and physical strength, while each man was incarcerated at different prisons in California. In a more abstract though still meaningful way, Jackson spoke of meeting Marx, Mao, and other influential theorists in his prison cell, men who helped set him on a revolutionary path in prison. Jackson also entered this level of abstraction through his own narrative; several prisoners claimed that they met George by reading *Soledad Brother* because his book was an authentic depiction of their experience in the confinement of ghettos and prisons or an authentic expression of their revolutionary desires.<sup>3</sup>

This use of narrative, and the struggle to make certain narratives visible, in the development of a prison-based social movement created what might be called a usable present. While prison organizing utilized some of the tools of collective memory in response to living prisoners, the memorial importance of such processes increased as people died, often in dramatic circumstances, and events faded into (recent) history. The texture of depictions changed with prisoners' access to media and their ability to play a role in shaping their own representation, making media a crucial site in the formation and recession of prison visibility. Narrative therefore played a central role in the development, circulation, and contestation of prison radicalism. That prison activism relied on narrative tools, however, does not suggest that this was purely or predominantly a literary movement. Rather, narrative was a tactic in the high-stakes physical and ideological battle between prisoners and the prison system, each one visible as metonymic antagonists—of revolution versus reaction, of criminality versus order. As I argue below, narratives were crafted through grassroots organizing and punctuated by the spectacular violence of both prisoners and the government.

This chapter chronicles how the tools of memory and the search for political subjectivity served to make visible racial meaning. This meaning was often articulated as an expression of authenticity, inflected by racial standing and political positioning.<sup>4</sup> I begin by parsing more specifically the ways in which prison activism and its search for visibility amidst social death utilized the codes of collective memory. Next I examine exposure as a political strategy by which prison activists sought to make the prison visible so as to bury it. This approach displayed a complicated, often contradictory positioning in relation to the dominant media: it insisted that prisoners were the architects of their own visibility even as supporters shaped and promoted these representations, amplifying prisoner visibility. A strategy of exposure was similarly troubled by its value-neutral utility. As prisoner visibility increased, so too did prison officials and others seek exposure so as to shift the narratives attached to the publicity of prisoners. This chapter examines visibility in relation to mass publicity, itself dependent on narrativity. Shifting political conditions gave added visibility or salience to different narratives in struggles over knowledge and collective consciousness. I conclude by examining the struggles over prisoner memory on both the Left and the Right, each side invested in prisoners (and the prison) as symbols of racial production. The articulation of prisoners as authentic racial subjects, whether revolutionary or criminal, confined their visibility to dichotomous categories of good and evil to be deployed as symbolic currency for the needs of outsiders, including journalists, scholars and politicians, as well as activists.

I ground this discussion in an investigation of George Jackson, widely recognized as the symbolic figurehead of this prison radicalism. After several run-ins with the law as a youth, both in his native Chicago and in the Los Angeles area where his family moved

when he was 15, Jackson was given a one-year-to-life sentence for a \$70 gas station robbery in 1960. He was 18 years old, the second oldest of five children and the oldest son to Lester and Georgia Jackson, a postal employee and a homemaker. Throughout the 1960s, he became well-known throughout the state penal system for his strength, character and ultimately for his politics. He served time in several prisons located in different parts of California, during which he participated in work strikes and desegregation efforts. On several occasions, he violently squared off against guards and against other prisoners. He joined the Black Panther Party from prison, and was given the rank of “Field Marshal,” tasked with recruiting other prisoners to the organization.<sup>5</sup> In January 1970, Jackson and two other black prisoners, John Clutchette and Fleeta Drumgo, were charged with the murder of 26-year-old John Mills, a new prison guard, thrown off the third tier of the prison. Mills was killed three days after three black prisoners, each well-known dissidents, were shot and killed by another prison guard during a fight in the yard. Mills was killed the night prisoners at Soledad had heard on the radio that the district attorney believed the killing of prisoners three days prior to be “justifiable homicide.”<sup>6</sup> The killing of Mills was just the most dramatic response to the deaths of W.L. Nolen, Alvin “Jug” Miller, and Cleveland Edwards. Local newspapers reported on the incident, and according to journalist Min Yee, black prisoners “went on hunger strikes, burned prison furniture and dispatched a voluminous amount of mail to their families and attorneys and to state officials, demanding an investigation. Fistfights erupted in numerous housing wings. White and black cons alike walked around with magazines stuffed in their shirts to blunt knife attacks.”<sup>7</sup>

Supporters labeled Clutchette, Drumgo, and Jackson the Soledad Brothers. In an effort to build support for the case, and recognizing his eloquence, Jackson's attorney collected his letters and arranged for them to be published as a book. *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* was published in October 1970 and became a best-seller, bringing its author widespread acclaim—until he was killed in a bloody incident (an escape attempt gone awry, a government execution that got out of hand, or some combination thereof) in August 1971. Both of these acts, his eloquent writing and his violent death, shaped the contradictory interpretations of Jackson's contentious visibility. The Soledad Brothers case instantiated visibility as a mechanism for undercutting the power of imprisonment: because the repression of prison labored in silence, it could be undercut through a public display of antiracist protest. This position identified invisibility as itself an enemy and used visibility to construct prisoners as heroic militants. It became part of the narrative activists used to build support for the Soledad Brothers and other prisoners. Paradoxically this visibility emerged not just from the general isolation of prison but the hidden prison inside the prison—the Adjustment Center, the solitary confinement unit where Jackson was held for the last and most visible year of his life.

Clutchette, Drumgo and Jackson were each held incommunicado for two weeks after the January 16 killing of Officer Mills. Prison authorities never alerted the families, and when the mothers of Clutchette and Drumgo called the prison, officials told them that there was nothing to worry about and that their sons did not need legal representation.<sup>8</sup> Activists used this duplicity by prison officials to establish the Soledad Brothers case as an issue of injustice, where dissemblance described invisibility. The case became paradigmatic of prison militancy throughout the decade, with George Jackson at the

center. Jackson emerged as the central figure for multiple reasons: California Penal Code 4500 mandated an automatic death sentence for a prisoner serving a life sentence, which included Jackson's vague sentence of "one year to life," who was convicted of assault. In addition to the severity of the penalty he faced, Jackson's eloquence served to establish the terms of this visibility. Jackson's authenticity lay in the amalgamation of his eloquence and the severity of the charges he faced. Even to his detractors, Jackson was judged by his authenticity: the Soledad warden justified charging Jackson with the death of a prison guard because "no one else could have done it."<sup>9</sup> What varied in evaluations of Jackson's authenticity was the substance of it, the varying degrees of its political or criminal salience.

Throughout the 1970s, Jackson epitomized the symbolism of prisoners—their political potential and their malleable meaning over time. His short life, shocking death, and contested legacy provided a synecdoche for struggles over race and confinement. As if summarizing these connections, a sympathetic minister eulogized Jackson as an apostle of "the black condition."<sup>10</sup> He was both an eloquent writer whose books contributed to making the prison visible in a myriad of ways, and a military strategist of revolutionary violence who defined black people confined in prisons and ghettos as idealized political warriors. After a decade locked away in various prisons, Jackson argued for visibility as a necessary element of revolutionary transformation. He defined violence as a vital way to secure this visibility. His forceful arguments for the use of violence, as well as its usage by several supporters (including his younger brother), shows that, as Iain Boal and colleagues have argued in a different context, the power of spectacle "comes out of the barrel of a gun."<sup>11</sup> That is, Jackson helped define a radical politics of dramatic resistance

that utilized representation as a necessary terrain of battle. Representation, in this context, was a high-stakes, embodied category—including, arguably revolving around, Jackson himself. As I examine in greater detail below, public perceptions of Jackson were shaped in a hall of mirrors. The prison's opacity bolstered investments in authenticity on both the Left and the Right. Representations of Jackson had significant, if fraught, repercussions. These representations changed over time, becoming re-presentations in the context of shifting political circumstances.<sup>12</sup> I conclude the chapter with an analysis of the shifting narratives that emerged as representations of Jackson became contested memories among different collectives.

#### Memory, Space, Time, and Social Death: Mapping the Terrain of Prison Radicalism

Not just history but memory is made possible by “a minimum degree of distance between past and present.”<sup>13</sup> While this temporal distance is necessary to qualify something as memory, spatial distance creates processes that utilize mechanisms similar to those scholars have identified with the formation and transmission of memory. Whereas the passage of time suggests a gap between past and present, an elapse of space on the basis of forced confinement points to a chasm between different presents. These coterminous realities make themselves known to one another through discursive and iconic practices. Memory theorists have analyzed space in the form of tangible commemorations: monuments, museums, and other physical declarations that memorialize people or events of the past for use in the present. I am suggesting instead that space is a useful analytic in conceptualizing how the prison as a site of confinement informs political struggles in real-time through the tools of memory. Space, in this

context, is not where the past makes its presence known in the present but the sites through which marginalized collectives make visible the stubborn presence of an ignored and parallel present. Ruth Wilson Gilmore has suggestively labeled prisons “forgotten places,” sites hidden through their invisibility as a result of their geographic location (in rural and largely desolate parts of the country) and the ideological denigration of those kept there. To oppose prisons requires first a recognition, a recollection, that they exist as part of the cultural and political economies.<sup>14</sup> Doing so inserts place back into the experience of space and time, against what Giddens and others have identified as the distancing of modernity. This re-inscription of place occurs through the impersonalized and often invisible places of power.<sup>15</sup> In the context of racial protest, seeing the prison becomes a part of making visible the border upholding racial divisions in society at large.

Removed from the present, memory is recalled in words, stories, images, gestures, symbols, and actions. Although it appeals to historical events, memory is less interested in truth claims than it is in the impact of the past. Memory is understood through conceptual and material “traces” of the past that appear and are used in the present. Collective memory explains how people can recall or subjectively imagine a relationship to people or experiences that they have not directly known.<sup>16</sup> As Susan Sontag wrote, “Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead.”<sup>17</sup> Memory also allows communication with the past through the living. Marita Sturken writes that survivors—in her case, of war and disease—embody the blurry lines between memory and history.<sup>18</sup> That fraught relationship is equally true for those whose survival takes place in perpetual proximity to the trauma of which they survive: namely, those who are physically alive but socially dead. The prison, too, is removed from the present, by space

more than by time.<sup>19</sup> The prison, too, is recalled—that is, described and understood, made visible—through narrative and performative or commemorative acts. In this regard, visibility is the call for public witness as a form of seeking justice. Prison activism is an attempt to make present those who confinement has rendered absent. To remember prisoners is to circumvent the ways incarceration would have people be forgotten; as such, awareness of prisoners is a necessary element of their freedom. This fusion of memory, truth, and justice, writes Elizabeth Jelin, is typical of human rights movements, especially in shifting political contexts.<sup>20</sup> The spatial remove of the prison relegates it to a certain mnemonic understanding. Print and visual culture make up for what is not experientially possible as a result of confinement. Memory practices can be spotted in open appeals to remember the incarcerated as well as injunctives to see their bodies, read their words, or hear their voices.

Space is also central to how time is understood within prison. In controlling the rhythm of days and the structure of daily activities, the prison creates different notions of time for the incarcerated. Foucault described this control of time as essential to the prison as a disciplinary technology. The experience of prison has often been described in terms of time. This temporal emphasis is embedded within the vernacular of being imprisoned as “doing time.” Debord declared that the expropriation of time was a vital step in capital accumulation and class stratification. The liberatory project therefore seeks to re-appropriate time, or even obliterate time as a social relationship of hierarchy.<sup>21</sup> Prison radicalism, then, can be seen as an attempt to undo time—that is, to regain control over one’s daily routine as a way of establishing a measure of self-determination. Jackson used time to explain the space of prison. He described the horrors of prison and his attempt to



transcend them by emphasizing how he spent his time. He labeled prison an endless void that he overcame by determining his schedule and filling his days with exercise and study. He described his daily routine to muckraking journalist Jessica Mitford in an interview for the *New York Times*. “I generally get two or three hours of sleep a day, six hours of exercise, and the rest [of the day is spent] reading and writing. ... I spend 45 minutes a day learning new words.”<sup>22</sup> In that interview and several other writings, Jackson boasted of doing one-thousand finger push-ups each day. This claim was celebrated by many of Jackson’s supporters, who used it as evidence of his heroic strength. Instead of “doing time,” Jackson illustrated that prisoners were using time to refashion the prison as a space for the cultivation of a revolutionary praxis that was both conceptual and physical. Jackson saw part of his task as making visible the ideological labor of political education. He described his own shift in consciousness upon entering prison, how more politically sophisticated prisoners introduced him to communist theorists and how he likewise tutored other black prisoners in a range of revolutionary thought (as well as martial arts). Jackson highlighted his prison pedagogy for the purpose of making visible the transformative potential of prisoners in general.<sup>23</sup>

Such descriptions appropriated time away from the prison and applied it to the prisoner for the purposes of establishing symbolic authority. This authority, as Bourdieu wrote of symbolic capital, is established through investments of time.<sup>24</sup> Following Jackson’s lead, prisoners reworked the notion of time to invest it with new racial meaning and political purpose. They converted time into political power, understood through racial subjectivity. Prisoners refashioned time in both its small- and large-scale meanings. The former could be found in the various ways prisoners described their individual days.

The latter saw prisoners redefining years or epochs and arguing that black people were on a different scale of history than their white captors. This view originated inside of prison but extended to black people in general. After Jackson's younger brother, Jonathan, was killed in an armed raid on the Marin County Civic Center on August 7, 1970, Jackson began dating his correspondence based on the standard Gregorian calendar and a new scale: "ADJ," After the Death of Jonathan. The last letter in *Soledad Brother*, for instance, was dated "August 9, 1970. Real Date, 2 days A.D." The letter, written to a supporter, began with the directive that society must "reckon all time in the future from the day of the man-child's death."<sup>25</sup> This heroic representation of history, as I will explore in greater detail later in this chapter, extended to the ways prison activists made certain prisoners visible within a schema of racial solidarity. Supporters of Ruchell "Cinque" Magee, the sole prisoner to survive the August 7 events, tried to enlist support for him based on his significance within an alternate but parallel sense of history. "Brothers and Sisters we care nothing about our Brother going down in White History but we care very much that he goes down in Black History. *You can only see to that*. In the meantime, a lot of Black people's hopes are pinned up in Cinque's moves" (emphasis in original).<sup>26</sup>

From revolutionary violence to literary repudiations, George Jackson was the symbolic vehicle through which the prison was contested in the 1970s. He was arguably the most visible and articulate spokesman of the prison movement, even if he lived for only a year of national prominence. He elevated his all-male surroundings to be a field guide to political struggle more generally, defining revolutionary politics as a masculine expression of multiracial unity and physical force. Supporters of subsequent prison

radicals often upheld Jackson's political framework as their own, despite what Rebecca Hill has usefully described as the "feminine" elements of prisoner support as a political practice (rooted as it is in the reproductive labor of emotional support and consciousness raising).<sup>27</sup> Jackson's iconic stature continued to shape prisoner activism throughout the decade and beyond. The image of him, in life and in death but above all in his capacity as a person rendered socially dead by confinement regardless of his physical status, provided the battle flag for prison activists, observers, and detractors. While the meaning of his iconicity depended on political perspective, diverse parties treated Jackson as a symbol and a symbolic representative of prisoners. A powerful figure inside the California prison system throughout the 1960s, Jackson became a symbol of imprisonment and its discontents to many outside of prison in the 1970s. As a writer, Jackson contributed to his symbolic stature, which ultimately led to his presence in the pantheon of protest literature and revolutionary memoirs.

His literary skills were partly responsible for garnering him public attention. That attention focused in turns on his legal status, political beliefs, and physical body. While this visibility, following the public spheres of incarceration established in the 1960s, attracted attention to confinement in general, this focus was overshadowed in mainstream public discourse by an interest in Jackson himself. Jackson attempted to converge the often-violent struggle of black prisoners with broader political formations, placing the prison in a vision of black revolutionary warfare against a racist American state alongside the decolonizing Third World. Jackson saw his subjectivity bound up with the violent struggle against colonialism being waged in prisons, ghettos, barrios, colonies and other Third World sites. He defined this struggle as being the metric of racial and political

reality. He took inspiration from a poem Vietnamese revolutionary Ho Chi Minh wrote about the political potential of prisoners, written while the author himself was imprisoned: “People who come out of prison can build up the country./ Misfortune is a test of people’s fidelity. / Those who protest at injustice are people of true merit. / When the prison doors are opened, the real dragon will fly out.”<sup>28</sup> Inspired by this sentiment, Jackson took to calling himself the Dragon, as well as the Comrade. These nicknames contributed to his iconography by articulating aggrandized character judgments of reliability and ferocity with physical strength.

As a symbol, though, Jackson was a malleable entity. His import was being constantly channeled and challenged, rendering him a controversial figure in life and a contentious memory in death. Jackson, in eloquently describing imprisonment as an unending site of black enslavement, positioned himself as what Lorena Oropeza, following Jelin, calls a “memory entrepreneur ... those people who apply the full force of the past in service of a political cause.”<sup>29</sup> In life, Jackson attempted to control his own representation, the real-time memory of himself. Jackson’s self-representation made visible a heroic revolutionary soldier. This image, connoting asceticism, strength and purity of purpose, failed to account for the more politically ambiguous aspects of Jackson’s actions, both prior to and during his incarceration. Further, the visibility of Jackson owed to many sources with many motives; the heroic soldier was made visible alongside the innocent victim. As a result, under the mantle of authenticity, the image of Jackson in the late 1970s signified to some critics the falsity and moral depravity of black prison radicalism, if not of the left more generally.

Violence, I will argue, provided a central modality through which supporters granted prisoners their authenticity and critics denied it. This use of violence owed to the brutality of conditions in prison, where violence was the currency of power, as well as the fact of confinement itself. The prison had denied physical mobility but could not confine the political imagination. Prison radicalism confronted institutions and policies, as any other social movement, but it of necessity transpired on a landscape of representation. People outside the prison could not physically witness the violence of imprisonment, whether violence by the guards against the prisoners, violence among the prisoners, or violence by the prisoners against the guards. Prisoners endeavored to draw attention to certain forms of violence, including through violent acts of their own. But much as their condition remained invisible to outsiders, so too did prisoners lack the ability to observe the outside world. Their use of violence became potent evidence of the (in)authenticity of prison radicalism, depending on the observer.

The malleability of prison activism, its appeal and its denigration, owes in large part to the physical isolation that defines confinement. Surrounded by seemingly impenetrable walls, total institutions cast long and mysterious shadows. As a result, the political meaning of such places is conjectural. The prison does not exist in a vacuum—it is strongly influenced by events, ideas and phenomena that take place outside its control—but it is an almost indescribable place in its universal control over the life of its interns, who are nonconsensual residents. Scholars have alternatively labeled the experience of such confinement as constituting either bare life or social death.<sup>30</sup> Both terms denote a system whose victims are physically alive but lack the constituent dimensions of living, such as access to means of voluntary association, political

franchise, or physical mobility. The inhabitants of such institutions, including prisons, exist in a liminal site of structured denial and systemic lack. Because the experience of incarceration cannot be simulated or tangibly grasped, the prison is made visible through narratives that are by definition malleable, mediated and mobilized.<sup>31</sup> These narratives can, at times, make prison walls more transparent, even if they cannot remove them. But the chasm between sight and social change can be vast. Even in their insistence on exposing prisons as sites of racist repression, prisoners were trapped by their surroundings—their limited ability to reach beyond prison walls for direct contact with others and the troublesome ways that images can never replace experience. “It is not reality that photographs make immediately accessible,” Susan Sontag wrote “but images. ... What the photograph-record confirms is, more modestly, simply that the subject exists.”<sup>32</sup> Prisoners relied on the media as a source of information and of inspiration. This usage was shaped by the spatial remove. Images, not just visual but conceptual, shaped prison activism because prisoners faced isolation that broader publics could only overcome through their imagination. But images exist in a constant state of precarity, being challenged by competing narratives or foreclosed from public access altogether at the directives of prison administrators who prefer that their institutions remain removed from view.

Social death drastically constricts but does not eliminate all expressions of political practice. Total institutions circumscribe the reach of their interns, although the symbolic terrain of mass culture can undercut some institutional opacity. This symbolic terrain, a landscape of representation, is vital to the circulation of subaltern politics. While all protest campaigns utilize symbolism in real-time and in collective memory, the

spatial constraints of imprisonment alter the ways such symbols are made and circulate. The social death of the prison creates living martyrs, people whose symbolic resonance can be constructed and deployed as much in life as in death. To be sure, as Elun Gabriel notes, the prison can destroy martyrdom by silencing but not killing those who commit political violence expecting to be sacrificed.<sup>33</sup> But, as in the case of George Jackson and other prison radicals of the 1970s, a campaign for prison visibility can turn social death into a resource. It did so by attempting to visibilize social death as a political problem, where the process of visibility served as a form of social resuscitation. This reliance on visibility drew from a strategy of exposure. At the same time, it battled against a competing strategy of counter-exposure.

### The Dialectics of Exposure

Through a semiotic analysis of style, Dick Hebdige argues that subcultures turn the spectacle of surveillance into the pleasure of being watched.<sup>34</sup> Radical prisoners endeavored a similar process, though the culture of control in prison altered the ways in which they could appropriate watchful eyes. As a panoptic and total institution, the prison utilizes surveillance as a routine part of its functioning. Embedded in the very purpose of the institution, this surveillance is accomplished through prison employees and architecture alike. The small cells provide no privacy or space for their occupants to hide, and the prison is divided into different units that are isolated from one another and provide greater ease for those monitoring captives. Armed guards conduct routine counts and random cell searches, inspect incoming mail for contraband, and search prisoners' bodies before and after each visit. Prisoners subverted these mechanisms using both

secrecy and publicity. Covertly, prisoners discovered how to hide contraband in their cells or elsewhere on prison grounds; they formed themselves into unsanctioned groups for self-protection, education, or economic gain; and they participated in study groups where reading materials were scarce but coveted, and therefore shared from prisoner to prisoner.<sup>35</sup> In a letter to journalist Jessica Mitford, for instance, San Quentin jailhouse lawyer Ruchell Magee spoke of circulating around the cell block an article she sent him for feedback. Such stories abound, including of prisoners who copied by hand each page of a book so that it could be shared with fellow prisoners.<sup>36</sup> Prisoners sought to circumvent controls on their communication by sharing information and resources. Even when confined in isolation units, prisoners communicated to each other while locked in their cells. They yelled to those adjacent to them. They also discovered how to use prison architecture against itself: by flushing their toilets, for instance, prisoners temporarily created a megaphone through which to communicate with those held in cells on the tier above or below them.<sup>37</sup>

Publicly, prisoners flouted surveillance by seeking the support of outside activists and the attention of outside media to monitor the prison. This visibility, prison activists hoped, would provide a counterbalance of power that might guarantee their safety against reprisals or routine violence. Visits to the prison were an essential element by which this counterpower was established. Visitors demonstrated that prisoners were “not forgotten” and demonstrated that prisoners enjoyed support from friends, family and “the community.” Because protest emanated most from black prisoners and as a display of Black Power, the physical presence of black people was especially prized. Inez Williams spoke of visiting her son, Fleeta Drumgo, weekly in hopes that her presence would



convince the guards that people were aware of their behavior. “[M]aybe they won’t beat him because they know I’m there. But I do go and they still beat him.... I think if enough black and brown people got together and started bitching loud enough, they would have to stop and listen.”<sup>38</sup> This physical presence in the prison visiting room—and later, in the courtroom—was vital to making prisoners visible as political subjects. It provided surveillance of the prison by breaching its walls, temporarily and in a controlled setting but with the hope that this visibility would lead to both broader social transformation and concrete improvement in people’s lives. Prison activists argued that black people especially needed to visit prisoners to prevent the prison from further destroying black lives on both sides of the wall. The invisibility of incarceration as a site of racial domination combined with the stirrings of what anthropologist John Jackson has labeled racial paranoia generated a belief that the visibility of the prison to black people was necessary to prevent racial genocide. The prison was a harbinger of racial standing more generally, and it thrived in silence. “A warning: *BLACK PEOPLE*: what is happening in San quentin [sic] maximum security concentration camp is only a small example of what is to come in the minimum security concentration camp” of society, declared a statement by a prisoner support group in Oakland. “...Your reactions will indicate how fast or slow they will go with their program of genocide. WE SEEM TO THRIVE ON DECEIT: AWARE BLACK PEOPLE LET THIS BE AWARNING [sic] ESPECIALLY TO YOU.”<sup>39</sup>

With the help of Jackson’s prodding, prison radicalism rested on “exposure” as a political imperative, one deemed necessary to interrupt the invisibility of incarceration and advance demands about social conditions for black people. Exposure was said to

have a pedagogic value—it “awakened the masses” to the “truth” of their conditions. Exposure required sight as a political framework, both in the pursuit of visibility and in the discursive naming of political goals. Soledad Brother John Clutchette described the difference between reform and revolution as changing the frame versus changing the picture: the revolutionary struggle aimed to change what people saw.<sup>40</sup> From the confines of the prison, visibility was a revolutionary demand. While this use of exposure was most dramatically demonstrated through acts of violence, it underpinned various mundane and nonviolent efforts to raise awareness about the existence of prisoners, including the Soledad Brothers. Jessica Mitford, writing to Dr. Benjamin Spock as part of her efforts initiating what would become the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, wrote that exposure of this case would ripple across the nation. “Because of what will be exposed about this [case], and what it says about prisons in general (Calif. [sic] prisons are, as you know, considered the most ‘advanced’ and ‘reformed’ in the country) I believe the case has national importance.”<sup>41</sup> Mitford’s appeal exposes a series of synecdochic representations: the Soledad Brothers stood in for California prisons, which stood in for prisons nationally by virtue of their reputation. The prison referred generally to sites of incarceration more than a particular institution; even as the Soledad Brothers moniker named a particular prison, the visibility accompanying the case focused more on San Quentin, where the men were moved not long after the incident.

Black communities were the target of this prison exposure, as indicated by the inclusion of Carleton Goodlett, publisher of San Francisco’s black newspaper the *Sun Reporter*, among the initial endorsers of the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee. The five-member Black Caucus of the California legislature was also instrumental in building

the early support for the Soledad Brothers. Several prisoners and their family members had contacted members of the caucus to request they investigate conditions at Soledad Correctional Facility, leading them to visit the prison and meet with the warden in the summer of 1970.<sup>42</sup> With the publication of *Soledad Brother* and the growth of Jackson's visibility, however, organizing for the case—and around prison issues more generally—centered on more militant groups, led by the Black Panther Party and white radicals associated with its political vision.

This emphasis on exposure as a strategy exhibited a complex positioning vis-à-vis the media. In some ways, Jackson and others displayed a Frankfurt School distrust of and hostility toward the (mainstream American) media as a tool of elite domination. “We don't expect much from the media at large, the media from outside, from the enemy culture,” Jackson told an interviewer from the progressive Bay area Pacifica radio station.<sup>43</sup> Prisoners critiqued the media as one of ways that the state controlled visibility. Through racial paranoia—characterized by “extremist thinking, general social distrust, the nonfalsifiable embrace of intuition, and an unflinching commitment to contradictory thinking”—prisoners held that mass media was the representational arm of state violence against black people, in and out of prison.<sup>44</sup> They argued that journalistic conventions stacked the deck against them receiving favorable coverage. Prisoners identified the government and the media as twinned forces responsible for their confinement and the negative views most Americans held of them. Prison officials “will tell (not Pay [sic]) those foolish news media dogs to lie publicly.... a lot of people would hear where the pigs have charged for people with a lot of verbal shit written on paper, and hear the news media lies and convict innocent people before they are tried,” prisoner Ruchell Magee

argued.<sup>45</sup> Other prisoners accused the mainstream media of helping “fabricate a non-existent world,” with the media using “publicity tricks” to shape public consciousness against black demands. These and similar anecdotes reveal that prisoners, in keeping with the oppositional distrust of officialdom, saw media as what Althusser called an ideological state apparatus, an institution that indoctrinates an acceptance of the status quo and thereby secures its longevity.<sup>46</sup> Against this enemy, some black prisoners encouraged self-reliance. They declared it a “sacred obligation” of all writers, amateur and professional, to make sure that “our people” know the “*real things*” (emphasis in original).<sup>47</sup> For prisoners, as I show in the following chapter, knowledge of the real meant keeping the dominant media at arm’s length while producing their own forums for creating and sharing knowledge.

Prisoners produced their own and participated in already existing underground newspapers. But the biggest boost to prisoner-created knowledge came in the form of *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. The book collected letters Jackson had written, mostly to his family, between 1964 and 1970. Its publication in October 1970, preceded by several letters serialized in the *New York Review of Books* in the summer and fall of that year, exposed the country to the racial violence of life in prison for a black militant. Its success marked Jackson as an eloquent spokesman of the plight of black prisoners, and with them, black people in general. The book became an allegory of black radicalism in the Black Power era, providing global visibility to the prison as a gendered site of dissident racial formation. While the book earned Jackson popularity, *Soledad Brother* was the outgrowth of complex representational strategies, including his attorney, Fay Stender (who initiated the Soledad Brothers Defense

Committee), and his editor at Bantam Books, Gregory Armstrong. The private struggles over how Jackson would be represented to the public would define his rise, fall, and subsequent reinterpretation—mostly behind the scenes, until it manifest to the public through violence on August 21, 1971.

Through *Soledad Brother*, Jackson emerged as a translator of the discontent growing inside prisons. He was part of a coterie of black prisoners that challenged racism in prison and whose politics were shaped by the extrajudicial killing of several black prisoners by white guards or prisoners (typically acting with the collusion of guards). He played a leading role in opposing such violence, often with violence, making him a respected figure among black prisoners. Indeed, seven prisoners were disciplined in June 1970 for trying to raise money for the Soledad Brothers Defense Fund in an expression of support for Jackson and the other men.<sup>48</sup> His eloquence shaped his visibility, allowing him definitional authority in describing his experiences as a leader of dissent in prison. Jackson exposed the contentious and violent struggles taking place behind prison walls, completing the metaphoric chain established through earlier texts and campaigns surrounding black prisoners (see chapter 1). His words provided the coherent narrative through which people could understand the growing prison protest in a highly politicized register. In Jackson's urgent telling, prisons were schools rapidly graduating authentic revolutionaries who transformed themselves behind bars. "There are still some blacks here who consider themselves criminals—but not many. Believe me, my friend, with the time and incentive that these brothers have to read, study, and think, you will find no class or category more aware, more embittered, desperate, or dedicated to the ultimate remedy—revolution. The most dedicated, the best of our kind—you'll find them in the

Folsoms, San Quentins, and Soledads. They live like there was no tomorrow. And for most of them there isn't."<sup>49</sup> Jackson's description of the racial and political polarization that was increasingly gripping prisons in California and nationally, he defined the contours of blackness as an oppositional identity formed amidst confinement. In *Disturbing the Peace*, Bryan Wagner categorizes blackness as a "condition of statelessness" marked by invisibility.<sup>50</sup> Writing from the invisibility of prison, Jackson identified confinement as the basis of black political subjectivity. To be black was to live in and struggle against confinement. Jackson argued that enacting political subjectivity in a restrictive atmosphere required "[i]mprovising on reality" from within what Jackson elsewhere called "the Black contingencies of Amerika [sic]."<sup>51</sup> Improvisation in this sense, as Fred Moten has argued of the black avant garde and Charles Taylor has suggested of authenticity, defined political subjectivity as the performance of freedom in the context of un-freedom.<sup>52</sup>

Visibility was a key mechanism through which this improvisation occurred. In particular, Jackson's visibility proceeded through a reworking of his own reality, his presence in prison and the underlying normative assumptions of black criminality, to articulate a call to arms against white supremacy. Jackson did not display overt political beliefs prior to his incarceration; indeed, his conversion to radical politics once in prison became an idealized model of the ways that prisoners could transcend the conditions of their confinement. *Soledad Brother* became an Ur-text through which to redefine prisons as schools of liberation, a place where the poor and the poorly educated became schooled in leftist theory as part of their training to be vanguard fighters for the revolution.<sup>53</sup> Jackson's political transformation in prison expanded traditional left-wing notions of who

counted as a “political prisoner” to include those who were transformed *through* the prison. With its violent restrictions and pronounced racial divisions, confinement made gangsters and hustlers into militants and revolutionaries. In the millenarian discourse surrounding prison radicalism, this politicization was described as a spiritual rebirth due to the violence of incarceration. The prison created new identities of struggle, both for those incarcerated and those who took up their plight. Prisoners and their families were, it could be said, razed and born through prison: the prison destroyed their old identity as criminals and rebirthed them as radicals, which they then defined as the “true” racial-political identity. Through confinement, they grew to understand and take up the black condition as itself a position of confinement. This position, forcefully advocated by prisoners, was echoed by their family members. As Hill argues, family members, especially mothers, have been critical in the defense of prisoners historically.<sup>54</sup> Georgia Jackson was a vociferous critic of the prison as a tool of racist domination and a vocal supporter of her son, even as his letters to her in *Soledad Brother* often described her in Moynihan-like terms as an overbearing matriarch who emasculated the men in her family. Other mothers also became spokeswomen as a result. Inez Williams, the mother of Soledad Brother Fleeta Drumgo, likened her activism on behalf of her son to being “born again... Born to struggle.”<sup>55</sup>

The publication of *Soledad Brother* was part of a strategy to build public support for Jackson and his codefendants. The strategy was orchestrated by Fay Stender, at that time Jackson’s main attorney, who saw in his letters an eloquence that encapsulated the potent political thinking of prisoners. (Jackson, in turn, saw in Stender a passionate advocate of prisoners and directed numerous prisoners to write her about their

grievances, resulting in the creation of the Prison Law Project.) Stender, who first learned of Jackson in 1969 while she was working on the case of Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton, drew on various connections within the Bay area radical scene, especially those close to the Black Panther Party, to get the book published. Jessica Mitford, the bestselling author and former Communist, was especially helpful in securing a major publisher, Bantam Books, for Jackson's collected letters. So too was French novelist and playwright Jean Genet, who had toured the United States in support of the Black Panthers. Genet wrote the preface to the book—praising the book for displaying “the miracle of truth itself, the naked truth completely exposed”—arranged for Gallimard to publish a French edition, and secured letters of support for Jackson from other prominent French authors and intellectuals.<sup>56</sup>

Molotch notes that media and social movements meet when their different interests collide around a similar story.<sup>57</sup> With *Soledad Brother*, this convergence of prisoners and journalists transpired through the concept of authenticity. Many critics praised the book on these grounds. A book of intimate pain, emotional isolation, and physical violence, *Soledad Brother* was hailed for being an authentic expression of both black radicalism and the human spirit. Critics suggested that these qualities were universal and that Jackson had, as a result of his confinement, unique insight into the human condition. Dominant newspapers praised *Soledad Brother* both for its literary merit and its realness. Even those reviewers who rejected Jackson's politics noted his dramatic eloquence formed in the peculiar circumstances of prison. In proclaiming the book's greatness *because of its authenticity*, journalists compared Jackson's tome to that of two earlier but contemporary prison-redemption memoirs: Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on*



*Ice* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. As authors and as historical figures, Cleaver and Malcolm became touchstones for the media to evaluate Jackson—much as *Soul on Ice* was judged against *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* upon its publication and Cleaver deemed “an authentic voice of black rage.”<sup>58</sup> Unlike the earlier books, however, *Soledad Brother* was published while the author was still incarcerated—and his redemption did not lead to his release, as it did with both Cleaver and Malcolm X. The fact that Jackson remained in prison and continue to advocate openly for revolution fostered his authentic subjectivity. Political opposition was his redemption and thus his visibility. Even for those critics who preferred the earlier books to Jackson’s, reviewers still evaluated *Soledad Brother* within the parameters of authenticity.<sup>59</sup>

While *Soledad Brother* was the latest in a long line of American prison writing, Jackson made the genre more durable and profitable than most and consecrated it as an overlapping field of black protest writing. *Soledad Brother* utilized some of the discursive and colloquial elements of other black protest writing. Jackson was self-consciously steeped in the black radical authorship. In his interview with Jessica Mitford, Jackson spoke of reading Richard Wright and W.E.B. DuBois as a child at the urgings of his mother.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps unconsciously, Jackson borrowed from a speech given by the protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* in saying “I’m part of a righteous people who anger slowly, but rage undamned” (*Soledad Brother*, p. 222). In Ellison’s version, the invisible man exhorts a crowd protesting an eviction in Harlem by describing blacks as a “law-abiding people and a slow-to-anger people” (*Invisible Man*, p. 275).

Jackson’s continuing imprisonment bolstered his legitimacy while at the same time structuring the response to his book as the latest offering in an established genre of

black prison narratives. In defining the genre, journalists described each text as more real than its predecessor. The *New York Times* “Selected Books of the Year in Nonfiction” called *Soledad Brother* “a document of revolutionary rage, ‘the most important single volume from a black since *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.’”<sup>61</sup> In a review titled “Beyond Cleaver,” the *Washington Monthly* said Jackson “picks up where Cleaver left off.” But, the reviewer argues, *Soledad Brother* did more than that: it was more “inclusive” and universal than *Soul on Ice*. “Where Cleaver throws you back on yourself because you are not black, not oppressed—and that has its value—Jackson draws you in through your shared humanity... Cleaver gives you no time to breathe, drives you to the wall. Jackson breathes you in.”<sup>62</sup> Bantam Books used similar sentiments to package the book as universal, Jackson as authentic. The paperback edition of the book carried a quote from Huey Newton proclaiming George to be the “greatest writer of us all.” The undefined subject of Newton’s praise could be read as both a black “us” and a universal “us.” The publisher also treated Jackson’s family, the original audience for most of the letters in the book, as a synecdoche for a national or global potential audience. The paperback edition proclaimed that “Because of his burning need to communicate with his family, Jackson finally communicates with everyone.” The book was given the nonfiction award of the Black Academy of the Arts and one of the Notable Books of 1970 by the American Library Association.<sup>63</sup> This praise for Jackson’s universal appeal was global. Reviews in British periodicals described Jackson as a “free black man in white America,” attempting to obliterate “ghettos of the mind.” They called Jackson “a man who lost his freedom—and found himself.”<sup>64</sup> *Soledad Brother* expanded the market for writings by and about prisoners, leading Mitford to quip that “literary agents are scouting prisons for

convict talent.”<sup>65</sup> Underneath these critical declarations of Jackson’s universality was the assumption that blackness involved isolation and impoverishment that, if overcome through eloquent communication, could transcend the limitations of racial conditions altogether.

Journalistic certifications of Jackson’s authenticity clashed with other constructions of Jackson’s authenticity. Jackson’s editor, Gregory Armstrong, and attorney, Fay Stender, wanted to use the book to build support for Jackson’s case. As a result, they objected more to depictions of the book that challenged his standing or threatened his defense effort than reviews that questioned its literary merits. The pair attempted to manage Jackson’s image as an icon around which black protest might cohere. At the release party for *Soledad Brother*, held at the gates of San Quentin, Armstrong highlighted this metonymic labor of the black prisoner by calling Jackson “a medium, a voice for all oppressed people.”<sup>66</sup> Jackson’s authenticity, then, lay in his instrumentality; such utilitarianism is typical to authenticity which, as John Jackson and Lionel Trilling have each shown, assumes a static object rather than an ongoing subject.<sup>67</sup> Armstrong and Stender sought visibility for their narrative of an individual and collective search for justice, even as Jackson himself seemed to prefer an image more heroic and less sentimental. When Julius Lester wrote in the end of his favorable *New York Times* review of the book that Jackson “makes Eldridge Cleaver look like a song and dance man on the Ed Sullivan Show,”<sup>68</sup> Armstrong wrote several letters of protest to the *Times*. He chastised the *Times* for possibly damaging Jackson’s relationship with the Black Panthers. He argued that the newspaper had an obligation to print a rejoinder from Jackson for the benefit of the Soledad Brothers defense campaign and its relationship

with the Black Panthers.<sup>69</sup> The public narrative of Jackson rested on presenting black militants as a united force; the co-creators of his image objected to reviews that undermined this presentation. Jackson's response to the *Times* called Cleaver a "master" political theorist and demanded that "[a]ny comparison between myself and Comrade Cleaver must be respectful, or it doesn't represent my feelings of fraternity and love for him."<sup>70</sup>

Jackson's stern directive to the paper of record illustrates prisoners' complex positioning in regards to dominant media. While their access to media was limited, prisoners also displayed a remarkable sophistication regarding journalistic technology and practice. Jessica Mitford recalls that, when she interviewed him for the *New York Times* in 1971, George Jackson knew how to work her tape recorder and she did not.<sup>71</sup> Even as they treated mainstream media as an enemy, they coveted a wide audience in which to air their grievances and with which to build alliances. These prisoners recognized that media could be fundamental to their goals in two ways: it could facilitate their efforts to expose prison conditions and to shift public perceptions of who was in prison and why. Heather Thompson argues that prisoners took notice of the shock Northern liberals expressed upon seeing exposed the horrors of segregation and of the venality that characterized Southern prisons. In response, prisoners in other parts of the country hoped that they could similarly gain reforms through exposure. "Northern inmates nevertheless clung to the hope that, if Americans just knew about the conditions that they endured, then the public would demand reforms."<sup>72</sup> Exposure was a process; prison activists needed to "constantly plac[e] the plight of people in prison before public scrutiny," or else they would lose their attention.<sup>73</sup> Eve Pell remembers that a similar

motivation impelled her organizing on behalf of George Jackson and other prisoners in California: “If the public knew what was going on, we believed, people would surely be outraged and demand change.”<sup>74</sup> In addition to exposing conditions, radical prisoners sought visibility to alter collective consciousness. This approach defined the struggle for collective consciousness—for what Jackson described as “knowledge, recognition, foresight; common experience and perception’ sensibility, alertness, mindfulness”—as a vital ingredient of political transformation.<sup>75</sup> Devised from within prison cells, this approach defined exposure as a step toward creating new affinities. From Attica prison, Richard X. Clark wrote that the “revolution is primarily the [public] awareness because we know the revolution starts in the mind.”<sup>76</sup> Members of the San Francisco-based Prisoners’ Union argued that the more they were mentioned in print, “the less resistance we will face from the general public in the future.”<sup>77</sup>

Visibility in the form of media access became a battleground. Prison officials noticed the interest prisoners displayed in media and sought to curtail prisoner’ ability to communicate with those outside. These officials also noticed that media access affected the inner workings of the prison: officer Mills was killed on January 16, thereby launching what became known as the Soledad Brothers case, after prisoners heard a radio broadcast clearing another guard of wrongdoing in killing three prisoners. (Jean Genet was fond of treating this tit for tat as an equation: a white guard kills three black prisoners and gets away with it; three black prisoners are then charged with the death of a white guard.) Angela Davis got involved in the Soledad Brothers case after reading a story about the case in the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>78</sup> Most dramatically, prisoners at Attica Correctional Facility in western New York launched a silent protest and fast upon hearing

news that San Quentin guards had shot and killed George Jackson on August 21, 1971. Coming after a year of tumult in New York state prisons, and after weeks of rising tensions amidst prisoner efforts to improve their conditions, the protest commemorating Jackson's death spiraled into the biggest prison riot of the century, September 9 through 13, 1971. Despite their frequent distrust of mass media, politically conscious prisoners still relied on such news sources as they were able to find. Their physical isolation gave information, especially about matters dealing with prisons and protests, a high currency.

Prison officials limited the access that the outside world had to prisoners and that prisoners had to outside world. This two-way restriction understood visibility, whether mediated or embodied through personal visits or tours, as a site of struggle over knowledge. "They don't want us to know what's going on out there and they don't want people out there to really know what's going on inside the walls," an activist prisoner declared in 1972.<sup>79</sup> Censorship kept prisoners invisible by making them unseen by the outside world and denying them the possibility of seeing beyond the prison. This restriction was arguably aimed at curtailing activism among prisoners by removing the hope that people cared about their plight. As Bourdieu argued, censorship limits the field of what is considered possible.<sup>80</sup> In moments of crisis, however, where ideological restrictions are already being challenged and new possibilities are being imagined, attempts to limit contact become themselves sites of contestation. Not surprisingly, prison riots often demanded that the media be allowed access to these institutions. Prisoners fought to have journalists included on negotiating teams or allowed to investigate prisoner grievances, and they demanded an end to the censorship of books, periodicals and letters. The visibility of access as a political demand can create new fields of action

or attempts at management. As the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee garnered additional visibility, prison officials agreed to let a select group of journalists and state politicians tour the facility in June 1970. Two months later, in an effort to counter widespread reports of prison abuse, the warden invited ten reporters to a “News Media Open House” at the prison on August 25. By that point, however, additional acts of violence by prison activists—centrally the August 7 armed raid on Marin County Civic Center by George Jackson’s brother, Jonathan, which I discuss below—had increased the salience of the story, and fifty journalists showed up.<sup>81</sup>

Prison officials sought to limit visibility in the amount of access they allowed between prisoners and outsiders. Their positions of power in the closed-off world of the prison made these officials arbiters of prisoner publicity. Officials exercised this role as news sources and as news gatekeepers. These roles often fused, if sometimes unevenly: imbued with ready media access and institutional power over people typically denigrated in the public imagination, prison officials established themselves as authoritative sources against those held in their charge. They responded to prisoner criticisms through the media. In doing so they attempted to shift the focus away from prison conditions onto prisoner psyches, appealing to preconceived notions of the pathologies of poverty. California Department of Corrections director Raymond Procunier told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1972 that the public needed to know about *the kinds* of people who go to prison, not just what happens behind prison walls. Such attempts to refocus attention occurred as a matter of policy. It was not just a discursive battle between parties with parity in media coverage. Prison officials as news sources had the power to limit prisoner ability to be news sources or correspond with the outside world in general. By 1972, after

several riots and bloody disturbances in California prisons, most centrally the one leading to George Jackson's death in August 1971, corrections officials limited the number of people with whom prisoners were allowed to correspond. While journalists still covered prison issues, they were no longer devoting space to investigative coverage as they had when Jackson was a best-selling author.<sup>82</sup> San Quentin authorities blamed the media for contributing to Jackson's popularity and therefore, in their minds, to the circumstances which led to his death and that of five others. Warden Louis Nelson bemoaned the "greater communication between inside and outside," especially as prisoners heard about campus protests. In response, officials instituted a variety of censorship techniques following Jackson's death in 1971. San Quentin authorities denied journalists, attorneys and family members access to prisoners; censored mail; and vowed to review what publications, if any, would be allowed to enter prison. While these restrictions responded to the crisis brought about by Jackson's death, officials shortly before then had limited the number of interviews prisoners were allowed to give. While the policy, allowing reporters access once every three months and shrinking the number of legal investigators a prisoner could hire, applied to all San Quentin prisoners, the warden said it was directed at "'celebrity' inmates" such as the Soledad Brothers and Ruchell Magee.<sup>83</sup>

Jackson's death signaled a shift in the image management of the prison. (It also, as I explore later in this chapter, marked the beginning of a related shift in the representation of Jackson himself.) The most visible prisoner in the country, Jackson was killed in what authorities claimed was an escape attempt on August 21. He had acquired a gun, and prisoners briefly took control of the Adjustment Center, the solitary confinement unit within San Quentin where Jackson and nearly thirty other prisoners, many of them



black or Latino militants, were held in bare conditions. These men were the most isolated within the prison yet they included some of the most visible prisoners in California as a result of their own actions and the organizing around the Soledad Brothers, Ruchell Magee and other cases. Three guards and two prisoners, all white, were killed during the prisoner takeover of the Adjustment Center. Most of them had their throats slit with crude, makeshift knives; one was shot. Upon retaking control, guards removed all of the prisoners in the Adjustment Center to the yard. The guards stripped and handcuffed the prisoners, and then left them in the prison yard for several hours. This included George Jackson, whose dead body was handcuffed and then left in the prison yard for six hours. Photographers captured the image from above, before the prison was placed on lockdown and the prisoners held incommunicado for several days. This scene would be replayed three weeks later in a prison on the other side of the country. After a four-day prison rebellion, the New York State Police stormed the yard at Attica Correctional Facility in western New York and forced the hundreds of dissident prisoners there to strip and crawl through mud. In both cases, guards beat the naked captives with clubs as they hurled racial epithets at them.<sup>84</sup>

The ruptures at San Quentin, lasting less than an hour and unseen by the outside world, and at Attica, which transpired over four days of steady news coverage that was still limited by prison walls (as well as the usual constraints accompanying journalistic coverage), generated highly visible and violent responses by law enforcement. Prison activists synthesized the two incidents into one narrative about state barbarism and the violence of incarceration.<sup>85</sup> In both examples, as in other contemporary incidents, such as the hostage taking in Marin in 1970 or at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, radicals found

proof of state duplicity. This venality was revealed by the state's twin monopolies: of force and of definitional power. Stuart Hall and colleagues argued that the media exist in structured subordination to elite sources who comprise the "primary definers" of reality by establishing the discursive limits of the political issues that appear in the news.<sup>86</sup> In response to dramatic incidents initiated by subaltern groups, governmental agencies displayed both their definitional and military powers. Through their use of violence, law enforcement agents both ended prison riots and established the news that the riots were done. Officials within those same agencies then utilized their ready access to mass media to interpret those same events. Both uses of state power, the violence and the information, were technologies of punishment; they were deployed to discipline rebellious subaltern populations. Their crafted publicity—the assault on Attica was recorded, while the only photographs of the events at San Quentin displayed dead or captured and humiliated prisoners—was key to their success. This visibility demonstrated that, contrary to Foucault's assertion that the prison instantiated the power of surveillance over that of the spectacle, the prison was still a vital site for the most spectacular displays of punishment to secure state sovereignty. Racial or colonial dominance justifies the use of spectacular punishment. The rupture of invisibility in these contexts requires an even grander response to overcome the "image defeat" brought on by subaltern dissent.<sup>87</sup>

Information was as important an element in the visibility of state authority as physical force. As the *Black Panther* reported, "At Attica, San Rafael [i.e., Marin County on August 7, 1970], Munich, the same events unfolded: desperate, disenfranchised men take over other men as hostages in order to command the attention of the world to their plight. Then State [sic] power, exposed in its evil by the fatal spectacle, conspires to kill

all the guerrillas and all the hostages to the last man.” Initial news stories in each incident claimed that “the guerrillas” killed all the hostages, only to be revealed in subsequent testimony that the government fired first.<sup>88</sup> Accuracy is hard to come by in crisis situations, yet so is balance. Regardless of whether misinformation is deliberate or accidental, government sources still emerge as primary definers in the immediate aftermath of crisis situations.<sup>89</sup> This tendency is exacerbated in the case of prisons, where circuits of knowledge are already curtailed and the ideological construction of prisoners in popular consciousness breeds violent associations in the minds of many people.

The events at San Quentin and Attica reveal that groups lacking ready access to mass publics often rely on dramatic challenges to the hegemonic status of elite sources. These events further demonstrate that such sources regain control of the terrain, both material and mediated, through the violent display of power. Such displays were embodied and mediated. After Jackson’s death, prison guards sought to discredit his iconicity through their own spectacular display aimed at the surviving prisoners. While they forced prisoners to strip and then handcuffed them in the prison yard, the San Quentin guards sang their own version of a classic antiracist Civil War song, substituting Jackson’s name for iconic abolitionist John Brown and changing the locus of celebration from Brown’s life to Jackson’s death. They sang “George Jackson’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave” and “George Jackson’s body is rotting in the grave/ The revolutionary soldiers are rotting in their cells.”<sup>90</sup> More than disciplining prisoners, however, the display of violence has mass publics as its intended audience. This violence, often but not always more dramatic than the rupture to which it responded, drew additional power from its visualization. The circulation of images showing prisoners

humiliated and restrained—naked, handcuffed, beaten, surrounded by armed guards—was a part of the way prison officials and other government elites endowed the prison with power. Further, these images circulated uncontested: while various parties debated the *narratives* of what happened at San Quentin or Attica, the only available *pictures* showed heavily armed police dominating criminally vulnerable prisoners. If, as Hartley argues of journalism and visualization generally, photographs restore normalcy by depicting stasis, the pictures emanating from the yards of the prisons in California and New York in the summer of 1971 showed the normalcy of confinement to be governed by the state's monopoly of force.<sup>91</sup> The disproportionate display of force, that is to say, both the use and the image of violence, provided its own narrative. This narrative, while not uncontested, sought to quiet criticisms of the prison and depictions of prisoners as innocent victims or heroic activists through the visibility of their punishment and news (later contested) of their crimes. Backed by the violence of the state, this narrative comprised a step in the process of establishing criminal justice issues beyond the realm of what Hallin has labeled the sphere of legitimate controversy into an unchallenged consensus around criminal justice.<sup>92</sup> In that, the visible display of armed state power following Jackson's death and the quashed Attica rebellion can be seen as a response to the politicization of the prison for which Jackson had become a visible public figure.

As a writer, Jackson had brought attention to the prison as a violent site of racial formation and possible redemption. *Soledad Brother* generated struggles over prisoner access to the outside world from the start of its publication. Perhaps more than any news story, *Soledad Brother* provoked a fierce battle over prison visibility. Several California prisons refused to accept copies of the book that the publisher donated to the prison

libraries. Word of the book still spread, and individual prisoners received copies. Jackson said that prisoners “seem to be gratified that one of us had the opportunity to express himself” and appreciated that he was “getting ideas across, speaking for them, speaking for us.”<sup>93</sup> While they did not want other prisoners to read the book, prison officials viewed the text as a chance to conduct surveillance on prison militants for the purpose of undercutting their efforts to mobilize. *Soledad Brother* provided the rationale for officials to curtail prisoner efforts to communicate with the outside world. L.H. Fudge, the Superintendent of North Coast Conservation Center, released a memo to prison officials in the state suggesting that “every employee in the Department of Corrections” read *Soledad Brother* as part of the in-service training for staff to understand “the personality makeup of a highly dangerous sociopath.”<sup>94</sup> Precisely because its author was still in prison, the book generated additional attention to prison protest, a visibility that prison officials sought to discredit or redirect. San Quentin Warden Louis Nelson pointed to the media coverage describing the prison as “the best breeding and/or recruiting ground for neo-revolutionaries” as rationale for closing or restructuring several educational organizations in the prison.<sup>95</sup>

As a tactic of prisoner visibility, *Soledad Brother* put the focus on Jackson’s eloquence to challenge prevailing narratives of black criminality. The book’s title established its connection to the defense efforts: *Soledad Brother* made the Soledad Brothers a visible entity. The terminology is revealing of the politics of the burgeoning prison movement. It continued the metonymic quality that had been applied to other political cases of the time, such as the Chicago 8 or the New York 21. In this instance, the defendants’ representative claims were generalized further by describing the case through

gendered claims of racial solidarity, reworking the legal charges filed against them into an expression of fraternal conspiracy. This framing popularized the masculinity of the highly racialized realm of prison protest. It further politicized the space of prison by naming it as the site which had produced such racial protest. The Soledad Brothers case instantiated a vernacular that would accompany other prison-based trials in the ensuing decade, including the Attica Brothers, the Marion Brothers and the Leavenworth Brothers, among others. Each case had its particular circumstances, yet the moniker indicted the prison generally through an interchangeable invocation of specific prisons. In this vernacular, the prison supplanted the city as the site of black masculine, militant protest. Scholars have argued that prisons connect rural and urban spaces geographically and sociologically.<sup>96</sup> As radicals took greater interest in prisoners, especially through the Soledad Brothers case, prisoners established this spatial linkage as a way to name racial solidarity. The Soledad Brothers case helped establish a conceptual connection between prisons, cities and racial solidarity as the geography of black radicalism. Borrowing from the Black Panthers, prisoners addressed their comments to the “brothers on the block,” the people of the ghetto, or simply to “the street.”<sup>97</sup> Outside observers took notice, casting the growing troubles inside American prisons as an extension of the riots that had befallen American cities in recent years. ACLU attorney Herman Schwartz described the 1971 tumult at Attica as “the same kind of thing that happened at Watts and Newark: you’ve got to see it as part of the same picture.”<sup>98</sup> The visibility of prison radicalism provided additional exposure to the conceptual image of black politics in the aftermath of the civil rights movement. The prison and the ghetto were joined in the public eye as sites of discontent, two fronts in the geography of black dissent. Even without endorsing this

worldview as a political project, other discussions of Jackson articulated the prison and the ghetto as authentic sites of the black condition. Referring to his upbringing in South Chicago and Watts, the *Los Angeles Times* titled its obituary of the slain prisoner “George Jackson—Product of 2 Ghettos.”<sup>99</sup>

#### Race and Celebrity in the Making of Prisoners’ Political Subjectivity

*Soledad Brother* was one of several ways that the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, under Stender’s direction, pursued visibility as a way to build support for the three imprisoned defendants. In August 1970, the group also opened an office in San Francisco dubbed “Soledad House.” The office provided space for the defense committee to coordinate volunteer support and host events. Conceptually, it provided a visible counter to the prison—a parallel institution where people concerned about prisoners could voluntarily gather plot their opposition to the space of prison. In using the name of the prison, now also the collective name of the three most well-known interns of the prison, the Soledad House gave a material visibility to the connection between prisoners and their supporters: both the prisoners and their supporters spent their time, at least at some point, in a place called Soledad. The house was one way that supporters attempted to make the prison visible in public life. As I noted in chapter 1, the Grateful Dead headlined a rock concert held at the gates of San Quentin in 1968 to support prisoners holding a strike inside. To greet the publication of *Soledad Brother* in October of 1970, supporters held a book release party outside San Quentin, where the Soledad Brothers were all being held at that point, with champagne and free copies of the book for all in attendance. As with other celebratory demonstration, the prison book release party

appealed to the affect; it was an attempt to please prisoners by staging joy outside of prison gates.<sup>100</sup> Developing since at least 1968 and used throughout the 1970s, this visibility benefited from San Quentin's close proximity to major urban areas with a large and active progressive population. The ease of prison visibility increased through the combination of urban density and prison siting, making San Quentin an anomaly to the typical prison, which is geographically removed from urban areas.

Stender also enlisted the help of numerous celebrities and Bay area radicals to build what became the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee. Gary Fine argues that elite support was critical for posthumously creating John Brown as a hero.<sup>101</sup> But the support of elites was more critical in efforts to attract visibility to Jackson and other confined dissidents in their moments of need than it was after their death. The interventions of well-known artists, intellectuals and others contributed to the crafting of a collective narrative that invoked prisoners as if a memory. As in the nineteenth century, the involvement of such famous personalities legitimized the movement. A coterie of radical lawyers and activists in the Bay area enlisted several well-known attorneys, artists, and journalists. Signatories on an early support letter included figures such as Julian Bond, Noam Chomsky, Ron Dellums, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Jane Fonda, Jean Genet, Tom Hayden, Arthur Kinoy, William Kunstler, Jessica Mitford, Robert Scheer, Pete Seeger, and Benjamin Spock, among others.<sup>102</sup>

Prison activists attempted to meet the invisibility of incarceration with the hyper visibility of celebrity. Journalist Tom Wolfe lampooned this celebrity involvement in political activism as just the latest fad, famously dubbing it "radical chic."<sup>103</sup> But the artists and intellectuals saw it as life-or-death activism. When Angela Davis was arrested



for allegedly supplying the guns used by Jackson's younger brother in a failed prisoner escape, singer Aretha Franklin offered to pay her bail, saying that Franklin's money came from black people and so should go their well being. "Black people will be free," she predicted. "I've been locked up, and I know you've got to disturb the peace when you can't get no peace."<sup>104</sup> Connected to the story of George Jackson, the Davis case generated support in a similar valence. The Council on Church and Race (COCAR) of the United Presbyterian Church donated \$10,000 from the church's Emergency Fund for Legal Aid to Davis's legal defense. COCAR members, most of whom were black, defended their gift by arguing that "racism and repression—not communism—is the Greatest [sic] threat to America." Further, they argued that Davis needed to be protected as a "*symbol*" of "every black who has ever been slapped down by the power of white government" (emphasis in original).<sup>105</sup> (I explore the Davis case in greater depth in the following chapter.)

This strategy of garnering visibility through celebrity performed two synecdochic functions: first, it built upon fame to represent public support for men who were, second, said to represent all people enduring and resisting repression. This approach claimed prisoners as a universal underdog, a political subject whose universalism was forged through its conscious black identification. Such universal particularity articulated blackness and prisoner as mutually representative categories. The stakes of prison protest, then, were especially high for black people—and, therefore, it was through black freedom that humanity would most benefit. Both positions, that black people had a special investment in prisoners and that humanity ought then to have a special investment in black struggle, demanded visibility against the silence of racial oppression. The first

approach mandated greater black involvement in prison issues whereas the second directed greater involvement by whites and others.

James Baldwin argued both sides of this position in characteristic eloquence. In an open letter to Angela Davis after her arrest, the author described the time period as “an age in which silence is not only criminal but suicidal.” Baldwin pleaded for a visible show of united black resistance, arguing that black people recognized that Davis’s life was, almost literally, their own.<sup>106</sup> Around this time Baldwin also spoke to 3,000 people at a rally for the Soledad Brothers in Westminster, organized by the British support committee for the three men. For Baldwin, the cases of Angela Davis and George Jackson represented humanity’s last hope. “I don’t merely mean black lives: that’s merely the greatest metaphor, the most visible symptom [sic] of the rottenness of a certain state, of the end of a certain history.” He invoked a global structure of racism, telling the British audience that “Mr. Nixon who sits in Washington is also *your* President,” to argue that rebellious black prisoners held out not just the promise but perhaps the only possibility of a world free of white supremacy.<sup>107</sup> Although Davis was herself part of the synecdochic symbolism of black prisoners after her arrest in October 1970, she contributed to establishing Jackson as an even more powerful icon. She described her love of him as a commitment to black people and revolutionary action. “I love you, I love my people—that’s all that matters: liberation by any means necessary. ... The Amerikan Oppressor [sic] has revealed to us what we must do if we are serious about our committment [sic]—if I am serious about my love for you, about Black people, I should be ready to go all the way. I am.”<sup>108</sup>

Davis's comment reveals the way in which George Jackson's fame inculcated a view that held prisoners to be the vanguard political subject, whose authenticity was earned by their proximity to suffering. Sturken argues that survivors of traumatic events "become, within specific subcultures, appealing objects of desire whose suffering is seen as giving them wisdom, an understanding of life's purpose, and a heightened sense of values."<sup>109</sup> As prisoners became more visible as a political population, their supporters argued that surviving confinement, particularly isolation, endowed them with greater wisdom. One prison activist argued that "contemporary prison rebels have provided some of the best insights into American society," especially Malcolm X and George Jackson.<sup>110</sup> For some, the greater the severity of incarceration, the greater the wisdom. Prison activists and leftist attorneys described radical prisoners as bearers of civilization. Fay Stender said she felt that, "person for person, prisoners are better human beings than you would find in any random group of people. They are more loving. They have more concern for each other. They have more creative human potential."<sup>111</sup> William Kunstler, perhaps the pre-eminent leftist attorney of the era and a negotiator during the Attica prison riot, described prisoners in an equally grandiose manner. "If it was not for the difficult roads that these Brothers and Sisters chose, we would still be living in a jungle," he said in a 1972 interview.<sup>112</sup> A November 1970 *Black Scholar* editorial declared that "Angela Davis is campus, is community, is vanguard." Davis herself argued that "the most beautiful Black revolutionaries, men and women—are prisoners of war."<sup>113</sup> The pinnacle site of overt repression, the prison in its visibility symbolized institutional power; the other, metonymic side of this coin held that those who survived prison

symbolized commitment and purpose. The visibility of both sides of this coin was arranged and understood through racial prisms.

Jackson instantiated this chain of equivalencies whereby blackness signified both incarceration and redemption. His definition of blackness was an embodied masculinity that needed to be demonstrated in radical action. “I know I am black. I know that no one can better represent his blackness than I. I can and have always represented mine. ... If a man wants to relate to my blackness, fine, but I would prefer he relate to me on the basis of my status as a soldier in the WORLD [sic] revolution.”<sup>114</sup> Jackson defined race as something performed in global-minded action against colonialism. This perspective contributed to the construction of Jackson’s image as the individual embodiment of intellectual and physical resistance. Especially after Jackson was killed, prisoners across the country identified him as the most authentic revolutionary figure. Jackson’s authenticity owed to the way he combined intellectual pursuits and physical acumen with survival in prison. These qualities then became the basis of subsequent articulations of racial subjectivity. Some prisoners, for instance, argued that Jackson knew at birth that his life “was going to be an engagement, an enormous battle ... to demand respect and to be treated as a man.”<sup>115</sup> Typical of what Hanchard describes as the expression of revenge fantasies common to subaltern cultural production, Jackson himself argued that blackness was a condition of structured confinement that could only be ameliorated through anti-systemic violence.<sup>116</sup> As he wrote in *Soledad Brother*, “I’m going to charge them for this, twenty-eight years without gratification. I’m going to charge them reparations in blood. ... This is one nigger who is positively displeased. I’ll never forgive. I’ll never forget,

and if I'm guilty of anything at all it's of not leaning on them hard enough. War without terms" (p. 222).

Even where prisoners did not directly refer to Jackson, their cultural production continued to define race in the terms of confinement that he had articulated. Media, both mass and self-produced, were crucial venues for the circulation of this articulation of racial confinement and black redemption. Angela Davis granted her first interview from jail to *Muhammad Speaks*, newspaper of the Nation of Islam. Asked why she was a communist, Angela Davis replied "Before anything else I am a Black woman. I dedicated my life to the struggle for the liberation of Black people—my enslaved, imprisoned people."<sup>117</sup> The visibility of prison radicalism synthesized racial identification and political perspective in the form of the prisoner. As a subject position, the prisoner made visible histories of slavery, the endurance of white supremacy, and a critique of the ideologically laden concept of criminality. In an interview with a journalist, one of the prisoners on the team negotiating an end to a riot in the Queens, New York, jail in 1970 articulated blackness as the cause for his confinement and for his rebellion. It trumped all other categories of the self, from his name to the particular transgression that landed him in jail: "Q. What is your name? A. I am a revolutionary Q. What are you charged with? A. I was born black. Q. How long have you been in? A. I've had troubles since the day I was born."<sup>118</sup> Central to this racial understanding was making visible the construction of blackness as a badge of guilt as well as a banner of liberation. As a prisoner in Auburn, New York, wrote in a 1973 poem, "I am a political prisoner, charged with the unwritten/law of race."<sup>119</sup>

This emphasis on black prisoners as the centerpiece of authentic antiracist struggle circulated well beyond prison walls. It shaped prison protest in the United States and Europe, and it reached throughout the black diaspora. Prison was a vital institution through which black people in Africa and the Caribbean understood blackness in/and the United States. Cultural theorist Manthia Diawara remembers George Jackson and Angela Davis, along with Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, and Muhammad Ali, among others, introducing an American blackness into Mali, then recently independent of French colonialism. These figures of black American defiance, most of whom were at the time or had been previously in prison, taught Africans a certain practice and ideology of blackness. Diawara writes that he and his high school classmates in Mali began to imitate “our black American heroes” in dress, adopted nicknames, and linguistic style. “We began to see racism where others before us would have seen [only] colonialism and class exploitation.”<sup>120</sup> Knowledge of these figures, including not just general awareness but particular legal updates or other current events, became a cultural marker of personal independence. Through such knowledge, “African youth... were creating within us new structures of feeling, which enabled us to subvert the hegemony of *Francité* [i.e., French ways of speaking and thinking] after independence.”<sup>121</sup> Jackson’s death in August 1971 confirmed to these black activists the authentic threat black prisoners represented to the U.S. status quo. In a eulogy for Jackson written three months after his death, Guyanese scholar-activist Walter Rodney praised Jackson “because he discovered that blackness need not be a badge of servility but rather could be a banner for uncompromising revolutionary struggle.... [E]ver since the days of slavery the U.S.A. is nothing but a vast

prison as far as African descendants are concerned. Within this prison, black life is cheap.”<sup>122</sup>

The global appeal of the American black prisoner circulated beyond the black diaspora. After years of growing protest intersected with the state apparatus of criminal justice, the prison emerged as a meta site of power. As the prison aggregated various forms of repressive control, so too could it synthesize opposition from a myriad of subject positions. Thus, prison became visible as a site of intellectual interest and political critique for a variety of figures interested in the vicissitudes of power. In France, theorists including Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jean Paul Sartre formed the Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons (GIP) to publicize prisons as sites of repression. The group investigated and reported on French prisons, articulating the public’s right to know about prisons with the prisoners’ right to dignity. While this and similar efforts emerged in and emphasized particular national contexts, the specter of black American prisoners informed their efforts. At the prodding of Jean Genet, members of the GIP joined other French intellectuals, including Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, in signing statements of protest on behalf of George Jackson and Angela Davis.<sup>123</sup> Particularly in the Angela Davis case, articulations of racial protest and confinement were mobilized in a Cold War register across communist countries and beyond. The discursive positioning of Davis within the Eastern bloc differed somewhat from the circulation of her image in the black diaspora. Whereas the latter described the *prison* as the ultimate, negative expression of U.S. society, the former embraced the *prisoner*, or at least a certain prisoner, as positively epitomizing the United States. Both paradigms trafficked in certain tropes of black heroism. Angela Davis and George Jackson symbolized resistance

in both cultural productions, but the valence and object of that resistance varied as it traveled from Third World countries to the Eastern bloc. (As a black communist born in Alabama who studied in Germany, traveled in England, and lived in California, Davis was herself familiar with such circulations of blackness and socialism.) The Communist support for Davis, owing to her own membership in the U.S. Communist Party, attempted to highlight differences within the United States by seeking support outside the U.S. boundaries. A small book published with the support of the East German government called Angela Davis the “hero of the other America.”<sup>124</sup> Davis also received public support from women’s groups in Vietnam, Cuba, Mexico, Jordan, Japan, and, of course, the Soviet Union. Calls for her release came from Guyana, Denmark, Belgium, Australia, and Canada. Sixty-four Italian directors and screen writers signed a petition for her release. Greek director Costa Gavras, composer Mikos Theodorakis, and actors Yves Montand and Simone Signoret sent a letter to Governor Nelson Rockefeller when Davis was in custody there, and the seventh congress of the International Organization of Journalists petitioned Governor Ronald Reagan for her release. Well-known leftist intellectuals Shirley Graham DuBois and George Luckacs initiated petition campaigns in Egypt and Europe, respectively.<sup>125</sup> The visibility of black prisoners had global appeal, circulating within Cold War and colonial boundaries. This visibility enlisted a variety of cultural producers to collaboratively intone against the ongoing confinement of the black condition.

Heroism, Prestige and the Violence of Exposure



Allen Feldman argues that vision and violence are inextricably connected in situations of war between insurgents and states. “[V]isual perception ... is informed by, if not actually modeled on, acts of violence; seeing and killing, being seen and being killed, are entangled and exchangeable in the ecology of fear and anxiety.” In this context, “visual appropriation, because it is always pregnant with the potential for violence, has become a metonym for dominance over others.”<sup>126</sup> Rhetorics of violence inform the discourse of image-making: cameras are aimed, photographs are shot, pictures are taken.<sup>127</sup> At the same time, those who engage in violence pursue technologies of seeing as part of their actions. The use and display of weapons both serve to establish what Feldman calls a “political iconography” of violence.<sup>128</sup> As an iconography, the performance of violence, in both display and action, establishes political subjectivity by making itself visible.

The visibility of violence uses spectacle and symbolism to tell stories. Political violence, whether by imperial powers or guerrilla insurgents, gains its power from both force and image.<sup>129</sup> The narrative depictions of violence overlap with the technologies of memory. Feldman quotes an Irish former paramilitary partisan who described murder as a necessary political mnemonic: violence sends a message, it helps people remember.<sup>130</sup> The strength of that message depends on the severity of the violence and the extent of its mediated circulation. The spectacle of violence is therefore critical to the symbolic power its practitioners hope to extract from such actions. Debord and Bourdieu, key analysts of spectacle and symbolic authority, respectively, used these concepts to describe power through practices of domination. But both can, I believe, be used to explain how subaltern populations develop and articulate their own power. In other words, spectacle

and symbolic authority are weapons of the weak as well as the strong. They are multilateral political processes used to create diverse sources of power. According to Debord, spectacle is a social relationship whereby representation supplants experience due to the physical separation people now experience from one another. The same logic informed prisoner spectacles, which emanated from their positions of physical and conceptual invisibility. Representation was needed to make their experience known and provide what Debord called “*visible form*” of negating the social relations of confinement (emphasis in original).<sup>131</sup>

Spectacle was a leftwing mechanism of interrupting political domination. Starting in the 1950s spectacular violence emerged as a strategy of anticolonialism. It responded to the invisibility of political opposition in colonial regimes, disappeared through brutality and censorship. This strategy, called the “foco theory” or focoism (based on the belief that the disciplined actions of small, focused group could catalyze mass uprisings), was developed in and extrapolated from Latin American revolutionary movements of the 1950s and 1960s, especially in Cuba. This model called for violence, applied either against people in the form of guerrilla warfare or against property. The latter was described as “armed propaganda,” spectacular acts that attacked the symbols of power to shatter the veneer of official authority and control.<sup>132</sup> Focoism held that even the death of revolutionaries could serve an educative function in inspiring greater rebellion. Che Guevara, the most visible architect of this approach to social transformation, argued that death could inspire victory. “Whenever death may surprise us, it will be welcome, provided that this, our battle cry, reaches some receptive ear, that another hand reach out

to take up weapons and that other men come forward to intone our funeral dirge with the staccato of machine guns and new cries of battle and victory.”<sup>133</sup>

Led by Jackson, radical prisoners extended Che’s view that death could have a pedagogic function by focusing public attention on sites of invisibility. Hill notes that prisoners, following Bakhtin’s theory of carnivalesque, foretold of death as a form of giving birth.<sup>134</sup> Whereas Che welcomed a death that could catalyze further action, the violence of life in prison acquainted prisoners with the routine possibility of death. Some of the most oft cited passages of *Soledad Brother* confront violent death as arbitrary, inevitable and ever-present. Extrapolating from Jackson’s writings, Genet described prison and death as two sites of black redemption.<sup>135</sup> Prison radicals likened the mundane violence of imprisonment to being buried alive and describe the pervasive threat of death from state (or prisoner) violence. Rodríguez labels this discourse the “vernacular of death” of imprisoned intellectuals, whereby incarceration both forces a familiarity with death and comprises the closest living approximation of it.<sup>136</sup> Prisoners juxtaposed their relatively invisible social death against the pedagogic possibilities of spectacular death. They identified this conceptual visibility as inextricably linked to social change, arguing that their bodies were the only recourse they had left in which to pursue visibility. “Anytime you try to expose the system which is as vast as this system is, you know there are going to be many, many sacrifices,” said Richard X. Clark, a participant in the Attica rebellion. “Sacrifices have been made all through time. If all of us have to die to save generations to come then that is what has to be done. ... Attica was very good in a lot of aspects because in the society of today people have to be shocked into the reality of the time. You can sit down and talk all day long about what is being done, what needs to be

done, what should be done. But it really takes shock therapy. If 43 people hadn't been killed at Attica, people wouldn't have known that Attica existed.”<sup>137</sup>

From the 1950s through the 1970s, focoism provided a Marxist framework for the small-scale warfare that has been a part of revolutionary activity by communists, anarchists and nationalists around the world since at least the eighteenth century.<sup>138</sup> The Sixties-era Marxist iterations collectivized revolutionary violence, taking it from lone actions of what anarchists called “attentat” (propaganda by the deed) to clandestine groups, collectives and organizations. In the context of prison, this approach to violence meant building a culture of opposition that legitimized violence as an inevitable and appropriate response of the oppressed to their condition. While the gang presence and deep polarization of life in prison has long marked that space with collective violence, focoism arranged it as a political enterprise that made prison one site in a global conflict of colonialism. Further, the development of a shared culture among at least some of the politicized black and Latino prisoners in California in the 1970s expressed itself collectively in sentiment—shared opposition to the guards, racist prisoners, and prisoners who cooperated with either of them. This culture of antistatist and antiracist opposition provided the collective environment that sanctioned political violence. In the atomized world of the prison, the most severe act, the planned killing of guards, was done by individuals or by small groups of two or three rather than bigger collectives. Between 1970 and 1971, nine guards were killed in California prisons. During that time twenty-four prisoners were also killed.<sup>139</sup>

Even more than earlier iterations, the foco approach to political violence relied on media circulation for its desired catalytic effect. The spread of focoistic strategies owed

to the advance in mediated communication, from television to publishing, that served to compress how people experienced space and time in the 1970s.<sup>140</sup> Thus, the actions of Jonathan Jackson on August 7, 1970, were read against the backdrop of Black Power militancy and Third World insurgency. On that day, the seventeen-year-old Jackson walked into the courtroom of Judge Harold Haley in the Marin County Courthouse with several guns hidden in his coat and a travel bag. San Quentin prisoner James McClain was in court, serving as his own attorney in disputing charges that he assaulted a guard. Jackson interrupted the proceedings and armed McClain and Ruchell Magee, another San Quentin prisoner who was then on the witness stand. The pair armed another prisoner, William Christmas, who was waiting in the hallway to be called as a witness. Two other prisoners also in the holding cell refused to join the group. The group tied up the judge and affixed a shotgun around his head. They tied up the district attorney, Gary Thomas, and took him, Haley and several jurors hostage. They spent fifteen minutes explaining their rationale to the jurors-turned-hostages.<sup>141</sup> They took their hostages out of the courtroom and began walking toward the elevator. A photojournalist happened upon the group and began snapping pictures. One of the assailants declared “we are the revolutionaries. Take all the pictures you want.” The raid ended minutes after it was documented. The group climbed into a van that Jackson had rented. San Quentin guards had been called in to assist local police in diffusing the hostage situation. Unbeknownst to most people, however, San Quentin had a policy of preventing prisoner escapes at all costs—even if it meant killing hostages. Guards opened fire on the van, as Thomas wrestled a gun away from one of the prisoners and began shooting inside the van. Four

people were killed: Jackson, McClain, Christmas, and Haley. Magee and Thomas were wounded by shots fired from outside the van.<sup>142</sup>

The articulation of revolutionary action and photographic documentation makes the events of August 7 a signal point in the development of prisoner visibility in this time period. Observers and subsequent reports have attributed this quote to different members of the four-person group. Regardless of who said it, however, the statement illustrates the high purchase given to the wide circulation of an embodied violence carried out by black men, especially by or on behalf of black prisoners. The declaration provided an interpretation of the weapons—these guns mark us as revolutionaries—and expressed an ease at being documented—you should photograph us but not fear us; pictures will spread the message of revolution. The embrace of being photographed suggested visibility as a goal of the action, implicitly contrasting it against the invisible enemy of incarceration: as if to say that revolutionaries have nothing to hide whereas the prison system will not allow itself to be photographed. The articulation of revolutionary action and its representation suggests a slippage between them—that the event needed to be photographed to have achieved its desired revolutionary effect. In that sense, the gun and the camera were both part of the events of August 7.<sup>143</sup> The visibility sought, however, cannot be limited to visualization. Rather, Jonathan Jackson and company wished to capture the visibility of public consciousness, through another communication apparatus. Magee later revealed visibility to be the purpose of the event overall. He maintained that the group intended to take over a local radio station and broadcast news of the “torturous prison conditions.” He described August 7 as “an effort to reach the people and

dramatically awaken them to the plight of all prisoners, particularly Blacks.”<sup>144</sup> Visibility was both the goal and the performance of a revolutionary subjectivity.

This visibility had a theatrical component, present both in physical space and embodied action. In covering the trials of Magee and Angela Davis, who was charged with supplying the guns Jackson used, journalist Reginald Major cast himself as a theater critic. He titled the chapters of his book about the Davis trial as if acts in a play, complete with “the leading lady” (Davis), “dress rehearsal” (media coverage of the trial) and “casting call” (jury selection). The trials emerging from the events of August 7, 1970, were particularly theatrical. The drama owed not only to the audacity of the raid but the site in which it occurred. The Marin Civic Center, which housed the courthouse and several other municipal offices, was the first structure that noted architect Frank Lloyd Wright designed “for a government agency and the last of his life.” It featured an amphitheatre, and the courtrooms were “designed to make people more related visually and audibly to each other,” as if a stage.<sup>145</sup> Jonathan Jackson, with the help of three San Quentin prisoners, attempted to spark prisoner visibility by using dramatic tactics in a theatrical space.

Articulating violence and vision, prison radicals—including those who were not incarcerated, as with Jonathan Jackson—entered a terrain of semiotic constructions of heroism and political struggle. Their use of violence through visibility can be seen as being a part of what Gramsci called a war of position, that is, a trench warfare over popular consciousness and affinity.<sup>146</sup> Violence in this context was a way to challenge popular conceptions, especially among people of color, of the impervious structure of state power. For prison activists, motivated by the invisibility of confinement, symbolic

violence mattered to the extent it garnered visibility. The fusion of violence and vision necessitated a heroic narrative. Opponents of the prison needed figures powerful enough to overcome its overwhelming authority. This enterprise crafted political subjectivity through dramatic, embodied action that could be subsequently circulated for greater impact. Heroism was the only force powerful enough to counter the prison's immense power, establishing the terms of prison radicalism as a violent contest between the hypervisible and the hyperinvisible. Speaking at the joint funeral of Jonathan Jackson and William Christmas, Black Panther leader Huey Newton praised the men as martyrs who "intensified the struggle and placed it on a higher level. A picture is worth a thousand words, but action is supreme."<sup>147</sup>

Prison radicals pointed to the four deaths that day as visible evidence of the state's venality. They mourned the deaths but celebrated the heroism that had courted death. That heroism was described as a proper feat of black revolutionary standards. Jackson praised his younger brother for embodying self-determination through his violent act. "Man-child, black man-child with submachine gun in hand, he was free for awhile. I guess that's more than most of his can expect." At the same time, he said that he would have stopped his brother from pursuing this course of events because he knew how brutal prison guards could be.<sup>148</sup> Eric Mann was imprisoned in Massachusetts for a violent antiwar demonstration during August 7. In a book about Jackson published in 1974, Mann praised the "Courthouse Raid"—the capital letters mark the event as historically significant—as being "brilliantly conceived and executed—more in its audacity than in its complexity." Its heroism, Mann argued, accomplished three tasks of exposure: it showed the government to be callous, thereby demoralizing those who would otherwise



support it, and inspiring people who oppose it.<sup>149</sup> In a talk at the National Student Association meeting in Minnesota, Tom Hayden predicted future actions and kidnappings. Hayden called August 7 “a very, very important thing. It changes the entire relationship between the courts and political prisoners, between the oppressors and oppressed people.”<sup>150</sup> This audacious heroism was of greatest inspiration to black prisoners, who saw the action as making visible the challenge to prisons they had been waging largely in silence. Six prisoners charged with a riot in Auburn, New York, praised Jonathan as their role model. “[H]e lives in the heart of the revolution, the soul of the revolutionary people, the mind of the revolutionary, the body of liberation!... Right on to the baddest mothafucker [sic] that ever lived and died!” The prisoners joined Jackson’s raid with their own legal predicament, arguing that because of such militancy the “specter of complete freedom is haunting Racist Babylon.”<sup>151</sup> Perhaps no one was so taken by the events that day as Ruchell Magee, the only surviving participant. Because of his heroic violence, Magee described Jonathan Jackson as both a savior and a role model. Both positions were, to Magee, the epitome of what blackness should be: in open and visible conflict with the state. “The only Jesus for a black man today is a man like Jonnie Jackson. He’s a hard driving black man with plenty of soul to recognize the time of day. He wasn’t talking black, he was acting black—just like I am going to do from now on.”<sup>152</sup> Dependent on ruptures, the political spectacle encourages a performative display that, as in the case of August 7, could be used to define racial identity as a set of embodied actions that equipped practitioners with the authority to craft political subjectivity on their own terms but in public display.

As in Magee's pledge of continual defiance, this heroism was also the pursuit of visibility against state-sanctioned silencing; the two squared off as if a self-fulfilling prophecy, each approach drawing justification from the actions of its opponent. Citing security concerns in the immediate aftermath of August 7, California authorities moved trials involving prisoners to a makeshift courtroom housed behind the walls of San Quentin. Prison activists challenged this decision, and a court ruled in their favor. By October all trials, regardless of where the crime in question occurred, were once again prosecuted in courthouses. The six weeks of limbo, however, became a tussle over visibility. This conflict was discursive and material, in principle and practice; it involved a literal battle for access to the makeshift court against the backdrop of a symbolic debate over the sites and meaning of justice. As I discuss in the next chapter, prisoners sought to turn courtrooms into political sites. Doing so was part of a broader effort to make the criminal justice system, and prisons in particular, visible as institutions of (racial) domination. Moving the court to the prison, in response to an assault on a physical courtroom, shifted the symbolic location of juridical practice from a visible state institution to its invisible counterpart. Whereas the courtroom presumes innocence, the prison presumes guilt; it is a site of punishment rather than arbitration. The prison's metonymic power, established through its invisibility, generated protest that it was a site antithetical to publicness. The judge pointed out that the makeshift courtroom built (by prisoners) at San Quentin fit as many people as did any courtroom at the Marin Civic Center, that regular courts also limit the number of spectators allowed, and that people in both places were allowed access on a first-come basis. Journalists were also allowed to cover the trials; the San Rafael *Independent Journal* did so regularly, perhaps because of

its novelty, as part of its coverage of the aftermath of August 7. But the symbolic valence of prisons as a site of invisible punishment proved too powerful an image for the constitutional right to a public trial.<sup>153</sup> Official pronouncements of the similarities between the typical courtroom and the makeshift one in prison only bolstered political claims that both sites were innately unfair.

Now that the court system attempted to utilize the space of prison for its own security, activists attempted to make that space visible for its repression. This move synthesized the conceptual use of prison as a universal metaphor of confinement with an attempt to make visible a typically hidden material institution of repression. Magee and his supporters challenged the move to host trials in prison as an attempt at silencing him. Magee cursed the judge in his first appearance at the San Quentin court, saying that the prison setting by definition negated any legal impact of the proceedings. Instead, the symbolic invisibility of the prison relegated the hearing to the realm of Jim Crow justice that the prison practiced. He asked to be removed from the “Ku Klux Klan trial” and said further that “such proceedings are what caused the Marin County incident.”<sup>154</sup> A coterie of anti-prison groups indicted the in-prison trials as an attempt at creating a spectacle of silence meant to discipline the public more generally. The Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, the Black Panther Party and the Bay Area National Lawyers Guild initiated a protest at the San Quentin gates on August 24. They argued that although the courts were unfair already, hiding their unjust machinations behind prison walls would sever prisoners from their only contact with the outside (in the form of public trials) and a harbinger of fascism.<sup>155</sup> They targeted the move as an effort to enshrine invisibility, with its chilling effect on civil rights. Speaking to a rally of 125 people outside the court, Tom

Hayden shrilly challenged the disciplinary power of invisibility as the height of unfreedom: “people outside the prison walls have no rights and people inside the walls of less than no rights.”<sup>156</sup> The physical presence of supporters at the prison gates, and inside the prison for visits or during the short-lived time when hearings were being held behind bars, made prisoners and supporters visible to each other. That is, supporters saw prisoners and glimpsed conditions of their confinement, while prisoners saw a connection to the outside world. The lawyers involved in some of the hearings hoped to use the media attention devoted to the spatial conflict to make visible prisoners as a unified and impartial group. At a press conference, George Jackson’s attorney John Thorne said he would support a move of the Soledad Brothers trial to San Quentin if the brothers could be tried by a jury of their peers—other black prisoners. Thorne argued that their unity emerged from their spatial location and racial affinity. As they “live in a unique culture,” Thorne said of prisoners, they “must be judged by inhabitants of the same culture.”<sup>157</sup>

Thorne’s description of prisoners in general and black prisoners in particular as constituting a cohesive collective followed the position established by his most famous client. That position, in turn, was made more visible, circulated with greater urgency, as a result of the events of August 7. The spectacle of Jonathan Jackson’s actions structured the creation of George Jackson as a national symbol. It facilitated the prisoner’s visibility in relation to several key incidents: the killing of three prisoners and one guard in January 1970, the publication of *Soledad Brother*, and the events of August 7 (all spectacles being in some way self-referential). Although he had been increasingly known to a coterie of activists in the California area, George Jackson was not highly visible to a national audience before the assault on the Marin courthouse. The younger Jackson’s audacity fed

the narrative of the older Jackson's militancy. The subsequent visibility George Jackson enjoyed, in part by his own design, was refracted through this frame of heroic violence as racial subjectivity. With the publication of *Soledad Brother* two months away, the raid made the tumult inside and, now, surrounding California prisons a national news story. The dramatic setting, the bloody end, and the possible involvement of well-known radical professor Angela Davis—to whom several of the guns used by Jackson were registered but who could not be found for six weeks afterward—all made the story a topic of interest. Because one of the prisoners said “Free the Soledad Brothers” as the group was leaving the courtroom, the district attorney declared it a conspiracy to free the three accused men. Such visibility expanded the George Jackson story, giving added attention to the fledgling Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, and placing in the public eye some of the issues involved in the case. Searching for the rationale behind August 7, the *New York Times* pointed to the January 13 killing of three black prisoners. The raid, or more precisely the search for its source, established the January 13 deaths as the origins of a radical prison movement. Likewise, the *San Francisco Chronicle* initiated a three-week series of articles on prisons in the aftermath of August 7.<sup>158</sup> The raid also became part of the publicity used to promote *Soledad Brother*, published two months later.<sup>159</sup> Thus, while the book made George Jackson a visible narrator of prison radicalism, Jonathan Jackson's spectacle endowed the prisoner with symbolic authority.

Feldman notes that the “meaning and memory of any political act” is determined in advance based on “an accumulation of mimetic moments and reenactments that weave together fate and fatality.”<sup>160</sup> The pictures of August 7 garnered photojournalist James Kean several awards. Images of the events, of the armed group and their hostages or of

the young Jackson facing the camera with a rifle in each hand, were reprinted throughout various underground newspapers and flyers urging support for Magee and extolling the coming black revolution. These images included both photographs and paintings or drawings based on them.<sup>161</sup> The photographs themselves, though, were an eerie reproduction of a cartoon that had appeared in the *Black Panther* newspaper two days before the raid. In the gratuitous style that had become the hallmark of Emory Douglas's artwork in the newspaper, the cartoon featured a group of armed black men freeing a handful of black men from behind prison bars while holding at gunpoint anthropomorphic pigs wearing police uniforms. The caption predicted the news of a few days later. "The walls must come down. The time is now for prison walls all across decadent Babylon to crumble, for prison gates to be blown to pieces, and for the prison hallways to vibrate with sounds of gunfire, hand grenades and shouts of liberation!" Asked about the image, Huey Newton said it was "not only a prediction of the event in Marin, but of the clash of social forces that we witness in a very regular way."<sup>162</sup> The cartoon was a bombastic allegory for black protest against white supremacy. It became a hyperreal advance rendering of the spectacle of prison visibility.<sup>163</sup>

The *Black Panther* cartoon was the most dramatic way that the violence of August 7 emerged as a new memory of political violence past. Before she became head of the Black Panther Party, Elaine Brown was known within the organization as a singer. She performed as a solo artist and with a group called The Lumpens. Brown's anthems extolled violence as a form of masculinist visibility directed against the invisible burden of oppression. The chorus of one song declared "believe it, my friends/that this silence can end/we'll just have to get guns/and be men." In the song "Jonathan," about the events

of August 7, Brown praised the masculinity of violent vision: “Jonathan/ he was so young/ picked up a gun/ Jonathan/ but a man/ was he.”<sup>164</sup> With the world seemingly more within reach, news of political violence spread at the same time as various political groups and book publishers made available a variety of texts, new and reprinted, that dealt with political violence. Thus both political mobilization and cultural production gave visibility to spectacular violence. In his auspices as Black Panther Minister of Information, Eldridge Cleaver reprinted the classic anarchist tract “Catechism of the Revolutionist” as a pamphlet for black revolutionaries. Printed in nineteenth century Russia, the Catechism was a manual for individual attacks against the state. It rejected collectivity and morals, finding hope only in violent assault.<sup>165</sup> In 1970, Schocken Books reprinted another anarchist classic of attentat, Alexander Berkman’s *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*. Berkman spent fourteen years in prison for attempting to kill Henry Clay Frick after the industrialist used Pinkerton guards to crush a steel strike in Homestead, Pennsylvania. The book, first published in 1912, describes Berkman’s assassination attempt, trial, and time in prison, during which he grew to reject romantic notions of revolution that were embedded not only in his act of attentat but also his belief in the consciousness of the striking workers and oppressed prisoners. The book’s reappearance in 1970, along with other republished anarchist texts, can be read as part of the growing interest in violence as an expository tactic.

For Jackson, exposing the prison as metaphor and materiality was an all-encompassing project. He spoke often of his self-education and rigorous exercise regimen as constituting his resistance; both of these facets, his intellectual and physical acumen, became part of the narrative structuring his visibility. (Eric Mann, for instance,

remembers hearing while he was in prison of “this guy in Soledad Prison in California who did a thousand finger-tip push-ups a day. He had been in segregation for years and wouldn’t let them break him.”)<sup>166</sup> His poetic emphasis on physicality defined a strong body as a necessary element of the political subjectivity needed to withstand life behind bars. He juxtaposed his physicality against the prison’s attempt to colonize the mind and soul. Jackson’s supporters pointed to the cruelty of his vague sentence of one year to life.<sup>167</sup> This punishment effectively placed his life in the hands of the California Adult Authority, the state parole board. A common juridical practice at the time, indeterminate sentencing placed the prisoner’s life in perpetual limbo. The Adult Authority, and its corollary for youthful offenders, the Juvenile Authority, used its expansive power to determine when a prisoner had been successfully rehabilitated. Critics charged that the Authority used prison time as a bludgeon to ensure compliance to the prison rules in particular and to a self-disciplined Protestant work ethic more generally.<sup>168</sup> In that context, supporters interpreted Jackson’s repeated parole denials as reflecting his ongoing victimization and his oppositional spirit.

Identifying what Foucault would subsequently dub the prison’s governmentality, Jackson posed a stark challenge: full-fledged resistance or death. Jackson boasted of doing one-thousand finger pushups daily to “repress the sex urge” denied him by confinement. Exercise was a part of what he described as the emotional detachment necessary to survive prison. “So, if they would reach me now, across my many barricades, it must be with a bullet and it must be final.”<sup>169</sup> This emotional detachment went alongside Jackson’s call for guerrilla warfare as a scientific strategy of revolution against sentimental methods of social change. Privately he described both sex and



violence as “the end-game,” his missions in life.<sup>170</sup> In correspondence, he offered an obdurate defense of emotional detachment and revolutionary violence as evidence of his own political subjectivity. In a January 1971 letter to his legal team and close supporters, he argued for “clinical, retaliatory, organized revolutionary violence” as the only justified approach. He challenged the recipients of the memo for questioning this position and, with it, the vanguard role of black prisoners in radical struggle. “Being a slave and living in the shadow of the gas chamber for years and under the knout all my life leaves me in a position above you and I'm laughing. At you.”<sup>171</sup>

Jackson's emphasis on violence increased alongside his visibility, which owed in part to his brother's dramatic actions and death. He had long emphasized guerrilla war, and he used the greater attention he received as a writer and prison organizer to articulate such a political strategy. He rearranged the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee to have his family members at the helm and the Black Panthers as beneficiaries, believing them to be more loyal to his program than the multiracial group organized under the direction of Jackson's attorneys. As part of this shakeup, Jackson severed his ties with Stender, who had orchestrated the campaign that first brought Jackson to visibility. In correspondence, Stender confided that George was “angry with me for the book [i.e., *Soledad Brother*] for cutting out the blood and guts part.” Indeed, he had no part in selecting which letters were cut and which were included in the book.<sup>172</sup> Even before the book was published, Jackson was objecting to the presentation of him as only an innocent victim, rather than an open antagonist, of a corrupt system. “There is very little that I could say at present to make people think that I am merely an ox in a bind, an 18 yr. [sic] old candy store bandit. That hasn't worked, I knew it wouldn't. And really it wasn't my

idea to try it. ... Noone [sic] is going to sympathize but the others of my kind anyway.”<sup>173</sup>

Jackson never saw his political authenticity bound up with innocence, but rather with revolution. It was the latter project, therefore, that he wanted to make visible.

Jackson’s second book, the posthumously published *Blood in my Eye*, would not have the editorial intervention that he felt marred his first publication. The book was completed less than two weeks before Jackson’s death. “I’m not a writer but all of its [sic] me the way I want it, the way I see it,” Jackson said of the manuscript on August 11.<sup>174</sup> *Blood in my Eye* emphasized revolutionary violence, especially from within the “principal reservoir” that “lies in wait inside the Black Colony” of ghettos and prisons, against capitalism and the incipient fascist threat (p. 10). A manual on the theoretical and practical underpinnings of guerrilla war, the book was a combination of essays and letters that Jackson had written to individuals. Unlike his first book, *Blood in my Eye* is arranged into thematic chapters to emphasize the political interventions Jackson wanted to advance. Spared from the heavy editorial hand that shepherded *Soledad Brother* to publication as an organizing tool, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to evaluate how much *Blood in my Eye* reflects Jackson’s growing militancy versus his attempt to make visible what he had believed and been trying to make visible on the subject for a long time. *Soledad Brother*, even with its intent to position Jackson as an innocent victim, contained several expressions of violent ideations or proclamations. Yet, as I argue below, while these statements were initially part of what established Jackson as an authentic literary talent with universal appeal, critics ultimately used them as proof of his criminal authenticity, and therefore his political inauthenticity. Posthumous critiques of Jackson juxtaposed violence and victimhood as mutually exclusive categories of

authenticity—either Jackson was an authentic criminal who believed in violence or was an authentic radical who was therefore a victim. The use of authenticity as a zero-sum framework could not reconcile Jackson’s violent politics with his claims of being victimized by a racist state or its brutal institution. These critics set as their task to expose the “real” George Jackson from the narratives propagated by and about him as a result of his visibility.

Published in 1972, *Blood in my Eye* synthesized Jackson’s view of political violence as a strategy based in exposure as a political imperative. Jackson argued that revolutionary action could expose the criminal justice system, and through that demonstrate the venality and racial oppression that characterized the American state. He saw prison radicalism as the natural conduit for the use of violence as a revolutionary strategy. “Only the prison movement has shown any promise of cutting across the ideological, racial and cultural barricades that have blocked the natural coalition of left-wing forces at all times in the past. ... The issues involved and the dialectic which flows from an understanding of the clear objective existence of overt oppression could be the springboard for our entry into the tide of increasing world-wide socialist consciousness” (p. 109). In Jackson’s conception, the purpose of such violence was to attack popular support for the institutions of governance. He saw violence as a spectacular force to shift collective consciousness and break the invisibility, the “isolation” of repression (p. 29). This view potentially extended to state violence, since “repression exposes” the state’s monopoly of force (p. 23). Jackson cast violence as a rupture of the hegemonic order. Violence was, in his terminology, an attempt to “destroy the prestige” of established institutions. His was a semiotic analysis of violence and authority. Both were measured in

the messages they communicated, in what Jackson, like Walter Benjamin, described as their “aura.”<sup>175</sup> It was this aura that, Jackson said, needed to be attacked. “[P]restige must be destroyed. People must see the venerated institutions and the ‘omnipotent administrator’ actually under physical attack” (p. 50). Institutions maintained their authority by popular ascension to their permanence; thus, they needed to be violently uprooted. According to Jackson, the visible destruction of elite prestige, accomplished only through violence, was necessary to build a “revolutionary culture.” State violence, in the form of police brutality, was, in his estimation, an effort to extend that prestige by using spectacular displays of force to coerce submission.<sup>176</sup>

Jonathan Jackson was crucial in George’s attempt to theorize prestige as a locus of power. *Blood in my Eye* constructs Jonathan as a martyred example of this effort to destroy prestige, as well as a theorist of this approach to violent exposure. The first part of the book consists of a running dialogue between the Jackson brothers in which the elder constructs his martyred sibling as a hero. Jackson had been saying as much since the events of August 7.<sup>177</sup> The difference with *Blood in my Eye* is that he reprinted letters from Jonathan, constructing this heroic image out of his words and not just his deeds. Jonathan Jackson’s posthumous visibility was much like his brother’s: imperiled for his action, his visibility was secured nationally through the publication of letters. In doing so, George accomplished a desire he had named since August 7, 1970—that people should know, as well as wonder, “what forces created him, terrible, vindictive, cold, calm man-child, courage in one hand, the machine gun in the other, scourge of the unrighteous.”<sup>178</sup> In between August 7 and the publication of *Blood in my Eye*, however, the only written words of Jonathan that were publicly circulated, as if to give insight into his motivations

for attacking the Marin courthouse, was an article published in his high school newspaper acknowledging that he was “obsessed” with his brother’s case.<sup>179</sup> *Blood in my Eye* revealed him to be less focused on George in isolation and more concerned with guerrilla war as a strategy of black revolution. In a November 1969 letter, for instance, the younger Jackson argued that the ubiquity of police power was an illusion. “Their present show of strength is actually their weakness—show—they’re too visible” (p. 19). Jonathan argued that invisible violence, that is to say, guerrilla war, could demobilize elites and provide a potent source of power for the oppressed. George mythologized Jonathan: “He has to be the baddest and strongest of our kind: calm, sure, self-possessed, completely familiar with the fact that the only things that stand between black men and violent death are the fast break, quick draw, and snap shot” (p. 42). At the same time, George described Jonathan as his own alter-ego, inflating both of their images, especially since *Blood in my Eye* was not published until after George Jackson was killed.

The narratives *of* prisoners as heroes were both *about* them, as in the case of George Jackson, and *by* them, as with George’s depiction of Jonathan and the many prisoner depictions of George Jackson. Prisoners participated in shaping their own visibility through violent action and mediated representation. Each practice served to establish the symbolic authority of prisoners as heroic figures. Heroism was the insurgent construction that prison activists juxtaposed against the “prestige” of state institutions as a hegemonic force. As a tactic and as a destination, visibility provided the playing field in which prisoner heroism clashed with the prestige of the prison as two processes of iconicity.

## The Black Condition Upheld and Challenged

George Jackson was killed in the San Quentin prison yard on August 21, 1971, in the bloodiest event in that prison's history, and the bloodiest day yet in California prison history since a 1927 escape from Folsom. He was shot by prison guards and was found with a gun in his hand. Johnny Larry Spain, a prisoner who had recently joined the Black Panthers, was found alive and hidden in bushes near Jackson with a vial of what he thought was explosive material but turned out to be a harmless liquid. The grisly event raised several questions: how did Jackson get a gun—or even, to some, *did* he have a gun? Was he attempting to escape, and if so, why would he do that two days before the start of the heavily anticipated Soledad Brothers trial? Was he killed in an intentional assassination plot? Did he surprise the guards with an attack or did he violently repel their attempt to kill him? Who killed the three guards and two prisoners and attempted to kill two other guards? Different observers, prisoners and activists, journalists and artists, attempted to answer these and related questions throughout the rest of the 1970s. The suspicious circumstances of Jackson's death, especially the competing claims of state officials as to the weapon Jackson had, its source, and the direction of the bullet that killed him, along with subsequent revelations of other plots against his life, prevented any easy narrative closure. However, attempts to uncover the mysteries behind Jackson's death generated greater attention to the unknown details of his life. Some of these investigations then raised questions of Jackson's authenticity or revolutionary merit. Using the conceptual claims Jackson himself had pioneered, including a political subjectivity shaped by racial oppression, antisystemic protest, and the ubiquitous presence of confinement, some observers attempted to provide narrative closure to the

George Jackson story by narrowing their focus to Jackson as a corrupt individual rather than as an innocent victim of a corrupt system. This individual study of Jackson used the prison to make visible a burgeoning investment in *white* identity and coincided with and contributed to the growing climate of law and order. These processes provided ongoing visibility to the prison as both a metaphoric and material site—only now for conservative rather than revolutionary ends.

George Jackson remained a potent symbol through which diverse parties throughout the 1970s negotiated the meaning and significance of the black condition in the United States. I devote the rest of this chapter to examining the posthumous constructions of George Jackson. The investment in Jackson as both hero and anti-hero, the attempt to make the true George Jackson visible, could be found in rituals of dissent and in popular culture productions that included memoirs, music, and film. These embodied and mediated performances provided the landscape in which competing notions of Jackson battled for narrative supremacy. And much as the living Jackson articulated race and confinement through a visible political praxis, so too did these posthumous representations of him seek to understand the relationship between racial formation, structures of confinement and the perils of (in)visibility. I turn first to those who viewed Jackson as an authentic representative of the black condition—either to carry out what they saw as his vision or to discover the truth of his killing. In the next section, I examine the subsequent investigations of Jackson that raised questions of his political authenticity while still being trapped by the tropes of racial authenticity.

Gary Fine argues that elite support can transform a controversial personality from a negative reputation to a positive memory, creating the inverse of a social problem.<sup>180</sup>

We might label this process as the formation of a posthumous social heroism. For George Jackson, this process happened more in his life than his death. Trapped in a largely invisible institution, and in a position of social death, Jackson participated in crafting an image of himself—thereby extending, responding to and in some ways shaping the boundaries of his controversy. His voice was critical to that process; his position as a metonymic spokesman of prison radicalism allowed him to speak for (black) prisoners. Yet no one could publicly speak for him with the same authority, even if his representation was the process of multiple negotiations by different vested interests. Although imprisonment rendered him a malleable symbol from the moment of his public visibility, his death placed his iconicity in the contentious realm of collective memory, where diverse collectives fought over his salience. Within the dominant public sphere, Jackson's death marked an effort to discover the "real" version of himself, hidden behind prison walls and a complex apparatus of smoke and mirrors. His social death was more conducive to positive associations than was his physical death. Social death generated a more enticing narrative of good versus evil than a death where circumstances were disputed and not easily answered. More than creating new sympathizers, Jackson's death created confusion and alienation. His death and the unanswered questions surrounding it were racially and politically polarizing. Unlike other towering figures of black protest, including Malcolm X and Ida Wells Barnett, who have had buildings, streets or postage stamps in their honor, Jackson has not been incorporated into the official public memory of black martyrs.<sup>181</sup> The circumstances of his death and the subsequent narratives representations of him make him an enduringly controversial figure. This lack of



consensus, shrouded by the confusion shaped by his death in invisible circumstances, assures that no postage stamp awaits him.

Jackson remained inspiring in the collective memory of many black activists and others who deployed his image and symbol as a battle cry. Several rituals made Jackson visible as a heroic figure after his death, beginning with his funeral and extending to the use of Jackson's image as a political mnemonic. Jackson's funeral provided the space and tone in which to construct the heroic prisoner as a catalyst for future action. The funeral was a key site for the ongoing production of a visible narrative around black heroism and state conspiracy. As with his brother's funeral a year earlier, the commemoration for George Jackson made visible a heroism defined as the embodied expressions of revolutionary action and racial militancy. Both funerals also attempted to make prisoners visible in the fabric of their ceremonies; Jonathan's service had several prisoners listed as "honorary pall bearers" and both included eulogies written by prisoners (and read by others).<sup>182</sup> The oppressive weight of imprisonment, the lack of public access to the prison and the inconsistencies in the government's story of what happened, cast George Jackson as a hero for his endurance and for his possible martyrdom. Both his life and his death were mobilized as beacons of black heroism. Jackson's funeral was held at the St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland and presided over by the church's pastor, Father Earl Neil, who worked closely with the Black Panther Party. Although fewer people attended this funeral than the one held the year previously for George's brother, Jonathan, the church was filled beyond capacity. Many of the 2,000 people present could not make it inside; they listened to the proceedings over loudspeakers. Mourners filed in to the church while Nina Simone's "I Wish I Knew What it Felt Like to be Free" blared

over the speakers, suggesting that Jackson's struggle was a natural outgrowth of his invisible confinement ("I wish you knew what it was like to be me/ then you would see that every man should be free.") The song suggested that white society understood neither side of the black condition—neither its subjection nor its aspirations. As the preliminary eulogy for Jackson, the song implicitly established the black prisoners as the unseen representative of this duality of hope and oppression.

In his eulogy, Father Neil described Jackson as a martyr in the biblical sense. "To us, George was a fire that never went out," Neil said, after thanking Georgia Jackson for giving the world two of her sons as an offering "to the liberation of our people." The Jackson brothers, Neil said, were the latest heroic figures to contest black confinement. "The black condition is our imprisonment," he said, arguing that this "condition" made essential black unity in the face of white supremacy. "George has brought us together today ... We have been brought together by his spirit, by his passion" and across differences of race, age, or gender. "But we are going to stay together when we leave here," Neil cautioned. That unity in action marked Jackson's presence. "George is with us today. He is telling us to rise up, to take steps toward freedom, to not lay around begging for freedom."<sup>183</sup> Huey Newton described Jackson as a victim with aspirations of being a Superman. This combination of suffering and heroism provided a new standard of political subjectivity. Newton defined Jackson's superheroism as two fold: it was found both in his military approach and his conceptual orientation to confinement as distributed throughout society. Newton used this second point to argue against the government's claim that Jackson was trying to escape, articulating that Jackson's effort to raise awareness through writing synthesized his ideological position (of a ubiquitous

imprisonment) with his orientation to physical violence. Jackson realized, Newton argued, that “you don’t break out of prison into freedom. It’s just an extended wall. . . . George realized the wall was very large. He realized that those prison victims were inside the wall and outside the wall, and this is why he began to write.”<sup>184</sup> Even the publication of *Blood in my Eye* was a part of the heroic elegy for Jackson. Citing an affidavit filed by prisoners at San Quentin, Gregory Armstrong, the editor of *Soledad Brother*, wrote in the introduction that Jackson was killed near the prison walls because he was attempting to draw guard fire away from the other prisoners housed in the Adjustment Center. According to the affidavit, “he sacrificed his own life to save them from an official massacre. This would only have been in keeping with the character of his entire life.”<sup>185</sup> Such a description was, likewise, in keeping with the establishment of heroic martyrs as something other than victims: they choose their own deaths.<sup>186</sup>

These pronouncements of heroic action, and its association with mass visibility, extended Jackson’s notion of race as an embodied practice. Yet this emphasis on the spectacular obscured other acts of selflessness that might be considered heroic. For instance, Jackson used the money he received from book sales to provide legal aid for a number of prisoners in San Quentin.<sup>187</sup> Further, praising Jackson as a larger than life figure established authenticity as an impossible standard. This mythical visibility obscured the systemic visibility that he had somewhat accomplished. Jackson’s eloquent writings, his visibility as a vociferous prisoner and defendant, had served to draw attention to the prison and the plight of black people held there. Writing less than a month after Jackson was killed, Mel Watkins suggested that Jackson had the last word. His death put the spotlight on prison in ways that other challenges to black confinement had

not. “The idea that all black Americans are symbolically imprisoned is, of course, a cliché,” Watkins wrote in the *New York Times*. “But it may be realistically said that prison is an exaggerated facsimile of society for those who suffer from racism, violence and bureaucratic insensitivity.”<sup>188</sup> This spotlight would be short-lived, however.

The seeming impenetrability of prison walls, together with Jackson’s strident politics and frequent predictions of immanent death, fostered considerable skepticism of the official version of what happened on August 21. Jackson’s death fed into the visibility of Jackson as a political figure whose authenticity was bound up in his heroism, extended to almost mythic proportions that curiously blended black nationalism and an acceptance of the government’s theory of what happened on August 21. A prisoner in Illinois described Jackson as “everything and some of what all twenty-some-odd million Blacks in this *strange* land of North America should be: A Real Bad Nigger” (emphasis in original). In keeping with the various descriptions of Jackson’s physical capabilities, this prisoner described the other killings of August 21 as proof of Jackson’s heroic victory: Jackson killed five people before they were able to kill him. Oppositional to the end, Jackson was the idealized subject of prisoner dissent. “Therefore, we—in these prisons—must spend long hours studying, to live up to that image.”<sup>189</sup> A prisoner in San Quentin, writing anonymously, called Jackson “the epitome of manhood” and someone who taught prisoners political and physical literacy.<sup>190</sup> The twenty-six prisoners in the San Quentin Adjustment Center released a statement proclaiming that they “will vindicate him [Jackson], because we are the ones who knew him best and loved him the most.” The statement, as with one

released two days after Jackson's death, also made visible the severe physical reprisals the men had been experiencing since August 21. Some prisoners held in other parts of the institution were radicalized by Jackson's death and the official response to it.<sup>191</sup> In her 1974 memoir, Angela Davis called George "a symbol of the will of all of us behind bars, and of that strength which oppressed people always seem to be able to pull together."<sup>192</sup> The memory of George Jackson was developed continually as a call for black heroism, epitomized by the black prisoner.

Other texts also described Jackson's authenticity as the source of his death. These cultural products made authenticity the visible metric through which to evaluate Jackson's racialized political subjectivity. After reading an article about Jackson's death in the fall of 1971, Bob Dylan, who had largely abandoned political songwriting by this time, recorded a song about the prisoner. Dylan wrote the song immediately and had Columbia Records book him a studio for the following day. The single hit stores eight days later. To ensure that radio stations would play the song, the record featured only two different versions of the song.<sup>193</sup> Although it flopped commercially and never made it to a full-length album, "George Jackson" was a musical elegy for slain authenticity. The song only briefly described the circumstances surrounding Jackson's incarceration. Rather, Dylan focused on Jackson's impact and his authenticity: "Authorities, they hated him/ Because he was just too real/ ... Prison guards, they cursed him/ As they watched him from above/ But they were frightened of his power/ They were scared of his love." Through the figure of George Jackson, Dylan echoed the

perspective popularized at the time by radical black prisoners and the Black Panthers—that America was a prison, the walls and barbed wire only separated those in maximum security from those in minimum security. As Dylan put it, “Sometimes I think this whole world/ Is one big prison yard/ Some of us are prisoners/ The rest of us are guards.”<sup>194</sup> While not mentioning George Jackson specifically, James Brown’s 1971 live album *Revolution of the Mind* continued this theme of imprisonment as an authentic feature of black life. The album cover featured a picture of Brown held behind bars. Underneath the album title, with “Revolution” being the most visible word, Brown resembled a Black Panther in his attire of an Afro and a black leather jacket. The album title alluded, perhaps unintentionally, to cultural and intellectual labor as being significant features of black radicalism, most visibly demonstrated by the fact of imprisonment.

Some viewed visible attacks on the prestige of authority as the only authentic response to Jackson’s death. Indeed, the immediate response to August 21 seemed quite in line with Jackson’s wish that his murder would serve pedagogic ends. Jackson’s death sparked hunger strikes and rebellions at prisons throughout the country, of which the one at Attica was the biggest and most famous. Bay Area activists demonstrated at the prison gates, while international supporters protested outside American embassies; both demonstrations attempted to make visible the institution they held responsible for Jackson’s death, the prison and the U.S. government—two sides of the same coin of black subjection.<sup>195</sup> Others tried more direct, if still symbolic, means of visibilizing through violence those they defined as Jackson’s killers. This approach was fitting

with Jackson's political playbook. Speaking of his commitment to violence, Jackson wrote a supporter shortly before his death that "no *man* can match me for fighting dirty—no one, no group. I've worked very hard at arriving" (emphasis in original).<sup>196</sup> Jackson described violence as an ongoing process of formation, akin to poststructuralist descriptions of identity as an endless practice of becoming rather than being.<sup>197</sup> In marking his death with two bomb attacks against buildings housing offices of the California prison system, detonated hours before Jackson's funeral, the Weather Underground commemorated Jackson "for what he had become [at the time of his death]: Soledad Brother, soldier of his people, rising up through torment and torture, tyranny and injustice, unwilling to bow or bend to his oppressors."<sup>198</sup> The "George L. Jackson Assault Squad" claimed credit for the August 29 killing of a police officer in San Francisco, done in revenge for the "intolerable political assassination of Comrade George Jackson in particular, and the inhumane torture of P.O.W. (Prisoner of War) Camps in general."<sup>199</sup> In the Pacific Northwest, a clandestine group calling itself the George Jackson Brigade carried out a series of bombings and an attempted prisoner escape in the late 1970s. An unrelated group of prisoners in San Quentin also called themselves the George Jackson Brigade in 1972. In the Northeast and in the Bay area, separate groups used Jonathan Jackson's name (and that of slain Attica prisoner Sam Melville) in carrying out other bombings of government buildings.<sup>200</sup>

Battles over collective memory entail both the memory *of* a subject or concept and the desire to have these memories be publicly visible. These interrelated claims of memory compelled other violent attacks throughout the

decade on behalf of Jackson's memory. These actions slowly made visible some of the work that Jackson had been doing in his time in prison. He had, as I explained earlier, already made visible his program of study and exercise. The Black Panthers described him as a mentor to many black prisoners, and Jackson spoke frequently but vaguely about the discontent shared by black prisoners. There was another layer, or at least a more concrete element of this work that the narratives of Jackson as teacher did not fully address. Jackson grasped that power within prisons operated as a microcosm of nation-state power: it required physical force and economic strength. He developed organizations that could do both, involving himself in the informal economy of prisons and with the strength to collect upon debts owed him. The groups that Jackson established began as gangs involved in various illicit activities common to prison economies, including drugs and gambling. As Jackson became more steeped in a radical Black Power politics that combined Marxism and Third World anticolonialism (beginning in 1962 and continuing throughout the decade), he steered these groups in a more political direction. What began in 1961 as the Capone Gang turned into the Wolf Pack. After Jonathan Jackson's death it became the August 7<sup>th</sup> Guerrilla Movement (A7GM), and finally the Black Guerrilla Family (BGF). Jackson was also instrumental in getting several of these men and others in prison to join the Black Panther Party and start prison-based chapters of the group.<sup>201</sup>

After Jackson's death, the A7GM and BGF groups continued to make him visible as figurehead of black revolutionary violence emanating from the prison movement. The A7GM claimed responsibility for several attacks, including a



1973 shooting of a police helicopter that killed two officers and a communiqué threatening to kidnap the Director of Prisons unless certain prisoners were released (a threat never actualized).<sup>202</sup> The BGF spread throughout the California prison system, using Jackson as its figurehead and describing its mission as the creation of many George Jacksons. The BGF was a controversial entity; it provided political education for some black prisoners. But officials and some critics, including other politically active black prisoners, accused the group of being a gang. Most bizarrely, the BGF was said to be behind the 1979 shooting of prisoner attorney Fay Stender. She was shot six times for allegedly betraying George Jackson in his “time of need.” The shooting left Stender paralyzed and in constant pain. She took her own life a year later.<sup>203</sup>

Jackson’s death made war visible as a component of confinement, both from those who sought to wage guerrilla war to expose the prison and those who described invisibility as the prison’s method of war. The invisibility of incarceration generated racial paranoia, both as an affect and a topic of journalistic inquiry: the lack of public access solidified a belief, especially prominent among black people, that Jackson must have been set up. This view made visible political tensions that were often organized along racial lines. The visibility of this belief in a state conspiracy highlighted animus as part of the black condition. For instance, Tom Wicker used Jackson’s death as a teachable moment about the anti-authoritarian sentiment characterizing black ghettos as a result of racist law enforcement patterns. Another *New York Times* story about Jackson’s symbolic character did not even name any of the people quoted. The sources, who expressed anger at Jackson’s time and death in prison or echoed his critique of the prison system, were

presented as a homogenous group defined only by their racial status and their identification with Jackson.<sup>204</sup> The invisibility of Jackson's death was crucial to the visibility of racial discontent. Georgia Jackson, for instance, alleged that the government murdered her son in his cell and then removed his body to the yard to be photographed. As a result, she barred the news media from photographing the burial of her son.<sup>205</sup>

That Jackson's death was analyzed through racial lenses does not mean that only blacks took notice (or that there was a racially shared consensus). As with the visibility of his case, knowledge of his death became a global political issue. In France, Michel Foucault and other GIP members published a pamphlet, with an introduction by Genet, about Jackson's murder as a "masked assassination." The prison system killed Jackson under the cover of invisibility, and then used the hypervisibility of intensive media coverage to cover up the underlying truth: Jackson was advancing multiracial unity and military preparedness from behind prison walls. They concluded that the prison was a state of war, a new front in revolutionary struggle, and that "the entire black avant-garde lives under the threat of prison."<sup>206</sup> The pamphlet by Foucault et al. indicted the media for colluding with the prison system in the "manipulation of public opinion" and the destruction of "the public image (so that Jackson would not survive) and the function (so that no one would take his place)."<sup>207</sup> These missions were accomplished through ideological descriptions of prisoner violence and guard beneficence and a campaign of deliberate misinformation about the source and caliber of Jackson's gun.

The GIP's analysis of media coverage was neither incorrect nor complete. Journalists lacked steady accounts of what happened inside San Quentin, a problem compounded by the frequent changes that official sources made to their narrative of the

events—especially to the make and caliber of the gun Jackson was alleged to have used as well as the mystery of its source. (Officials charged that attorney Stephen Bingham brought it in on a visit with Jackson on August 21. As Angela Davis did after August 7, Bingham went underground while maintaining his innocence. He lived abroad until 1984, when he turned himself in and was subsequently acquitted.) The GIP argued that this confusion was part of tarnishing Jackson’s reputation; it obscured the truth but revealed in Jackson’s death as an armed murderer. In the two weeks after Jackson’s death, the *New York Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle* reported a total of six different types of gun to be the one that Jackson had used in his escape attempt. The frequent change owed in part to journalistic research: reporters at the *San Francisco Chronicle* used a black model wearing an Afro wig to test the state’s theory that Jackson hid a gun under an Afro wig and walked fifty yards from a visit with an attorney back to the prison under armed guards who did not notice the weapon. The *Chronicle* found that the gun did not fit under the wig and wobbled as the model walked a few feet. In response, the government switched the caliber it said Jackson had, from an Astra M600 to a short 9mm Llama. Likewise, a second autopsy, conducted a month after his death, revealed that Jackson was killed from a shot in the back—not, as had been initially reported, in the head. Prisoners in the Adjustment Center and other skeptics had alleged as much from the start.<sup>208</sup>

Journalists raised questions about some of the facts presented by government sources but did not, as many activists and artists did, reject outright the story of Jackson’s alleged escape. Instead journalists attempted to recreate the details of the escape and fill in the missing pieces. In doing so, they were especially reliant on the state—namely, prison officials—for access to the site of the conflagration. They also recounted the gory

details of the five other murders to have occurred in San Quentin on August 21. According to the GIP, the visibility of the blood-and-guts details of what happened in the Adjustment Center served an ideological function, even if it made good copy for journalists. Such details presented August 21 as a “savage massacre” of prisoners ran amok. Instead, the GIP called for a shift in perspective to the unanswered questions.<sup>209</sup> This response suggested that journalists knew little of what happened inside the San Quentin Adjustment Center. Lurid details of violence—who had their throats slashed in what order, how they spent their terrifying final moments—replaced the deeper issues in need of redress. While the GIP’s approach implied a certain clamp on the visibility of the August 21 events, it also provided critique of what communications scholar James Carey later described as American journalism’s excessive, obsessive attention to *how* but its inability to answer *why*.<sup>210</sup> Because it blocked revelation of certain details, the prison’s invisibility facilitated journalism’s tendency for descriptions (how) to trump explanations (why). Even progressive journalists were trapped by this constraint. For instance, Yee, who had covered the case for several publications, both mainstream and radical, published the first book-length investigation of the Soledad Brothers case, from its antecedents in various instances of brutality and racial division to its bloody close in an alleged escape attempt at San Quentin. The book, *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison* (1973), presented and then troubled the state’s theory of what happened in the San Quentin yard, based on interviews and affidavits with several people describing histories of state-planned murder in the California penal system and known conspiracies against George Jackson specifically. These included the administration’s efforts to frame a sympathetic prison psychologist and bribe white prisoners to kill Jackson; one prisoner

filed an affidavit in March 1971 in which he described officials soliciting him to kill Jackson to prevent “another Eldridge Cleaver.”<sup>211</sup> Yet troubling the flawed official narrative is not the same thing as providing a cogent counter-narrative, especially since Yee devotes much more detail to his vivid and repulsive description of the murders inside the Adjustment Center. Even while acknowledging the sequence of events as “the state’s case,” Yee lends support to that perspective with the depth of his detail—narrating the last words and actions of the guards as they bled to death.

Prison activists and the family members of those incarcerated at the Adjustment Center were similarly pressing for public access and reported being abused inside. San Quentin authorities permitted two separate delegations to tour the prison; one three-person delegation of conservative journalists and a four-person delegation of liberal black politicians and professionals. Both delegations disputed the claims of widespread maltreatment, although they found evidence of abuse and isolation.<sup>212</sup> Competing claims contributed to a general atmosphere of confusion in the immediate aftermath of Jackson’s killing. While the state’s version, or at least parts of it, had been discredited, no suitable alternative theory had supplanted it. The visibility of competing narratives on the left contributed to the confusion of August 21 without solving the riddle of what happened and why. In October 1971, a man named Louis Tackwood revealed himself to have been a double agent working undercover with various California law enforcement agencies as part of the counterinsurgency efforts directed against black radical organizations in the state. Tackwood maintained that his last assignment was the assassination of George Jackson. He claimed to have been a part of the team of police officers that brought a gun into San Quentin for Jackson in August 1971. He also claimed to have intimate details of

the broader insurrection that was supposed to have occurred alongside Jonathan's raid the year prior. Tackwood testified at the trial of the San Quentin 6, as I discuss in the next chapter, and with the help of some left-wing journalists he published a book in 1973 detailing his covert operations with the Los Angeles Police Department.<sup>213</sup> At least some of his claims seemed accurate, but he was not taken seriously by many outside the Left. The only things clearly known in the visibility of Jackson's death is that it was a bloodbath that left him and five others dead. Lacking a clear narrative, observers were left with clear affective but limited factual closure: partisans held that either Jackson or the state was a murderous fiend, while others could only point to discrepancies in the government's case without providing a compelling counter-narrative.

More prosaically but no less significantly, Jackson provided a mnemonic inspiration to ongoing constructions of racial protest and opposition to imprisonment. As I discuss in greater detail in the following chapter, Jackson's name, ideas and image provided ongoing inspiration to prison activists. He was frequently cited and annually commemorated—in drawings, poems and articles—in various prisoner newspapers that sprung up in the mid 1970s. In these efforts, George Jackson represented resistance as a reparative process of communication and community building. The prisoner, represented by Jackson, became a currency of commitment to political struggle. The two years following his death gave rise to the George Jackson Health Clinic (run by the Black Panthers in Oakland, CA) and the George Jackson Prisoner Contact Program in Scandinavia. The Black Panther survey for potential recruits included questions about Jackson and other black political prisoners.<sup>214</sup> Even by the decade's end, with such political formations curtailed or non-existent, Jackson remained a visible image of black

popular culture. The black British reggae band Steel Pulse featured a song about Jackson, “Uncle George,” on its 1979 album *Tribute to the Martyrs*. The song called for “three cheers for Uncle George,” and extended the trope that Jackson was the victim of a targeted assassination. (Steel Pulse included a cover of Dylan’s song about Jackson on its 2004 album, *African Holocaust*.)

Jackson was also the (thinly veiled) subject of the 1977 fictional movie *Brothers*, starring former football player turned actor Bernie Casey. The film presents a sanitized version of Jackson’s story, reviving the early narrative of Jackson’s innocence and articulating blackness as a badge of confinement. The film opens to a song, written and performed by Taj Mahal specifically for *Brothers*, that declared “If you got a little soul/ They’ll throw you in the hole.” The film’s protagonist, David Thomas (Casey), is a black man jailed for a robbery that his friend committed without Thomas’s knowledge while the pair cruised around town. The white public defender convinces Thomas to plead guilty to save the court’s time. The judge gives Thomas a one year to life sentence, to be determined based on his behavior inside. Politicized by his cellmate (first in conversation, then through books and finally when guards killed his cellmate—a clear reference to W.L. Nolen), Thomas falls in love with Paula Jones (Vonetta McGee, as Angela Davis), a young black philosophy professor who becomes a prominent supporter of Thomas and the other two “Mendocino Brothers,” charged with killing a white guard during a prison riot that erupted after the killing of a prisoner. Thomas challenges the overt racism of white prisoners, who receive special privileges and better food from the guards than the black prisoners. The denigrating treatment by guards, including strip searches, beatings and malnourishment, have a clear effect on Thomas. He struggles for dignity. Thomas

achieves visibility inside prison by furtively producing a newsletter, *Underground*, that is distributed among black prisoners with growing skill as the film continues. Jones wants to publish *Underground* and Thomas's letters to his brother as a way to secure visibility. Thomas demurs, saying he "wrote those letters to keep my sanity."

The biggest difference between the real Jackson and the sanitized representation of him through Thomas concerns the family. Gone from the film is Jackson's fraught relationship with his parents, the people he had castigated as an overbearing mother and a spineless father. Thomas's parents are almost entirely absent from the film, and Thomas speaks of them with gratitude and love. Further, the film shows Thomas to have only one sibling, a younger brother named Josh. This portrait of a small, loving family does more than erase the troubles Jackson had with his family. It invisibilizes the gendered labor of his mother and sisters, who were vocal and visible advocates and organizers on his behalf. The film's sanitized family relationships carries over to political strategy. David councils Josh against violence, saying it will not help his case or the movement more generally. Unlike Jackson, who had given up on the parole board after multiple rejections, Thomas displays faith that the system will ultimately work in his favor. The "truth will free me [at trial] and I shall come and remove your chains," Thomas writes to Jones after she is imprisoned when Josh is killed in an event similar to that of August 7, 1970. Further, the film skirts questions of Jackson's possible involvement in the January 16, 1970, death of an officer by having the event transpire by an unknown person during the chaos of a riot rather than as a planned act to have occurred secretly on a routine patrol of the tier.



An officer had bribed two white prisoners to testify against Thomas, but they back out in an expression of solidarity for Thomas's militant stance of prisoner unity. In response, the officer enlists a black prisoner to set up Thomas. The prisoner is given two guns and placed in a small room with Thomas, the other Mendocino Brothers and a dozen others; the provocateur keeps one gun and gives the other to a known white supremacist prisoner. Sensing the plot, Thomas overpowers the black prisoner and rations with the white prisoner to surrender his gun in order to prevent the guards from massacring the group. Thomas heads outside, away from the prisoners and knowingly toward his death, because "someone's gotta make the trial." He is shot and killed by guards, although not before he gets his revenge by killing the officer who had set him up. This final act of sacrifice spares the life of other prisoners, specifically in a declaration of faith that the jury system would vindicate him and his codefendants. The film ends with a multiracial display of prisoner unity—a clear allusion to Attica—followed by a note saying that the Mendocino Brothers and Jones were all found innocent and freed at their respective trials. This verdict is keeping with the historical facts of the cases in question. Yet as the postscript to Thomas's heroic action, it would seem to certify Thomas and his final declaration that the court system was more benevolent than the prison system. The film received mixed reviews in the black press and was largely unnoticed in the mainstream. Like Dylan's tribute song, it fared poorly as a commercial product.<sup>215</sup> *Brothers* was tame by the standards of blaxploitation films and hackneyed in comparison to other contemporary movies.

Various figures memorialized George Jackson throughout the 1970s, in venues that included prison yards and popular culture. The heroic construction of George

Jackson rested on an impossible standard of a racially inflected political authenticity. Commemorative re-presentations of Jackson diverged between the fearless guerrilla and the innocent victim. These approaches defined blackness as an amalgamation of heroism and victimhood, a realness of which the slain prisoner was said to be the best embodiment. Yet the confusion surrounding his death and the growing law and order climate instantiated a different visibility of Jackson. While there were audiences loyal to and interested in Jackson, by the late 1970s his visibility did not garner widespread support. It also had to compete with other portrayals of Jackson and his salience. These alternate narratives, as I examine next, provided a visibility to Jackson that was critical of him and ultimately provided more narrative closure than those sympathetic to his cause.

#### The Black Condition Revised and Rearticulated

“We all live in a prison of some kind, don’t we,” author Thomas Gaddis asked in his introduction to a 1975 anthology of prison writings, poems and songs.<sup>216</sup> This sentiment described the view, common by the mid-1970s, that prison was both a metaphor of and the epitome of the hidden constraints in American society. Popularized by George Jackson and his supporters, this position was shared by many reformers, academics and others. For instance, Michel Foucault published *Discipline and Punish*, an insightful history of the peculiar institution’s rise, in 1977. The book, building on Foucault’s experience organizing against prisons, argued that imprisonment was an institutional creation to discipline society into modernity. The prison bolstered state power by demanding people adhere to its logic of surveillance and threats of punishment. The book was less concerned with the prison than with the disciplinary and punitive

technologies that were central to the practice of power. For Gaddis, Foucault and many others, the prison represented a microcosm of social relations. These efforts made the prison visible to expose the mechanisms and machinations of power as a general and dispersed feature of life. These texts were not the only ones to use the prison as metonymic expression of broader psycho-social forces, nor were such efforts uniformly progressive. As the prison became an expansive conceptual map for claims of identity and politics, it became further removed from an organizing tool for the construction of (black) protest. Instead, several authors utilized the prison to raise questions of political subjectivity through the racial authenticity of whites and blacks alike. This alternate use of the prison accelerated with George Jackson's death and continued to use him as a synecdochic exemplar.

California Governor Ronald Reagan penned an editorial in the *New York Times* that used Jackson's death to call for greater law and order. Titled "We Will All Become Prisoners," Reagan's article argued that support for Jackson illustrated that society risked being imprisoned by "the falsehood that violence, terror and contempt for the moral values of our society are acceptable methods of seeking the redress of grievances."<sup>217</sup> Other prominent conservatives sounded a similar note. William Buckley praised the *Los Angeles Times* for posthumously emphasizing Jackson's prior run-ins with the law rather than his victimization. Instead of describing Jackson's incarceration relative to the indeterminate sentence, Buckley, following the *Los Angeles Times*, noted that Jackson was denied parole ten times in eight years, during which he racked up forty-seven disciplinary violations. Buckley quoted several people, interviewed for the original news story, who described Jackson's violent temperament prior to and during his

incarceration.<sup>218</sup> Even without using Jackson as a symbol of the need for greater law and order, journalistic investigations into Jackson made him visible as the hypersexualized byproduct of white imagination—the black projection of white fantasy. In a lengthy 1972 *Esquire* article about the relationship between Angela Davis and George Jackson, for instance, Ron Rosenbaum talked with an anonymous supporter of Jackson about his significance. Rosenbaum opens the article by describing a “pale yellowish stain” on the front of a flirtatious letter that Jackson had sent the woman—a letter she quickly removes from view. The move symbolizes Rosenbaum’s argument that the woman does not want to expose troublesome aspects of Jackson’s personality to public scrutiny; she later verbalizes this protective urge in telling Rosenbaum not to write about the semen-stained letter she received from Jackson with his note calling it his ““physical evidence of love.”” Rosenbaum, however, was more concerned with detailing what the woman says is *not* important about Jackson (his sexual exploits and aggressively flirtatious letters) than what she claims as his import (his emphasis on multiracial revolutionary struggle).<sup>219</sup> As with Buckley and Reagan, Rosenbaum’s article challenged radicals for making visible a false representation of George Jackson. These articles endeavored to make visible a different image of George Jackson to tell a different story about him.

These and similar interventions challenge the typical memory of social unrest. According to Jill Edy, the elapse of time allows for more sources, and therefore more views, to shape the narrative of controversial people, places, events, and eras. Edy argues that while initial media coverage of crises cedes disproportionate definitional power to elites, other actors gain interpretive access with the greater temporal distance from the events in question, even if often circumscribed by the pre-established discursive

parameters.<sup>220</sup> Yet this access is contingent upon a certain base level of consensus that was absent from the narrative of George Jackson. The controversial image of Jackson, fueled by the unresolved questions about the circumstances of his death, prevented any narrative closure. Where controversy remains, established institutions use the battle over information to bolster their legitimacy against contending claims. Diverse sides engage in this process, but elites have the advantage in bolstering their authority in such situations. Barbie Zelizer showed that journalists used the confusion surrounding John F. Kennedy's death to legitimate their professional authority: as truth-tellers, as witnesses and as scribes. Based on journalists' presence in relation to the events, the process of establishing such authority crowded out other storytellers with alternate views.<sup>221</sup> The struggle for narrative dominance following Jackson's death did not privilege journalists. Taking place in the invisible protection of prison walls, Jackson's death generated increasing polarization around opposite notions of conspiracy, whether of the state or of the prisoners. The visibility of this morality play centered on questions of racial and political authenticity. As a result, Jackson remained the metonymic representation of the black prisoner, and the black prisoner continued to stand in for both blacks and prisoners.

Critiques of Jackson as a misanthropic deviant always circulated alongside his publicity. Yet the confusion surrounding his death gave such narratives added currency by making Jackson more visible as an individual. That is, these narratives became more visible and more believable. Paradoxically, the confounding circumstances of his death created space for critics to raise questions about his life and the way supporters had allegedly misrepresented it. These investigations did not trouble Jackson's representative status; they changed the meaning of what it was that he represented. This shifting

visibility supplied personal transgression rather than racial oppression as the reason for (Jackson's) incarceration. They objected to Jackson's fame overshadowing the other five people who were killed on August 21, 1971, probably some by Jackson and definitely all by prisoners. These subsequent narratives of George Jackson increasingly described blacks, prisoners, and black prisoners as a threat. The George Jackson story was evolving from one of victimhood to one of villainy. This shift in Jackson's significance utilized some newly revealed information, but depended as much on a shift in the salience of facts that had been well-known: his physical strength, for instance, was now said to signal not an ability to endure confinement but used as evidence of his capacity for violence.

These reinterpretations of Jackson began by journalists writing in newspaper columns and magazine feature articles in the early 1970s. They became more visible midway through the decade with the publication of several memoirs and book-length investigations, mostly authored by one-time associates of George Jackson and the Bay Area prison movement. These texts included memoirs by *Soledad Brother* editor Gregory Armstrong (*The Dragon Has Come*, 1974) and the formerly incarcerated associate of Jackson, James Carr (*Bad*, 1975). There were also two book-length journalistic investigations of Jackson: Min S. Yee's *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison* (1973), a progressive interpretation discussed above, and Jo Durden-Smith's *Who Killed George Jackson* (1975). In 1981, as if to mark the national embrace of law and order, novelist Clark Howard published a true-crime story about George Jackson's death (*American Saturday*), and one-time New Leftist David Horowitz marked his hard-right turn by publishing a sharply critical magazine article about Fay Stender and the prison movement.<sup>222</sup> Other books dealing with Jackson and the prison movement appeared

during these years, most notably Angela Davis's autobiography and Eric Mann's *Comrade George*, both published in 1974 and which described Jackson as a creative, heroic revolutionary killed by the state. But it was these other texts, devoted exclusively to George Jackson, that contributed to a reconsideration of his status in line with the rightward shift in society. These narratives grew more conservative with time, reflecting the changing structures of feeling. The more conservative the narrative the greater closure it provided. Each one, in its way, contributed to making George Jackson and the prison movement visible through narratives of trauma that hinged on questions of authenticity. Armstrong's book marked the initial rupture, sparking a reconsideration of the Jackson narrative from one of its architects. Subsequent iterations took up this task with added intensity.<sup>223</sup>

These narratives were still confined by assuming authenticity to be a valid heuristic through which to understand racial and political meaning. These narratives defined prison radicalism as an inauthentic rebellion, saying it was based on obscured representations of prisoners' "real" (i.e., violent and manipulative) selves. As if to certify this inauthenticity, to "expose" him as inauthentic, these narratives revisited George Jackson's biography. They told a different story of George Jackson, implying that the narratives told by Jackson and that supporters told about him were inauthentic or inaccurate and could not be trusted. Such a claim required the authors to establish their own authority as truth-tellers, a process they typically accomplished through what Zelizer has called personalization.<sup>224</sup> Most of these texts begins with the author's relationship to Jackson—how they knew him (his editor, a former prison comrade) or why they didn't (separated by geography or disinterest). The personalization obscures the lack of

documentation in these books. Through prefatory disclaimers about the extent of their research or the fear of retaliation, the authors justify their lack of citations or demonstrable sources. Readers are left with books that attempt to describe Jackson's inner most feelings and actions through a string of unknown and unnamed sources. Clark Howard, the most egregious example, lists the time—"the better part of a year"—and the sites of his research—"a 3,000-mile stretch of America ... [including prisons,] mortuaries, newspaper morgues, Catholic schools, mining towns, welfare offices, motel rooms, pool halls, libraries, and a seemingly endless succession of kitchen tables, front porches, and fast-food joints" (p. 11). Such a description, a variation of which appears in Durden-Smith's book, uses the time and places of research to stand in for demonstrable evidence. It serves as a preface legitimating the claims leveraged in the book, no matter how outlandish (e.g., Howard's claim on page 280 that Jackson's "sphincter tightened" because he was caught with a gun coming back from the visiting room—a narrative flourish that accompanies the casual stating of contested claims about Jackson's putative escape attempt on the day of his death). The authors do not provide footnotes to any of their claims, nor do they list their interviewees. The quantitative declaration of their research substitutes for a qualitative presentation of its caliber.

Authenticity remained the most visible metric of analysis in these texts. The concern with authenticity was two-fold: it referred both to the subjectivity of prisoners and to that of the authors. In both analyses, the visibility of confinement touched off questions of authenticity. To Armstrong, Jackson is significant as a character foil to his own quest for personal fulfillment—his "black *alter ego*" who expressed the radical break from society Armstrong desired but could not affect.<sup>225</sup> "I know why so many



middle-class whites like myself identify with blacks. We say to ourselves that only blacks possess true authenticity. I know that loving George, caring about him, is part of my desire to be real” (p. 183), Armstrong wrote, acknowledging that this realness was only possible because Jackson was incarcerated and therefore subject to other people’s constructions of him (p. x). This realness defined the black condition as an acquaintance with death, something these white authors simultaneously desired and detested. British New Left journalist Jo Durden-Smith also saw in Jackson his own claim to an authentic identity. Even though they had never met, Durden-Smith recalled feeling close to Jackson because “he was real to me, in a way that most of the totem-figures of the sixties had not been” (p. xiii). Durden-Smith was drawn to Jackson after being part of the crew that filmed Johnny Cash’s live San Quentin album; he thought the performance exhibited a “naïve frontier mawkishness ... [that] made Cash seem grander and more compassionate than he really was, and the prisoners of San Quentin seem more poignant and more defeated than they really were” (p. xvi). Durden-Smith described his interest in Jackson being motivated out of Jackson’s apparent authenticity whose realness was shaped by his defiant stance in the face of invisibility. Likewise, he characterized the failure of Jackson, the prison movement, and the left in general as a loss of authenticity that existed in the early 1960s (pp. 208-290).<sup>226</sup> In its place, he held out hope for a mythical and mystical “politics of feeling” that has authenticity as its central concern. Durden Smith juxtaposed this affective politics against what he called “history as fiction” (the state’s theory of what happened on August 21) and “history as fact” (the paranoia and misinformation that circulated around George Jackson and his supporters).

Both books describe the respective author's lost faith in Jackson in particular and prison radicalism in general. Armstrong recounts a private conversation with Jackson admitting his guilt in the death of Soledad guard John Mills. The confession ran counter to Jackson's repeated claim of innocence, as well as the image of Jackson that Armstrong had actively perpetuated. Until Jackson's death, Armstrong described himself as being privately shocked by the confession and publicly supporting Jackson's innocence—even as he contemplated helping Jackson escape. Likewise, Durden-Smith opens his book noting his one-time belief in Jackson's heroism. By the end of the book, he describes Jackson on the inside and the prison movement on the outside as engaged in a desperate search of authenticity that can only be met by escalating violent rhetoric on the outside and violent action on the inside. Jackson, in this analysis, engaged in violence to keep from being seen as a “fake, a Judas-goat revolutionary” whereas his erstwhile supporters were in fact “inauthentic, adolescent” (p. 287). Coming of age in the New Left, both Armstrong and Durden-Smith attempted to certify their own authenticity through association with George Jackson, at the same time as they express posthumous repulsion by the violence surrounding the realities of confinement and the circumstances that led men such as Jackson to find themselves incarcerated. Their texts reproduce the paranoia they challenge, making visible prison protest as an elaborate, dangerous fraud: its visibility of innocence masked its substance of violence.

Writing a few years later and with no interest in “self-styled revolutionaries,” Clark Howard did not see his political authenticity bound up in Jackson. But questions of racial authenticity, especially its connection to economics and exploitation, clearly impelled his text. His interest in Jackson emerged when he discovered, years after

Jackson's death, that the two men were from the same part of Chicago. But whereas Jackson described his upbringing in a "ghetto," Howard always thought he grew up in a "slum." Jackson's terminology reflected an authentic attachment to impoverished urban space that troubled Howard and his investments in the authenticity of his origins. Specifically, Howard maintained that he was equally impoverished but more exploited than Jackson, because his broken home lacked the economic stability of Jackson's upbringing. Howard defined this stability in gender normative terms: a working father and a stay-at-home mother. But it was the racial attachment to urban space that was particularly vexing to him. "'Slum' to us meant a run-down neighborhood where poor people lived. 'Ghetto' seemed to mean something else: a place where only *black* poor people lived. It did not make sense to us: *everybody* down there was poor. ... Why then, I wondered, did George Jackson end up face-down on the San Quentin yard with a gun guard's bullet in him, while I was now a moderately successful writer of books? Was it only because of the color difference?" (p. 9). While he admits not being able to come up with another answer, Howard rejects the question because he finds Jackson to be too great a tragedy to merit such an investigation. Instead, Howard's narrative of George Jackson is an authentic mass murderer whose "worth as a human being" may not be "equal to the blood he spilled, the men he killed, and the many lives he blighted" (p. 10). Whereas Jackson had argued for a revolutionary strategy of visibility, Howard suggested that Jackson was motivated by his own desire to be visible to distinguish himself. Jackson's authenticity in this scenario is a manipulative and deceptive performance. Howard writes that Jackson studied diligently so that he did not look "like just another dumb nigger" (p. 227) and that his "daily life consisted of confinement, violence, and

survival—nothing more” (p. 184). Political study was, according to Howard, Jackson’s tactic for misrepresenting his “true” self of a racially bound criminal delinquency.

This critique of prisoners as inauthentic rebels because of their predilection toward criminal violence was facilitated by the posthumous publication of James Carr’s memoir, *Bad* in 1975. Carr, a one-time comrade of Jackson on the inside who was married to the daughter of a prominent Soledad Brothers supporter, was shot to death in his driveway on April 5, 1972.<sup>227</sup> His memoir was compiled by his brother-in-law and a friend, who crafted the narrative out of interviews they recorded with Carr. The book’s title, *Bad*, seems to refer at once to the black vernacular sprinkled throughout the text—signaling a racial authenticity the book might otherwise lack due to its white co-authors—a description of Carr’s behavior in prison, and his evaluation of the left.<sup>228</sup> Describing his prison exploits, Carr’s narrative challenged the view, expounded by Jackson and many others, that prisoners were selfless revolutionaries. Each chapter of the book describes a string of violent incidents—rapes, stabbings, armed robberies—most of which involve Carr as perpetrator, sometimes in league with Jackson. There is no claim to victimhood, limited assessment of prison conditions, no attempt at analyzing either the universal human condition or the black one. He described Jackson as a Pan-African thinker, a political mentor and a respected figure in the prison who had bridged racial divisions through physical and political education. He also described Jackson as a drug runner and a loan shark who killed other prisoners without remorse. In the eight-page conclusion, Carr breaks from his glib recounting of the traumatic events he participated in to chastise the left for encouraging a “false consciousness” among prisoners that defined the prison system “as the only battleground” (p. 192). A victim of this process himself,

Carr writes of his own disillusionment. “I came charging out [of prison] in 1970 expecting to find a Red Army ready for revolutionary war. What I found was a handful of red criminals with the same world view I’d had as a pool hall hustler, reinforced with heavy doses of ideology and drugs. But my disappointment at their lack of power was softened by the tremendous amount of money they had to spend on me” (p. 193). Thus, Carr both describes prisoners as authentically bad while picturing prison activists as lacking the authenticity of their verbiage.

Carr’s detailed discussion of the violence he participated in showed the search for authenticity embedded in these texts to be a deeply embodied process. Jackson’s body was the site of evidence that suggested his capacity for violence, thereby implying his guilt in the charges against him. Howard reminds readers often that Jackson was a deadly karate expert whose body was “corded” with muscles: “With his strength, and the expertise he had developed over the years in prison-learned karate, there was little doubt that he had the ability to kill a man with his bare hands” (pp. 141-142). Armstrong is obsessed with Jackson’s body: he admires it in numerous erotic passages and confesses privately to loving George. He describes embodiment itself as a badge of black authenticity with detachment marking (an unspoken middle class) whiteness (pp. 73-74). Armstrong repeatedly describes Jackson as physically superhuman but emotionally a child—never as an adult. And yet, Armstrong desired Jackson’s approval and company because this doomed black prisoner held the key to Armstrong’s personal emancipation. Armstrong projects his own feelings of rejection and fear onto George throughout the book; privately and while Jackson was still alive, Armstrong sought validation from others involved in the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee.<sup>229</sup> Because Armstrong has

denied Jackson the status of an adult, the twenty-nine-year-old Jackson cannot be anything but inauthentic. Armstrong sees the prison as enforcing “an eternal childhood” (p. 79). Yet even with his status as omnipotent narrator, Armstrong cannot escape confining himself in this eternal childhood. He describes his marriage as a “prison cell in another form” (87), his own feelings of guilt as “another set of shackles” (p. 92), and his middle-class status as a “slave mentality” (p. 33).

Howard’s text is the dénouement of these posthumous re-presentations of Jackson. Through the genre of its writing, a crime novel, *American Saturday* provides narrative closure to the open questions of what happened on August 21, turning skepticism into certainty. The previous texts, including those by Armstrong and Durden-Smith as well as the earlier journalistic investigation by Yee, had raised questions about the state’s theory of what happened on August 21, pointing out discrepancies or impossibilities in the official narrative. These include that Jackson hid a gun and bullets in a wig and walked fifty yards without detection, the constant changes to the caliber and the direction of the bullet that killed him, the numerous other attempts on Jackson’s life.<sup>230</sup> Yet these projects succeeded more in raising questions than answering them. They did not provide a counter-narrative, at least not one that achieved dominance. Howard, and more recent texts, make up for that difficulty by developing a clean narrative that makes assertions over a messy one that raises questions. By using a journalistic or novelistic tone, rather than the investigative or affective one that characterized earlier works, these more recent texts, with explicit temporal and political distance from Jackson the person, smooth the rough edges of the Jackson story. By erasing the unanswered questions of his death, these narratives establish a clean—and clearly negative—version

of his life as well. Howard is aided in this task by the genre of true-crime, allowing him to occupy the mindset of Jackson to even absurd levels. Openly disinterested in Jackson's story, Howard's text is not hampered by the personal connection of previous authors. *American Saturday* provides narrative closure by depicting Jackson as an authentic criminal subject: a violent, mad-dog killer. Thus, the political subjectivity Jackson fought to create was mobilized to demonstrate that the prison movement was a dreadfully inauthentic and criminal enterprise.

To rework a well-known aphorism of Stuart Hall, race was the modality through which anxiety over political authenticity was lived in these texts.<sup>231</sup> The authors describe their own search for authenticity and project onto Jackson and the others their own search for authenticity. Matthew Frye Jacobson demonstrates that the 1970s witnessed the start of an embrace of white ethnicity that utilized civil rights frameworks to shift the public focus to white identity absent considerations of power. Occurring throughout diverse spheres of culture, this embrace of white ethnic particularity treated race as a teleological fact rather than for its material impact. This focus on white ethnicity, Jacobson argues, established "white primacy" as a salient outgrowth of the civil rights movement. It contributed to a context where questions of ethnicity trumped questions of injustice.<sup>232</sup> In the aftermath of the civil rights and Black Power movements, narratives of race and confinement were negated but not transcended. These posthumous discussions of Jackson and his authenticity utilized the black prisoner to explore the realities of race in the 1970s—or, perhaps more accurately, to examine white confusion over blackness and black radicalism in the aftermath of the civil rights movement. They emanated from a deep-seated wonder of how or whether black and white people could get along in an

environment marked by the end of Jim Crow segregation but the endurance of white racism—and, we now know, the rise of a racialized mass incarceration. Obsessed with this question, the authors of late 1970s texts on Jackson invest more heavily in what seems to be the cruel confinement of whiteness: they find the circumstances of privilege to be constraining, and they imagine conversations or project feelings onto Jackson as a way to explore their truths about race. In so doing, with Jackson metonymically representing the black prisoner, if not blackness itself, these late 1970s narratives invert the discourse of authenticity prevalent earlier in the decade. The texts move from authenticity as a desire (Armstrong) to a lament (Durdin-Smith). They arrive finally on the assertion of an ever-present criminal authenticity that confidently proclaims Jackson to have been a real-bad subject, with whites having a more universal view of urban space (Howard). Authenticity provided their motivation and gave license to their self-obsession, from Armstrong's desire to be loved to Durdin-Smith's mystical political proposals and Howard's ostensible success as a writer.

Each of these texts expressed anger at Jackson and his supporters (including, where relevant, themselves, although often in a self-serving manner). Their anger at Jackson emanated less from a belief that he was different than his representation than from the horror at discovering that Jackson meant what he said. The violence, the warfare, the sexual longing—all were a part of Jackson's visibility that some dismissed as hyperbole, others ignored, and many took at face value. Jackson never tried to hide these aspects of his personality or his politics; these were, in fact, the substance of the visibility he sought. When Jackson died in an event that proved the sincerity of his militant self-presentation, and when some of his supporters also acted on his theoretical premises,



critics objected to them as dangerously inauthentic. Rebecca Hill argues that George Jackson “would test the left’s ability to trust Black men, to believe in imperfect heroes, and to define itself without the long-standing and comfortable logic of white rebellion and Black victimization” in the context of anxieties “about the ‘truth’ on the other side of the wall.”<sup>233</sup> Visibility imbues subjects with authenticity while also troubling it. When that visibility clashes with normative values, authenticity provides a convenient framework with which to reject uncomfortable or disconcerting realities. Unable to reconcile George Jackson the eloquent writer with George Jackson who died a violent death in a bloody event that he in some way participated in, critics resorted to describing him and the movement he represented as the inauthentic figment of cross-cutting narratives. Yet the claim says more about those who invested Jackson with certain political meaning than it does about George Jackson the person.

The mid-1990s saw the publication of two book-length journalistic treatments of Jackson: one about Jackson and Stephen Bingham, the attorney who was accused and acquitted (thirteen years later) of smuggling the gun into prison on August 21; the other is a biography of Johnny Spain, a prisoner who was mentored by Jackson and was found alive in the prison yard next to Jackson’s corpse. Spain was convicted of murder in 1976 but released from prison on appeal in 1988 (thanks in part to Bingham’s acquittal). These books followed the publication of Eric Cummins’ scholarly account of California prison radicalism, which argues that the prison movement was little more than a collective fabrication by manipulative and tough-talking (mostly black) prisoners, on the one hand, and naïve whites eager to impress their imprisoned comrades on the other. Of Jackson, Cummins (echoing Durden-Smith) writes that he was trapped by the different

representations of him that he felt forced to meet in the most violent spectacle imaginable.<sup>234</sup> Collectively, these books treat Jackson as little more than a smooth-talking thug. Jackson is also mentioned in some memoirs, looms large as a symbol of radicalism in black popular culture, and appears in studies theorizing the connection between racism, imprisonment, and power in the United States. These texts exhibit a division between his words (political theorists and literary analysts, who quote him approvingly) and his deeds (journalists and memoirs, who describe him negatively)—a chasm that historians have yet to bridge.<sup>235</sup> Authenticity remains a popular valence through which Jackson is understood, with the poles firmly established as revolutionary or gangster. A heroic icon to prison activists, Jackson remains the epitome of authentic criminality. In refusing to stay the 2005 execution of Crips founder Stanley Tookie Williams, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger said that the one-time gang leader had failed to prove his redemption. The governor was particularly incensed that Williams, who had devoted much of his imprisonment to encouraging nonviolent alternatives to gangs, had included Jackson among the names of activists Williams had dedicated one of his books. Schwarzenegger said that Jackson’s inclusion “defies reason and is a significant indicator that Williams is not reformed.”<sup>236</sup>

The problem with the popular constructions of George Jackson is not that he was an inauthentic misrepresentation of himself but that his eloquent proclamations of violent revolution were sincere expressions of his beliefs. Had people not made Jackson visible in life through the trap of authenticity as an either/or statement of personal value, they likely would not have been so traumatized by his personal flaws, contradictions or eccentricities. Absent other ways of relating to black subjectivity, authenticity established

a morality contest. George Jackson, in these narratives, was inauthentic less because of his deception than his consistency, his sincerity. He was inauthentic because he could not live up to the objectification that accompanied his visibility as an ostensibly authentic spokesman of black protest. Authenticity is a value judgment; it separates genuine writers from clever hustlers, innocent activists from deceptive criminals.

The posthumous stories of George Jackson reveal a profound inability to trust the sincerity of black oppositional political figures, especially ones operating from the constraints of confinement. George Jackson became a visible figure as a result of a carefully managed image of victimhood, but violence was never absent from his public status. Even with the edits to *Soledad Brother*, the book contained many of the issues that later texts would use to raise questions about the “real” George Jackson, calls for guerrilla war and promiscuous declarations of sexual longing. Further, his visibility was facilitated by an act of violence itself: the August 7 actions his brother coordinated. The praise for *Soledad Brother* as an authentic and universal expression of pain and isolation baited the trap of posthumous re-constructions of Jackson’s image. The real George Jackson was far more consistent than any construction of an authentic George Jackson: he believed in violence as a strategy of political liberation that could eliminate colonialism, stop fascism, and spread multiracial unity on the basis of revolutionary politics. The shifting parameters of his visibility defined this desire on Jackson’s part first as the romantic hyperbole of an innocent man and second as the hidden terror of a manipulative criminal. Both representations/ re-presentations of Jackson required outside certification of Jackson’s authenticity, whether by journalist, activist or politician. Their investment in Jackson as an authentic and universal voice of the pain wrought by

isolation owed to the widely shared view that prisoners, blacks, and black prisoners could not be political actors on their own behalf. Instead, they could only be foils for the development of broader agendas, whether political or psychological. The black condition, as applied to Jackson in particular and black prisoners in general, became the visible site of white projections. As a visible public figure, George Jackson has always been the subject of narratives competing for dominance. Yet Jackson himself was more consistent than the “authentic” meanings given him through various constructions of his visibility.

### Conditions of Confinement

Violence can be a tool of visibility. As with any tool, violence knows no ideological grounds. The visibility of violence is intimately connected to questions of power: violent acts are crafted for their visible power. This visibility can be used to bolster subversive ideas in the formation of an insurgent politics—as seen in George and Jonathan Jackson’s discussions of heroism and prestige. It can also be used to bolster the authority and control of existing institutions, as seen through the dramatic government responses to prison riots. Notwithstanding its attempt to establish a clean slate through abrogating the status quo, the public exposure of violence takes place in a context marked by institutions and structures of feeling. These systems then shape the parameters, meaning and impact of the subsequent visibility. The ensuing narratives may be shaped or revised by violent acts in ways far different than their producers had intended, especially as certain institutions recede into the shadows once more.

Narratives of confinement are themselves confining. They create opportunities to theorize the constrictions of identity and to make visible diverse spaces and institutions of

identity formation. But they can also foreclose other imaginations of how identity is lived and experienced. Used as a metaphor, confinement reifies isolation and yearns to establish the authenticity that further restricts more complex modes of narration. The visibility of confinement in the context of a racially inflected system of incarceration and persistent structures of racial dominance imbues questions of imprisonment with racialized identity claims. Confinement is one component of racial conditions. Prisoners do not exist in the public consciousness outside of their iconic representation, this symbolic visibility being the only way most people can have access to the confined. In radical, reformist or reactionary narratives, this iconicity easily becomes a metonym—for other prisoners, for other members of a particular racialized group, and or for those seeking to name the feelings of pain and isolation that prisoners describe of their conditions as constituting their own lives. The visibility of typically hidden places generates concern over the authenticity of political subjects. This struggle over “the real” is a battle over knowledge—how it is used and parceled, by whom, and for what ends.

Visibility engages questions of subjectivity and a search for “the real,” for the man behind the curtain, the motivation behind the deeds, or the deeds that contradict the words. As material institutions of confinement lose their publicity, the condition of confinement emerges as a conceptual category with which to make sense of everyday realities. Authenticity emerges as a metric of “the real,” something embodied and affected. An impossible standard to reach in practice, authenticity still provides narrative closure to events that remain controversial in the public eye. Yet believing “the real” to be a judge of authenticity baits a trap destined to confine those who would use it as a judge of character.

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<sup>1</sup> George Jackson, *Soledad Brother* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994 [1970]), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1995 [1952]), p. 459.

<sup>3</sup> Huey Newton, statement at George Jackson funeral, reprinted in George Jackson, *Blood in my Eye* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1990 [1972]), pp. 193-197. Newton talks of meeting Jackson on pp. 193-194. See also Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, p. 16; Eric Mann, *Comrade George: An Investigation into the Life, Political Thought, and Assassination of George Jackson* (New York: Perennial Library, 1974), pp. 1-5.

<sup>4</sup> Authenticity has long been a metric for evaluating the political and cultural significance of black lives. For insightful analyses, see John L. Jackson, Jr., *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); J. Martin Favor, *Authentic Blackness: The Folk in the New Negro Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50: 2 (Spring 2008), pp. 177-218; Hortense J. Spillers, "The Idea of Black Culture," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 6: 3 (Winter 2006), pp. 7-28.

<sup>5</sup> This biographical sketch of Jackson draws from many sources. These include his own self-description in *Soledad Brother*, pp. 3-16; Min S. Yee, *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison: In Which a Utopian Scheme Turns Bedlam* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1973); Jo Durden-Smith, *Who Killed George Jackson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976); James Carr, *BAD: The Autobiography of James Carr* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2002 [1975]); Gregory Armstrong, *The Dragon Has Come* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); and Ron Rosenbaum, "Wither Thou Goest," *Esquire Magazine* July 1972, pp. 86-88, 92, 174-176. Jackson describes his participation in various in-prison organizing in the letter that serves as the opening to *Soledad Brother* and in a letter he sent to a Salinas attorney seeking legal help for his January 1970 charges. The letter can be found in Min Yee, "An Untitled Book on Soledad Prison, the Soledad Brothers and the Marin Courthouse Shooting Incident," in Angela Davis Legal Defense Papers (hereafter ADLD), Box 5, Folder 6, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Author's conversations with Kiilu Nyasha, Felix Shafer and Claude Marks were also instructive in thinking about the details of Jackson's biography.

<sup>6</sup> Many prisoners, and subsequent outside observers, viewed the January 13, 1970, killings as a set up. That day, a group of black and white prisoners were let out in the yard at Soledad after a period of lengthy isolation sparked by the killing of two black prisoners, one of them also killed on the prison yard, in 1968. Those deaths and the closing of the yard deepened the racial hostilities already prevalent at Soledad. The fifteen prisoners let out to exercise in early 1970, eight white and seven black, included Billie "Buzzard" Harris, a leader of the Aryan Brotherhood, and W.L. Nolen, a prison boxing champion who had been a political mentor to George Jackson and other black prisoners. Nolen had filed several lawsuits protesting the threats against his life by white prisoners and the guards' manipulation of racial tensions at Soledad. He was the first one shot by guard Opie G. Miller, a twenty-year Army veteran and expert marksman stationed in the guard tower overlooking the yard, when a fight broke out between the unarmed prisoners. Miller shot and killed two more black prisoners, and wounded three others, two black and one white. Black prisoners viewed the three deaths as premeditated murders: all were outspoken militants picked off by a sniper who knew they were unarmed and shot without warning. The best overview of this incident can be found in Yee, *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison*, pp. 29-68.

<sup>7</sup> Yee, *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison*, p. 70. Yee reports that prisoners started clapping and cheering for about ninety seconds after Mills fell. Then they became stone quiet, for fear of guard retaliation.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>9</sup> Armstrong, *The Dragon Has Come*, p. xii. Jackson's codefendants, John Clutchette and Fleeta Drumgo, were also selected partly on the basis of their racial militancy, even if by superficial standards. Clutchette wore an Afro, Drumgo had been disciplined for hanging a poster of Malcolm X—and both men's cells were near the scene of the crime. Clutchette and Drumgo were both serving sentences of six months to fifteen years for second-degree burglary. Clutchette had a parole hearing scheduled for April 1970, with what seemed like a good chance of being released, which supporters argued cast doubt on his involvement. See Eric Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 165; Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, "Soledad Brothers" pamphlet in Soledad Brothers Defense Committee vertical file, Tamiment Library, NYU.

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- <sup>10</sup> Father Earl A. Neil was rector of St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland and an active supporter of the Black Panthers. He officiated funerals for both Jonathan and George Jackson. See "George Jackson Funeral" audio file PM 067, Freedom Archives.
- <sup>11</sup> Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 131.
- <sup>12</sup> For the connection between "representation" and "re-presentation" as the work of memory, see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- <sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Jelin, translated by Judy Rein and Marcial Godoy-Anatívia, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. xvii.
- <sup>14</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning," in Charles R. Hale, ed., *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 31-61.
- <sup>15</sup> See Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) and *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1990). For a critical evaluation of space and time in modernity that also accounts for colonialism, see Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking," *Cultural Studies* 21:2 (March/May 2007), pp. 449-514.
- <sup>16</sup> See generally Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory in the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Barbie Zelizer, "The Voice of the Visual in Memory," in Kendall R. Phillips, ed., *Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), pp. 157-186.
- <sup>17</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 115.
- <sup>18</sup> Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, p. 12.
- <sup>19</sup> Time can also be found in critiques of incarceration. Given that the silences of prison have often produced brutalities that civil society has rejected as archaic, and given that prisons are slow to implement progressive social policies found outside of them (e.g., around issues of race or sexuality), some have suggested that prison is also temporally removed from the present.
- <sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Jelin, "Public Memorialization in Perspective: Truth, Justice and Memory of Past Repression in the Southern Cone of South America." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1 (2007), pp. 138-156; Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, p. 29. This use of memorializing the dead in the context of human rights activism rests on recalling those absented by violent. For an example of memory and absence, see Marita Sturken, "Memorializing Absence," Social Science Research Council, After September 11, URL (accessed March 4, 2010), <http://essays.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/sturken.htm>.
- <sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, translated by Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995 [1977]), pp. 135-256; Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 2006), pp. 90-91. For an insightful discussion of temporality and the prison, see Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 212-217.
- <sup>22</sup> Jessica Mitford, "A Talk with George Jackson," *New York Times Book Review*, June 13, 1971. In an interview conducted in the late 1970s, Willie Tate describes the vocabulary-building activities Jackson used. See Debby Begel, "An Interview with Willie Tate," in Tony Platt and Paul Takagi, eds., *Punishment and Penal Discipline: Essays on the Prison and the Prisoners' Movement* (San Francisco: Crime and Social Justice Associates, 1980), p. 179. More generally on Jackson's discussion of his experience in prison, see *Soledad Brother*.
- <sup>23</sup> Tad Szulc, "George Jackson Radicalizes the Brothers in Soledad and San Quentin," *New York Times*, August 1, 1971, pp. SM10, 16.
- <sup>24</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 180.
- <sup>25</sup> Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, p. 329.
- <sup>26</sup> "Who is Ruchell Magee? Cinque," p. 2, in ADLD, Box 2, Folder 7.
- <sup>27</sup> Rebecca N. Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law: Anti-Lynching and Labor Defense in U.S. Radical History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 20.

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- <sup>28</sup> Ho Chi Minh, translated by Aileen Palmer, *Prison Diary* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House [4<sup>th</sup> Edition], 1967), p. 32.
- <sup>29</sup> Lorena Oropeza, "The heart of Chicano history: Reies López Tijerina as a memory entrepreneur," *The Sixties* 1: 1 (June 2008), pp. 49-67. Although Jelin coined the phrase "memory entrepreneur," my usage of it here borrows most directly from Oropeza's application of the term in regards to a social movement figure in the United States associated with an ethnic nationalist radicalism (in her case, Chicanos in the Southwest). For Jelin's definition, see Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*.
- <sup>30</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). For a critique, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
- <sup>31</sup> Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* volume 12, no. 2 (June 1995), pp. 214-239.
- <sup>32</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 165.
- <sup>33</sup> Elun Gabriel, "Performing Persecution: Witnessing and Martyrdom in the Anarchist Tradition," *Radical History Review* 98 (Spring 2007), pp. 34-62.
- <sup>34</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London: Routledge, 1988).
- <sup>35</sup> The structure of surveillance in prison has been well documented; it has been central to writing about life in prison, historically and experientially. Cf. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Jackson, *Soledad Brother*; and Norman Johnston, *Forms of Constraint: A History of Prison Architecture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).
- <sup>36</sup> Ruchell Magee, letter to Robert Treuhaft and Jessica Mitford, March 5, 1971, in Jessica Mitford Papers, Series III: Kind and Usual Punishment, 1963-1973 (hereafter JMP), Box 48, Folder 9, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Mitford's archives contain her correspondence with several other prisoners, especially in Marion (Illinois) and McNeil Island (Washington—a prison Mitford filed suit against for first amendment violations), that are revealing of prisoner communication strategies. For other published descriptions of the ways prisoners communicated around this time, see Sam Melville, *Letters From Attica* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1972); Piri Thomas, *7 Long Times* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1994 [1974]); Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (As Told to Alex Haley)* (New York: Ballantine, 1965); Eve Pell, ed., *Maximum Security: Letters From Prison* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, Inc., 1972); H. Jack Griswold, Edward Tromanhauser, Art Powers, and Mike Misenheimer, *An Eye for an Eye: Four Inmates on the Crime of American Prisons Today* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970).
- <sup>37</sup> Kalima Aswad, interview with the author, October 24, 2008. Prisoners were not the only ones who figured out how to use the prison architecture in communicating. Aswad remembers that guards turned on the air conditioning system before beating prisoners on the Adjustment Center following George Jackson's death on August 21, 1971, to drown out their cries from being heard in other parts of the prison. This effort was unsuccessful, as Aswad, two floors above, could hear the men screaming.
- <sup>38</sup> "San Quentin 6 Indicted," *The Guardian*, November 3, 1971, special insert on George Jackson's death, p. 4, in Tony Platt, private collection.
- <sup>39</sup> Black Mothers United for Action, "Open Letter to Black Officials: Where is Ruchell Magee?" August 1971, in ADLD, Box 2, Folder 7. See also Friends of San Quentin Adjustment Center, *Letters to Mother from Prison* (San Francisco, circa 1972), in Tony Platt, private collection.
- <sup>40</sup> John Clutchette, "On Prison Reform," in Angela Y. Davis and Bettina Aptheker, eds., *If They Come in the Morning* (New York: Signet, 1971), p. 151.
- <sup>41</sup> Jessica Mitford, May 21, 1970, letter to Dr. Benjamin Spock, in JMP, Box 48, Folder 9.
- <sup>42</sup> Yee, *Melancholy History of Soledad Prison*, pp. 133-141; Black Caucus Report, "Treatment of Prisoners at California Training Facility at Soledad Central," July 23, 1970, in JMP, Box 49, Folder 3.
- <sup>43</sup> "Interviews with Soledad Brothers" audio file PM 058, Freedom Archives.
- <sup>44</sup> John L. Jackson, Jr., *Racial Paranoia: The Unintended Consequences of Political Correctness* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 7.
- <sup>45</sup> Ruchell Magee poster, circa November 1972, in Tony Platt, private collection.
- <sup>46</sup> Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008 [1971]), pp. 1-60.



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<sup>47</sup> These quotes come from an article authored by “A Brother of The 3<sup>rd</sup> World,” entitled “Be Aware of the Publicity Tricks,” in *Black Pride* June 1972, pp. 7-8, in Raúl R. Salinas Papers (hereafter RRS), Box 6, Folder 30, Green Library, Stanford University.

<sup>48</sup> Black Caucus Report, “Treatment of Prisoners at California Training Facility at Soledad Central,” July 23, 1970, in JMP, Box 49, Folder 3. The report was authored by Senator Mervyn M. Dymally and Assemblyman John J. Miller after a visit the men made to Soledad. Dymally’s office also compiled news articles about prison conditions into a packet, “Prisons—A California Crisis,” March 22, 1971, in JMP, Box 55, Folder 6.

<sup>49</sup> Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, p. 26.

<sup>50</sup> Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Jackson, *Blood In My Eye*, p. 42; George Jackson, November 16, 1970, draft of letter to *New York Times*, in Papers Relating to the Publication of Soledad Brother (hereafter PPSB), Carton 1, Folder 22, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>52</sup> Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>53</sup> While this rhetoric was particularly widespread in American prison radicalism, it was not exclusive to it. See Allyn and Adele Rickett, *Prisoners of Liberation* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973). Allyn and Adele Rickett, for instance, published a memoir describing how their four-year incarceration in China (1951-1955) on charges of espionage led them to go from anti-communists to sympathizers of the Chinese Revolution. The Ricketts described how prison was a site of political education for them, complete with criticism/self-criticism sessions in which they developed an analysis of political economy and the Chinese Revolution. I thank Tony Platt for bringing this book to my attention.

<sup>54</sup> See Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*. The visibility of prisoner families was not an inherently radical enterprise. As Zaretsky shows, the early 1970s also witnessed a new visibility for family members of American POWs held in Vietnam. Their visibility used the family as a metonym for the nation more generally. See Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), pp. 25-70.

<sup>55</sup> See Inez Williams, draft of untitled pamphlet about Drumgo, in Angela Davis Materials (hereafter ADM), Box 3, Folder 8, Green Library, Stanford University. George Jackson was impressed by his mother’s militant response to Jonathan’s death. She also became executor of his estate, which meant that she approved what went into *Blood in my Eye*, George’s posthumous publication—a power she did not have in the case of *Soledad Brother*. See November 3, 1971, contract between Edward Bell, attorney for Georgia Jackson, and David Lubell, attorney for Stronghold Consolidated Productions, in Huey P. Newton Foundation Papers (hereafter HPNF), Series 2, Box 45, Folder 6, Green Library, Stanford University.

<sup>56</sup> See September 2, 1970, press release from Bantam Books and Coward-McCann announcing publication of *Soledad Brother*; and the June 23, 1970, letter from Fay Stender to Jessica Mitford, both in JMP, Box 48, Folder 9. See also Edmund White, *Genet: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 496-598, *passim*; and Jean Genet, edited by Albert Dichy, translated by Jeff Fort, *The Declared Enemy: Texts and Interviews*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 49-70, 81-90. Stender’s decision to publish Jackson’s letters as a book took as precedent attorney Beverly Axelrod’s role in helping Eldridge Cleaver publish his prison writings two years before *Soledad Brother* was published. For Newton and Stender’s involvement, see Ron Rosenbaum, “Wither Thou Goest,” *Esquire Magazine* July 1972, pp. 86-88, 92, 174-176. The Genet quote appears in his preface, p. 332 of the 1994 edition of *Soledad Brother*.

<sup>57</sup> Harvey Molotch, “Media and Movements,” in Mayer Zald and John D. McCarthy, eds., *The Dynamics of Social Movements* (Cambridge: Winthrop, 1979), pp. 71-93. See also Harvey Molotch and Julian Lester, “News as Purposive Behavior: On the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents, and Scandals” in Stanley Cohen and Jock Young, eds., *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media* (Beverly Hills: SAGE, 1981), pp. 118-137.

<sup>58</sup> John Kifner, “Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther who Became GOP Conservative, is Dead at 62,” p. B8.

<sup>59</sup> A review of *Soledad Brother* in the *New York Times* described Cleaver as “the greatest writer of us all,” rather than Jackson, as Huey Newton had proclaimed, because Cleaver confronts his “criminal disposition”

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whereas Jackson evades it. Establishing the terms as a choice between confrontation and evasion continues to evaluate black authors based on some behaviorist notion of authentic dispositions. Indeed, the reviewer notes that Jackson's letters demand attention not because they are compelling but because they are disturbing. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, "Books of the Times: 'From Dachau, with Love,'" *New York Times*, November 20, 1970, p. 39.

<sup>60</sup> Jessica Mitford, "A Talk with George Jackson," *New York Times Book Review*, June 13, 1971. For literary analyses of *Soledad Brother*, see Lisa Marie Corrigan, "Reimagining Black Power: Prison Manifestos and the Strategies of Regeneration in the Rewriting of Black Identity, 1969-2002" (Ph.D. diss, University of Maryland, College Park, 2006); Douglas Edward Taylor, "Hustlers, Nationalists, and Revolutionaries: African American Prison Narratives of the 1960s and 1970s" (Ph.D. diss, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002). For a meditation on Jackson's intellectual significance, see Rodríguez, *Forced Passages*, pp. 114-133. For a classic assessment of prison literature see H. Bruce Franklin, *The Victim as Criminal and Artist: Literature from the American Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978),

<sup>61</sup> "Selected Books of the Year in Nonfiction" *New York Times*, December 6, 1970, in National United Committee to Free Angela Davis papers (hereafter NUCFAD), Box 6, Folder 1, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

<sup>62</sup> Suzannah Lessard, "Beyond Cleaver," *Washington Monthly* November 1970, p. 63.

<sup>63</sup> January 20, 1971, press release from the American Library Association, in PPSB, Carton 2, Folder 22.

<sup>64</sup> Colin McGlashan, "Slender Bullets," *New Statesman*, March 26, 1971, p. 30; A. Sivenandan, "Ghettos of the mind," *New Society*, April 1, 1971, p. 54; *The Bookseller*, advertisement, January 30, 1971, p. 282, in PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 22.

<sup>65</sup> Jessica Mitford, "Kind and Usual Punishment in California," *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1971, p. 52.

Several prison memoirs appeared in the wake of the success of *Soledad Brother*, including those by Catholic leftist Daniel Berrigan, Rosenberg codefendant Morton Sobell, and black poet Etheridge Knight, among many others. See Lee Bernstein, "The Age of Jackson: George Jackson and the Culture of American Prisons in the 1970s," *Journal of American Culture* 30:3 (2007), pp. 310-323.

<sup>66</sup> Armstrong, *The Dragon Has Come*, p. 170.

<sup>67</sup> Jackson, *Real Black*, pp. 12-18; Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). See also Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002).

<sup>68</sup> Julius Lester, "Black Rage to Live: *Soledad Brother*," *New York Times Book Review*, November 22, 1970, p. 293.

<sup>69</sup> Gregory Armstrong, November 17, 1970, letters to William DuBois and Frances Brown (both of the *New York Times*), in PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 22.

<sup>70</sup> George Jackson, November 16, 1970, draft of letter to *New York Times*, in PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 22.

<sup>71</sup> Jessica Mitford, *Poison Penmanship: The Gentle Art of Muckraking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 191.

<sup>72</sup> Heather Ann Thompson, "Blinded by a 'Barbaric' South: Prison Horrors, Inmate Abuse, and the Ironic History of American Penal Reform," in Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 87.

<sup>73</sup> Prisoners' Union Grant Proposal, circa 1972, p. 17, in JMP, Box 40, Folder 3.

<sup>74</sup> Eve Pell, *We Used to Own the Bronx: Memoirs of a Former Debutante* (Albany: State University of New York, 2009), p. 174.

<sup>75</sup> Jackson, *Blood in my Eye*, p. 23.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in anonymous, *Voices from Inside: 7 Interviews with Attica Prisoners* (n.p.: April 1972), p. 39, in Voices from Inside vertical file, Tamiment Collection, New York University.

<sup>77</sup> Prisoners' Union Grant Proposal, circa 1972, p. 9, in JMP, Box 40, Folder 3.

<sup>78</sup> Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1988 [1974]), p. 250.

<sup>79</sup> A Brother of The 3<sup>rd</sup> World, "Be Aware of the Publicity Tricks," *Black Pride*, June 1972, p. 7, in RRS, Box 6, Folder 30.

<sup>80</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 169.

<sup>81</sup> Yee, *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison*, pp. 132-156. See also Black Caucus Report, "Treatment of Prisoners at California Training Facility at Soledad Central"; Tom Wicker, *A Time to Die* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975); Heather Ann Thompson, *Attica!* (New York: Pantheon Books, forthcoming).

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- <sup>82</sup> Wally Burckhard, "Communications Blackout," *The Outlaw* volume 1, number 3 (January – February 1972), p. 2, in JMP, Box 57, Folder 3. The Prisoners Union protested the Adult Authority to overturn these mail restrictions. The *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Sacramento Bee* each conducted multi-part investigations of California prisons in 1971, with the *Chronicle* sending two reporters to prison for a week, one as a corrections officer and the other as a prisoner. For more on prison censorship following Jackson's death, see Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, pp. 224-226, 231-239.
- <sup>83</sup> Nelson quoted in Bruce Jackson, "Prison: The New Academy," December 6, 1971, the *Nation*, p. 587; "San Quentin's New Policy on Interviews," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 21, 1971, p. 3. The policy was announced one day before Jackson's death. See also David F. Greenberg and Fay Stender, "The Prison as a Lawless Agency," *Buffalo Law Review* 21:3, p. 821.
- <sup>84</sup> Jackson's death received extensive coverage in the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Sun Reporter*, among other sources. The chronology of August 21, and here I have just presented the uncontested elements, serves as the denouement to several texts: Yee, *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison*, pp. 201-258; Armstrong, *The Dragon Has Come*, pp. 213-238; Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, pp. 225-227; Clark Howard, *American Saturday* (New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1981), pp. 278-319. Durden-Smith opens rather than ends his text with Jackson's death; see *Who Killed George Jackson?*, pp. 3-40.
- <sup>85</sup> See, for example, National Lawyers Guild of New York City, *San Quentin to Attica: The Sound Before the Fury* (New York City, circa 1972); and "The Struggle Inside" program booklet for the 1972 Prison Action Conference, in author's files courtesy of Tony Platt. The Red Family and People's Press, members of whom organized the Prison Action Conference the following spring, produced a broadsheet in September 1971, *War Behind Walls*, which dealt mostly with Jackson's death and the events at Attica. Similar sentiments could be found in the various prison movement publications I examine in the next chapter and other leftist media. Joy James's edited collection *Imprisoned Intellectuals* features a picture of Jackson overlain an iconic photograph of dissident prisoners from the Attica yard.
- <sup>86</sup> Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978), pp. 58-59.
- <sup>87</sup> Allen Feldman, "Violence and Vision: The Prosthetics and Aesthetics of Terror," *Public Culture* 10: 1 (1997), pp. 29-30; Joy James, *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender and Race in U.S. Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 24-43. The phrase "image defeat" comes from Retort, *Afflicted Powers*.
- <sup>88</sup> "Attica to Munich," *Black Panther*, September 30, 1972, p. 2. Official sources told journalists that all of the dead hostages killed at Attica had their throats slit by prisoners. They said that at least one hostage was castrated. Two days later, the medical examiner revealed that all of the dead at Attica were killed by police bullets, fired during the retaking of the prison.
- <sup>89</sup> Jill A. Edy *Troubled Pasts: News and the Collective Memory of Social Unrest* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Dan Berger, "Constructing Crime, Framing Disaster: Routines of Criminalization and Crisis in Hurricane Katrina," *Punishment and Society* 11:4 (2009), pp. 491-510.
- <sup>90</sup> Lori Andrews, *Black Power, White Blood: The Life and Times of Johnny Spain* (New York: Pantheon, 1996), p. 166; Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, p. 225. A picture of the yard is reprinted in a photo section in Cummins' book.
- <sup>91</sup> Dan Berger, "Regarding the Imprisonment of Others: Prison Abuse Photographs and Social Change," *International Journal of Communication* 1 (2007), pp. 210-237; John Hartley, *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of Popular Media* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
- <sup>92</sup> Daniel Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
- <sup>93</sup> Jessica Mitford, "A Talk with George Jackson," *New York Times Book Review*, June 13, 1971.
- <sup>94</sup> L.H. Fudge, November 4, 1970, State of California Memorandum, Subject: In-Service Training Recommendations, in JMP, Box 44, Folder 4.
- <sup>95</sup> L.S. Nelson, March 22, 1971, California State Prison, Subject: Inmate Activity Programs, in JMP, Box 44, Folder 4.
- <sup>96</sup> Gilmore, "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning,"; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of

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California Press, 2007); Loic Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh," *Punishment and Society* 3:1 (January 2001), pp. 95-134.

<sup>97</sup> Cf., National Lawyers Guild of New York City, *San Quentin to Attica*; The Harriet Tubman Prison Movement, *The Harriet Tubman Prison Movement* (Los Angeles, circa 1972). Both pamphlets are housed in Tony Platt, private collection.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Jackson, "Prison: The New Academy," *The Nation*, December 6, 1971, p. 586.

<sup>99</sup> Stanley Williford, "George Jackson—the Product of 2 Ghettos," *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 1971, p. 23.

<sup>100</sup> "Soledad Brother Party: Champagne Flows Outside Quentin." *The [San Rafael] Independent Journal*, October 16, 1970, p. 21. More generally on affective protest, see Benjamin Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>101</sup> Gary Alan Fine, "John Brown's Body: Elites, Heroic Embodiment, and the Legitimation of Political Violence," *Social Problems* 46:2 (May 1999), pp. 225-249.

<sup>102</sup> October 14, 1970, press release, Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, vertical file, Tamiment Library, NYU.

<sup>103</sup> Tom Wolfe, *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970).

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in the Milwaukee Committee to Free Angela Davis, "Free Angela Davis," circa 1971, Angela Y Davis vertical file, Tamiment Library, NYU.

<sup>105</sup> "Why Angela Davis" *Monday Magazine*, July 1971, pp. 7-8, in ADLD, Box 3, Folder 9.

<sup>106</sup> James Baldwin, "An Open Letter to my Sister, Angela Y. Davis," in Davis and Aptheker, eds., *If They Come in the Morning*, p. 19.

<sup>107</sup> James Baldwin speech, printed in Friends of Soledad, ed., *Speeches from the Soledad Brothers rally* (London: Friends of Soledad, 1971), p. 33, in Friends of Soledad vertical file, Tamiment Library, NYU.

<sup>108</sup> Angela Davis, June 22, 1970, letter to George Jackson, in ADLD, Box 3, Folder 2.

<sup>109</sup> Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, p. 256.

<sup>110</sup> Tony Platt, cited in notes by Jessica Mitford, in JMP, Box 36, Folder 2.

<sup>111</sup> Fay Stender, "Introduction," in Pell, ed., *Maximum Security*, p. 13.

<sup>112</sup> "Entrevista Sobre el Caso de Humberto Pagan," *Palante* volume 1, number 24, (March 1-15, 1972) p. 12. The interview originally appeared in *La Hora*.

<sup>113</sup> Angela Davis, June 22, 1970, letter to George Jackson, in ADLD, Box 3, Folder 2. Not everyone agreed with proclaiming prisoners leaders of a coming revolution. Two prisoners objected to this approach in an article published by *The Guild Practitioner*: "The view from behind bars is this: If the free (relatively speaking) people look to us as the vanguard of the movement, what does this say about the condition of the movement?" Article found in JMP, Box 36, Folder 2.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in *The San Quentin Six* (no author, circa 1974), p. 8, in RRS, Box 7, Folder 12.

<sup>115</sup> Leon X. Bates, "George, in the Tradition of Malcolm," *Black Pride* volume 28, May 18, 1972, p. 7, in RRS, Box 6, Folder 30. See also the untitled poem written by Johnny Larry Spain and printed in anonymous, *The San Quentin Six*, circa 1974, p. 8, in RRS, Box 7, Folder 12.

<sup>116</sup> Michael Hanchard, *Party/Politics: Horizons in Black Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 49.

<sup>117</sup> Joe Walker, "Angela Davis: What's on her mind?" *Muhammad Speaks*, reprinted as a pamphlet by the National United Committee to Free Angela Davis, in JMP, Box 49, Folder 6.

<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Michael Spencer, "Tear Down the Walls," *Synergy* 1971, p. 3, in JMP, Box 56, Folder 1. See also Jackson, "Prison: The New Academy."

<sup>119</sup> No author, *Midnight Special*, volume 3, number 12 (December 1973), p. 15.

<sup>120</sup> Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 100.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>122</sup> Walter Rodney, "George Jackson: Black Revolutionary" November 1971. Available online: <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/rodneyjackson.html>. (Accessed March 19, 2009).

<sup>123</sup> Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), pp. 45-103, especially, pp. 79-95; Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, edited and translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford

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University Press, 2002), pp. 41-45, 125-129. For more on Derrida, see also Che Gossett, "Silhouettes of Defiance: The memorialization of historical sites of queer and transgender resistance in an age of neoliberal inclusivity," unpublished paper in author's files. Genet's involvement with the Black Panthers, and Jackson and Davis in particular, is discussed in White, *Genet*, pp. 496-598, *passim*. See also Genet, *The Declared Enemy*, pp. 49-70, 81-90.

<sup>124</sup> Klaus Steiniger, *Free Angela Davis: Hero of the Other America* (East Berlin: National Council of the National Front of the German Democratic Republic, 1972).

<sup>125</sup> Many of these statements can be found in the Angela Davis Legal Defense Fund, Box 2, Folders 6, 14, and 15, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. Herbert Marcuse, who was Davis's dissertation supervisor, and James Baldwin each helped secure signatures from prominent people in Europe. See Bettina F. Aptheker, *Intimate Politics: How I grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech, and Became a Feminist Rebel* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006), p. 250. In response to calls from the Soviet Union for Davis's release, Richard Nixon invited fourteen Russian scientists to observe her trial. See Tad Szulc, "Russians Invited to the Davis Trial," *New York Times*, January 4, 1971, p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> Feldman, "Violence and Vision," p. 29.

<sup>127</sup> Cf., John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 41-69; W.J.T. Mitchell, "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture," in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader (Second Edition)* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 86-101; John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Barbie Zelizer, "What's Untransportable about the Transport of Photographic Images," *Popular Communication* 4:1 (February 2006), pp. 3-20.

<sup>128</sup> Feldman, "Violence and Vision," p. 29; Nikhil Pal Singh, "The Black Panthers and the 'Undeveloped Country' of the Left," in Charles E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1998), pp. 57-105; Curtis Austin, *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006).

<sup>129</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1993); Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>130</sup> Allen Feldman, "Political Terror and the Technologies of Memory: Excuse, Sacrifice, Commodification, and Actuarial Moralities," *Radical History Review* 85 (Winter 2003), 58-73.

<sup>131</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, pp. 7-9.

<sup>132</sup> Although the theory built on the ideas of Che Guevara, the central text to elaborate focoism for a North American audience is Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?* (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Within the United States, focoism has been mostly discussed in relation to the Weather Underground. See Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), and Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). For one of many critiques of focoism in the context of Latin American radicalism, see María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 63-107. For a critique of focoism in the events of August 7, see Henry Winston, *The Meaning of San Rafael* (New York: New Outlook Publishers, 1971).

<sup>133</sup> George Lavan, ed., *Che Guevara Speaks: Selected Speeches and Writings* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1987 [1967]), p. 159.

<sup>134</sup> She also notes that this regenerative use of death is typical of American culture. See Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, pp. 11-21.

<sup>135</sup> Genet, *The Declared Enemy*, p. 91.

<sup>136</sup> Dylan Rodríguez, "Forced Passages," in Joy James, ed., *Warfare in the American Homeland*, pp. 48-54. For an example published at the time, see Joseph Bruchac and William Witherup, eds., *Words from the House of the Dead: Prison Writings from Soledad* (New York: The Greenfield Review Press, 1971).

<sup>137</sup> No author, *Voices from Inside: 7 Interviews with Attica Prisoners*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>138</sup> The literature here is vast. Cf. Mike Davis, *Buda's Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb* (London: Verso, 2007); Elun Gabriel, "Performing Persecution: Witnessing and Martyrdom in the Anarchist Tradition," *Radical History Review* 98 (Spring 2007), pp. 34-60; Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*

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(London: Verso, 2008). My thinking on these matters has been greatly informed by ongoing conversations with Andy Cornell about the temporalities of leftwing violence among Marxists and anarchists.

<sup>139</sup> Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, p. 165.

<sup>140</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

<sup>141</sup> Alexandra Close, "The Trial of Ruchell Magee," p. 4, in JMP, Box 49, Folder 6.

<sup>142</sup> This description of August 7 draws from multiple accounts, including coverage in the San Rafael *Independent Journal* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*; Yee, *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison*, pp. 157-173; Paul Liberatore, *The Road to Hell: The True Story of George Jackson, Stephen Bingham, and the San Quentin Massacre* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1996), pp. 81-92; and the transcripts of the Angela Davis trial, found in the ADM, Boxes 2 and 3, and the Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute (hereafter MCLI), Subseries 2.5, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. Thomas maintained that he killed all the men inside the van; it seems likely, however, that the San Quentin guards did. In any event, neither the prisoners nor Jonathan Jackson did not kill any one except *perhaps* Haley; the shotgun taped around his neck tore off his face, but he may at that point have already been dead by a shot to the chest. Further, the shotgun may have gone off in a reflexive move rather than an intentional one after Magee had been shot in the chest. See Angela Davis trial transcript, pp. 2858-2938.

<sup>143</sup> My analysis here builds on the scholarship theorizing the connection between acts of violence and their representation. Cf., Feldman, "Violence and Vision"; Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others," *New York Times*, May 23, 2004; Zelizer, "The Voice of the Visual in Memory."

<sup>144</sup> Ruchell Magee Defense Committee, *By Any Means Necessary* newspaper, in Eldridge Cleaver Papers (hereafter ECP), Carton 4, Folder 21, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. See also Reginald Major, *Justice in the Round: The Trial of Angela Davis* (New York: The Third Press, 1973), 77-122; Aptheker, *Intimate Politics*, pp. 239-248.

<sup>145</sup> Major, *Justice in the Round*, pp. 12, 13.

<sup>146</sup> Antonio Gramsci, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers 1971), pp. 229-240.

<sup>147</sup> Sol Stern, "The Campaign to Free Angela Davis and Ruchell Magee," *New York Times Magazine*, June 27, 1971; "Huey Newton, eulogy for George Jackson" audio file PM 068, Freedom Archives. See also "Huey Newton on George Jackson" audio file PM 092, Freedom Archives.

<sup>148</sup> Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, p. 329; Tim Findley, "A Brother's Doubts on Plot," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 15, 1970, p. 3. In a letter to Jessica Mitford, Jackson said the "Battle of Marin" would have transpired without violence were it not for the San Quentin guards, "men so automatized to kill that no logical combinations of forces or logic can contain them. ... [They are the] most callous and vicious men ... in all the enemy state." See George Jackson, letter to Jessica Mitford, March 4, 1971, in JMP, Box 48, Folder 9. Newton echoed Jackson's description of his brother and William Christmas as free, juxtaposing their martyrdom against those who remained "slaves" as a result of passivity. See "Jonathan Jackson Funeral" audio file PM 008, Freedom Archives.

<sup>149</sup> Mann, *Comrade George*, pp. 42-45. The quote is from p. 42.

<sup>150</sup> "Angela Davis on FBI List." The [San Rafael] *Independent Journal*, August, 19, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>151</sup> Prisoner Solidarity Committee, *Prisoners Call Out: Freedom* (New York City, 1971), p. 39, in Prisoner Solidarity Committee Vertical File, Tamiment Library, NYU.

<sup>152</sup> Major, *Justice in the Round*, p. 122. Magee also argued that yesterday's sword was today's gun and appealed to a warrior Jesus found in the bible (Matthew chapter 10, verse 34): "I come not to send peace but the sword," in *By Any Means Necessary* newspaper, p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> Mary Leydecker, "Court Hearings: a First at San Quentin," *The [San Rafael] Independent Journal*, August 23, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>154</sup> Mary Leydecker, "Magee Resists Judge in Quentin Appearance; Shouts 'This Is Not a Court,'" *The [San Rafael] Independent Journal*, September 10, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>155</sup> "Stop the San Quentin Railroad," August 1970, flyer in Social Protest Collection (hereafter SPC), Reel 20, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>156</sup> Leydecker, "Court Hearings: a First at San Quentin," p. 1.

<sup>157</sup> UPI, "Guns Puzzle Mother of Slain Youth," *The [San Rafael] Independent Journal*, August, 12, 1970, p. 1.

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<sup>158</sup> Earl Caldwell, "Courthouse Shootout Linked with Radical Movement and Killing of Black Inmates," *New York Times*, August 24, 1970, p. 40. Angela Y. Davis, "An Appeal," in Davis and Aptheker, eds., *If They Come in the Morning*, p. 148

<sup>159</sup> September 2, 1970, press release from Bantam Books and Coward-McCann announcing publication of *Soledad Brother*; See also the back cover and inside front cover of the original paperback version of the book.

<sup>160</sup> Feldman, "Violence and Vision," p. 37.

<sup>161</sup> Jonathan Jackson and the Marin Civic Center raid inspired graphics that could be found in the *Black Panther* newspaper, *By Any Means Necessary* (a newspaper produced in support of Ruchell Magee), *Babylon* and *Right On!* (newspapers produced by dissident factions of the Black Panther Party), and other anti-prison publications. A mural of an armed Jonathan Jackson was produced in Boston; see Stephen Shames, *The Black Panthers* (New York: Aperture, 2006). James Kean won several awards for his pictures from the Marin Civic Center.

<sup>162</sup> Quoted in "How the Panthers See It," *The [San Rafael] Independent Journal*, August 13, 1970, p. 4. The newspaper reprinted the cartoon. Emory Douglas's artwork can be found in Sam Durant, ed., *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007).

<sup>163</sup> Baudrillard coined the neologism "hyperreal" to describe a simulation that lacks an original. See Jean Baudrillard, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994 [1981]). For his analysis of terrorism as an exercise in hyperreal spectacle, see Jean Baudrillard, translated by Paul Foss, John Johnston, Paul Patton and Andrew Derardini, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007).

<sup>164</sup> The first song appeared on a KPFA program about the Soledad Brothers, in "Interviews with Soledad Brothers" audio file PM 058, Freedom Archives. The lyrics for "Jonathan" can be found in HPNF, Series 2, Box 41, Folder 2.

<sup>165</sup> Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 7, 13.

<sup>166</sup> Mann, *Comrade George*, p. 5.

<sup>167</sup> Jackson's biography has been a central element to the use of his image. Aspects of it, namely that he got in trouble as a youngster and his sentence for the gas station robbery (in which his friend allegedly played a leading role) were found regularly in flyers supporting him, and an autobiographical letter opens his book *Soledad Brother*. Yet, as I will argue, a different biography of Jackson could be found in the books about him that emerged in the late 1970s. For variations on his biography, see Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, pp. 3-16; Jo Durden-Smith, *Who Killed George Jackson?* (New York: Knopf, 1976); and Howard, *American Saturday*.

<sup>168</sup> Prison Action Project, *Freedom On Our Terms: The Case Against the Adult Authority* pamphlet (Oakland: n.p., circa 1971), in author's files courtesy of Tony Platt. Indeterminate sentencing and parole were notable features of twentieth century rehabilitative school of penology. Indeterminate sentencing was first developed in California, beginning in 1917. Parole developed similarly as part of a governmental effort to regulate behavior, based on the belief that criminal behavior could be eliminated through proper training. Thus, prisons in the twentieth century were often known as "training facilities." See Lawrence M. Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 304-308; more generally, see Jonathan Simon, *Poor Discipline: Parole and the Social Control of the Underclass, 1890-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>169</sup> Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, p. 208. This theme of emotional detachment, simultaneous to a passionate engagement, as a survival mechanism can be found in several of Jackson's letters, both public and private. He wrote to Jessica Mitford, for instance, "I make my appeal to arms, and the people who have escaped the mindless, yankee autonaton [sic] syndrome....Dispassionately I face the men who hate us—and the real revolution will start here." George Jackson, letter to Jessica Mitford, March 4, 1971, in JMP, Box 48, Folder 9. A June 2, 1971, letter to Gregory Armstrong expresses a similar sentiment: "At this stage, I think I have more confidence in people than you tho [sic] I care much less for any individual life." See PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 37.

<sup>170</sup> George Jackson, letter to Gregory Armstrong, September 20, 1970, in PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 38.

<sup>171</sup> George Jackson, January 11, 1971, "Top Secret Legal Manifesto," page 6, in HPNF, Series 2, Box 4, Folder 16.

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<sup>172</sup> Fay Stender, undated letter to Greg Armstrong, from PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 47; Fay Stender, November 2, 1970, letter to Frances Jackson, in JMP, Box 48, Folder 9; “About Soledad Defense...” *Berkeley Barb*, August 13 – 19, 1971, p. 3; Jackson, “Top Secret Legal Manifesto”; Mitford, “A Talk with George Jackson,” *New York Times Book Review*, June 13, 1971; Yee, *Melancholy History of Soledad Prison*, pp. 117-156; Durden-Smith, *Who Killed George Jackson?*, pp. 113-114, 158-159, 203-204.

<sup>173</sup> George Jackson, letter to Gregory Armstrong, September 20, 1970, from PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 38.

<sup>174</sup> George Jackson, letter to unnamed person, August 11, 1971, from PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 38.

<sup>175</sup> Jackson, *Blood in my Eye*, p. 47. For Benjamin’s notion of the aura (its power and its connection to authenticity), see his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in Walter Benjamin, ed. by Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 217-252.

<sup>176</sup> “George Jackson interview” audio file PM 021, Freedom Archives.

<sup>177</sup> See, for instance, *Soledad Brother*, pp. 329-330; and “Jonathan Jackson Memorial” audio file PM021, Freedom Archives.

<sup>178</sup> Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, p. 329. Jackson expressed similar sentiment in several interviews following August 7.

<sup>179</sup> “People have said I am obsessed with my brother’s case and the movement in general. A person that was close to me once said that my life was too wrapped up in my brother’s case and that I wasn’t cheerful enough for her. It’s true. I don’t laugh very much any more. I have but one question to ask all of you and the people that think like you: What would you do if it was your brother?” Quoted in Armstrong, “Preface,” in Jackson, *Blood in my Eye*, p. xvi. This text was republished approvingly in several leftist venues as well, suggesting obsession an appropriate response to incarceration. See, for example, Friends of Soledad, “Marin: August 7th” flyer, in JMP, Box 49, Folder 1.

<sup>180</sup> Gary Alan Fine, “John Brown’s Body: Elites, Heroic Embodiment, and the Legitimation of Political Violence,” *Social Problems* 46:2 (May 1999), pp. 225-249.

<sup>181</sup> In terms of black political incorporation, including the sanitization necessary to create a postage stamp, see Hanchard, *Party/Politics*, p. 255. See also Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 95-145.

<sup>182</sup> Jonathan P. Jackson Memorial Service, in PPSB, Box 1, Folder 47; “George Jackson Funeral” audio files PM067 and PM068, Freedom Archives; “Jonathan Jackson Memorial” audio file PM008, Freedom Archives.

<sup>183</sup> “George Jackson Funeral” audio file PM 067, Freedom Archives.

<sup>184</sup> “Huey Newton on George Jackson” audio file PM 065, Freedom Archives.

<sup>185</sup> Gregory Armstrong, in Jackson, *Blood in my Eye*, p. xix.

<sup>186</sup> Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, p. 17.

<sup>187</sup> George Jackson’s March 11, 1971, will named seven prisoners in the California state system whose defense committees he wanted to be among the beneficiaries in the event of his death, as well as the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee. He left his “political funds and valuables” to the Black Panther Party, specifically Huey Newton and his sister Penny, with the directions that they “see to it that these funds are used to help smash totalitarian capitalism and all men who would defend Amerikanism.” See George Jackson will, March 11, 1971, in HPNF, Series 2, Box 45, Folder 6.

<sup>188</sup> Mel Watkins, “The Last Word: The Late George Jackson,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1971, p. BR55.

<sup>189</sup> Leon X. Bates, “George, in the Tradition of Malcolm,” *Black Pride* volume 28 (May 18, 1972), pp. 7, 14, in RRS, Box 6, Folder 30.

<sup>190</sup> National Lawyers Guild of New York City, *San Quentin to Attica*, p. 14.

<sup>191</sup> The affidavit is reprinted in National Lawyers Guild of New York City, *San Quentin to Attica*, p. 11; the other statement is quoted in Foucault et al., “The Masked Assassination,” p. 152. Kalima Aswad, then on death row, describes Jackson’s death as the moment of his politicization. He wrote an article (never published) about the contradictions in the official story, and he began writing protest letters to a federal judge about guards beating prisoners in the Adjustment Center. The warden prevented Aswad from sending telegrams to the judge. The denial depressed Aswad and then motivated him. He was gripped with a vision: “Angela Davis on the left, Malcolm X on the right, and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the middle. Reverend



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King pointed his finger at me and said, ‘Get up, nigga. Nigga, get up!’ I felt this powerful surge of strength well up in me. I got off the bunk, faced the direction I thought his office was located, and said, ‘warden, you might be god of this prison, but I will never bow down to you.’” That declaration marked the start of more than three decades of activism by Aswad, some of which I discuss in the following chapter. See Kalima Aswad, “Questions raised about political prisoners and my ‘politicization’ which came during my days on death row,” and “Coincidences,” unpublished manuscripts in author’s files courtesy of Aswad.

<sup>192</sup> Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1988 [1974]), p. 317.

<sup>193</sup> Nigel Williamson, *The Rough Guide to Bob Dylan: The Man, The Music, The Myth [2<sup>nd</sup> Edition]* (London: Rough Guides Ltd., 2006), p. 83.

<sup>194</sup> Bob Dylan, *Lyrics, 1962-2001* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. 273. The other major political song that Dylan wrote in that period was also about a black prisoner. “Hurricane,” first released on the 1975 album *Desire*, put to music the lengthy travails of black boxer Ruben “Hurricane” Carter, who many believed had been framed by police for the murder of a bartender in New Jersey. The song was far more popular than “George Jackson”; it was a more classic protest song (challenging the injustice of someone wrongly accused and around whom a campaign had been launched) as well as a more musically intricate and sophisticated song. It may also have stood out more than “George Jackson” due to the fact that political songs in general were far less common among famous musicians by 1975 than they were in 1971. I thank Richard Iton for pushing my aesthetic assessment of these songs.

<sup>195</sup> Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement*, pp. 224-227.

<sup>196</sup> George Jackson, letter to unknown, August 11, 1971, from PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 38.

<sup>197</sup> Stuart Hall, for instance, defines identity thusly: “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” See Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 222-237.

<sup>198</sup> Weather Underground, “George Jackson: San Francisco, August 30, 1971,” in Bernardine Dohrn, Bill Ayers and Jeff Jones, eds., *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground, 1970-1974* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006), p. 175.

<sup>199</sup> Quoted in Mann, *Comrade George*, p. 135.

<sup>200</sup> “From the George Jackson Brigade,” *Babylon* volume 1, number 4 (January 15, 1972), p. 9, in New Left Collection (hereafter NLC), Box 49, Folder: RPCN, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University; “George Jackson/ Communiqués Post George Jackson Assassination” audio file PM 013, Freedom Archives. For the other George Jackson Brigade, see Daniel Burton-Rose, *Guerrilla USA: The George Jackson Brigade and the Anticapitalist Underground in the 1970s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>201</sup> See Huey Newton, “Hidden Traitor, Renegade Scab: Eldridge Cleaver,” in HPNF, Series 2, Box 42, Folder 1; San Quentin Black Panther Party, “Tell it Like It Is!” in HPNF, Box 42, Folder 2. Author’s interview with Kiilu Nyasha, October 22, 2009. See also David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1993), pp. 295-296, 335, 379-380. Even though the early groups (the Capone Gang and Wolf Pack) were not of a political-military orientation as were the subsequent entities, they were not entirely removed from a military expression of politics in the racially polarized world of prison. Although economic gain and enforcement were likely their chief goals, these groups displayed an investment in enforcing solidarity among black prisoners. James Carr remembers that Jackson would lead political education sessions about racism with the members of the Capone Gang in the San Quentin yard. See “George Jackson: Teacher & Organizer—Interview with Jimmy Carr,” in *War Behind Walls*, September 1971, p. 3.

<sup>202</sup> Tim Findley, “‘Guerrilla’ Group Claims Oakland Copter Attack,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 10, 1973, p. 3; Tim Findley, “New Note from ‘Guerrilla’ Group,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 12, 1973, p. 6; Nancy Dooley, “New Questions in Oakland Copter Crash,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 9, 1973, p. 5; Bill Friedmann, “SQ Six Silent on Aug 7 Band,” *Berkeley Barb*, October 12 – 18, 1973. The communiqués were reprinted in the October 12 – 18, 1973, issue of the *Berkeley Barb*, p. 3.

<sup>203</sup> Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California’s Radical Prison Movement*, p. 246. Collier and Horowitz use the Stender shooting as the opening salvo for a sharply conservative critique of the left in the 1960s and

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1970s. See Peter Collier and David Horowitz, "Requiem for a Radical," in Collier and Horowitz, *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts about the '60s* (New York: Summit Books, 1989), pp. 21-66. Also in 1979, Soledad Brother and San Quentin Six defendant, exonerated in both cases, Fleeta Drumgo was shot and killed in the streets of Oakland.

<sup>204</sup> Tom Wicker, "Death of a Brother," *New York Times*, August 24, 1971, p. 37; Earl Caldwell, "Jackson Called Blacks' Symbol of Anger with Judicial System," *New York Times*, August 23, 1971, p. 33. More generally on race and rumor, see Gary Alan Fine and Patricia A. Turner, *Whispers on the Color Line: Rumor and Race in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Jackson, *Racial Paranoia*

<sup>205</sup> "Outbursts Mark Burial of Jackson in Illinois," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1971, p. 17.

<sup>206</sup> Michel Foucault, Catharine von Bülow and Daniel Defert, "The Masked Assassination," in Joy James, ed., *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prison in a Penal Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 140-159. The quote is from p. 155. Genet's introduction is reprinted in *The Declared Enemy*, pp. 91-97.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142, 149.

<sup>208</sup> Durden-Smith, *Who Killed George Jackson?*, pp. 68-96; "Pistol and Wig Experiment," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 28, 1971; UPI, "Second Autopsy Reveals Jackson Shot in Back," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 22, 1971; Yee, *Melancholy History of Soledad Prison*, p. 236.

<sup>209</sup> Foucault et al., "The Masked Assassination," p. 147.

<sup>210</sup> James Carey, "The Dark Continent of American Journalism," in Robert Manoff and Michael Schudson, eds., *Reading the News* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), pp. 146-196.

<sup>211</sup> The prisoner, Allan Mancino, was shot by guards while handcuffed in the San Quentin yard on August 21, 1971. Some alleged he was intentionally targeted for blowing the whistle on the prison's efforts to kill Jackson. His affidavit is reprinted in National Lawyers Guild of New York City, *San Quentin to Attica*, p. 10, and in Yee, *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison*, pp. 232-233, 255-256. Yee also describes the case of psychiatrist Frank Rundle, fired from the prison for protecting the confidentiality of prisoners he saw as patients. As a result, prison officials unsuccessfully tried to frame Rundle for two murders. See pp. 175-186. For more on Rundle, see also Don Jelinek, "The Soledad Frame-Up," *Bay Guardian*, June 22, 1972, p. 1.

<sup>212</sup> Philip Hager and Daryl Lembke, "Newsmen Touring San Quentin Discount Maltreatment Claims," *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 1971, p. A1. See also "Deaths at San Quentin" audio file PM 025, Freedom Archives.

<sup>213</sup> Citizens Research and Investigation Committee and Louis E. Tackwood, *The Glass House Tapes* (New York: Avon Books, 1973). Tackwood's claim on a broader conspiracy to have taken place on August 7 may have some legitimacy. See Durden-Smith, *Who Killed George Jackson?*, pp. 127-172; Hilliard and Cole, *This Side of Glory*, pp. 379-380; Paul Avery, Jim Brewer, and Rick Carrall, "Marin Shootout - New Disclosures," *San Francisco Chronicle* June 23, 1975, p. 1.

<sup>214</sup> George Jackson People's Free Medical Research Health Clinic and Don Williams, "Facts About Black Genocide, Sick Cell Anemia, and Glucose-6 Phosphate Dehydrogenase Deficiency" in HPNF, Series 2, Box 17, Folder 17; Black Panther Party Quiz (1973), in HPNF, Series 2, Box 4, Folder 3; George Jackson Prisoner Contact Program flyer, in HPNF, Series 2, Box 10, Folder 11.

<sup>215</sup> "'Brothers,' A Powerful Motion Picture," *Sun Reporter*, April 14, 1977, p. 41; Margaret Tarter, "The Movie 'Brothers' a Watered-Down Love Tale," *Bay State Banner*, June 9, 1977, p. 18; "Theatrical News: 'Brothers' Flick Zooms to No. 25 in First Week," *Tri-State Defender*, April 23, 1977, p. 7. Although he does not examine *Brothers*, Robinson argues that the figure of Angela Davis influenced the female lead in several blaxploitation films of the early 1970s. See Cedric J. Robinson, "Blaxploitation and the Misrepresentation of Liberation," *Race and Class* 40:1 (1998), pp. 1-12. See also Stephane Dunn, *Baad Bitches" and Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Josiah Howard, *Blaxploitation Cinema: The Essential Reference Guide* (Surrey, UK: FAB Press, 2008).

<sup>216</sup> Thomas E. Gaddis, "Introduction," in James E. Trupin, ed., *In Prison* (New York: Mentor, 1975), p. xvii.

<sup>217</sup> Ronald Reagan, "We Will All Become Prisoners," *New York Times*, October 7, 1971, p. 47. See also AP, "Nobody Cares about Guards, San Quentin Widow Laments," *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 1971, p. A1.

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- <sup>218</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Real Line on George Jackson," *Washington Star*, September 22, 1971. Joe Skubitz (R-KS) included the article in the Congressional Record of October 1, 1971, pp. 34572-34573. Thanks to Heather Thompson for sharing this document with me.
- <sup>219</sup> Rosenbaum, "Whither Thou Goest," pp. 77, 79.
- <sup>220</sup> Edy, *Troubled Pasts*.
- <sup>221</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- <sup>222</sup> Howard, *American Saturday*. Horowitz's article is discussed in Pell, *We Used to Own the Bronx*, pp. 190-191.
- <sup>223</sup> Eve Pell, "Book Review: Puff the Magic Dragon," *The Conspiracy* volume IV, number 11, pp. 10-11, 21, National Lawyers Guild Papers (hereafter NLGP), Oversized Box #7, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. His text provoked a particularly protective response, with the National Lawyers Guild hesitating to run a sharply critical review of the book in its newsletter lest the visibility contribute to added book sales.
- <sup>224</sup> Barbie Zelizer, "Achieving Journalistic Authority Through Narrative," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 (1990), 366-376.
- <sup>225</sup> Armstrong calls Jackson his "black *alter ego*" in an unpublished version of the introduction to his memoir. This extended version is a meditation on Jackson's authenticity as a source of white fulfillment. See Armstrong, "My Brother George," Draft Manuscript, p. iii, in PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 24. Similar, if somewhat more restrained, representations of Jackson's significance can be found in more recent texts as well. See Pell, *We Used to Own the Bronx*, p. 180.
- <sup>226</sup> For 1960s authenticity, see Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). For its loss, see Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissicism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979).
- <sup>227</sup> Two men who had been members of the Black Panther Party were arrested and convicted for Carr's death, although they appeared to be acting at the request of someone else. Why they killed him is unknown; journalists speculated at the time that he had been stealing money from the Angela Davis Defense Campaign, a charge Davis and her supporters denied. Durden-Smith alleges that Carr, the brother-in-law of acknowledged police informant Louis Tackwood, was working with the government to undermine the prison movement, and that he was killed when his subterfuge was revealed. See Betsy Carr, "Afterword," in Carr, *Bad*, pp. 198-225; Durden-Smith, *Who Killed George Jackson?*, pp. 122-125; Fanya Carter, "Former Bodyguard to Newton Killed at San Jose Home," *Oakland Post*, April 13, 1972, p. 1; Jerry Cohen, "Theft of Angela Davis Funds Linked to Slaying in San Jose," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1972, p. 1.
- <sup>228</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* reviewer, for one, was not impressed with the book. "Filtered through the mutes of [Isaac] Cronin and [Dan] Hammer's typewriter, what might have become a powerful social document is only another in a growing list of bad-bad books about bad-good people." John Weisman, "Flawed Profile of a Protester," *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 1975, p. U13. Dan Hammer, Carr's brother-in-law, and Isaac Cronin were two white activists who conducted the audio interviews with Carr. They edited, transcribed, and arranged them for publication as a memoir. Carr's text has informed subsequent narratives of Jackson, including those by Howard and Cummins. Curiously, Howard alleges that Carr was Jackson's mentor rather than the other way around, as both men (and others) had described it.
- <sup>229</sup> See John Thorne, July 8, 1970, and July 14, 1970, letters to Gregory Armstrong, in PPSB, Carton 1, Folder 42.
- <sup>230</sup> Jackson's father wrote that his son spoke of a plot against his life two weeks before his death. His father dismissed such speculation, believing the public attention to the case to provide a barrier against any such plot. See Lester Jackson, "A Dialogue with my Soledad Sun," *Ebony*, November 1971, pp. 72-82.
- <sup>231</sup> Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance" in Unesco, *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: Unesco, 1980) pp. 304-345. See also Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 411-440.

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<sup>232</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>233</sup> Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, pp. 311, 314.

<sup>234</sup> Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, p. 265; Durden-Smith, *Who Killed George Jackson?*, p.289.

<sup>235</sup> For recent texts that emphasize his deeds in a critical framework, albeit in different ways, see Andrews, *Black Power, White Blood*; Liberatore, *The Road to Hell*; Collier and Horowitz, *Destructive Generation*. In her memoir, *We Used to Own the Bronx*, Pell does likewise, although in a more agnostic way; she reports that her experience in the prison movement of the 1970s leads her to believe both what most prisoners say about the guards as well as what most guards say about the prisoners. For positive uses of his words and ideas, see Joy James, ed., *Imprisoned Intellectuals: America's Political Prisoners Write on Life, Liberation, and Rebellion* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); Rodríguez, *Forced Passages*; The Network of Black Organizers, *Black Prison Movements USA* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1995). For an insightful scholarly account, see Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, pp. 265-314.

<sup>236</sup> Quoted in Dan Berger, "Two Prisoners Named Williams," *The Nation* online <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20051226/berger> (posted December 14, 2005).

### CHAPTER 3: Slavery and Race-Making in the Shadows

“Slaves are not consensual and willful actors, the state is not a vehicle for advancing their claims, they are not citizens, and their status as persons is contested.”

– Saidiya Hartman<sup>1</sup>

“The fate of the black prisoner has always been intrically [sic] tied up with the fate of the imprisoned black nation and vice versa. In each instance, ‘gaining our freedom’ remains the primary concern....”

– Sundiata Acoli<sup>2</sup>

Representation confines as well as liberates. It both captivates and forecloses the imagination by playing up certain mechanisms of identification at the expense of others. Representation involves surveillance and self-possession, structure and agency, individuals and institutions. It is a social process both embodied and mediated. Stuart Hall defines representation as a set of meaning-making practices “involv[ing] the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things.” Representation involves the perpetual process of crafting identities.<sup>3</sup> Through representational practices, individuals aggregate or are aggregated into groups. These groups, according to

sociologists Poletta and Jasper, then form collective identities out of the “vocabularies, stories, and images available.”<sup>4</sup> Representation is a process laden with power; in fact, representational practices arguably take on greater urgency among marginalized populations. In demonstrating the importance of popular culture as a terrain of politics, Richard Iton argues that “the excluded are never simply excluded.”<sup>5</sup> Rather, their identities take shape inside and outside of, within and against, positions of power that are themselves both visible and invisible. The process of making representational claims among the subaltern is an attempt to make particular identities and particular *aspects* of identities visible, often against existing and derisive modes of representation and non-representational forms. Representations are made in the present but necessarily use the past to construct how people understand reality. Representation relies on signification schemes that draw from lived experiences, historical events, and collective memories. The past is something that is used in crafting diverse representations. Walter Benjamin famously defined the past as something “to seize hold of...at a moment of danger” for use in the present.<sup>6</sup>

Slavery was the past that black prisoners seized hold of to navigate the dangers of confinement in the 1970s. The political use of slavery to fight imprisonment was not mere hyperbole. Rather, it provided a usable past through which black prisoners crafted their opposition. American chattel slavery, as a concept and a material reality of bonded black flesh, marked the black radical critique of incarceration. Slavery structured modes of discourse and types of political organization among prisoners and prison activists in the 1970s; slavery therefore informed both the narratives and strategies of prison radicalism. “Looking out from slavery” is how historian Steven Hahn describes an

epistemic orientation to defining the political practices of slaves. It is a perspective that emphasizes “kinship, labor, and circuits of communication and education . . . as fundamental components of slave and freed politics.” I propose a similar challenge for analyzing prison protest that is at once historical and historiographic. That is, by “looking out from slavery” through the prism of the prison we can discover how prisoners crafted their own political ideas and projects that, as historians of the black freedom struggle have emphasized, made self-governance a central political practice of black protest.<sup>7</sup> In the context of prisoners in the 1970s, looking out from the slavery of the prison necessitates an examination of the ways that black prisoners themselves looked out *through* slavery. Black prisoners articulated blackness, incarceration and slavery as mutually reinforcing, and slavery helped them make sense of the prison. To prison radicals, slavery described both their material reality (to be imprisoned was to be enslaved) and their ideological position (the prison ought to be understood as a form of slavery). Slavery was the basis of a collective identity formation that continued to structure black prison radicalism from the spotlight to the shadows. Indeed, the vexing visibility of prisoners in the 1970s—they were seen most publicly when on trial (and therefore on a terrain of visibility they did not choose), while their daily violations went unnoticed—was part of the evidence they leveraged in documenting their enslavement. A state of bondage can be said to constitute the formation of identities amidst invisibility and coerced visibility. Thus, prisoners sought to control their visibility as a representational tactic to destroy their identity as slaves. Slavery, as several scholars have argued, assaults efforts to self-define a collective or individual identity.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore an example of representational violence, which, Goldberg argues, “serves to humiliate, so to

reduce as to make disappear, to be erased in crucial regard, to be rendered invisible.”<sup>9</sup> Prisoners in the 1970s argued that this violence occurred through the confinement and invisibility of incarceration.

This chapter traces slavery throughout 1970s black prison radicalism, especially in California. First I outline the broader interest in slavery that animated American political culture at this time. Then I contrast different notions of the prison, comparing those who described the prison system as a form of racial slavery to those who called for unions to secure better conditions within prison. While these positions need not necessarily be juxtaposed, they became the venues through which prison activists debated the meanings of race and class in the context of incarceration. In the bulk of the chapter, I examine the struggles for voice and self-representation in diverse arenas. In the first half of the 1970s, these struggles most visibly occurred in the courtroom, and I examine the trials of Angela Davis, Ruchell Magee, and the San Quentin 6. Next I examine the communicative rituals that prisoners initiated in the second half of the decade, especially media and collective rituals. These latter acts were principally concerned with certifying the existence of a black nation, of which prisoners were the most obvious representative. These events stretched throughout the entire 1970s. Prisoners adopted these different approaches based on the possibilities for visible protest amidst the shifting political landscapes of that decade. For instance Magee and Davis each stood trial amidst widespread interest in black prison radicalism, while the San Quentin 6 trial occurred in a time of waning radicalism but growing distrust in government after revelation of the official crimes and cover-up known as Watergate. Subsequently, the nationalist media projects were informed by the results of these and other trials. These expressions of



visibility emerged from contingent historical circumstances, such as changes in prison policy or black protest, as much as from any transhistorical elements of carceral life, such as the visibility of panoptic surveillance. Prisoners crafted their politics in response to the macrostructure of imprisonment through immediate political concerns and possibilities. Therefore, I analyze these phenomena in chronological order.

These various experiments involved representation as both an embodied act, where prisoners fought to define themselves through their person and their protest, and a symbolic act, where prisoners and others constructed notions of what the prison meant. Both activities produced gendered racial formations through practices of visibility. This chapter therefore analyzes several types of visibility. These visibilities all involved practices of self-representation enacted to identify the prison as a form of slavery premised on invisibility. They each attempted to repurpose official spaces, courtrooms and prisons, for the expression of oppositional politics and self-respect. Black nationalism informed each approach to varying degrees. As such, these approaches intermingled and informed each other such that they cannot be firmly distinguished. However, as this chapter documents, these visibilities were expressed differently based on the material conditions out of which they emerged and the political purpose they were trying to achieve. These differences owed to changes in the broader political context, the spatial arrangements of confinement, and the public familiarity of the individuals involved. For purposes of analytic clarity, the components of these visibilities can be summarized in the following chart:

Table 3.1: Typology of prisoner visibility

<b>Type of visibility</b>	<b>Expression of visibility</b>	<b>Conditions of emergence</b>	<b>Purpose of visibility</b>
Legal self-representation 1: Masculinist politics of respectability	Defiant: highly embodied, rhetorically strident spectacle of individual defiance.	Well-publicized trial of a relatively unknown prisoner (Ruchell Magee).	Identify prisoner-slaves as representative of oppressed people; Define representation as the negation of the slave-state.
Legal self-representation 2: Proto-feminist politics of respectability	Resistive: collectively arranged, intellectually argued, media-savvy protest.	Well-publicized trial of a highly known activist (Angela Davis).	Challenge ideologies of gendered racism; Express solidarity with other prisoners.
Anti-disciplinary	Bearing witness: legal challenges and public protest.	Public visibility of prison panopticon (San Quentin 6).	Use publicity of repression to challenge practices of incarceration as expressions of state violence.
Communicative rituals	Collective practice: self-made media, invented traditions .	Constricting radicalism amidst growing prison population.	Rebuild protest through nationalism, consolidate political ideology, and practice self-reliance.

Prison activists used slavery as a heuristic through which to understand imprisonment and make it visible by publicly upholding a politics of respectability, emancipation, and self-determination as the antidote to their confinement. Each political expression required extensive efforts by prisoners to make their bodies and ideas publicly visible on their terms. Prisoners spoke often in terms of abolition, although it was revolution against the state, embodied in the prison system, more than prison abolition that defined their political position. George Jackson defined the terms as such in *Blood in my Eye*: “As a slave, the social phenomenon that engages my whole consciousness is, of course, revolution.”<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, then, these prison activists resurrected political formulations from slavery and its aftermath to confront the ordeal of imprisonment.<sup>11</sup>

Black prisoners described the state’s capacity to punish as a form of white terrorism that continued uninterrupted against black, and increasingly brown, bodies from the days of chattel slavery. (Or, as Angela Davis more recently put it, black people went “From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison.”<sup>12</sup>) Unlike chattel slaves, however, prison slaves fought for visibility. They suggested that prison slavery was in fact *enabled by its invisibility*—that is, the prison drew its power from being neither seen nor understood as an institution of slavery. In this analysis, it was only by making visible such enslavement to the public could prisoners hope to be free from it. Prisoners therefore argued that visibility could reveal the violent bondage of imprisonment, found both in spectacular incidents and the routine realities of life in a total institution. This approach to organizing anticipated Saidiya Hartman’s description of slavery as constituted by “the terror of the mundane and quotidian” more than by the “shocking spectacle.”<sup>13</sup> Hartman argues that the subjection of slavery can only be understood

through a focus on its everyday terrors rather than its spectacular abuses. Prisoners made a similar argument, although they themselves utilized spectacle so as to make visible the everyday violations whose violence, they argued, expanded by virtue of its invisibility to the public.

As a state of unceasing bondage slavery provided the most readily available—and, with its implied racial valence, the most preferred—discourse used to describe this system of repression. For example, Davis described getting involved in the Soledad Brothers case after seeing a picture of the three men in a *Los Angeles Times* story about the case in February 1970. The sight of the chained men impressed upon Davis the continuation of black bondage.<sup>14</sup> When, a few months later, Davis herself was facing trial, slavery continued to be a trope in her defense. One of her attorneys declared that the government was proceeding as if it was “prosecuting a fugitive slave case,” and Davis likened her flight from California after August 7 to that of a fugitive slave.<sup>15</sup> Magee described the “indeterminate sentence law of California [as] ... the *Fugitive Slave* law warmed over. ... the ‘*Judicial and Prison Systems*’ are ‘*Practicing Slavery under color of law*’” (emphasis in original).<sup>16</sup> As a condition of lawlessness, the fugitive condition deeply informed black prison radicalism. It conjured a system of racially coded criminality that necessitated furtive flight. Yet the prison made escape more difficult, and visibility provided a mechanism through which prisoners could challenge their confinement. The idioms used were not limited to the chattel slave experience; rather, they drew from a range of black experiences of white terror, such as the frequent refrains to trials of black revolutionaries comprising modern-day “lynchings” or, alluding to the Middle Passage, the claim that Davis or imprisoned Black Panther had been “kidnapped”

by the state. Still, slavery was the most salient heuristic, and black prisoners used it as literally as possible.

Slavery pervaded 1970s prison radicalism conceptually and materially. That is, prisoners' understandings of slavery structured how they understood and opposed their plight. Their actions continued to make use of slavery as the framework for conceptualizing race as a material force that determined prisoners' relationship to the state. Black prisoners fought for dignity and self-representation as elements of self-governance in light of the access they were denied to civic and political life. As elucidated in the above chart, this emphasis on self-determination in the total institution of imprisonment took several forms. It included efforts at self-representation in court, viewing the courtroom as a vital arena for "exposing" the slavery of imprisonment and broadcasting their political ideas and grievances.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, prison slaves viewed the court system as little more than the legal justification for the slave system. So even while the *space* of the courtroom provided a rare, vital public political arena, prisoners vociferously objected to the court's decorum: its routines, conventions and authority as the state-sanctioned arbiter of truth. Prisoners viewed the court as a venue to publicize their concerns and objected to any person or practice that tried to prevent them from doing so. They challenged judges and attorneys, sometimes including even court-appointed defense attorneys, as agents of the state and therefore of the slave system. Such roles were obstacles to prisoners' ability to control their own representational visibility. Their supporters, therefore, fought to secure prisoner self-representation in court by publicizing the court system as unjust. As I show below, this imperative to wrest control of representation from the state extended to other organizing campaigns, including

international petitions that prisoners launched from within their cells. The drive for self-representation also saw prisoners challenging the pervasive symbols of slavery, found especially among the ubiquitous presence of chains, while they adopted traditional African names or upheld icons of the nineteenth century antislavery movement. Self-representation included, finally, self-made media and holidays whereby prisoners utilized black nationalism as a conceptual framework to challenge state power, comment on a range of issues, and foster black protest.

All of these activities created terrain for political and cultural expression that was otherwise denied. In crafting their own politics, black prisoners drew on deep histories of self-reliance in confronting slavery and segregation. While these histories extended throughout the United States, there was a certain geographic specificity in the ways prisoners crafted their politics. The American South heavily informed prisoners' constructions of race and conceptions of representation. As the bastion of chattel slavery and the region where the rigidity of racial hierarchies was most visible and most violent, the South's political geography seemed to mirror that of the prison. There were other, related reasons why the South shaped prisoner radicalism. As I argued in chapter 1, jail was a vital site through which black activists in the South publicized the abuses of segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. Following this strategic deployment of the Southern jail, a spirit of prison reform among Northern liberals exposed widespread abuse and neglect throughout Southern prisons in the late 1960s.<sup>18</sup>

Further, many of the most well-known imprisoned black activists and spokesmen of the period were raised in the South. Even the Black Panthers, a leading group in the prison movement, took its name from an organization developed in Lowndes County,

Alabama. As a result, historian Peniel Joseph wrote, the Oakland-based Panthers “were producing an urban phenomenon with distinctly southern roots.”<sup>19</sup> The two Panthers who were arguably most responsible for emphasizing the prison as a political site of struggle imbued with racial meaning were born in the South. Eldridge Cleaver ended up in Watts by way of Little Rock, Arkansas. Huey Newton was born in Louisiana, the youngest of seven kids to sharecropper parents.<sup>20</sup> Soledad Brothers John Clutchette and Fleeta Drumgo were each from the Deep South; Clutchette was born in Texas and Drumgo in Louisiana. Both moved to Watts with their respective families as children.<sup>21</sup> Johnny Larry Spain, who, like George Jackson, became a Black Panther after his incarceration and was among six prisoners charged with killing three guards and two prisoners the day Jackson was killed, was born of a white mother and a black father in segregated Mississippi. The target of physical abuse at school and verbal abuse by his mother’s white husband, Spain was sent to live with a black family in California. Another of the six, Willie Tate, was born in Selma, Alabama, and lived as a child in Texas before coming to California.<sup>22</sup> Angela Davis was born and raised in Birmingham, home to many of the pitched battles and white terrorism that targeted the Southern wing of the civil rights movement, and Ruchell Magee moved to Los Angeles shortly after being released from prison in his native Louisiana. These activists, with the exception of Newton, not only moved from the South to the West, but to Los Angeles specifically, contributing to the massive spike in the black population of Southern California following World War II.<sup>23</sup>

The locus of black prison radicalism, then, traveled in one generation from the rural South to urban Los Angeles, and then again from the industrial metropolis to the small-towns where the prisons were (and are) located.<sup>24</sup> They brought with them an

understanding of slavery as the conceptual and material building block of the American state and its attendant racial hierarchies. They struggled against slavery in the form of incarceration. Central to their efforts were attempts by prisoners and their supporters to have a voice. Patricia Hill Collins defines voice as a necessary element of (black feminist) self-definition, itself a precursor to self-determination. This search for voice endeavors to interrupt not just the invisibility of marginalization but the visibility of subjugation.<sup>25</sup> Voice is therefore an essential ingredient of emancipation, and prisoners worked to achieve voice in diverse venues, from courtrooms to the pages of underground newspapers. Achieved through a manner of representational practices, voice was an embodied act by which prisoner-slaves attempted to gain their freedom. And because the denial of voice is a necessary part of the prison's invisibility as well as its governmentality, encouraging consent by extinguishing the unruly self, this political struggle for voice outside and against the limited available channels of communication underscores the radicalism embedded in prison activism.

Throughout the 1970s, black dissident prisoners found and used their voices through embodied protest, self-made media, and collective rituals that promoted self-discipline and self-reliance. Voice, or more accurately self-representation, characterized their objections to state surveillance and served as justification for claiming allegiance to a parallel black nation, itself held captive within the United States by white supremacy. The venues for voice shifted according to the shrinking availability of mass attention. Smaller venues generated greater attention to the means by which they crafted representation and visibly protested.



## Slavery in the 1970s Structures of Feeling

That prisoner efforts at self-representation would encompass so vast a terrain should not be surprising. Even when physically isolated, prisoners struggled to maintain some connection to the outside world. Such connections were especially vital in the 1970s, as both radical and charitable organizations provided outlets for human connection and communication. Nor should these efforts, including the conceptual argument of prison as a form of slavery, be seen in isolation from broader dimensions happening in American society at the time. Much as authenticity was embedded in the political culture of the United States in the 1970s so too did slavery shape the structures of feeling in that time period. Raymond Williams defined structures of feeling as “the meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt” in a particular time and place.<sup>26</sup> The 1970s in America witnessed a resurgence of interest in slavery, as history and as allegory. Indeed, the efforts of black radical prisoners can be mapped as an insurgent claim on slavery’s enduring legacy amidst popular and scholarly efforts to understand chattel slavery in its own context. The 1970s witnessed a new generation of historical scholarship on slavery that, in Hahn’s summary, “showed growing and increasingly sophisticated interest in what slaves ‘did’ under slavery, and in how they shaped the institution and hastened its eventual demise.”<sup>27</sup> While historians uncovered slave practice, radicals utilized markers of slave resistance. To mark ongoing structures of inequality and racism in the year of the bicentennial, many on the left reprinted Frederick Douglass’s classic speech “What to the slave is the Fourth of July?”<sup>28</sup> Groups such as the Weather Underground used the speech to indict contemporary examples of white supremacy, especially in Boston where the

government's attempt at busing provoked massive and violent resistance by white working class residents of the city.

Most dramatically, the 1970s witnessed a massive, multimedia depiction of slavery in the form of Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. The book, which quickly became a bestseller, traced seven generations of Haley's family, from eighteenth century Gambia to twentieth century America. The much-anticipated book appeared in 1976, although portions of it had first appeared in the *Reader's Digest* in 1974.<sup>29</sup> Then, from January 23 to 30, 1977, ABC broadcast a twelve-hour miniseries based on the book. The program "scored higher ratings than any previous entertainment program in history; its finale is still the third most watched (100 million viewers) program in television history; it averaged 80 million viewers during its initial network run; some 250 colleges planned courses around the series; the seven episodes that followed the opener earned the top seven spots in the ratings for their week; and 85 percent of all homes with televisions watched all or part of the miniseries."<sup>30</sup> *Roots* was a television event; its success popularized the consecutive-night miniseries model. *Roots* placed slavery at the center of American political culture, even if, as several scholars have noted, the most salient impact of the *Roots* phenomenon was less about racial justice than a newfound interest in white ethnicity, multiracial American nationalism, and normative family values.<sup>31</sup>

Prisoners did not factor heavily in this national acknowledgement of slavery, even if they helped contribute to its circulation and tried to articulate their grievances alongside its public invocation. In attempting to make their situation visible not just as prisoners but as slaves, black radical prisoners contributed to a post-civil rights racial

formation that defined the state as an enforcer of white supremacy and black subjugation. This position, using slavery as its anchor, applied the South's prototypical racial hierarchy to the United States as a whole. Black prison politics was not the only place where the South exerted influence. Schulman and Zelizer argue that the "South's historic policy prescriptions—low taxes and scant public services, deference to religious sensibilities, military preparedness and an inconsistent preference for state and local government over federal supremacy—came to define the national agenda during the seventies."<sup>32</sup> The South occupied greater presence nationally through the much-banded "Southern strategy" that Nixon used in his electoral success, even if, as Matthew Lassiter has shown, this approach can be more accurately described as a suburban strategy.<sup>33</sup> The ascension of Jimmy Carter, a peanut farmer and self-proclaimed political outsider from Georgia, to the presidency in 1976 seemed to cement the South's importance in national politics. The formal political arena was not the only realm where the South loomed large in the 1970s. Johnny Cash's national success following *At Folsom Prison* (as well as *At San Quentin*), according to Hayes, similarly projected cultural frameworks of the South onto the country in general through the prison system.<sup>34</sup>

#### Workers and Slaves, Abolitionists and Political Prisoners

The turn toward slavery as a heuristic through which to understand the prison rejected prevailing notions of prison reform by drawing upon a system of incarceration, confinement and punishment—racial slavery—that predated the development of prisons in the United States.<sup>35</sup> Chattel slavery was, among other things, a system of compulsory and uncompensated labor. But it was the inherently punitive dimension of confinement,

its civic and political death that could quickly become corporeal punishment and physical death, that compelled black prisoners to argue that prison was a form of slavery. Challenging the prison as slavery was an argument about racial bondage, not compulsory labor. This paradigm emerged in the context of changes in penology that saw prison officials move away from a belief in the redemptive power of labor and a behaviorist approach to moral reform reflected in the notion of prison as a site of “corrections.” In its place emerged a new model of imprisonment, one that Rebecca McLennan has dubbed “punishment without labor.”<sup>36</sup>

Such an approach was not the only expression of prison activism at the time. The 1970s witnessed the innovation of prisoner labor unions. These efforts enlisted thousands of prisoners across the country in the 1970s, garnering a good deal of visibility through campaigns to organize the “convict class,” as they called it, on the basis of their position as laborers.<sup>37</sup> In some parts of the country, most notably at Walpole Prison in Massachusetts, the union movement successfully joined forces with Black Power expressions of prison militancy in challenging—or, in the Walpole example, for four months taking over and running—the prison.<sup>38</sup> Yet in California, where both the analysis of prison-slavery was perhaps most forcefully articulated and where prison unionism enjoyed a strong following, the union activists and the prison-slaves had a rockier relationship. Both branches of prison activism, the unionists and those who challenged prison as a form of slavery, had their roots in the growing political disruptions that had occurred in the California prison system in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Prisoners’ Union specifically emerged out of the nineteen-day strike at Folsom prison in the fall 1970. The demands from that strike included what had by then become typical

grievances, namely abolishing the indeterminate sentencing system and the Adjustment Centers. The demands also included several labor-related issues, including wages and the right to unionize.<sup>39</sup>

Activists with the Prisoners Union and its associated groups argued that prisoners were laborers who ought to receive protection and remuneration for their work inside. They waged semi-traditional union campaigns to win the right to collective bargaining. Their demands included several of the same issues common to those who saw the prison as racial slavery—the political defense organizations, the Black Panthers and others—including greater human and civil rights for people behind bars and an overhaul of how sentences and parole decisions were made.<sup>40</sup> Yet there were increasingly deep chasms separating the two forms of organizing in prison. By 1973, Prisoners' Union organizer Willie Holder identified four principles of prisoner unionism: “1. accepting labor issues as primary 2. presenting a ‘non-political’ overt posture 3. establishing viable locals which represent every ethnic-racial segment of a particular prison and 4. maintaining an intensive sensitivity to the threat of opportunism.”<sup>41</sup> The first two principles ran in direct opposition to the organizing of black nationalist prisoners (and the fourth can be seen as a challenge to the persistence of criminal activities among some ostensible prison radicals). Prison unionists saw their subjects as fellow workers. Even where they saw prisoners as slaves, it was only because they were denied wages for their labor; they defined slavery along an economic axis and said little about the civic status of prisoners.<sup>42</sup> Prison unionists saw themselves organizing a workforce like any other union, only their sector of the labor market was “convicts.” They were not primarily concerned with the reasons for incarceration, but in developing a shared class identity among the incarcerated. They

demanded “power to the convicted class,” and its newspaper printed “poetry of the convicted class.”<sup>43</sup>

Among prisoners who viewed, usually through the lens of black nationalism, their condition as one of slavery, however, the word “convict” was anathema—a sign of ascension to the hegemonic and racist construction of criminality. That the prison comprised slavery was a question of political subjectivity, of access to social resources and civic life, *before as well as during incarceration*. It was not primarily an issue of labor. Underpinning the “slavery” argument, but decidedly absent from the union position, was a critique of the state’s legitimacy to punish, as well as its ability to control the *terms* of labor (and not just its surplus value).<sup>44</sup> That is, the prisoner-slave position challenged the unavailability of labor or the structured underemployment as a cause for black involvement in economic crimes or the expendability of black life. The prison as a slave plantation was only the most dramatic example of what black radicals were increasingly prone to labeling genocide. The lack of access to labor, rather than conditions under which labor transpired, shaped this perspective: for instance actor-activist Ossie Davis argued that by 1970, the U.S. elite (both in government and business) was contemplating genocide because it no longer had any need for black labor.<sup>45</sup> Although rarely argued in such terms at the time, there was another reason the split between “slaves” and “workers” was so dramatic. Many prisoners did not labor inside, and so the issue of productive work, much less work without pay, did not apply to them. The most forceful advocates of the “slavery” position, black nationalists and known agitators, were often housed in isolation units that further removed them from the general

population. Being able to labor in prison was a privilege rather than an economic necessity.<sup>46</sup>

The differences between these expressions of prison radicalism owed in part to the explanatory power of organizing on the basis of one's political relationship to the state as opposed to on the basis of one's economic relationship to the means of production. As Frank Wilderson notes, "The worker demands that productivity be fair and democratic ... In contrast, the slave demands that production stop, without recourse to its ultimate democratization."<sup>47</sup> As Hahn argues, unlike labor disputes, which are regulated principally by the market, slave rebellion "challenges the fictions of domination and submission around which slavery was constructed, and is thereby imbued with a political resonance that would not necessarily be true for the worker's defiance."<sup>48</sup> Prisoner-slaves, consequently, cast their demands as part of the revolutionary effort to escape slavery and overturn the slave system, starting with the *sites* of imprisonment and extending to the *regime* of imprisonment. Moving from the sites of imprisonment to the broader regime of the prison, understood as a confining system of racist capitalism or imperialism, built on deep legacies of black radicalism that indicted white supremacy as a constitutive and confining feature of American society. Just as slavery followed black bodies, even formally free ones, off of the plantation and throughout the country, so too did black prison activists find prison to be a ubiquitous field of control, a condition more than a place, as argued in the previous chapters.<sup>49</sup>

Affirming a slave identity claimed and attempted to make visible a political subject position. For some prisoners, this identity coincided with declaring themselves "political prisoners." But others eschewed that label in describing themselves as slaves.

They did so for two reasons: they wanted to reserve, in honor of those grassroots campaigns appealing to international law on the treatment of political prisoners, the sanctity of the label for those people incarcerated as a result of political actions or views outside.<sup>50</sup> The bigger if related, reason, however, was that slavery described the condition of confinement itself, regardless of the political motivations of those incarcerated.

Richard X. Clark said in 1972 that he did not see himself and the other Attica Brothers as political prisoners but as slaves. “The political prisoner is subjected to reprisals by the system because of his *views* but a slave is subjected to reprisals because of his *situation*” (emphasis added). Clark argued his point by noting that the Attica prison population was 85 percent black “because blacks are subjected to atrocities from birth—education-wise, job-wise, and economically.” It was only in prison, when he took the time to study and analyze, that Clark identified the enslavement black people faced from birth. It took being a prisoner for Clark to realize that he had always been a slave.<sup>51</sup>

Even while many prisoners cast themselves as slaves, they did not consistently posit abolition as the solution. The visibility of prisoners as slaves was sometimes its own imperative; in other instances, revolution was said to be the only antidote to slavery—even if it held that revolutionaries would need to imprison their enemies. Calls to abolish the prison were undoubtedly a strong, if inconsistent feature of 1970s prison radicalism in the United States. Crucially, abolition crossed racial lines—even though many who called for abolition did not ascribe to the position that the prison constituted an extension of slavery. Some of the leading abolitionists could be found in predominantly white, faith-based communities. Internationally, calls for prison abolition also circulated at this time among intellectuals in France and Scandinavia.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the most sustained effort at



theorizing prison abolition in the U.S. context, and develop the community responses to social problems necessary to supplant imprisonment as an institution, could be found among the Prison Research Education and Action Project in New York state. PREAP was an ecumenical and predominantly pacifist group, best known for its self-published 1976 book *Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists*.<sup>53</sup> In a mixture of analysis and worksheets, the volume described the prison's inability to solve crime or social problems. It outlined potential community-based responses, alternatives to incarceration, for rape, theft, and other acts that violated social mores.

In the 1970s, abolition was a frequently stated but rarely elaborated demand. Among the militants, abolition could be inferred from the various calls to “tear down the walls” and “free them all.” It could be heard more explicitly in the efforts, usually in faith-based mobilizations, to enact moratoriums on prison construction.<sup>54</sup> The rejection of “prison reform” as a ruse through which to expand state power was perhaps the primary expression of prison abolition. Abolitionism could be spotted in George Jackson's claim, echoed by other imprisoned intellectuals, that reform only legitimized the system and ultimately bolstered its capacity to repress. “[I]f one were forced for the sake of clarity to define [fascism] in a word simple enough for all to understand, that word would be ‘reform.’”<sup>55</sup> Writing in a law review journal, a Pennsylvania prisoner named Samuel Jordan wrote that prison reform was a domestic version of the “strategic hamlet” program that displaced and recreated villages in Vietnam as a method of anticommunist counterinsurgency. Prison reform was, therefore, domestic imperialism. “The prison reformer—wittingly or unwittingly—is an agent of capitalism, a used-car salesman.”<sup>56</sup>

Instead of reform, Jordan and Jackson and other black radical prisoners insisted on revolutionary empowerment as a step toward eradicating not just prisons but the social, political and economic systems that created them. Describing the prison as a form of slavery was an attempt to foster a shared racial identity and political stance. Slavery could only be overturned, not reformed. But one did not need to believe the prison to be slavery to call for abolition. Some of these other calls for abolition, however, lacked a definitional clarity that often hobbled the progress of prison abolition as a distinct movement of the 1970s. Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark made nods toward abolition in his book *Crime in America* (1970), and Institute for Policy Studies Resident Fellow Arthur Waskow circulated a call in 1971 to build a campaign that would abolish prisons and jails by the bicentennial. However, as Jessica Mitford noted at the time, Clark and Waskow each allowed for nonconsensual confinement—say, on rural farms—therefore compromising their calls for prison abolition by recreating physical restraint as a form of punishment, and in the same geographic areas where prisons were located.<sup>57</sup> Abolitionism, therefore, was at the heart of 1970s prison radical *discourse* but marginal to its *organizing strategies* of the time. More common, for those who saw the prison as a form of slavery, were attacks against state power, campaigns to free prisoners, and above all efforts at self-representation.

### The Bonds of Blackness against the Chains of Slavery

George Jackson identified a persistent connection between imprisonment and enslavement.<sup>58</sup> This connection was a colonial one, he argued, that could only be solved through revolutionary war for black liberation. More than any act of violence, however, it

was his argument of the prison as a form of slavery that most shaped subsequent prison radicalism in California and elsewhere in the 1970s. He became both a spokesman for and symbol of the prisoner-slave in resistance. In letters and interviews, he castigated the prison as the latest expression of black slavery. He claimed that “time has faded nothing. I recall the very first kidnap.”<sup>59</sup> He argued that the American state was little more than a slave plantation. “Blacks are still doing the work of the greatest slave state in history. The terms of our servitude are all that have been altered,” he wrote in a posthumously published letter.<sup>60</sup> The unanswered questions about his death became further proof to some of the enduring salience of slavery in the fabric of the United States. Jackson’s death confirmed to some supporters that slavery’s logic of the expendability of black life was still in play. In his political obituary for Jackson, Guyanese theorist Walter Rodney wrote that “ever since the days of slavery the U.S.A. is nothing but a vast prison as far as African descendants are concerned.”<sup>61</sup>

Along with Jackson, other prisoners throughout the 1970s, including many of his contemporaries and students, saw themselves as rebellious slaves and defined imprisonment as an extension of slavery.<sup>62</sup> Within this definition, blackness was said to be both the source and scourge of imprisonment. According to Soledad Brother Fleeta Drumgo, the prison was a “slave plantation” that breeds passivity and attempts to indoctrinate its racialized subjects, “like we’ve been indoctrinated for 400 years.” Drumgo declared that such scheme would fail because those inside “recognize our blackness.”<sup>63</sup> At San Quentin, Ruchell Magee described slavery as a structural and affective reality for its black victims. “To some degree, slavery has always been outlawed and condemned on the outside by the hypocritical mockery of chattering lips. But on the

inside of people and prisons, where slavery is embedded and proudly displayed as a Western way of life and a privilege of god himself, slavery is condoned on all of its numerous levels.”<sup>64</sup>

Such declarations, common to black prison radicalism of the time, used race to *explain incarceration* as well as to *undermine the prison’s grip on the mind and soul of the imprisoned*. From their experience in penal institutions, black prisoners challenged the prison as a mechanism of social control that tried to coercively induce consent to the prevailing rules of society. Jackson, for instance, told a reporter that “this camp brings out the very best in brothers—or destroys them entirely. No one leaves here unaffected.”<sup>65</sup> In making these arguments, prisoners theorized incarceration as a form of psychological and social control, much as Michel Foucault would demonstrate later in the decade in his now-classic history of prison, *Discipline and Punish*.<sup>66</sup> These prisoners drew, if somewhat anachronistically, on slavery as an uninterrupted fact of black life in the United States. Used as a collective memory of oppression, slavery became a narrative tool in the development of black nationalism, as I argue in greater detail below. Prisoners not only castigated the justice system as the new “peculiar institution” of black enslavement.<sup>67</sup> They also upheld racial solidarity as an ideological counterpoint to the reach of imprisonment. The prison turned its subjects into slaves, they reasoned, so it was their job to turn prisoners into rebellious slaves. This injunctive was a critique of the political consciousness and actions of those imprisoned. It was meant to discipline other black prisoners to act more sufficiently revolutionary by recognizing their enslavement and therefore finding personal strength and ultimately collective power in understanding their bondage.<sup>68</sup> As a narrative originating in racialized slavery, this call to connect

recognition of enslavement to a set of political behaviors was aimed specifically at other black prisoners. Although many acknowledged that white prisoners were disproportionately poor and working class people, there were few attempts (outside of prison unionism) made to have incarcerated whites understand themselves as slaves—especially in light of the prevalence of white supremacist gangs in prison. The collective identity fostered by arguing that prisons constituted slavery was created by and meant for people of color, especially black.<sup>69</sup>

It followed, therefore, that not only the prison but slavery itself could be undermined by such sharp declarations of black militancy and individual confrontation with the state. Throughout *Soledad Brother*, Jackson used slavery both to designate the material existence of black people in the United States as well as a derisive “mentality” of those who did not challenge the system. To make the prison visible as a form of slavery was to seek the material, physical, and conceptual destruction of the prison, slavery, and apathy. “If they kill me, Mama, I’ll just be dead, but I’ll not be any man’s slave,” Jackson wrote to his mother, in a passage widely reprinted by prison activists as a testament of self-respect as an element of prisoner dissent.<sup>70</sup> (She expressed a similar, albeit far less referenced, sentiment in March 1970: “That’s the way I raised him ... They might kill my boy but he’ll never be any man’s slave.”)<sup>71</sup> Jackson wrote that the height of political consciousness was to recognize oneself as being trapped in a system of slavery yet to reject being a slave. “I have, I hope, trained all of the slave out of me,” he wrote to attorney Fay Stender.<sup>72</sup> Blackness was a source of resistance, representing persistent confrontation with the slave state. Prisoners in several Midwestern and Southern states, for instance, organized collectives called Black On Vandards. The name was chosen to

connote racial pride as the antithesis of “backing off.”<sup>73</sup> The group advocated black men, especially in prison, to display greater diligence in challenging the visibility of white supremacy in American politics. Members of the group in Ohio and North Carolina endorsed a poem entitled “I have seen America,” that one or more Black On activists had written. The poem, which appeared in a national prisoner newspaper, argued that the black recognition of racial violence engendered radical consciousness. “I am shot up by law enforcers, I am experimented on/ By doctors, I live in the ghetto. I’ve seen America./ I do not qualify for justice. I was kidnapped from my/ Native land, I saw Brother George, and Malcolm killed/ I have seen America/ ... I remember Rockefeller + Attica, I remember/ George Wallace at U.A. I am a very/ Angry Black Man.”<sup>74</sup> This racial consciousness was developed through the visibility of white supremacy as endemic to American nationalism.

Activists who were not incarcerated also embraced the analysis of the prison as a form of slavery. And like the prisoners they supported, these outside agitators looked to the legacy of slave resistance as models of action. This inspiration ranged from small acts of subversion, much as feigned illness or work slowdowns provided slaves a subtle way to contest power, to the symbolic terrain informing prison activism. Reginald Major argued that he and other black people who attended the Angela Davis trial were “constitutionally incapable of making the line up [to be let into court] on police time. The tardiness was not so much a protest as the beginnings of resistance, a quiet ideological tensing up in rejection of absolute police authority.”<sup>75</sup> Major’s assessment suggests that rejecting the temporal niceties of court was an act of resistance inherited from slaves. His

language suggests that time is understood through racial valences of power, implying the well-known trope of “colored people time” but imbuing it with a resistive purpose.

The influence of slavery could be seen as well at the level of iconicity. Much as prisoners championed Nat Turner as an archangel of revolutionary deliverance, prison activists who were not incarcerated took as inspiration those who helped slaves to escape their bondage. In Los Angeles, the Harriet Tubman Prison Movement (HTPM) began in the early 1970s. Although never a large organization, HTPM nonetheless claimed chapters in seven cities and operated a bookstore in South Central LA. The group formed with three stated purposes: to provide free reading materials for prisoners, supply free transportation for families to visit their incarcerated loved ones, and support a minimum wage law for working prisoners. They saw these issues as perennial ones for black people, stretching from the ghettos to the prisons. “These are the same demands of all our people, whether on the ‘inside’ or on the ‘outside.’ whether you live in Watts or San Quentin, Harlem or Attica, these demands are the demands of Black and other minority oppressed peoples inside the United States.” In focusing on literacy (here, in the form of access) and mobility (in the form of prison visits), the HTPM, as with other prison activists who pursued similar approaches, utilized some of the standard modalities for black empowerment against slavery.<sup>76</sup> These tactics posited the memory of slavery and slave resistance as foundational to representational strategies of prisoners. That is, prisoners confronted the same state practices that denied slaves education and itinerancy. In fighting for these issues, prisoners and their supporters represented their struggle as an ongoing confrontation with slavery. Such imagery was not limited to prison radicalism; in Boston, the black feminist-socialist Combahee River Collective named themselves

after an 1863 escape of 750 slaves from South Carolina under Tubman's leadership. The collective became one of the most well-known radical black feminist organizations and, through its 1977 political statement, the group responsible for having first articulated an intersectional approach to oppression of race, class, gender, and sexuality.<sup>77</sup> An iconic attachment to slave rebels has long been present within black radical discourse. But prisoners had more than a symbolic purpose in invoking slavery and its discontents. This history informed their efforts at self-representation.

### Representing the Slave: The Trials of Ruchell Magee and Angela Davis

Arguably the most vocal prisoner of the period to define prison as a form of slavery and to pursue a visible representation on those grounds was Ruchell Magee. Like Jackson, by the time Magee became a visible figure he had been incarcerated for much of his life: first at Angola State Penitentiary, a prison located on a former slave plantation in northwest Louisiana. He was arrested again in 1963, months after being released from Angola and arriving at an aunt's house in Compton, Los Angeles. He got in a fight with another man over a woman and some marijuana; because the fight occurred in a moving car, Magee was charged with "kidnapping for the purpose of robbery" and sentenced to life in prison. During his first trial, the judge had him gagged with bath towels for vociferously asserting his innocence. At a second trial two years later, the same judge had Magee gagged for the same reason, this time with a dog muzzle. His court-appointed attorney entered a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity—a plea Magee objected to at the time and took as a personal insult to his integrity and intelligence. In addition to these grievances, Magee fought for release on the basis of what he claimed were the judge's



improper jury instructions and because the stenographer had altered or erased large sections of the trial transcript.<sup>78</sup>

A seventh-grade dropout who went to prison functionally illiterate, Magee had become an accomplished jailhouse lawyer in an effort to overturn his 1963 conviction. His mastery of the Constitution and formidable legal skills had helped several prisoners litigate their cases, even if he remained unsuccessful in reversing his own conviction. In fact, the six prisoners charged for the violence accompanying George Jackson's death had initially requested Magee as their attorney.<sup>79</sup> His trial and efforts at release had convinced Magee of several things: that he was being held captive by the state, that the court system was an inherently racist institution that thrived on invisibility and silence, and that only he alone could adequately represent his interests in exposing slavery.

Magee was testifying as a witness for San Quentin prisoner James McClain, who was serving as his own attorney on charges of having stabbed a guard, when Jonathan Jackson took over the Marin County Courthouse on August 7, 1970.<sup>80</sup> McClain and Magee, like Jackson, were imprisoned in the Adjustment Center at San Quentin and had been known as "troublemakers" to the authorities. Six months earlier, San Quentin guards had killed a mentally unstable black prisoner, Fred Billingslea, with tear gas and truncheons after he set his mattress on fire. McClain and Magee, along with other prisoners, helped get word out about Billingslea's death in a makeshift gas chamber. Magee helped file writs in protest and tried to contact Angela Davis's mother for support. One of the officers involved in that incident, John Matthews, also claimed in court to have fired the shots that killed Jonathan Jackson, James McClain and William Christmas

on August 7. Magee said later that his involvement in pursuing justice for Billingslea is why San Quentin guards opened fire that day.<sup>81</sup>

Magee was charged with conspiracy, murder and kidnapping for the death of Judge Harold Haley.<sup>82</sup> As a prisoner accused of murder, he faced the death penalty. Angela Davis was also charged, owing to the fact that the guns used were registered in her name. Davis disappeared and was not found until October 13. The two, who had never met before, favored different strategies of visibility but similar strategies of representation. Their differences owed partly to the respective positions they occupied prior to August 7: Davis was a young, promising and highly visible professor at UCLA, known for her prison activism on behalf of the Soledad Brothers and, more so, because of her highly publicized fight to remain faculty after an FBI informant and the *San Francisco Examiner* had exposed her as a member of the Communist Party in 1969.<sup>83</sup> Magee, however, was unknown to most people besides his fellow prisoners. He was focused on getting out of prison, which he argued could only happen through his own actions. Due to his prior experiences, he rejected any attempts at legal representation. Most centrally, their differences emanated from the divergent needs of someone trying to *stay* out of prison versus someone trying to *get* out of prison. Their differing strategies ultimately led them to sever their charges in July 1971 and stand trial individually. Before and after their cases were severed, however, Davis stressed her solidarity with Magee and objected to media depictions of them as fundamentally at odds.<sup>84</sup>

There was much uniting Davis and Magee, in addition to their shared charges. Both shared a belief in prison as a form of slavery, viewed August 7 as a slave rebellion, and fought to serve as their own attorney. Self-defense in court was fundamental. It

flouted the expected courtroom decorum and equipped the prisoner with greater agency in articulating a political position, turning the court from an instrument of elite rule into a vehicle for the spread of insurgent politics. Legal self-defense rejected the idea, central to Western legal practice, that a lawyer could represent a client. This position did not eschew representation itself; rather, it upheld that the *client was representative* and should therefore be empowered to speak in court as symbolizing a radical political subjectivity. This position held that self-representation was more politically authentic and honest, while also holding that self-representation *of the oppressed* was more representative of universal inequalities. This position emanated from positions of marginalization, due both to racial identity and imprisonment. It argued that black people in general and black prisoners in particular need to be heard in court because they could not be seen in prison.

The act of going pro se was not simply about legal representation but about resisting the slavery of invisibility and also visibly representing the slavery of imprisonment. Reginald Major, a black journalist who covered the Davis and Magee trial for the San Francisco *Sun Reporter*, argued that legal self-defense was a blow against slavery. “In the final analysis, a man stripped of the right to defend himself is a man being prepared for slavery. Every person who goes to prison as the result of incompetent or indifferent legal representation, in a situation where he had no wish for the attorney representing him to conduct the case, has been reduced to a slave.”<sup>85</sup> For Magee, legal self-defense was indistinguishable from its physical practice. Self-defense was the embodied, visible antithesis of slavery. To his mind, his actions on August 7 were not that different in motivation from his courtroom stance. Magee defined both actions as

embodied representations of self-defense against slavery. People could therefore oppose slavery both by supporting his efforts to represent himself in court and by arming themselves. “An unarmed people are subject to slavery at any given time,” declared a newspaper produced by the Ruchell Magee Defense Committee at Stanford.<sup>86</sup> Magee defined public support as critical to the success of his stance and the broader political campaigns for justice. “The courts won’t open the prison until the people open the courts,” he wrote in a letter to Jessica Mitford and her husband, a leftist attorney.<sup>87</sup>

Magee rejected legal representation altogether. He refused to accept court-appointed attorneys, lashing out at them verbally and sometimes physically. He accused them of being part of a broader attempt to silence him. His knowledge of constitutional law equipped him with a certain processural purity that he used to collapse standard courtroom practices with his desire for a public hearing. Magee described the court system and its notion of representation as criminally disempowering—an act of violence. He saw the state’s refusal to let him serve as his own attorney as evidence of its efforts to make him invisible: “what dreadful crimes the oligarchy has committed that they fear the voice of one man,” he asked rhetorically.<sup>88</sup> He positioned his voice as a powerful antidote to the detachment of traditional legal representation. Such arguments placed the courtroom as a crucial site of contestation for how prisoners were represented in, and therefore understood by, society. Edward Said argued that representation “implies control” and is therefore epistemic.<sup>89</sup> For Magee, self-representation made visible an epistemology of black prison radicalism rooted in voice, empowerment and exposure. Because slavery is a system that colonizes full beings, Magee argued that it was only by enacting a politics of *total* contradistinction, from participating in the events of August 7

to disrupting court proceedings, that he could resist such a system. It was an epistemology of racial protest: much like Fred Moten's description of the black avant garde as an interstitial phenomenon rooted "in the break," Magee's approach expressed an understanding of the totalizing nature of enslavement. He therefore justified interference as a political imperative in its own right.<sup>90</sup>

In both self-description and his representation by supporters, Magee was a rebellious slave who was being persecuted for resisting the structures of domination that held all slaves in bondage. Violence was his only recourse, and perhaps the only available option for similarly confined slaves. When such a confrontation failed to win him his freedom, the ability to represent his motives and describe his conditions was the next best means of securing visibility as a way to indict and expose white supremacist state power. Asserting a mixture of masculine dignity, antiracist critique, and legal strategy, Magee argued that justice could only be secured through voice, through "having the right to control your own defense so that the Courts must deal with the truth."<sup>91</sup> Magee juxtaposed "truth" against the law. His voice, therefore, carried the added imperative of exposing, in the words of his supporters, "the racism and repression of the legal system and to show he had the right to rebel Aug. 7, 1970[,] because he is being held illegally as a slave of the judicial system."<sup>92</sup> And yet, the effort to have his voice heard often resulted in visible confrontations. He routinely disrupted court proceedings and was removed several times for disrespecting the judge, the prosecutor, or his own court-appointed attorney.

In an attempt to underscore his enslavement and make visible the case law he used as precedent, Magee renamed himself Cinque. Magee was not alone in changing his

name; many black nationalists, in and out of prison, adopted African (typically Swahili) or Arabic names in the 1970s. But Magee had an even more specific purpose in mind in choosing the name he did. He named himself after a rebellious slave. The original Cinque led the 1839 rebellion aboard the slave ship *Amistad*. In 1841 the Supreme Court declared the uprising Cinque led to be a “justified rebellion.”<sup>93</sup> Magee pointed to that ruling and argued that, “having no other recourse,” he “rebelled slavery attempting to reach the people to expose his flagrant racist slave case.”<sup>94</sup> Presenting himself as a modern-day Cinque, Magee argued that he had both a moral obligation and a legal right to resist the slavery of imprisonment.<sup>95</sup> He also argued for removing the case to federal courts, appealing to statutes utilized by the civil rights movement to advocate federal intervention against states that refused to desegregate. Blending an understanding of slavery with his experience of Jim Crow segregation, Magee argued that the state of California was biased as a slave state against him. The Davis legal team disagreed, at least regarding their client, believing that she stood a much better chance in California courts on trial and preferring to reserve the federal option for appeal if need be. Yet Magee filed his own motions, succeeding in having six judges recuse themselves from the case for prejudice. In the spirit of waging a full-fledged fight with the government, Magee also filed for the impeachment of President Nixon.<sup>96</sup>

Magee’s defense hinged on defining the events of August 7 as a slave revolt, the only step available in his personal fight for freedom as well as a decisive element of the black freedom struggle. He had some allies in this regard. Perhaps most dramatically, psychologist Dr. Kenneth Clark testified for Magee, saying that Magee “had absolutely no other choice” but to rebel because it was a manifestation of “everything his life

literally stood for. ... [It was] an actual, concrete, behavioral approach to the goal of freedom,” embodied through “a black man with a gun, a black man giving orders. ... And that is freedom, you know. That is a rejection of the racist insistence that you are not worthy.”<sup>97</sup> Others embraced Magee’s position as part of an unending struggle against slavery. “His fight is our fight—slaves have the right to Rebel,” proclaimed a flyer in support of Magee.<sup>98</sup>

Magee’s fight to serve as his own attorney was simultaneously a struggle for freedom from prison and a struggle for dignity, to be respected as a competent, capable black man. His quest for visibility pivoted on his ability to secure dignified representation in the public eye—meaning both that he sought access to the public and control over how he was represented. He objected to a court-imposed gag order preventing him from accessing the media as akin to the physical gag placed in his mouth at his earlier trials. He attempted to circumvent this ruling by publishing pamphlets and open letters through supporters. A coterie of independent, leftist journalists took up this challenge by producing a factsheet to improve the accuracy of news coverage, while prison activists associated with the Venceremos Study Group published and distributed Magee’s writings.<sup>99</sup> Magee continued to directly confront what he saw as the efforts to gag him and strip him of his dignity. He objected to the results of two IQ tests, one administered in 1956 and the other in 1963, both of which were conducted when he was functionally illiterate. In 1971 prosecutors used the test results used to disqualify him from serving as his own attorney. Challenging Magee’s efforts to serve as his own attorney, prosecutors successfully argued that his low score fifteen years previously obviated his more recent accomplished record as a jailhouse lawyer. Magee filed a libel lawsuit in 1972 against the

Chronicle company for printing this IQ score, and against the district attorney and prison records officer for releasing the score, which he said biased the public against him. He said he was being held incommunicado, as a result of his imprisonment and a gag order the judge had placed on him, which prevented him from filing the suit or speaking to the media when reports first appeared.<sup>100</sup> The IQ test was, like the attorney who entered an insanity plea on his behalf but against his wishes, another affront to Magee's dignity. He saw the IQ test as further proof of slavery's enduring salience and of black people's un-American subject position. "Further, if one reviews history, it is one of the basic principles of racism, and an integral part of the fascist government, that Black people have always been labeled illiterate, ill-mannered and the like. This relates to something that I said before...that while Blacks are *in* Amerika, they are not *of* Amerika" (ellipses in original).<sup>101</sup> Representing and restoring dignity necessitated a fundamental break from American nationalism, to be replaced through racial solidarity.

His brash style in asserting his right to be his own attorney became its own tactic of insurgent visibility. For instance, Magee was cited for obscenity after threatening the judge for not letting him represent himself. Magee told the judge "kiss my ass and suck my dick, your honor." A National Lawyers Guild attorney wrote that this outburst was not obscenity; rather it had the "socially redeeming purpose of waking up the oppressed masses to see the true obscenity of his [the judge] denial of self-representation and/or choice of counsel." Ruchell's attempt to serve as his own attorney was, by extension, an attempt for oppressed people to achieve adequate representation: "so while Nobody [sic] may represent Ruchell; Ruchell truly represents them."<sup>102</sup> Prison activists cast the efforts of insurgent prisoners, these rebellious slaves, to represent themselves in and out of



courtrooms as a literal effort to speak truth to power. In this analysis, prisoners' attempt at *self*-representation was actually a *collective* representation of revolutionary politics by all oppressed people. The act of struggling to represent himself, to remove the barriers separating him from narratives about himself, paradoxically cast Magee as a symbol, through which many activists hoped to discover broader, even universal meaning about oppression.<sup>103</sup> As Reginald Major observed in covering the trial for the *Sun Reporter*, this repurposing of juridical spaces made the courtroom into a theater of black politics. Black activists welcomed black defendants with a "right on." While judges and prosecutors objected to this greeting, Major argued that this exchange served a similar function as an "amen" in church: it expressed an affirmation, understood here as a racial bond. Tellingly, in Major's analogy, the prisoner assumed the role of spiritual leader.<sup>104</sup>

For Magee and many of his supporters, this effort at combating slavery and achieving self-representation was a deeply masculine endeavor. Black Mothers United for Action, an Oakland group that was deeply involved in Magee's defense efforts, objected that Davis received most of the popular attention that the case attracted. They argued that the media emphasis on her was a legacy of slavery's attack on black masculinity and upheld black folk wisdom as the antidote against "the devil's policy to use the Black woman in the efforts to try and fender [sic] our BLACKMEN [sic] ineffectual in their fights for our liberation."<sup>105</sup> Magee's effort to represent himself, to make his predicament visible, was seen as an attempt to reassert a masculine-centered notion of defiance and dignity. Magee and his supporters argued that this dignity was a constitutionally protected guarantee for all men.<sup>106</sup>

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Angela Davis argued that her “life is at stake in this case—not simply the life of a lone individual, but a life which has been given over to the struggles of my people, a life which belongs to Black people who are tired of poverty and racism, of the unjust imprisonment of tens of thousands of our brothers and sisters.”<sup>107</sup> Her arguments therefore concerned representation in the courtroom, though she argued that this arena, through her individual predicament, represented something of the fate for all black people in America. Despite the metonymic dimensions underpinning her representative claims, she pursued a more measured approach. For Davis, legal self-representation meant acting as co-counsel in her defense, alongside an accomplished legal team that included Howard Moore, Leo Branton, Margaret Burnham, and Doris Brin Walker. The four had lengthy histories defending civil rights activists and Communists and all were active members of the National Conference of Black Lawyers or the National Lawyers Guild. Despite their impressive credentials, the four supported Davis’s role as co-counsel. Burnham noted that in demanding legal self-defense “Ruchell and Angela join a growing number of Black prisoners who are dispensing with a lawyer-spokesman in the courtroom ... in their constant search to find new forms of forcefully and effectively defending themselves and [for politically motivated defendants,] their movement.”<sup>108</sup> But their different approaches were also illustrative. Magee rejected any intermediaries, any co-counsel, as a violent act of silencing. Davis, however, fought to be a co-creator of her image rather than attempt to be its sole shaper. One can read in her actions a mixture of principle and expediency, recognizing that representation is of necessity a social force individuals cannot hope to control themselves.

While Davis and her attorneys both insisted on her representative status—one of many revolutionaries, one of many victims of state repression, and above all one of many black women—it was her uniqueness that explained the circumstances and circulation of her visibility. Magee focused on his case as an instance of “flagrant racist slavery,” seeking to gain support and attention to reverse his conviction and maintain his dignity. Aware of her notoriety, Davis often downplayed the particulars of her case in order to express solidarity with other imprisoned women and political activists. The result was paradoxical: supporters extracted a collective political position from Magee’s bold declaration of his selfhood whereas Davis’s insistence on collectivity was overshadowed by the attention focused on her personally and her specific case. Despite her claims to the contrary, her representative nature was severed in the public eye from the broader collectivities in which she claimed membership. Journalists emphasized the distinctive or peculiar nature of her case—a young attractive female professor accused of arming an escape by male prisoners. Supporters constructed her as a symbol of collective resistance, but in doing so they made her an exceptional figure, dynamic and captivating. Thus, even while Davis downplayed particular aspects of her biography, minimizing her middle class status for the sake of black solidarity, popular attention within the left and the broader society described her as unique.

Arguably no one else in that time period could have united the diverse figures that came together in support of Angela Davis. As a well-known prison activist, professor, and Communist, a black Marxist cultural critic and protofeminist, her case enlisted the support of communists from around the world as well as civil rights and Black Power activists. The CP-USA initiated the organized defense effort, the National United

Committee to Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners (NUCFAD). Other manifestations of support for Davis, from the Angela Davis Defense Fund (headed by actor Ossie Davis) to various local committees and celebrity endorsements, were more autonomous. All were united in their goal to secure Davis's release, first on bail, which was denied until California overturned the death penalty in February 1972 (meaning hers was no longer a capital case), and ultimately her acquittal in court.<sup>109</sup>

While all defense committees have produced their own media to publicize a particular narrative of the individual(s) in question and to mobilize popular sentiment against the prosecution, the pre-existing media attention on Davis combined with the broad coalition of financial and political support that lined up behind her gave a profound boost to the standard advocacy publishing. Her attorneys and supporters viewed their ability to sustain public attention as critical to Davis's defense. Branton's first motion in court, which was denied, was to have the entire trial televised. He argued that the closed circuit television surveillance of the trial could be opened up in the public interest by broadcasting the proceedings; barring that, Davis's attorneys asked for a larger courtroom so that they could accommodate more public witnesses. Her lawyers juxtaposed public presence and radical critique as visible challenges to the privation of surveillance.<sup>110</sup>

NUCFAD released trial bulletins, local and regional newsletters, pamphlets of support statements (and later, of the defense's opening and closing statements in court), and a book. *If They Come in the Morning* was edited by Angela Davis, Bettina Aptheker, and members of NUCFAD, and published in December 1971. The book was part of the group's campaign to build support for Davis and, to a lesser but significant extent, Magee. It printed several essays that Davis had written from the Marin County Jail,

including updates about other political prisoners across the country. That Davis, like Jackson, proved prolific from behind bars suggested that the mind could not be confined, encouraging readers to view Davis as representing the sharp mind of prisoners. Even the book's title, taken from an open letter author James Baldwin had sent Davis via the *New York Review of Books*, positioned Davis as iconic of repression's wide reach. In words that alluded to Martin Neimoller's famous poem, written during the Holocaust, about the cost of remaining silent amidst genocidal regimes, Baldwin wrote "if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night."<sup>111</sup>

The arrest and trial of Angela Davis generated a national debate over race, racism, black sexuality, judicial impartiality, and imprisonment. The metrics and modalities of slavery were visible throughout, in ways both implied and explicit. Principally they structured how Davis's supporters responded to her flight, capture and incarceration, and to the prosecution. Bettina Aptheker, an activist whose father, Herbert, was a renowned Communist historian of slave revolts, likened the FBI's intensive national search for Davis as the current incarnation of the historical "response of slave owners to slave rebellions" and the Fugitive Slave Act. Media were fundamental to marking slave bodies, from slave passes to wanted posters, and the massive media attention devoted to capturing Davis lent credence to this comparison for her supporters.<sup>112</sup> Davis contributed to this association in several writings from her jail cell, including articles she wrote about slavery and sexuality, and about race and contemporary political repression. These articles contributed to a public persona of Davis as the epitome of black resistance to slavery. In interviews from jail, she described herself above all as "a Black woman ...[who has] dedicated my life to the struggle for the liberation of Black people—my

enslaved, imprisoned people.”<sup>113</sup> Slavery continued to be visible in Davis’s description of repression even after her acquittal. As Cynthia Young notes, Davis began her 1974 autobiography (initially called *With My Mind Set on Freedom*, subsequently republished as *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*) describing her flight, time underground and arrest, a narrative tool that “cannot help but echo slave narratives. In both cases, the goal is physical freedom, escape from impending captivity.”<sup>114</sup>

The obsession with Davis’s whereabouts during her two months underground reached the highest level of American power, as she was placed on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted List. Two days after she was arrested in New York City in October 1970, Richard Nixon congratulated J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI while signing the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970. He called Davis’s arrest “a warning to those who engage in these acts.” Supporters took it as a sign of Nixon’s prejudicial assumption of her guilt.<sup>115</sup> Nixon’s gaffe was not the only reason some viewed Davis as a twentieth-century slave. The context of black prison activism, to which Davis herself had already contributed, provided the foundation for her arrest itself to be read as an extension of slavery. The visibility accompanying her arrest was proof that slavery continued to define the terms of black life in the United States. “One might have hoped that, by this hour, the very sight of chains on Black flesh, or the very sight of chains, would be so intolerable a sight for the American people, and so unbearable a memory, that they would themselves spontaneously rise up and strike off the manacles,” James Baldwin wrote in his open letter to Davis. “But, no, they appear to glory in their chains; now, more than ever, they appear to measure their safety in chains and corpses.”<sup>116</sup> As with other statements by black supporters, Baldwin’s letter described a fundamental antagonism between Davis

and the black masses she was now deemed to represent, and the American state. This antagonism was visible to Baldwin through the accoutrements of criminal justice.

Similarly Jesse Jackson said that even though there “are few like Angela Davis,” she remained representative of black people overall, such that her guilt would mean that “concentration camps are next.”<sup>117</sup> For both Baldwin and Jackson, the sight of her arrest and the knowledge of her incarceration were visible evidence of white supremacy.

As her case embodied black subjection, so too did her defiance embody black solidarity. Both dimensions were consistently invoked in the rhetoric of support for Davis. Prominent black supporters, including members of her legal team, invoked blackness as the basis of their affinity for Davis and the strategy of winning the case. This approach enacted black solidarity by making it visible. Even before Davis had chosen legal representation, the National Council of Black Lawyers convened a panel of twelve black law professors from eleven colleges to provide advice and counsel to her. Singer Aretha Franklin pledged her support to raise bail money for Davis, saying that because she got her money from black people she wanted to spend it in a way that would benefit them. At the Marin County Jail, Davis received visitors that included Maya Angelou, Nina Simone, Toni Morrison, and Ralph Abernathy. Singer and comedian Sammy Davis, Jr., spoke at a benefit rally for Davis, saying “I share her blackness, man, and that’s where it’s at.” Such declarations led Howard Moore, one of her chief attorneys, to pledge that Davis would be vindicated through a trial focused on racism as a political problem. Moore called this approach a “black defense.” He predicted its success because “[w]hite people know they are racists” and can therefore appreciate a straightforward

acknowledgment of it. Moore pledged to use a stridently black defense to compel “white people [to] respect their own law.”<sup>118</sup>

Davis’s body and her sexuality were crucial sites of evidence—both legally for the prosecution and culturally among her supporters.<sup>119</sup> As with other stories about prominent women at the time, journalists emphasized Davis’s body in stories about her, even before her two months underground. Due to those descriptions and the photographic depictions that often accompanied such coverage, many of the hate letters that she received after she was outed as a Communist vilified her body in terms racist and misogynist.<sup>120</sup> News stories routinely described her physique, noting that she was “slender,” “tall” and, a term her supporters also often utilized, “beautiful.” The last term was multivalent: journalists writing for black newspapers, as well as others who publicly advocated for her were also prone to describing Davis as beautiful, although they used the term to describe not just her physique but her oppositional stance.<sup>121</sup> The prosecution used Davis’s skin complexion, conventionally attractive looks, hairstyle, height, and the gap between her teeth in asking witnesses to identify her. “The general description of Angela that they [the witnesses] all had heard [from the district attorney] was that she was a tall, light-complected black woman, wearing an afro, and that she had a space between her two front teeth,” Aptheker writes. “They chanted this like a mantra on the witness stand, and the very monotony of it cast doubt on whom, if anyone, they had seen. One witness even said that he ‘couldn’t remember about the teeth.’”<sup>122</sup> One witness, who claimed to have seen Davis with Jonathan Jackson the day before the courthouse raid at the service station he owned, said he had served enough black customers to “notice



individual differences” among them, most notably in this case that Davis is “more good looking than most black people.”<sup>123</sup>

Most significantly, however, Davis became known for a hairstyle, an Afro. Many black people decided to wear their hair “natural” at this time, although Davis became so well known for doing so that the Afro became her trademark in popular culture. While police were looking for her, the Afro became a visible symbol, both as a form of evidence and as an expression of solidarity. Davis estimates that “hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of Afro-wearing black women were accosted, harassed, and arrested by police, FBI, and immigration agents during the two months I spent underground.” At the same time, other women who did not know her or her whereabouts proudly wore Afros in hopes of serving as decoys and providing extra cover for Davis.<sup>124</sup> In reflecting on the iconicity of her body, specifically her hairstyle, Davis noted two primary usages that photographs of her played in the 1970s: the first, by journalists and the government, depicted her as a foreboding anti-American and antiwhite terrorist. The second usage of images of her, by supporters, depicted her, often with her mouth wide open as if she were speaking. These images portrayed her as “a charismatic and raucous revolutionary ready to lead the masses into battle. Since I considered myself neither monstrous nor charismatic, I felt fundamentally betrayed on both accounts: violated on the first account, and deficient on the second.”<sup>125</sup>

It was not just her body, however, that animated prosecutorial and cultural interest in Davis. Rather her sexuality was also a visible element of her prosecution and defense. The prosecution claimed that Davis conspired with Jonathan Jackson out of her passion for his imprisoned brother. As proof, district attorney Albert Harris pointed to the vivid

expressions of love Davis wrote in an eighteen-page series of letters, a diary of sorts, that was found in Jackson's cell after his death.<sup>126</sup> Because the letters were written while Davis was in jail, nearly a year after the crime for which she stood accused, her attorneys argued that they were irrelevant to her state of mind prior to or on August 7. After much legal wrangling, the judge allowed a two-and-a-half-page excerpt to be introduced into evidence, which the prosecution read as its last piece of evidence before resting its case. More than the attempted legal maneuvering to prevent their use, however, was the political opposition that Davis and her attorneys and supporters levied. They not only called the prosecutor's strategy insensitive and unconvincing, but argued that turning love letters into legal evidence reproduced the slave-system logic of black women's illegitimate sexuality. They argued that the letters should be discounted from evidence on the basis of their deeply personal contents. Slavery defined its female captives as sexual objects that lacked rational capacities. While the total domination of captivity, alongside the ideology of black sexuality as lascivious, allowed white slave owners to sexually assault their captives, the system of social death refused to label such violations as rape, much less to prosecute them as crimes. Because slaves were thought to be sexually available while also being defined as less than human, rape, as a criminal act of unwanted sexual contact that violated a person's sense of self, did not apply to them.<sup>127</sup>

The prosecutor's argument revolved around the idea that Davis conspired to free Jackson (and "sacrificed" his brother and other prisoners in the process) not for political reasons but because her lust for Jackson knew no bounds.<sup>128</sup> The defense's opposition to this line of argument challenged the enduring tropes of slave sexuality. Davis analyzed the historical origins and continuing salience of such discourse even prior to the

prosecutor's attempt to use the eighteen-page letter in court. In an article written in her jail cell, Davis offered an indirect response to this focus on her gendered body and those of all black women. "Reflections on the Black Women's Role of the Community of Slaves" (1971), one of several intellectual efforts Davis made in this time period to theorize slavery and freedom, was an attempt to counter the "black matriarch" thesis that held black women to blame for black subjection. That position was, she wrote, "an open weapon of ideological warfare."<sup>129</sup> This view was popularized in the Moynihan Report and echoed by George Jackson, among others, in his declaration of black women as barriers to black liberation that operate from a position of normative masculinity. (Davis asserted in a preface to the essay that at the time of his death Jackson was in the process of revising his earlier positions on black women and struggling with other black men to be more receptive to women's revolutionary leadership.)

The focus on the relationship between Davis and Jackson, and therefore the emphasis on Davis's sexuality through her attachment to male partners, was not the sole province of the prosecution. Some of her vocal if not necessarily active supporters, in the realm of popular culture, similarly cast Davis's love for Jackson as the centerpiece of the case against her. Such depictions neatly inverted the case against her: they did not challenge the tropes of slave sexuality as explanations of Davis's involvement with Jackson or her current legal predicament. Rather they gave it a positive sheen by positing love as the bond slaves formed to endure their bondage. These declarations celebrated the love between the two black revolutionaries and used that love as proof of the illegitimacy of the case. Such expressions of support contributed both to Davis's visibility and the circulation of conservative images of black women's sexuality. Two songs released in

1972 pursued this theme of criminal love in support of Davis. On their album *Sometime in New York City*, John Lennon and Yoko Ono open their song “Angela” suggesting that Davis was put in prison because “They shot down your man.” A picture of Davis, with an Afro and mouth wide open, also appeared on the album cover, which was designed to look like the front page of a newspaper.<sup>130</sup>

The Rolling Stones also released a song in honor of Davis. A stripped-down blues rhythm, “Sweet Black Angel” is one of the group’s only explicitly political songs. It is therefore a more interesting cultural artifact than the song by Lennon and Ono, which appeared on a poorly received album of softly sung protest songs. Using an affected slave dialect, Mick Jagger sang about Davis as “a sweet black angel/ woh/ not a sweet black slave.” The song upheld her sexual symbolism, calling her a “pin up girl.” But with “her brothers been a fallin’,” now “de gal in chains.” The song ends with a call to “free de sweet black slave.”<sup>131</sup> In her 1978 critique of male-centered black radicalism, black feminist Michele Wallace wrote that such depictions of romantic interpersonal love were used only to describe black *women*. They erased black women’s political commitments and motivations with emotional affect. Instead, they constructed Angela Davis “as the epitome of the selfless, sacrificing ‘good woman’—the only kind of black woman the Movement would accept. She did it for her man, they said.”<sup>132</sup> Despite garnering international publicity, Davis still did not control the terms of her visibility: she was the creation of patriarchal imaginations that saw her, whether victim or villain, as loyal to her love for Jackson. Davis did express love for Jackson, so this loyalty was not invented. But this love, described in romantic or sexual terms, dominated the structure of her visibility in legal and cultural spheres that presumed a hyperemotional irrationality.

Perhaps the most dramatic, visible articulation of slavery in and through the Davis case came with attorney Leo Branton's closing argument to the court. Branton likened Davis's case to that of Frederick Douglass, who fled to Canada after being charged with conspiracy in the wake of John Brown's 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry as part of a war against slavery. Branton argued that Douglass, like Davis, was charged only for her "having spoken so eloquently on the right of all men to be free." He argued that "no black person in this world" would wonder why Davis fled, "only why she allowed herself to be caught."<sup>133</sup> The century lapse in time notwithstanding, Branton argued that the realities of Douglass were those of Davis and of himself: trapped in slavery. "As a black person, you realize that the chains of slavery, visible or invisible, are still there in your everyday life."<sup>134</sup> To ensure that jurors would judge the case fairly and understand "what it is about the history of this country which has made an Angela Davis," Branton asked the jury to "think black with me, to be black."<sup>135</sup> At the end of his closing statement, Branton "relieve[d]" jurors of "that responsibility" to be temporarily black—but in doing so, he admonished them that he did "not relieve you of your responsibility to be fair and just human beings in spite of the fact that you are not black."<sup>136</sup> Before ending his statement, Branton made a move to restore humanity to black sexuality. He had Dalton Trumbo, a Hollywood screenwriter and member of the "Hollywood 10" that Branton had defended against the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947, turn the same two-and-a-half-page excerpt of Davis's letter to Jackson that the prosecution used as proof of conspiracy into a poem. He read the poem to the jury, arguing that it showed only Davis's ability to express emotion.<sup>137</sup> Branton's playful rhetoric, temporarily empanelling an all-black jury, defined blackness as a conceptual orientation to social justice. He undermined

the prosecution's case not only on the basis of evidence but on the basis of narrative. His use of poetry and his licensing of black identity demonstrated that Davis's fate was being adjudicated on the basis of representation. He depicted Davis as a brilliant scholar, a dedicated activist, and a slave with a loving heart.

Davis was acquitted June 4, 1972. Several news stories pointed to Branton's powerful closing statement as having articulated the racial drama, tension and redemption embedded in the case. Some jurors were moved to tears, while others maintained it had no impact on them. Prosecutor Albert Harris told journalists that Davis' acquittal, owing in no small part to Branton's closing statement, was an expression of "white guilt."<sup>138</sup> Further, amidst the backdrop of her supporters having defined the case as an instance of persecution and enslavement, journalists and other critical observers opined that her acquittal vindicated America's judiciary. Within mainstream political discourse the exonerated prisoner showed that the system worked, that claims of repression—much less slavery—were hyperbolic protestations from people who, in the words of California governor Ronald Reagan, "ought to sit down and think a little bit about whether they want to run around and stage any more demonstrations again."<sup>139</sup> The *LA Times* editorialized that the "meticulous fairness of the court proceedings [including an all-white jury in a mostly white town] refuted the claims of the propagandists, here and abroad, who so monotonously asserted that it is not possible for a black militant to receive a fair trial in the United States."<sup>140</sup> Reagan, long a foe of Davis, also said the verdict "vindicated" the criminal justice system against critics who "have found the United States and our system of justice guilty without a trial."<sup>141</sup> In London, one writer responded to

the acquittal by writing a eulogy for Davis: had she been convicted, she would have become a martyr, but, he argued, in innocence her symbolism had died.<sup>142</sup>

The equation of conviction with martyrdom and acquittal with death exposes a conundrum accompanying hypervisible trials laden with synecdochic meaning. Political activists seized hold of Angela Davis not only to win her release but to use her high-profile status to represent other victims of repression and therefore to leverage broader critiques of injustice. This approach overlapped with prevailing journalistic routines only insofar as Davis was a continuing object of interest. Yet the framing of Davis as representative of black subjection, the attachment of her personhood to processes of collective bondage, was undone by Davis's victory. When her person walked free, so too did the claim of sweeping racial repression that she was said to embody. Her entire case was marked by spectacle, from Jonathan Jackson's actions through Branton's dramatic closing statement. Out of these spectacles, the image of Davis emerged as a visible representative of the repression that people of color and political activists faced. Her case was a media event that synthesized a number of political issues: questions over race, sexuality, the prison, violence, and law enforcement were applied on and negotiated through applied Davis as an individual. This process politicized and made visible certain state practices as repression. Repression, however, is both spectacular and mundane, and her trial coincided with the start of what would be a dramatic three-decade spike in incarceration rates that disproportionately locked up black people. The *symbol* of racialized repression may have diminished in saliency with Davis's acquittal, but the *fact* of it remained under the surface: visible to those it confined, audible in the cries for law and order, but dissipated in a social imaginary fixated on iconic individuals.

## The San Quentin 6: The Panoptics of Slavery

As journalists and others debated her symbolism, Angela Davis continued her organizing. Immediately after her acquittal, Davis expressed her commitment to keep fighting against the prison system and for the freedom of political prisoners.<sup>143</sup> As she had done during her trial, Davis attempted to redirect the attention focused on her to make visible others in similar positions. Eleven months later, she participated in the founding of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression. NAARPR was a coalition built out of the infrastructures developed through NUCFAD, which had grown to almost 100 chapters in the United States and a few dozen internationally.<sup>144</sup> It was dedicated to a broad range of efforts in support of prisoners, and it fought against numerous policies attached to the burgeoning law and order ideology. The CP continued to play an active role in the efforts of the NAARPR; the coalition can be seen as a revival of the Communist defense organizing of the 1930s. But the CP never controlled the work of NAARPR, which was a multiracial, multi-issue coalition of radical and civil liberties organizations. The NAARPR did not primarily view its efforts as a battle against slavery. Rather it emphasized broad opposition to state and, in the wake of a resurgent Ku Klux Klan, vigilante violence.<sup>145</sup>

Slavery, however, continued to be a strategic trope through which activists attempted to fight the prison throughout the 1970s. The prisoner-as-slave was not just an argument about subject position but about accoutrements. Prison activists used the presence and visibility of slave technologies—principally, chains and shackles—to support their overarching claim that the prison constituted a condition of slavery. The



image of chains had long occupied black radical critique of repression, as evinced in James Baldwin's stirring open letter to Angela Davis written after her arrest and quoted above. In the synecdochic work of prison activism, removing chains comprised a tactic within the campaign against prison slavery, akin to the task of self-representation in court. By protesting the use of chains as evidence of slavery, prisoners challenged the disciplinary function of carceral technologies. They challenged these tools to undermine the power of imprisonment: its visible display and its restraining effects. Prisoners articulated an antiracist critique of slavery with a challenge to what Foucault identified as the disciplining (and, to which they added, intimidating) surveillance to which they were subject.

The use of chains became a central challenge in the case of the San Quentin 6, six black and Latino men charged with the five deaths other than Jackson's that occurred in the Adjustment Center on August 21, 1971. The men were Fleeta Drumgo, David Johnson, Hugo Pinell, Johnny Larry Spain, Luis Talamantez, and Willie Sundiata Tate. All were contemporaries of Jackson and well-known dissidents in prison: Johnson and Tate were among the first to seek outside support in protesting the February 1970 killing of Fred Billingslea by San Quentin guards. Spain had participated in work strikes inside and had joined the Black Panthers shortly before Jackson was killed. Pinell was a student of W.L. Nolen and refused to give false testimony against Jackson in exchange for early parole. Pinell and Talamantez faced several charges since 1970 for altercations with guards. As Latinos—Pinell is Nicaraguan and Talamantez is Chicano—in what was seen as a black movement, the pair were also crucial in fostering some sense of racial unity among people of color in prison against Aryan prison gangs and white guards.<sup>146</sup>

The seventeen-month trial, followed by four months of jury deliberation, was the longest trial to date in California history. At \$2 million, it was also the most expensive.<sup>147</sup> With the exception of Tate, who had been paroled shortly before the trial began, five of the defendants “appeared in court chained and shackled to their chairs [which were bolted to the floor]. . . . [These five] defendants were transported together from San Quentin to the Hall of Justice in a specially constructed bus in which each was enclosed in a separate compartment. In the courtroom they sat behind a bulletproof screen.”<sup>148</sup> At various points throughout, the defendants were chained not just at the hands and feet but at the hips and neck as well. Police also shaved the heads of the five defendants in advance of the trial, further displaying them as wards of the state. The chains followed the defendants throughout their many courtroom appearances, from their 1971 indictments to the 1976 verdict. Judge Broderick authorized the men be shackled for the length of the trial after jurors said the sight of men in chains would not prejudice them.

While the case garnered media attention over its five-year duration, mass media coverage steadily declined, with major decisions or courtroom fracas the dominant means by which the case entered the news after 1973. The persistent chaining of the defendants constituted one of the enduring entry points for news of the case, refracting its visibility through what Tate called the “symbols of slavery.”<sup>149</sup> Members of the San Quentin 6 struggled to be represented by the attorneys of their choosing, including an initial demand that Magee serve as their attorney. Yet this fight for legal representation did not become the public focal point through which the case was described as it did for Magee and Davis. Instead, the use of chains remained a salient feature of their visibility—from their initial court appearances until even after the verdict. Supporters argued that the chaining

of Spain, at times more so than his codefendants, prejudiced the jury against him and resulted in his conviction on murder charges whereas the others were acquitted or convicted of lesser charges.<sup>150</sup> Lawyers for the men protested that their clients were chained and removed by a plexiglass barrier during their legal meetings. This arrangement forced the individuals involved to yell in order to be heard. Doing so, they protested, violated attorney-client privilege by making the content of their meetings known to the guards who watched the meetings from directly outside the room in which they took place.<sup>151</sup>

Chains were only the most dramatic example of the ways that punishment was visible in the trial. While they received the most extreme treatment, the defendants were not alone in being physically inspected and restrained. By order of the judge, all spectators to the trial had to pass through metal detectors, submit to body searches, and present valid identification to enter. In addition to the visible surveillance of courtroom spectators, the San Francisco FBI office covertly monitored the people who attended the trial in fear that the “political overtones” of the case might stoke violent responses.<sup>152</sup> Authorities claimed the additional security was necessary because of the people involved, their charges, and that the trial took place in the same courtroom where Jonathan Jackson staged his August 7 raid. The use of a plexiglass barrier to separate the defendants from their supporters created multiple levels of surveillance: the defendants were on display but at a remove even to those who had come to support them, much as the spectators had become the subject of surveillance themselves.<sup>153</sup> While the barrier facilitated visual surveillance, it also hindered audible witnessing: a public address system was necessary for the proceedings to be heard.<sup>154</sup> Nonetheless, supporters of the six argued, in now

familiar terms of the prisoners' representative status, that public witnessing comprised a collective battle against slavery. "*Whether they are treated as men rather than animals or slaves depends on us...It is a fight for all of us*" (emphasis and ellipses in original).<sup>155</sup>

In remaking the space of legal practice and constraining the bodies of the defendants in ways both hypervisible (chains) and hyperinvisible (incarceration), the police turned the San Quentin 6 trial into a spectacle of surveillance. The case negotiated publicity and silence from the outset. Three members of the grand jury that indicted the six walked out of court in protest of its secrecy and what they viewed as the bias of the prosecutor.<sup>156</sup> The struggle over the case's publicity grew in salience once the trial began and some of the conditions of the prison were replicated in the courtroom: forced confinement, disciplined bodies, and a panoptic visibility that removed the prisoners from all physical connection to anyone but themselves or officers—in this case, both police officers and officers of the court. By simulating elements of the prison within the courtroom, it was not just the prisoners who were subject to its reach. The use of surveillance and the re-creation of physical space showed that the governmentality of imprisonment, its ability to foster consent through self-regulation, was not created only by ideology and architectural design. It did not need to be made to appear as pre-ordained. Rather it could be installed and visibly coerced. The publicity of racialized punishment, what Joy James called the "visceral spectacles of state abuse," changes or limits the applicability of Foucault's analysis of the prison.<sup>157</sup> According to Foucault, the power of the panopticon owes to the fact that its subjects know that they *could* be watched at any time without knowing *when* or *if* they are being monitored at any given point. The surveillance of court spectators, together with the physical display of the

defendants through a sturdy but see-through barrier, removed any doubt about the use of monitoring. This publicity of surveillance generated some criticism from attorneys, civil libertarians, prison activists and others, who argued that surveillance and physical separation contradicted the sentiment of the constitutional guarantee of public trials.

Between the shackling of the defendants and the monitoring of the spectators, the government utilized its own targeted but ever-present visibility through the San Quentin 6 case—a more extreme and transparent panopticon than what is typically imagined. This panopticon differed from the one imagined by Bentham and theorized by Foucault. Whereas that model presumed a circular space in which “the eye of power” rested at the center, the courtroom exhibited its own mechanisms of symbolic authority in its layout: the location and position of the judge relative to others, the jury in relation to the contending sides, and the spectators in relation to the judicial apparatus. In remodeling the courtroom to fulfill panoptic goals, the eye of power was refracted through multiple lenses—an amalgamation of judicial authority and police power—yet not generalized to the point of lacking, as Foucault would have it, an “absolute point.”<sup>158</sup> Quite the opposite: moving the panopticon to the halls of judicial power *centralized* the absolute point of authority in the disciplining hands of the state. The eye of power could be seen most visibly in the judge, seated higher than anyone else. His power was bolstered by the armed guards in the courtroom, the surveillance that spectators endured prior to entering (and after leaving) the courtroom, and the chaining of the defendants themselves. Rather than a horizontal and unseen field of distrust, the panoptic courtroom generated a vertical and hypervisible field of antagonism between the judicial apparatus (understood to be the state) and the defendants and their allies (understood to be the oppressed). And so, rather

than seamlessly encouraging docility, the panoptic courtroom openly and awkwardly revealed itself. It displayed power, not concealed it. Even more than with a traditional courtroom, this convergence of police surveillance and judicial authority drew its power from its public display.

In response, the San Quentin 6 and their lawyers attempted the ultimate détournement of panoptic power, using the courtroom spectacle and its hypervisible practices of confinement and surveillance to provide public surveillance of the prison. The defense argued that abominable prison conditions caused the violence of August 21, regardless of who was individually responsible for the deaths of the three guards and two white prisoners. In addition to arguing this point in their own trial, the six also filed a federal lawsuit against the Adjustment Center and the use of shackles. Before making his decision, the judge toured the prison; the sight of solitary confinement led him to rule it “cruel and unusual punishment.”<sup>159</sup> The San Quentin 6 Defense Committee argued in 1973 that “this is *the* most crucial of all prison cases now before the court. Not only does it raise the important constitutional issue of right to counsel of one’s choice, it also poses the question of who are the real criminals in the current prison upheavals—rebellious convicts, or those who confine them in intolerable conditions?” (emphasis in original).<sup>160</sup> Central to that position was the contention, supported by a whistleblower named Louis Tackwood, that the government had conspired to kill George Jackson. This approach utilized the sullied image of American law enforcement after Watergate and the Church Committee revelations of governmental assassination plots both actualized and discussed. In his closing statement, defense attorney John Hill intoned that the existence of other assassination plots made the plot to kill George Jackson a conceivable notion—and if it

could be imagined, then the prison system caused the mayhem of August 21, not the prisoners.<sup>161</sup> The verdict: of the forty-six charges the group faced, three were acquitted entirely, and three were convicted of a total of six charges. This result demonstrates that perhaps the jury did not like what it was exposed to of the prison system, even if they did not believe that the prison system was entirely, if at all, responsible for the violence that occurred that day. In that mixed result, the jury's verdict can be seen as a mixture of the post-Watergate political skepticism with the post-1960s law and order backlash. The visibility of prison abuses provoked some leniency but did not generate support.

#### A Nation Captive but not Quiet: Communicative Rituals of Black Nationalist Prisoners

By the end of the 1970s, slavery underlay prisoner practices of representation and social relations. Slavery informed black prison politics and culture separate from the legal sphere examined above. As prisoner trials decreased in publicity if not in frequency, prisoners strengthened their claims that the invisibility of incarceration is part of what qualified the prison as a site of slavery. In response, prisoners utilized slavery in the creation of several collective practices designed to foster political unity and action among black activists on both sides of the walls. These practices included self-made media and rituals of dissent. In a period where protest against the prison was increasingly subsumed by shadows, rarely garnering much attention in the mainstream, the critique of slavery was the basis of much of its remaining visibility. Prisoners' capacity to represent and explain their experience of confinement proceeded through slavery as an analytic.

As public attention to prisons waned, black prisoners increasingly looked for ways out of slavery. This quest did not preclude the focus on individual self-

representation, the representative claims black prisoners were held to have, or the effort to define the prison as a form of slavery. It did, however, place greater emphasis on collective representations that united black prisoners with black people and the Third World. Through appeals to unite “the black nation,” prisoners proposed large-scale solutions that positioned themselves as the best spokesmen for black people generally. This effort built on a rich history of black nationalism. Poet Amiri Baraka proclaimed in 1962 that “black is a country.” His subsequent cultural productions and political mobilizations endeavored to demonstrate this point. Some of the most well-known black political figures and organizations of the time period, including Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party, argued that black people constituted “a nation within a nation” or an “internal colony” of the United States. The 1972 Black Political Convention, held in Gary, Indiana, with the blessing of the city’s first black mayor, declared that it was “Nation Time!” Defining a black nation argued that black people shared a cultural affinity and political sensibility. These efforts upheld a desire for political power and economic self-sufficiency as necessary to overcome the enduring legacy of slavery and white supremacy.<sup>162</sup>

Black nationalist groups differed over the implementation of these challenges and whether they could be achieved through existing political channels. Perhaps the largest black organization to advocate for the formation of an independent nation separate from the United States was the Republic of New Afrika (RNA). Formed in Detroit in 1968, the RNA adopted as its national territory the five black-belt states of the Deep South where slaves were most heavily concentrated: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. From its founding, the RNA constituted itself as a government in exile,



complete with elected officials and consulates through the United States. RNA officials met with representatives from several foreign governments, including those of China and Tanzania. The citizens of this republic were those who identified as “New Afrikan.” From the beginning, then, the RNA referred not only to an entity but to a new, idealized political subject, one who was neither African nor American but whose existence took shape during and as a result of the experiences of the Middle Passage, slavery and subsequent agonies. The RNA centered slavery as the origin of a new nation. Slavery structured the life of these black nationals such that independent land and reparations were necessary. The political subjectivity that the RNA offered, centered around slavery and nationalism, attracted more adherents than the organization itself. This claim on a new political subject shifted the valence of Black Power protest from a focus on “liberation” to one that emphasized “independence” and generated, by the mid-1970s, a force calling itself the “New Afrikan Independence Movement” (NAIM).

The “New Afrikan” was a political identity that used nationalism to account for the points of unity and departure within the black diaspora as shaped by the transatlantic slave trade and its North American particularities. New Afrika was a political designation that named a connection to Africa but acknowledged that the experience of slavery made impossible any simple notions of return or reclamation. Adherents, therefore, argued that the New Afrikan nation formed in the seventeenth century, with the first arrival of African slaves on the shores of what had not yet become the United States.<sup>163</sup> New Afrikan identity was open to all who declared themselves citizens of New Afrika—thus, while its frameworks defined all African descendants in North America as colonized, the RNA distinguished between “New Afrikans” and “blacks.” Such rhetorical challenges of

racial identification, including the call to embrace nationalist consciousness and terminology is familiar in black nationalist discourse, from Malcolm X's critique of the "so-called Negro" to George Jackson's dismissal of the "slave mentality." These efforts each castigated socially accepted racial designations as demonstrative of a colonized mentality. To this legacy, New Afrikans highlighted national belonging; they challenged other blacks to recognize that slavery both permanently excluded them from the American nation-state and established a parallel nation in need of a state.

Many black prisoners declared themselves New Afrikans throughout the 1970s. Earlier in the decade, George Jackson and others argued that prisons were schools for revolutionaries. And as Etienne Balibar argues, schools are one of the primary institutional locations for socializing individuals into shared political perspectives and, especially, linguistic practices.<sup>164</sup> It was in prison that many black people declared themselves New Afrikans loyal to the NAIM. The popularity of New Afrikan politics in prison owes to two factors. First, several self-proclaimed New Afrikans, including RNA officials, found themselves in prison after altercations with police. RNA cofounder and president Imari Obadele was arrested with ten other members of the group in a predawn raid on two of their headquarters in Jackson, Mississippi, in August 1971. Once in prison, Obadele and others of the RNA continued their organizing. They used the strict conditions of their confinement as further proof of their political arguments. Obadele participated in the formation of a multiracial coalition of radical prisoners at Marion and wrote for a black nationalist prisoner magazine based there, *Black Pride*.<sup>165</sup> Obadele wrote several articles from prison. The RNA gathered several of these essays into a book, which it self-published, called *Foundations of the Black Nation* (1975). Combined with

the location of its author, the book's title suggested that the experience of forced confinement was fundamental to bonding African descendants in the Americas as a national group.

Other self-proclaimed New Afrikans organized in prisons scattered across the country, although California, Illinois and New York remained central locations for this political expression. There were at least eight publications steeped in New Afrikan politics and with at least some connection to prison issues that formed in these three states in the mid-1970s: *Arm the Spirit*, *Awakening of the Dragon*, and *Seize the Time* (California); *Black Pride*, *The Fuse*—which began as *Stateville Raps*—and *Notes of an Afrikan P.O.W.*, which became *Viva wa Watu* (Illinois); and *Take the Land* and *Midnight Special* (New York). Not coincidentally, all three states were home to thriving chapters of the Black Panther Party, and several former Panthers declared themselves New Afrikans during this time as well, often as a result of incarceration and the internecine conflicts within the Panthers.<sup>166</sup> These ex-Panthers were often identified with the military splinter group that had formed out of divisions within the Party, the Black Liberation Army. Following Jackson, the BLA had pledged to transform prisons into strategic “instruments of liberation.”<sup>167</sup> Nationalism provided their favored modality for redirecting the prison from an institution of subjection into one of freedom.

Second and more compelling, if related, in terms of the national scope of New Afrikan influence, the ideology of national oppression and internal colonialism that the RNA espoused fit with the position articulated by George Jackson and others—namely, that black people were always already imprisoned by white supremacy. “New Afrika” extended this position by arguing that its political subjects were imprisoned first by the

system of white supremacy and next by the institution of prison. The New Afrikan position claimed that prisoners were the front lines within the prison that held all black people. This position had been enunciated for more than a decade to encourage militant opposition to white supremacy. Malcolm X had used the metaphor of imprisonment to explain the persistence of racism outside of the South and foster black nationalism across the United States. New Afrikans saw themselves in Malcolm's image and following his directives. Yet the NAIM also extended Malcolm's message: the prison was equally metaphorical but more material in the New Afrikan political imagination. They spoke of the United States as imprisoning the New Afrikan nation, urged adherents to support the struggles of prisoners, and promoted prisoners as strategists for the developing black revolution.

Central to New Afrikan political thought was the idea that the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution imposed the *duties* of American citizenship upon former slaves without guaranteeing the *rights* that were supposed to accompany such civic status. The amendment, according to New Afrikans, *offered* but did not *grant* American citizenship. A study group of New Afrikan prisoners in Illinois determined that the Thirteenth Amendment, which outlawed slavery except as punishment for a crime, was part of an elite strategy to ensure the continuation of black bondage, now through prisons rather than plantations.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, New Afrikan prisoners opposed the Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments. (These amendments respectively abolished chattel slavery except as punishment for a crime and established due process of law, which made former slaves into U.S. citizens.) New Afrikans argued that black people had never been given a chance to choose whether they *wanted* the citizenship that had been

forced upon them and yet had never been truly offered. In opposing the constitutional basis of black incorporation into the American nation-state, New Afrikans articulated the prison and slavery as constitutive of the juridical basis of U.S. national formation.

The spatial dynamics were also critical to the spread of New Afrikan politics. In a time when the prison and the ghetto defined the national imagination of black geographies, New Afrikans identified the black-belt South as an alternate site of idealized black politics. This Southern focus located New Afrikan conceptions of race in the geography most attached to stringent racial hierarchies—the Deep South, with its history of visible racial oppression and subterranean black resistance. New Afrikans upheld this rural base as a more strategically defensible and a more historically authentic location of black politics than the city. Yet prison was central to the New Afrikan political imagination. The New Afrikan call to “Free the Land!” proceeded through the space of prisons, articulated by the voice of prisoners. From their prison cells black prisoners became spokesmen (and, in some instances, spokeswomen) in a struggle for territorial sovereignty. New Afrikan politics called for redress by making visible a land base for the black nation, just as it made the prison visible as a land of black subjection.

Under the banner of New Afrika, prison politics moved from seeking national visibility to seeking visibility for the nation. In other words, prisoners sought to bring to light their subaltern nationality as black people. Prison was the best demonstration of national captivity. Whereas the drive for national visibility connoted a spatial terrain, from sea to shining sea as it were, the latter was more of an ideological position. This approach shifted the discursive terrain from racial injustice to “national oppression.” This nationalist visibility did not reject national visibility; it was still interested in maximum

circulation as part of its organizing agenda, and in fact showed even greater intent in *global* networks of struggle. But it devoted more conscious effort to the conceptual representations of its visibility. The injuries of prison conditions were of secondary importance in this approach, although they still mattered a great deal. Instead, prison visibility was a step toward representing and affirming the legitimate standing of a black nation. Prisoners argued that their incarceration was reflective of the ways that “U.S. imperialism” had denied the existence and thwarted the independence of New Afrika. They organized to make New Afrika visible. Because the prison epitomized political efforts to silence the existence of New Afrika, black prisoners defined themselves as the basic unit of political leadership. Atiba Shanna (born James Sayles, also known as Owusu Yaki Yakuba), a prisoner in Illinois and one of the most prolific New Afrikan theorists, became the RNA Minister of Information. According to Shanna, “prisoners will play a significant role in the formation of a national, *revolutionary*, black political party and in the formation of a national, *revolutionary*, black united front” (emphasis in original).<sup>169</sup> Shanna was the ideological force behind the Stateville Prisoners Organization and the New Afrikan Prisoners Organization (NAPO), which attempted to unite several prisoner groups throughout Illinois. NAPO defined itself as a political party in formation. It was one of several black nationalist efforts in the late 1970s that sought to reinvigorate revolutionary black politics through prisoner organizing.<sup>170</sup>

All political organizing is discursive and mediated, and certainly New Afrikan prison organizing was no exception in its pursuit of nationalist visibility. New Afrikan prison organizing was not limited to cultural and intellectual production. Indeed, self-proclaimed New Afrikans were behind several of the most ambitious prison organizing

campaigns of the late 1970s, including efforts to free the Pontiac Brothers, a group of seventeen black prisoners facing the death penalty following a deadly riot at the Illinois prison in 1978.<sup>171</sup> But because New Afrikan prison activism sought visibility not just of the prison but of the imprisoned nation, the discursive elements were critical. As with other nationalisms, language was of primary importance to New Afrikan prisoners. Thomas Holt argues that language comprises “the cultural building block of nationality.” Language and religion are “the media and processes through which one is made to belong.”<sup>172</sup> This national project was, if not more than others, at least more transparently discursive than others, as the neologism “New Afrikan” connotes, both in its existence and the alternate spelling of “Afrikan” to reflect the traditional Swahili use of the letter k for the hard-c sound in English.<sup>173</sup> Even the terminology of their confinement—national oppression, imperialism—served to linguistically establish the New Afrikan nation through the language of empire and the use of terms recognizable in the realm of international law.

New Afrikan discourse contravened standard practices of English grammar, not just in promoting a capital-B Blackness, but celebrating collectivity over individualism. New Afrikans capitalized “We” but not “I.”<sup>174</sup> Adherents changed their name to demonstrate a reconnection to their African ancestry and a rejection of the “slave names” they were given at birth. New Afrikans continued some of the expressions popularized by the Black Panthers, such as calling the United States “Babylon” and labeling its prisons as “death camps” for the “genocide” of black people. Even more than the Panthers, New Afrikan prison politics crafted its discursive claims with specific appeals to the standards of international law. New Afrikan prisoners argued for relabeling prisons “detention

centers” and “konzentration kamps.”<sup>175</sup> Both terms are categories governed by the United Nations in its protocols on genocide and the treatment of prisoners of war. New Afrikan discourse appealed to international law so as to certify the black nation’s existence. More than connecting its speakers to their African origins or engaging in collective speech acts—dynamics that scholars have identified in African American rhetoric—New Afrikan discourse sought to demonstrate a national existence.<sup>176</sup> New Afrikan linguistic practice was a discourse aimed at making visible their national subjugation and aspirations.

New Afrikan politics emerged as one of the most concrete expressions of prison visibility in the late 1970s. This visibility appeared through three areas of collective action: self-made media, grassroots organizing, and communicative rituals. Each effort originated in prison but involved outside supporters to ensure the greater circulation of visibility. Each effort can be seen as experiments of nationalist visibility—that is, as attempts to constitute the black nation by making visible the intellectual and cultural production of black prisoners. The New Afrikan approach coincided with another burgeoning strategy of prison protest: civil rights lawsuits. By 1980, prisoners had filed 12,718 civil rights claims in court—as compared to 218 such suits in 1966. As with the plethora of legal actions that the NAACP and others filed in the fight against segregation, these suits attempted to use juridical power to improve the conditions of black people suffering in silence. Such civil rights litigation on behalf of prisoners created vital protections for incarcerated people, but they did not restart a flagging prison movement.<sup>177</sup>



The communicative strategies favored by New Afrikans attempted to facilitate prison organizing by pursuing visibility and political unity around nationalism. Because the NAIM rejected the legitimacy of the American legal establishment, New Afrikans hesitated to use the law in pursuing their goals. Rather, media were especially useful venues through which to build support for New Afrikan organizing initiatives. Media, argued James Carey, “are not merely instruments of will and purpose but definite forms of life: organisms, so to say, that reproduce in miniature the contradictions in our thought, action, and social relations.”<sup>178</sup> New Afrikan publications were the lifeblood of black nationalist prison organizing in the late 1970s. They were attempts to use visibility to promote a shared political understanding of the problems of confinement and the potentials of nationalism.

Prisoners making media was not inherently subversive or counterhegemonic. Believing writing to be therapeutic and educational, prison administrators had allowed prisoners to produce newsletters since at least the early 1960s. These media, timid and apolitical products that mostly reported on prison happenings, were printed in-house and read predominantly by prisoners and staff.<sup>179</sup> Others utilized more subversive and political means of communication, mostly through covert publications, such as the 1968 San Quentin newspaper *The Outlaw* discussed in chapter 1. There were similar efforts at Attica (*The Iced Pig*) and other prisons across the country, usually involving a small group of prisoners acting covertly. While some of these efforts achieved added publicity when they were subsequently reprinted in radical newspapers, they were agitational materials designed to rally the prisoners against the guards. Subversive literature, whispered softly or shouted loudly, has been a hallmark of what political scientist James

Scott calls the “hidden transcripts” of resistance by subjugated populations.<sup>180</sup> Prison-based black nationalist publications of the late 1970s, however, were of a different magnitude and purpose. These publications, along with the organizing campaigns and collective rituals, spoke in the discourse of Third World anticolonialism and used their own nationalist idiom. They were venues for prisoners to work with outside activists in pursuit of a nationalist movement by perfecting means of communication and shared work despite the restrictions that the prison imposed. These forms of collective action did not, as some had earlier, portend that the revolution would come from within prisons alone. But they did posit that prisoners, as a result of their incarceration, were and ought to be providing intellectual leadership in the effort to achieve nationalist visibility. Prisoners therefore were representatives, almost ambassadors, of the black nation, while they also had a responsibility to represent their particular grievances as people dealing with the violence of confinement and the racial enmity that accompanied it.

These publications were, like their subversive predecessors, still utilized to foster prisoner unity, especially among black and, to a lesser but significant extent, between black and Latino prisoners. Their primary purpose, however, was to establish connections between prisoners and outside supporters under the mantle of nationalism through technologies of visibility. Such productions demonstrated that visibility needed media but was about consciousness. “It is our feeling that only an enlightened and thoroughly informed community can and will resolve the social-evils our prison systems are presently compounding,” wrote Ronald Bowman, a prisoner at Marion, in a letter to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* trying to get the newspaper to cover the heightened isolation practices at the Illinois prison.<sup>181</sup> Where overt political action, in the form of riots and

strikes, was a lot harder, media became a mechanism for developing an oppositional transcript that was both hidden and public. Prisoners often wrote anonymously in the newspapers they produced and covertly distributed. Yet the act of publishing created a literal, tangible transcript—products that gave their oppositional stance greater visibility than verbal commiseration or small-scale altercations with guards (or with other prisoners). While anonymity was a widely utilized form of self-protection, some authors or editors of prison publications did list their names, publicly identifying themselves, if usually via a chosen name that prison officials may not have used but could surely have easily discovered. These media projects fostered a shared political identity among prisoners while also continuing to bring them into contact with outside supporters. They overtly displayed resistance, both in the articles they printed and in their very existence. Yet the use of anonymity and, above all, the physical separation imposed by imprisonment ensured that the transcripts were still hidden. In fact, these media products can be seen as an effort to publicize their hidden location—to make public the transcripts hidden by the prison.

While fiercely political, the fact that such publications were used to demonstrate the existence of a black nation also allowed space for articles of a more cultural bent. Wahneema Lubiano argues that black nationalism is a discourse that opposes the Eurocentrism of the U.S. state while reinscribing its logics through policing behavior, especially regarding gender and the black family.<sup>182</sup> It is not surprising, then, that affirmations of black identity predicated black prisoners' efforts to comment on issues beyond their confinement. These included reviews of jazz, black theater, and the emergent blaxploitation genre. *Midnight Special*, a national newsmagazine of prisoner

writings that was edited and published by a collective of activists in New York City, printed two letters from prisoners about blaxploitation. Under the headline “Black Movies and Twentieth Century Slaves,” both authors criticized the genre for perpetuating negative, propagandistic, and derogatory stereotypes about black men and women alike. One of the authors, imprisoned at Soledad, began the letter by establishing his blackness as proof of the good intentions motivating his criticism. “I am writing to you, In Sincerity and Blackness [sic], concerning my feelings of Miss Pamela Grier as an actress.”<sup>183</sup> At Marion, prisoners writing for *Black Pride* discussed “The Beauty of the Black Woman,” printed poems in honor of Angela Davis, and reviewed the plays of Amiri Baraka.<sup>184</sup> The use of sincerity in one prisoner’s letter is revealing. These writings demonstrate, as the notion of (racial) sincerity does more broadly, that racial subjectivity is performative and partial. John Jackson notes that sincerity “imagines more volatile racial subjects—not just racial victims of other people’s power plays.”<sup>185</sup> That prisoners would describe their own efforts at cultural analysis as sincere demonstrates that prison visibility was not just oppositional but relational. That is, it sought to restore, or initiate for the first time, bonds that physical isolation would seem to have removed.

Nonetheless these publications were dominated by blatantly political concerns. Cultural analysis was typically sublimated to political analysis, as in Atiba Shanna’s use of the film *The Battle of Algiers*, itself a highly political film about the bloody Algerian war for independence, to argue for the importance of self-discipline in rejecting the label of criminal and therefore throwing off the mentality of colonialism. Shanna likened the film’s protagonist to George Jackson as two men who went from being criminals to anticolonial fighters.<sup>186</sup> The visibility of media established prisoners’ salience in the

absence of other visible forms of political resistance. In California New Afrikan prisoners began the newsletter *Voices from within San Quentin* in the fall of 1977, although funding problems prevented its printing until winter of that year. The paper began as a covert mimeographed newsletter to report on prison conditions. *Voices* editor Kalima Aswad, who had been mentored politically by former Black Panthers turned New Afrikans Geronimo ji Jaga Pratt and Jalil Muntaqim, had been furtively distributing reports on prison conditions via handwritten notes. (Visibility was continuously embodied: Aswad's name, given him by other prisoners, means "one with the word.") *Voices* was an advanced version of that effort. Yet it was also a response to the increasing austerity following August 21, 1971. Since the violence that day, the prison was split into more compartmentalized units. *Voices* emerged as a chance to foster greater communication *within* prison *among* prisoners. In attempting to circumvent the compartmentalization within the prison, *Voices* can be seen as an effort to expand visibility from within the constraints of invisibility. It was a response to the changing, diminishing levels of mobilization and unity that accompanied the ebb of black prison activism in the late 1970s.<sup>187</sup>

Six months after its first issue appeared, *Voices from within San Quentin* transitioned from being a monthly newsletter on prison conditions to become a quarterly newspaper dedicated to reporting on anticolonial movements around the world. Aswad remained the editor of the new publication, now called *Arm the Spirit*. The title was taken from a 1971 speech by Fidel Castro.<sup>188</sup> Aswad wrote and selected articles for publication. Members of the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee (PFOC), a public organization of antiracist whites that was formed by the clandestine Weather Underground in 1975,

secreted articles to Aswad.<sup>189</sup> PFOC also produced and distributed the paper around the country. It was free to prisoners, or fifty cents an issue (\$3 for a one-year subscription) for others. The first issue appeared in June 1978; the San Quentin warden refused to allow its entrance into the prison until an attorney retained by PFOC threatened to sue. Although *Voices* clearly argued for black unity in prison, *Arm the Spirit* more explicitly took George Jackson as a force for inspiration. A quote from Jackson encouraging unity in the face of an already present fascism appeared as the paper's tag line. The quote presumably identified *Arm the Spirit*'s mission when it declared: "Do what must be done, discover your humanity and your love in revolution. Pass on the torch. Join us, give up your life for the people." A note from the editors identified the paper as having three goals: to provide a medium for information about American prison radicalism, to provide prisoners an outlet for their political writings, and to connect the "various struggles" on which the paper reported—mainly self-conscious efforts for national liberation, whether in American prisons or Third World colonies.<sup>190</sup>

*Arm the Spirit* was one of several ways that prisoners in the late 1970s extended their visibility by articulating their struggles through the frameworks of international law. These efforts granted legitimacy to stateless nations by focusing attention on their plight and their protests. For black nationalists, following from the strategy Malcolm X advocated toward the end of his life, appealing to international law went along with declaring black people to be a colonized population within the borders of the United States. Black nationalists viewed international law, represented by the United Nations, as the only possibility for a neutral or, perhaps amidst the embrace of decolonization of the era, supportive hearing for subjugated nations. Appealing to the UN revealed this black

nationalist vision to be a global one. While it sought to establish its own state, naturalizing the state form as an appropriate unit of politics, its rejection of the American state led these nationalists to cast their lot with the Third World. New Afrikan prisoners and others hoped that making the violent confinement of white supremacy visible on an international stage could embarrass the United States into change, or at least foster greater transnational racial solidarity. Even more than the UN as a body, these campaigns were addressed to the UN as a symbol—the biggest international institution concerned with human rights, the UN meant global visibility. For that reason, Georgia Jackson initiated a petition to the United Nations in 1972 calling for an investigation into the circumstances of her son’s death, and Atiba Shanna opined that talking of “P.O.W.’s, and in particular of Afrikan P.O.W.’s is a way of building revolutionary nationalist consciousness, and of realizing the liberation of the nation.”<sup>191</sup>

Black internationalism had focused on the United Nations as a venue almost since the UN began as an institutional body. In 1951, the Civil Rights Congress authored and delivered a petition to the UN titled *We Charge Genocide*. The text was written by black Communist William Patterson and aided by the participation of performer-activist Paul Robeson. The United Nations never responded to the original petition, but it was reprinted in its entirety in 1970. In an introduction to the new edition, Patterson wrote that the petition aimed “to expose the nature and depth of racism in the United States; and to arouse the moral conscience of progressive mankind against the inhuman treatment of black nationals by those in high political places.”<sup>192</sup> Beginning in 1976, there was a convergence of interests among nationalist-oriented prisoners that upheld the UN as a logical political target. These converging strategies of black (inter)nationalism were

unrelated in practice—these appeals to the UN were made independent of one another—but sprang from shared goals. They each criticized black imprisonment as an historical fact that began with enslavement and carried over to the present, and they each identified George Jackson as an iconic figurehead. As with the New Afrikan newspapers, these prisoner appeals to the United Nations were less about prison conditions, even where they dealt with them, than establishing the legitimacy and international standing of the black nation. Originating behind bars, these petitions used the location of their authors as added evidence of black colonial subjection and as proof of the broad revolutionary imagination. Owing to “the extreme concentration of oppression” in prisons, those held there were the most obvious choice to launch a campaign oriented to “the ‘politics of anti-oppression’... presented within the context of the class and national liberation struggle.”<sup>193</sup>

NAPO initiated one such effort in 1977. Called “We Still Charge Genocide,” the petition clearly alluded to its 1951 predecessor. The 1977 iteration, however, took up concerns beyond contemporary structures of white supremacy to indict the American nation-state as itself hopelessly racist. As with other New Afrikan efforts, this petition had as its purpose a challenge to the moral and juridical basis of American power. Based on a study group at Stateville Prison that re-examined the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, “We Still Charge Genocide” located the prison as a constitutionally prescribed method of black subjugation. In each of the three amendments held up as harbingers of racial progress, prisoners found proof of white supremacy’s retrenchment. This petition circulated as evidence of prisoners’ intellectual sophistication and collectivity.



Appealing to the UN was another chance to establish the existence of a colonized black nation, through performing the rituals of international law. New Afrikan prisoners held out hope that the international arena might prove crucial to their redemption. From prison in Atlanta, RNA president Imari Obadele released a letter to Fidel Castro and the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization to request a prisoner exchange whereby the United States would release seventeen New Afrikans to Cuba in return for an equal number of “counter-revolutionaries now in Cuban jails.”<sup>194</sup> This letter utilized the body of international law to advance a spectacular demand, treating New Afrika as a Third World nation akin to Cuba. Organizations outside of prison also took it upon themselves to contact the United Nations at this time about the question of prisons in the United States. The National Council of Black Lawyers, the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, and the Commission on Racial Justice for the United Church of Christ filed a petition on December 11, 1978—the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Human Rights. The petition, given to the UN Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, detailed human rights violations in the incarceration of black, Puerto Rican, Chicano, and indigenous political dissidents. It also detailed government misconduct against these social movements, which had been recently reported through the Church Committee hearings.<sup>195</sup>

These petitions also originated out of attempts to resurrect political protest through a strategic focus on black prisoners that established nodes of prisoner communication. Beginning in 1976, San Quentin prisoner Jalil Muntaqim also initiated a prisoner petition to the UN from San Quentin. With outside organizations facilitating the

communication, this effort gathered 2,500 signatures from prisoners across the country. Muntaqim, one of the former Panthers to declare himself a New Afrikan, remembers there being adherents in twenty-five states across the country as well as some support internationally. This petition called for an international investigation into American prisons as sites of discrimination and genocide. But this support meant little more than verbal or written affirmation by prisoners; they were not actively involved in conceiving the campaign, although some did mobilize to help it succeed. In New Jersey, for instance, a group of prisoners established themselves as the August 21 Prisoners Human Rights Coalition.<sup>196</sup> Even if the petition did not prove to be an effective weapon in drawing negative attention to practices of U.S. imprisonment, the campaign served vital communicative means. It put prisoners in contact with one another, even if of necessity mediated through organizations such as PFOC and the United Prisoners Union (a splinter group of the Prisoners Union, which adhered to the prison-slavery position). These contacts proved critical to establishing the distribution networks for prisoner media, such as *Arm the Spirit*.

This communication among prisoners, while mediated by outside groups, was one way the petition was used to rebuild a lagging and fragmented black protest movement. Muntaqim asked Sundiata Acoli, another former Panther turned New Afrikan, who was then imprisoned in New Jersey, to initiate a protest in New York. This request served multiple purposes: it brought additional individuals into what had until then been Muntaqim's plan and, through involving a high-profile BLA prisoner on the east coast, presented the campaign as the unified expression of black prison radicalism. Acoli called for a protest at the State Building in Harlem through a coalition of nationalist-oriented

groups. These groups tried to coalesce under the auspices of a “National Prison Organization” that could do community organizing around prison issues and prisoner organizing around dynamics in communities outside. This effort, however, quickly shattered.<sup>197</sup>

Networks of communication also provided the basis for why the issues motivating the petition garnered some international attention, even if the petition itself did not. According to Muntaqim, a reporter for the French socialist newspaper *Le Matin* asked prison activists in the United States how he could help their campaign. Muntaqim suggested to the reporter, via intermediaries, that he ask U.S. Ambassador to the UN Andrew Young if there were political prisoners in the United States.<sup>198</sup> Young, the first African American to hold that post and a veteran of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, answered that “there are hundreds, perhaps even thousands of people I would call political prisoners.” Although he did not name any particular individuals, Young’s comments, delivered in France in the context of a discussion about the jailing of Soviet dissidents, provoked fierce response. Democratic Georgia Congressman Larry McDonald brought a resolution to the House calling for Young’s impeachment. Though it was roundly defeated (293-82), Young was widely criticized and apologized for his remark. He was eventually forced to resign after other such public relations blunders.<sup>199</sup>

From the international to the local, efforts at prison visibility in the late 1970s emanated from two divergent needs. On the one hand, some people hoped that prison, having been established as a mnemonic of racial violence, might serve to revitalize black protest. On the other hand, worsening conditions inside accompanied the response to the riots that had broken out in so many institutions earlier in the decade. An economic

downturn and a growing climate of law and order led to overcrowding in many prisons across the country. Additionally, the removal of educational programs, the use of prison-wide “lockdowns,” and the spread of isolation units further atomized and frustrated prisoners.<sup>200</sup> These factors fostered more prison violence, yet these new conflagrations displayed less political overtones and therefore tended to be less threatening to the institution itself. In both California and New York, black prisoners faced growing violence from Nazi gangs in prison. In New York, prisoners discovered that several guards at Napanoch prison were active members of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>201</sup> Beginning in 1977, and a part of Muntaqim’s appeal to the United Nations, demonstrations held at the gates of San Quentin sought publicity as a buffer between black prisoners and white violence. In protesting, these activists wanted not only to add their voice to the grievances compiled but to provide a mechanism for prisoners’ voices to be heard. The demonstrators petitioned that the prisoners’ demands be met, which included giving prisoners access to media through which they could expose prison conditions. George Jackson remained a visible figure in the effort to build prison organizing, embraced both by prisoners and activists outside. Demonstrators used the specter of Jackson’s life and death as demonstrative of prisoners’ potential to be eloquent spokesmen on their own behalf. In 1977 and 1978 the protests were held on or near August 21, and the organization sponsoring the march called itself the August 21 Coalition.<sup>202</sup>

Drawing attention to these conditions once again required making specific grievances visible in the context of a systemic critique of imprisonment. In California these efforts extended beyond the media production to the visible display of voluntary asceticism and personal discipline. Prisoners sought visibility for a ritual they had

invented, and in so doing wanted to make visible, as Daphne Brooks would have it, their bodies in dissent. Brooks described how black performers in the nineteenth century turned “alienation into self-actualizing performance.”<sup>203</sup> Similarly, black prisoners took the deprivation embedded in confinement and redirected it toward a performance of radical restraint in the face of structured violence. Slavery once again proved the modality through which prisoners attempted to draw attention to their conditions of violence. But now, prisoners did not use slavery just to name the system of imprisonment. Rather, they invoked slavery as a memory of injustice that informed their current practices of self-discipline and dignified autonomy.

These practices coalesced through an invented tradition called Black August. This prisoner-initiated holiday began in San Quentin by the Black Guerrilla Family (BGF) but spread throughout the California penal system as a way to commemorate the relatively recent history of prison radicalism alongside the long history slave rebellions. As with other invented traditions, Black August sought to “inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”<sup>204</sup> During the month of August, dozens of black prisoners refused food and water before sundown, did not utilize the prison canteen, eschewed drugs and conceited behavior, and boycotted radio and television. Instead of partaking in the privileges offered by the prison system, these prisoners initiated a month-long program of intensive physical exercise and political study. They wore black armbands to mark their participation in the protest. Prisoners used their self-sacrifice to gain additional attention to their standing demands against the death penalty, for a moratorium on prison construction, and in support of prisoners facing charges for riots. The first Black August was held in 1979, although it

built on the demonstrations against prison violence held in the previous two years. The August 21 Coalition organized a protest and rally at the gates of San Quentin on August 25 in solidarity with the contemplative protest happening inside.<sup>205</sup>

Tactically, Black August represented a return to some of the actions that marked the visible rise of prison protest within California—specifically, the August 1968 strike at San Quentin, where prisoners boycotted voluntary activities on the weekend to demonstrate their collectivity without courting violent retaliation from the guards. As with the earlier demonstration, Black August crafted a protest that could be expressive and pedagogical without violating prison rules. It was therefore a strategic way to demonstrate collective discontent without risking harsh sanctions. Within the confines of total institutions, such protest strategies of necessity required an ascetic self-discipline. This self-discipline, in its explicit declaration, was performed in a way that outwardly juxtaposed itself against the interiority of penal discipline. However, Black August differed from the earlier demonstration in several ways. Black August was not just a protest but a nationalist ritual. Organized as a period of commemoration, Black August was a decidedly racial protest. Black August articulated prison as a site of racial formation, domination, and resistance. Prisoners used their disciplinary rituals in hopes of developing greater unity between themselves and black and white activists on the outside. It is not surprising, then, that the solidarity prisoners received expressed itself in communal terms. “Prisons, for our people, represent, though sometimes difficult to view and accept, and unpleasant but real extension of the community,” declared a flyer distributed at the gates of San Quentin during Black August. “And as prisons represent a real part of our community, it is *criminal* for anyone to attempt to separate us from our

loved ones in prison, and it is also *unforgivable* for us to allow ourselves to be separated” (emphasis in original).<sup>206</sup>

The biggest difference between Black August and earlier efforts is the former’s nationalist goals. Black August was an effort to build prison radicalism as a nationalist program through making prisoner rituals visible. In that, it built on the Black Solidarity Day that prisoners in Auburn, New York, held on November 2, 1970.<sup>207</sup> Black August sounded a call of self-reliance, a theme typical of nationalist movements. Black August was not the first demonstration of New Afrikan self-reliance. The RNA’s titled its 1972 legislative platform for solving internal colonialism the “Anti-Depression Program.” Even while focused on systemic issues of securing sovereignty and reparations, and even while presenting itself in the form of a treaty between nations, the document nonetheless called for self-reliance against the psychic wounds of colonialism.<sup>208</sup> In prison, nationalists identified self-reliance as vital to forward motion in the late 1970s. “We begin with ourselves, with study and practice” Atiba Shanna wrote in his outline for rebuilding the prison movement.<sup>209</sup> Shanna and Black August organizers both identified self-reliance through political study, ascetic regimen, and collective discipline. They juxtaposed these personal practices against the disembodied nature of prison life. The ritual aimed to reject the colonizing elements of prison life by eschewing even its mundane privileges: media usage and the prison canteen. Recognizing that prison altered the bodily practices and conceptual orientation of its captives, black prison radicals attempted to gain control of their bodies in pursuit of revolutionary nationalist ends. Self-reliance was an attempt to reclaim initiative in a time of growing repression, within prisons and with the growth of new prisons. Although prison organizers declared self-

reliance as a necessary practice from the individual to the collective, the attendant visibility they sought was a collective enterprise that required outside supporters for its success.

Black August was a solemn celebration of resistance against centuries of racial confinement. As with other holidays, Black August drew its analytic power from collective memory. In invoking memories of slavery and death, Black August turned the places of racial confinement into what Pierre Nora termed *lieux de mémoire*—sites of memory.<sup>210</sup> Prisoners pointed to August as a time of great symbolic importance for slaves and their descendants: they marked the month that yielded slave revolts by Nat Turner (1830) and Jonathan Jackson (1970), and they honored the death of martyred prison-slaves George Jackson, William Christmas, James McClain, and Khatari Gauden. (Gauden was a comrade of Jackson's and a leading figure in the prison military formation Jackson started, the Black Guerrilla Family. A part of the planning for what would become Black August, Gauden died in the San Quentin infirmary on August 1, 1978. The BGF then initiated Black August.) Black August consciously collapsed distinctions between slaves of the early nineteenth century and prisoners of the late twentieth century. Consigning all such icons to the pantheon of heroic martyrs, Black August was an exercise in nationalist visibility. Slavery provided the historical memory, while prison served as the present space of racial subjugation. In this schema nationalism emerged as the future possibility of racial redemption, accomplished through a program of self-reliance and study. Black August was an attempt to showcase the leadership of black prisoners in the shifting political climate of the late 1970s. Unlike earlier in the decade, this leadership was not established through violent action or direct confrontation.



It was demonstrated through initiating a holiday, basing it in discipline and self-restraint, and seeking public support for a holiday whose rituals could only be described but not seen. In its asceticism, Black August depicted black prisoners as exhibiting an inner strength that could withstand the prison's attempt to colonize the soul and enslave the body. By making this inner strength visible to outside supporters, prisoners hoped that their rituals would demonstrate their persistence amidst the shadows of law and order.

As a ritual based on memory which developed in prison, there is little archival material about Black August. Yet as its origins have moved into the historical record, its existence has now itself become a mnemonic of prison resistance in the 1970s. Black August continues to be celebrated by prisoners in different parts of the country, but it has also taken on a life of its own. Since 1998, Black August has been the name of an international hip-hop festival. It remains a cultural event with explicitly political demands, including the freedom of black political prisoners. Black August practitioners, in and out of prison, have identified several additional dates of black resistance that have occurred during the month, over the course for three centuries.<sup>211</sup> George and Jonathan Jackson, Khatari Gaulden, and Ruchell Magee remain symbolic figures within the concerts. Black August was also the title of a 2006 independent film about George Jackson, based on Gregory Armstrong's book, *The Dragon Has Come*.

### Slaves and Shadows

Slavery was central to the production of the American nation-state and its political economy as a racial regime. It structured the formation of citizenship and its exclusions. Since the abolition of its chattel variant, slavery has been equally central in the

reproduction of meaning within and against the American nation-state. The rigid hierarchies and crass exploitation of racial slavery has informed black critique of U.S. society. For some whose ancestors worked the fields, the continuation of bondage and racialized mechanisms of punishment demonstrated that slavery was an ongoing reality, a social system embedded in the fabric and functioning of the United States. This critique of slavery's continuation has animated black critique since the fall of Reconstruction. It picked up steam in the wake of the civil rights movement, when the dismantling of segregation failed to eliminate the white supremacy that took place through the often private channels of incarceration. While chattel slavery made black bodies visible through their subservience, the slavery of imprisonment rested on invisibility. The enforced silence of shadows was a heavy burden of bondage that its victims understood as a form of state-sanctioned social death: slavery. Yet unlike their ancestors held in the bondage of chattel, whose imprisonment was widely acknowledged, black prisoners *had to prove* that they were slaves. They sought visibility not just to fight slavery but to show that it existed. Their efforts at visibility were at once attempts to render their conditions public and declarations of a collective identity. That identity was first named as one of enslavement, but it increasingly turned from identifying oppression into affirming national identity. The invisibility of prison, which grew throughout the decade, became added proof of its enslavement.

Prisoners attempted to document and subvert their enslavement through diverse means. Central to these efforts, whether embodied or mediated, were attempts at self-representation. Prisoners tried to speak for themselves, in court and from their cells. These representational efforts were often slanted toward masculinist constructions by

equating self-representation with masculine dignity and the presumption of heroic male leadership. As the structures of feeling tilted toward law and order, media became the premier venue where prisoners controlled their representations. These media efforts facilitated greater connections among prisoners across the country and between prisoners and outside activists. Prisoners used media to communicate among themselves and with those outside in pursuit of a shared political framework. Through articulations of nationalism, black prisoners traced a lineage of racialized punishment stretching from chattel slavery to incarceration, and they identified nationalism as a political solution to the ordeal of imprisonment. Such identifications rested on the global circulations of slavery's enduring impact through the form of anticolonialism that utilized the United Nations as an expression of international visibility. These media ultimately included rituals of self-reliance as a way to demonstrate a narrative of uninterrupted slave resistance that stretched into the present.

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- <sup>1</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 65.
- <sup>2</sup> Sundiata Acoli, *Sunviews* (Newark: Creative Images, 1983), p. 33.
- <sup>3</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), p. 15. See also Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 222-237.
- <sup>4</sup> Francesca Poletta and James M. Jasper, "Collective Identity and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001), p. 289.
- <sup>5</sup> Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 3.
- <sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 255.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf., Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 7; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon, 2002).
- <sup>8</sup> Howard Winant, *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 84. Winant's argument builds on the analysis advanced by Orlando Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
- <sup>9</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 350.
- <sup>10</sup> George Jackson, *Blood In My Eye* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 7. Prison abolition and revolution against the state are not necessarily mutually exclusive; my point here is to argue that the framing of prison radicalism, its discourses and strategies, proceeded more through "revolution" than "abolition." The abolitionist current within 1970s prison radicalism, therefore, feeds and influences current expressions but can only be seen as an uneven and indirect precursor. For an overview, see Liz Samuels, "Improvising on Reality: The Development of Prison Abolitionist Praxis," in Dan Berger, ed., *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, forthcoming).
- <sup>11</sup> Arguably the best overviews of these (post)slavery political expressions can be found respectively in Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; and Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*.
- <sup>12</sup> This is the name of an article printed in Joy James, ed., *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 74-95.
- <sup>13</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, p. 4.
- <sup>14</sup> Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1988 [1974]), p. 250.
- <sup>15</sup> The lawyer was specifically referring to the state of California's prodigious efforts to extradite Davis from New York City, where she was arrested in October 1970, to California. Davis was extradited less than two months after her arrest; the proceeding can take a year or more. See Diane and Gary Laison, "Angela Davis 'Prosecuted Like Fugitive Slave,'" in *Philadelphia Tribune* August 14, 1971, p. 5. The Palo Alto Angela Davis Defense Committee printed the following quote from Davis: "Let me ask this question. When a slave who managed to escape from the whips and wheels of the white slave master fled to another state, was this evidence of his guilt? ... I fled because I was convinced that there was little likelihood that I would get justice in California." *Her Fight is Our Fight* March 1972, number 1, p. 2.
- <sup>16</sup> Ruchell Magee, letter to Robert Treuhaft and Jessica Mitford, March 5, 1971, in Jessica Mitford Papers, Series III: Kind and Usual Punishment, 1963-1973 (hereafter JMP), Box 48, Folder 9, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. On the role of the fugitive condition in prison radicalism, see Michael Hames-Garcia, *Fugitive Thought: Prison Movements, Race, and the Meaning of Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
- <sup>17</sup> Such a political usage of the courtroom is familiar to political movements, especially ones that society has outlawed. For examples from the United States, see Rebecca N. Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law: Anti-*

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*Lynching and Labor Defense in U.S. Radical History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For an example from South Africa, see Fran Lisa Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Arkansas was central to the exposure of abuse in Southern prisons in the late 1960s. Governor Winthrop Rockefeller hired Tom Murton, a former criminology professor, to overhaul the state's prison system after reports of official neglect inside. Murton continued to publicize this violence, bringing a crew of reporters with him to dig up three bodies of prisoners who had been killed and buried on the grounds of Tucker prison. He was fired for this action but wrote a memoir describing the conditions in Arkansas. Thompson argues that this focus on prison barbarism as distinctly Southern obscured that similar conditions existed in prisons across the country. See Thomas Murton, *Accomplices to the Crime: The Arkansas Prison Scandal* (New York: Grove Press, 1970); and Heather Ann Thompson, "Blinded by a 'Barbaric' South: Prison Horrors, Inmate Abuse, and the Ironic History of American Penal Reform," in Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 74-95.

<sup>19</sup> Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), p. 207. See also Donna Murch, "The Campus and the Street: Race, Migration, and the Origins of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, CA," *SOULS* 9:4 (2007), 333-345. For more on the Lowndes County Black Panther Party, see Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Dennis Hevesi, "Huey Newton Symbolized the Rising Black Anger of a Generation," *New York Times*, August 23, 1989, p. B7; John Kifner, "Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther who Became GOP Conservative, is Dead at 62," *New York Times*, May 2, 1998, p. B8.

<sup>21</sup> Min S. Yee, *The Melancholy History of Soledad Prison* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1973), pp. 130-131.

<sup>22</sup> Lori Andrews, *Black Power, White Blood: The Life and Times of Johnny Spain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996); *The San Quentin Six* pamphlet (no author, circa 1974), pp. 6-7, in Raúl R. Salinas Papers (hereafter RRS), Box 7, Folder 12, Green Library, Stanford University. As the title of Andrews' book makes clear, Spain's mixed race background has been particularly tantalizing to journalistic observers. In his true-crime book about the day Jackson was killed, Clark Howard writes that Spain's background made him an "alien" consumed with anger. See Clark Howard, *American Saturday* (New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1981). For a critique of this discourse of racial mixture and hybridity, and the transition to its current expression in the form of multiculturalism, see Michael Hanchard *Party/Politics: Horizons in Black Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), and Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> For the racial politics of Los Angeles, see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990); Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (New York: De Capo Press, 1997), pp. 3-43; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California, 2006); Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> For an excellent study of the spatial politics of imprisonment, using California as its laboratory, see Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 99-102.

<sup>26</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 132.

<sup>27</sup> Steven Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 108. These historians, writes Hahn, include several labor and Marxist-influenced historians, such as John Blassingame, Eugene Genovese, Herbert Gutman, Lawrence Levine, Nathan Huggins, and Leon Litwack, among others.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, the Weather Underground reprinted parts of the speech in its clandestine magazine *Osawatomie* volume 2, no. 2 (June – July 1976), pp. 14-15. The group used Douglass's speech particularly to refer to white violence against black people in Boston, done in protest against busing. More generally on the contentions marking the bicentennial, see Christopher Capozzola, "It Makes You Want to Believe in

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the Country': Celebrating the Bicentennial in an Age of Limits," in Beth Bailey and David Farber, eds., *America in the 1970s* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), pp. 29-49.

<sup>29</sup> Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1976); Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), pp. 155-156.

<sup>30</sup> Lester D. Friedman, "Introduction: Movies and the 1970s," in Lester D. Friedman, ed., *American Cinema in the 1970s: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, pp. 155-156; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, "Introduction," in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 6. Of course, "the South" is a geopolitical abstraction rife with its contradictions and struggles over meaning. Cf., W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Revised Edition) (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> John Hayes, "Man of Sorrow at Folsom," *Radical History Review* 98 (2007), p. 130.

<sup>35</sup> Angela Y. Davis, "Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition," in Joy James, ed., *Angela Y. Davis Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), pp. 98-100. Christianson, for instance, begins his history of American imprisonment with Christopher Columbus and the "rise of the prisoner trade." Scott Christianson, *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Rebecca M. McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Loic Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Cf., Emanuel Perlmutter, "Prisoners Union Formed upstate," *New York Times*, February 28, 1972, p. 1; and Everett R. Hulles, "Convicts Seek to Form a National Union," *New York Times*, September 26, 1971.

<sup>38</sup> See Jamie Bissonette, *When the Prisoners Ran Walpole: A True Story in the Movement for Prison Abolition* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2008). More generally, see Ronald Berkman, *Opening the Gates: The Rise of the Prisoners' Movement* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1979); John Irwin, *Prisons in Turmoil* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980) and Daniel Burton-Rose, "War Behind Walls: Work Strikes and Prisoner Self-Organization in U.S. Prisons, 1967-1976" (B.A. thesis, Oberlin College, 1998).

<sup>39</sup> John Irwin and Willie Holder, "History of the Prisoners' Union," *The Outlaw* 2: 1 (Jan-Feb 1973), p. 1. The "Folsom Prisoners Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Oppression Platform" is reprinted in Angela Y. Davis (ed.), *If They Come in the Morning* (New York: Signet, 1971) pp. 65-74.

<sup>40</sup> See "Goals of the Prisoners' Union," document (circa 1972), in United Prisoners Union vertical file, Freedom Archives.

<sup>41</sup> Willie Holder "To Persons Interested in Prisoner Organizations," March 7, 1973 memo, in JMP, Box 40, Folder 3.

<sup>42</sup> For instance, a United Prisoners Union broadside urged unionization in a Marxist idiom against slavery: "Prisoners UNITE, or what have you to lose but your chains!!! Slaves of the state, RISE UP!" in United Prisoners Union, vertical file, Freedom Archives.

<sup>43</sup> Such expressions were common features of Prisoner Union publications. See, for instance, *The Anvil*, newspaper of the California Prisoners' Union, and *The Outlaw*, newspaper of the Prisoners' Union.

<sup>44</sup> The Prisoners' Union, in fact, declared "that society has a right to punish persons for law violations, but we submit that this punishment should be spread evenly among the largest number of law violators as possible and not heaped upon a few. Moreover we accept incarceration for reasonable periods as punishment, but only after conviction"; from "Goals of the Prisoners' Union," in United Prisoners Union vertical file, Freedom Archives.

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<sup>45</sup> Ossie Davis, "Preface," in William L. Patterson, *We Charge Genocide* (New York: International Publisher, 1970).

<sup>46</sup> Prison labor remained an important issue, at the time and all the more so since the post-1970s spike in incarceration has coincided with the growth of private prisons and the corporate use of prison labor. Yet even with a greater number of workers locked up and a greater number of prisoners laboring, the primary purpose of confinement is repression not profit. For a critique of an overly economics-oriented argument to prison labor, see Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 211-244. For a discussion of the significance of prison labor, see Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Decline, Crisis, and Transformation in Postwar American History," unpublished manuscript in author's files.

<sup>47</sup> Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal," in Joy James, ed., *Warfare in the American Homeland: Policing and Prisons in a Penal Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p.28.

<sup>48</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> This discussion builds on Rodríguez's discussion of the prison regime in *Forced Passages*. For slavery as a national phenomenon, one that reached beyond the plantation and extended past emancipation, see Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* as well as Hahn's discussion of "slaves at large," in which he cast the U.S. North as a maroon society—located within the slave system but with outposts of black freedom. See Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*, pp. 1-54. Rhetorically, Malcolm X made a similar point when he admonished his audience to "stop talking about the South. As long as you're South of the Canadian border, you're South." See, for instance, "Black Nationalism Can Set Us Free," <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/malcolm-x/we-have-no-freedom.mp3>.

<sup>50</sup> This distinction between "political prisoners" and "social prisoners" was, and remains, a controversial one among prison activists. Those who reject the division argue that politics is deeply enmeshed in any act of crime or punishment, that international law is an insufficient metric for evaluating prisoners' actions, and that distinguishing among prisoners sets up unnecessary hierarchies and reifications. The political leadership and visibility of figures such as George Jackson, who was not a political activist prior to his incarceration, further blurred the lines among many prison activists. See, for instance, Rodríguez, *Forced Passage*, pp. 3-10; Michel Foucault, "Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview," *Telos* no. 19 (spring 1974), p. 160.

<sup>51</sup> No author, *Voices from Inside: 7 Interviews with Attica Prisoners* (April 1972), p. 38, in *Voices from Inside* vertical file, Tamiment Collection, New York University.

<sup>52</sup> In a similar, if more theoretical, way as Jackson, Foucault troubled the possibilities of prison "reform" or "alternatives." See, for example, Michel Foucault, "Alternatives to the Prison: Dissemination or Decline of Social Control?" *Theory, Culture & Society* 26: 6 (2009), pp. 12-24; and Michel Foucault, ed. by Colin Gordon, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp. 1-55. Foucault's concern with the limitations of prison "reform" undoubtedly extend from his involvement with the Maoist-leaning anti-prison Groupe d'information sur les Prisons. See Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), pp. 45-103. For a seminal account of early abolitionist thought in Norway, see Thomas Mathiesen, *The Politics of Abolition* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974); for a critique of its ignorance of race, see Angela Y. Davis, "Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition," in Joy James, ed., *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), pp. 96-107.

<sup>53</sup> The contemporary prison abolitionist group Critical Resistance issued a reprint of the book in 2005; while the group included a new introduction, the rest of the text remains unchanged. Under the direction of Fay Honey Knopp, one of its founding members and a primary author of *Instead of Prisons*, PREAP became the Safer Society Program, an organization dedicated to preventing and addressing sexual abuse through models of restorative justice.

<sup>54</sup> For instance, "tear down the walls" was the theme of the 1972 Prison Action Conference held in Berkeley. "War Behind Walls" broadsheet and "The Struggle Inside" pamphlet, both in author's files courtesy of Tony Platt. The National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression participated in coalitions with churches advocating moratoriums on prison construction. See National Alliance Against

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Racism [sic] and Political Repression Records (hereafter NAARPR), Box 1, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

<sup>55</sup> George L. Jackson, *Blood in my Eye* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1990 [1972]), p. 118.

<sup>56</sup> Samuel Jordan, "Prison Reform: In Whose Interest?" *Criminal Law Bulletin*, volume 7, no. 9 (November 1971), p. 786.

<sup>57</sup> Jessica Mitford, *Kind and Usual Punishment: The Prison Business* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 274-325. Mitford noted that the timing was crucial: both Waskow and Clark raised the call for abolition, with credibility if also confusion, in light of George Jackson's death and the deaths at Attica. Waskow's initial proposal celebrated the civil disobedience of white, primarily antiwar youth as the natural base for a campaign to abolish jails. In private correspondence, Mitford challenged Waskow on two points, pointing out first that prisons incarcerated more people than jails (and that an ethically honest abolitionism would need to remove both institutions), and that black radicalism was far more at the root of prison radicalism than "white intellectuals [and] civil disobedients." The revised version of his proposal appeared in *The Saturday Review* on January 8, 1972. Mitford still called it a false expression of abolitionism, for it still relied on caging people. Likewise, Mitford called Ramsey Clark's take on abolition, printed in his best-selling book *Crime in America*, "shallow and erroneous." See Jessica Mitford, July 20, 1971, and July 21, 1971, letters to Arthur Waskow, in JMP, Box 40, Folder 2.

<sup>58</sup> For more recent explications of this position, see Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006) and Joy James, "Introduction: Democracy and Captivity" in Joy James, ed., *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. xxi-xlii. For a critique of Jackson's ability to "recall" the Middle Passage and chattel slavery, see Robert Reid-Pharr, *Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire, and the Black American Intellectual* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), pp. 127-128.

<sup>59</sup> George L. Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994 [1970]), p. 233.

<sup>60</sup> Jackson, *Blood in my Eye*, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Rodney, "George Jackson: Black Revolutionary" November 1971, reprinted in *History is a Weapon*, <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/rodneyjackson.html>. (Consulted March 19, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> In his memoir, for instance, Robert Hillary King writes "I was born in the U.S.A. Born black, born poor. Is it then any wonder that I have spent most of my life in prison?" See King, *From the Bottom of the Heap* (Oakland: PM Press, 2008), p. 25. King, who also joined the Black Panther Party while in prison, wrote the book after serving thirty-one years in Angola prison, all but two of them in solitary confinement. He was released in 2001 when the government acknowledged his innocence in the death of a prison guard, which had been the justification for his ongoing incarceration and being placed in isolation.

<sup>63</sup> Fleeta Drumgo, quoted in "Interviews with the Soledad Brothers" audio file PM 058, Freedom Archives.

<sup>64</sup> "Tape on Ruchell Magee," flyer by Students for a Democratic Society, circa 1972, in New Left Collection (hereafter NLC), Box 56, Folder: Black Panther Party, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

<sup>65</sup> "Iron Box: The Prison Life and Death of George Jackson" audio file PM 023, Freedom Archives; originally a BBC program, aired on KPFA.

<sup>66</sup> Rebecca Hill argues that Jackson's *Soledad Brother* "inspired the young Michel Foucault to think about the relationship of the reform of the soul to the maintenance of power." See Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, p. 296. She also points out that Jackson's description of prison as a microcosm for social and political inequality have a long tradition; where Jackson differs is his naming of that inequality as racialized slavery rather than a colorblind capitalism. Black feminist theorists Joy James and Angela Davis have, in a similar vein, criticized Foucault for ignoring race in his discussion of prison. Doing so, they argue, misses vital elements of how prison functions and exerts control. See Joy James, *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender and Race in U.S. Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 24-43; Angela Y. Davis, "Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition," in Joy James, ed., *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), pp. 96-107.

<sup>67</sup> A Soledad Brothers Defense Fund pamphlet, circa 1970, discussed the California criminal justice system as a new peculiar institution, making explicit reference to slavery. See *Soledad Brothers*, p. 7, in NLC, Box



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57, Folder: Black Power. For a contemporary analysis of prison as a peculiar institution, see Loic Wacquant, "The New 'Peculiar Institution': On the Prison as Surrogate Ghetto," *Theoretical Criminology* 4: 3 (2000), pp. 377-389.

<sup>68</sup> See Akinshiju, "the Blkprisoner [sic]: criminal or political prisoner [?]" in *Black Pride*, March 23, 1972, p. 3, in JMP, Box 56, Folder 3.

<sup>69</sup> For an exception within the Black Power movement, see Huey Newton, "The Black Panthers," *Ebony* August 1969, pp. 106-112. In that article, Newton describes the Panthers' goal as freeing all of humanity from slavery. Prisoner unionists also often described all prisoners as slaves of the state.

<sup>70</sup> It appears, for instance, in the *Soledad Brothers* pamphlet, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> George Jackson, quoted in "Unknown Racist Trial in far off Salinas" *People's World*, March 28, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, p. 210.

<sup>73</sup> See for instance "Black On Vanguard," *Midnight Special* volume 3, no. 11 (November 1973), p. 15. The group claimed chapters in Ohio, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Wisconsin. As with adopting Swahili or Arabic names, such action-oriented articulations of black collectivity were common to late 1960s expressions of radicalism. In particular, as Brown shows, southern California's US organization chose its name "as a dual reference to the organization and the community its members pledged to serve: *us Blacks as opposed to 'them' Whites*" (emphasis in original). See Scot Brown, *Fighting for Us: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), p. 38.

<sup>74</sup> Black On Vanguards, Ohio and North Carolina, "I Have Seen America," *Midnight Special*, volume 3, no. 2 (February 1973), p. 8.

<sup>75</sup> Major notes, however, that black journalists and spectators abandoned this form of resistance when the verdict in Davis' trial was ready. Then, he writes, "we were up front." Reginald Major, *Justice in the Round: The Trial of Angela Davis* (New York: The Third Press, 1973), p. 290.

<sup>76</sup> *Harriet Tubman Prison Movement* pamphlet, circa 1973, in Tony Platt, private collection.

<sup>77</sup> The statement is reprinted in Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983 [1981]), pp. 210-218. More generally on black feminism, see Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>78</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, "Wither Thou Goest," *Esquire Magazine* July 1972, pp. 86-88, 92, 174-176.

<sup>79</sup> For Magee's background, see Major, *Justice in the Round*, pp. 77-122. See also Sol Stern, "The Campaign to Free Angela Davis and Ruchell Magee," *New York Times Magazine*, June 27, 1971; Black Mothers United For Action flyer "Who is Ruchell Magee? Cinque" circa 1971, Angela Davis Legal Defense Fund (hereafter ADLD), Box 2, Folder 7, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. More generally on the phenomenon of prisoners who become self-taught legal mavens, see Mumia Abu-Jamal, *Jailhouse Lawyers: Prisoners Defending Prisoners v. the U.S.A.* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2009).

<sup>80</sup> Noting that they both had a gold-capped tooth, Rosenbaum intimates that Magee may have been responsible for the attack himself, rather than McLain. See Rosenbaum, "Wither Thou Goest," *Esquire Magazine*, p. 176.

<sup>81</sup> Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, pp. 180-182; Prison Solidarity Committee, *From Soledad to San Quentin* (San Francisco: n.d., circa 1972), p. 5, in Tony Platt, private collection; Major, *Justice in the Round*, p.88; anonymous, "1970," p. 15, in ADLD, Box 6, Folder 3; Alexandra Close, "The Trial of Ruchell Magee," p. 5. Other prisoners involved in this effort around Billingslea included David Johnson, Luis Talamantez and Willie Tate (all later defendants in the San Quentin Six case), and Jeffrey Khatari Gaulden (part of the Black Guerrilla Family, later died in prison). See "The San Quentin Six" flyer in San Quentin Six Legal Defense Fund vertical file, Tamiment Library, New York University.

<sup>82</sup> While no one, himself included, disputes that Magee immediately joined the raid, his precise role in it was described in dramatically different terms. Yee, quoting two witnesses from the courthouse, writes that Magee "spoke gently" and was the most restrained, convincing his associates not to take the couple and their young baby hostage. See Yee, *Melancholy History of Soledad Prison*, p. 159. Other accounts, including witness testimony in court, attribute this restraint to James McClain. See *FrameUp* volume 1,

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number 7 (March 31, 1972), p. 4, in Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute Collection (hereafter MCLI), Carton 37, Folder: Section XII, Docs. 30-36, Public Relations, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>83</sup> In July 1969 FBI informant William Divale, working covertly in the Communist Party, wrote that the University of California was employing a Communist. Ed Montgomery of the *San Francisco Examiner* unmasked Davis as the person in question. Aware of this controversy, as well as Davis' prison activism, Ruchell Magee wrote to Davis via her lawyer, claiming to have details of a high-level conspiracy against her. See Magee, July 3, 1970, to John McTernan, in MCLI, Carton 37, Folder: Section VI, Doc. 3, Items Turned Over in Discovery, People vs. Angela Y. Davis, pp. 404-504.

<sup>84</sup> See Major, *Justice in the Round* and Sol Stern, "The Campaign to Free Angela Davis and Ruchell Magee," *New York Times Magazine*, June 27, 1971. In a letter to Huey Newton from jail, Davis complained that the media were denying her support of Magee. See April 3, 1971, Angela Davis to Huey Newton, in Huey P. Newton Foundation (hereafter HPNF), Series 2, Box 41, Folder 15, Green Library, Stanford University.

<sup>85</sup> Major, *Justice in the Round*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>86</sup> *By Any Means Necessary* (circa 1970), Eldridge Cleaver Papers (hereafter ECP), Carton 4, Folder 21, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>87</sup> Ruchell Magee, letter to Robert Treuhaft and Jessica Mitford, March 5, 1971, in JMP, Box 48, Folder 9.

<sup>88</sup> Untitled pamphlet for Ruchell Magee, circa November 1972, in Tony Platt, private collection.

<sup>89</sup> Edward W. Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* [edited by Gauri Viswanathan] (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001), p. 41.

<sup>90</sup> Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). For a journalistic assessment of Magee's interruption as a response to slavery, see Nicholas Von Hoffman, "Magee and the Law Factory," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 23, 1971, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Untitled pamphlet for Ruchell Magee, circa November 1972, in Tony Platt, private collection.

<sup>92</sup> "Tape on Ruchell Magee," flyer by Students for a Democratic Society, circa 1972, in NLC, Box 56, Folder: Black Panther Party.

<sup>93</sup> For more on Amistad and its aftermath, see Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>94</sup> Cinque (Ruchell Magee), *The Barbarian Conspirators*, pamphlet circa 1972, p. 7, Ruchell Magee vertical file, Tamiment Collection, NYU.

<sup>95</sup> Ruchell Magee, "Letter to Angela Y. Davis," in Angela Y. Davis, ed., *If they Come in the Morning* (New York: Signet, 1971), p. 177.

<sup>96</sup> Major, *Justice in the Round*, pp. 77-122; Cinque (Ruchell Magee), *The Barbarian Conspirators*, p. 9. Davis lead attorney Howard Moore was one of the attorneys who argued for this strategy in 1967-8 in the South, and Moore defended Julian Bond in his effort to be seated in the Georgia legislature after winning an election.

<sup>97</sup> March 1, 1973, press release, "Dr. Kenneth B. Clark Testifies for Ruchell Magee," Ruchell Magee National Defense Campaign vertical file, Tamiment Collection, NYU.

<sup>98</sup> Untitled pamphlet for Ruchell Magee, circa November 1972, in Tony Platt, private collection.

<sup>99</sup> See "Notes to and from the Press," in NLC, Box 58, Folder: Ruchell Magee; and Ruchell Magee, "Wake Up Oppressed People (Open Address to the President)" by the San Francisco Venceremos Study Group (San Francisco, 1972), in NLC, Box 58, Folder: Ruchell Magee. Begun as a study group emphasizing prison issues, members of Venceremos were accused of participating in helping a prisoner escape from Chino. The prisoner had presented himself as radical to outside supporters, although when the escape failed he cooperated with authorities in the prosecution of Venceremos activists. See Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, p. 147.

<sup>100</sup> Huey P. Newton Foundation papers, Series 2, Box 41, Folder 17.

<sup>101</sup> Ruchell Magee, "San Quentin Communique," *Midnight Special* 2:7 (September 1972), p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Siporin, "Nobody May Represent This Man," *People's Justice* volume 5, number 1, p. 13.

<sup>103</sup> Magee's trial did not begin until after Davis was acquitted, at which point the prosecutor dropped the conspiracy charge. His first trial, which lasted six months, ended in a mistrial after the jury voted to acquit on aggravated kidnapping and was deadlocked on the murder charge. As a result, the murder charge was

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dropped.” He eventually pleaded guilty to simple kidnap for the events of August 7 and was sentenced in January 1974 to life in prison, where he remains as of 2010. See *Midnight Special* volume 3, no. 6 (June 1973), p. 23; Bettina F. Aptheker, *Intimate Politics: How I Grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech, and Became a Feminist Rebel* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006), pp. 288-291.

<sup>104</sup> Major, *Justice in the Round*, p. 291.

<sup>105</sup> See Black Mothers United For Action press statement dated “July 30, 1071” [sic], in NLC, Box 58, Folder: Ruchell Magee.

<sup>106</sup> Alexandra Close, “The Trial of Ruchell Magee,” p. 3, in JMP, Box 49, Folder 6.

<sup>107</sup> Angela Y. Davis, “Notes for Arguments in Court on the Issue of Self-Representation,” in Angela Y. Davis et al., *If They Come in the Morning* (New York: Signet, 1971), p. 252.

<sup>108</sup> “Angela Davis Talks About Her Future and Her Freedom,” *JET*, July 27, 1972, p. 57; Margaret Burnham, “Ruchell and Angela Want to Represent Themselves,” in Angela Y. Davis et al., *If They Come in the Morning* (New York: Signet, 1971), p. 222.

<sup>109</sup> For an overview of the campaign in support of Davis, see Bettina Aptheker, *The Morning Breaks: The Trial of Angela Davis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997 [1975]).

<sup>110</sup> Major, *Justice in the Round*, p. 138; *Frame Up* #1, February 4, 1972, p. 1, from ADLD, Box 5, Folder 3.

<sup>111</sup> Behind the scenes, however, the circumstances of Davis’ case were controversial within the Communist Party, including differences over black militancy and prison visibility—the grounds on which she staked her claims. Davis, her associates in the Che-Lumumba Club, an all-black collective of Communists in Los Angeles, and some of the younger Communist militants described August 7 as a prisoners’ revolt akin to a slave rebellion (which is not to say that they necessarily endorsed it, as Magee and his supporters did). The Communist Party leadership, however, viewed August 7 as the desperate act of a foolhardy youth. It was caused by the system’s cruelty, stressed Communist Party Chairman Henry Winston, but it was a disastrous and misguided move by Jackson. Some in the Party, fearful of a McCarthyist reprise, wanted to distance or even expel Davis as a result of August 7. See Henry Winston, *The Meaning of San Rafael* (New York: New Outlook Publishers, 1971); Aptheker, *Intimate Politics*, p. 245.

<sup>112</sup> Aptheker, *Intimate Politics*, p. 246. This speech appeared in the leftist newsweekly *National Guardian* in October 1970.

<sup>113</sup> Joe Walker, “Angela Davis: What’s on her Mind?” *Muhammad Speaks*, January 1, 1971, reprinted as a pamphlet by the Committee to Free Angela Davis, in JMP, Box 49, Folder 6.

<sup>114</sup> Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 187.

<sup>115</sup> After making similarly prejudicial comments about Charles Manson and the My Lai massacre, Nixon conceded that he overstepped his bounds. See “Nixon Says He Erred on Defendants,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1970, p. A17; “President Admits Error in Commenting on Three Cases,” *The Modesto (Calif.) Bee*, December 11, 1970, p. 35; John Abt, “On the Defense of Angela Davis,” November 22, 1970 speech at the Unitarian Church in Los Angeles, in Social Protest Collection, Reel 21, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. For the use of media in nineteenth century slavery, see Christian Parenti, *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America From Slave Passes to the War on Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), pp. 13-32. More generally on the connections between legal regimes and photography, see John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>116</sup> James Baldwin, “An Open Letter to My Sister, Angela Y. Davis,” in *If They Come in the Morning*, p. 19.

<sup>117</sup> *Free Angela* newsletter number 23, pp. 1-2, in Social Protest Collection (hereafter SPC), Reel 21, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>118</sup> Dean Paul E. Miller, (Washington D.C.) *Sunday Star*, February 14, 1971; Milwaukee Committee to Free Angela Davis, *Free Angela Davis* circa 1970, in Angela Davis Vertical File, Tamiment Library, New York University; March 10, 1972, news release by the National United Committee to Free Angela Davis, in ADLD, Box 5, Folder 3; Stern, “The Campaign to Free Angela Davis and Ruchell Magee,” *New York Times Magazine*; Major, *Justice in the Round*, p. 105; Aptheker, *Intimate Politics*, p. 250.

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<sup>119</sup> The body has long been a site of evidence. See Barbie Zelizer, “From the Body as Evidence to the Body of Evidence,” in Katharine Young, ed., *Bodylore* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press and the Publications of the American Folklore Society, 1993), pp. 225-244.

<sup>120</sup> Seven folders of hate letters that Davis received after revelation of her membership in the Communist Party can be found in MCLI, Carton 39.

<sup>121</sup> Cf., Linda Charlton, “FBI Seizes Angela Davis in Motel Here,” *New York Times*, October 14, 1970, p. 1; “Personality: The Fugitive,” *TIME*, August 31, 1970 (available <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,876780-1,00.html>); “Can California Convict Angela Davis? Long, Costly Battle Ahead,” *Afro-American* [Baltimore], October 24, 1970, pp. 1-2; *Angela Davis—Like it is* (New York: Folkways Records, 1971) in Angela Davis vertical file, Freedom Archives.

<sup>122</sup> Aptheker, *Intimate Politics*, p. 271.

<sup>123</sup> Major, *Justice in the Round*, pp. 231-232.

<sup>124</sup> Angela Y. Davis, “Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia,” in Joy James, ed., *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), p. 276.

<sup>125</sup> Davis, “Afro Images,” p. 275.

<sup>126</sup> The letters contain several expressions of love for Jackson—politically and emotionally, but also romantically and erotically. Davis refers to herself as Jackson’s wife and lover. Later on, they also express feelings of confusion and frustration over an apparent miscommunication between the two. Mostly, they display a romantic affect that the two shared in the form of revolutionary struggle. The letters can be found in MCLI, Carton 39, Folder: Angela Davis Papers, Letters to George Jackson.

<sup>127</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, pp. 80-110.

<sup>128</sup> Cf., the summaries presented in Aptheker, *The Morning Breaks*; Major, *Justice in the Round*; and Mary Timothy, *Jury Woman* (San Francisco: Glide Publications and Emty Press, 1975). The prosecutor’s “crime of passion” argument informed journalistic coverage of the trial and Davis’s relationship with Jackson throughout the trial.

<sup>129</sup> This article appeared in *The Black Scholar* volume 3, no. 4 (December 1971) and is reprinted in James, ed., *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, pp. 111-128. The quote comes from p. 126. Davis had been attempting to theorize slavery and its relationship to contemporary black activism before the events of August 7 and her subsequent incarceration. Her 1969 UCLA class on “Recurring Philosophical Themes in Black Literature” explicitly engaged slavery and freedom. The first two lectures were prepared as a pamphlet in her defense against the California Regents. Called *Lectures on Liberation*, the pamphlet now appears in Angela Y. Davis, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2010), pp. 41-84.

<sup>130</sup> John & Yoko/ Plastic Ono Band, *Sometime in New York City* (New York: Capitol Records, 2005 [1972]). The album features several protest songs, including “Attica State,” about the response to the prison riot and a song about the failing education system called “Born in a Prison.”

<sup>131</sup> Rolling Stones, *Exile on Main Street* (New York: Virgin Records, 1994 [1972]).

<sup>132</sup> Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (London: Verso, 1999 [1978]), p. 166.

<sup>133</sup> Leo Branton, closing statement, June 1, 1972, p. 7024 court transcript XLIX, in Angela Davis Materials (hereafter ADM), Box 3, Envelope: June 1, 1972, 6972-7142, Green Library, Stanford University.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7015.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7012-7013.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7053.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7081.

<sup>138</sup> Carolyn Anspacher, “Angela Trial Review,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 8, 1972, p. 3; Rick Carroll, “No Juror Cast a Ballot of Guilt,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 5, 1972, p. 2; Associated Press, “How Jury Found Angela Innocent,” *Stockton Record*, June 5, 1972, p. 1 in Angela Davis Materials, Box 4, Folder 22, Green Library, Stanford University.

<sup>139</sup> UPI, “Reagan Says Davis Trial Vindicates U.S. Justice,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1972, p. A23.

<sup>140</sup> “Angela Davis’ Fair Trial,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1972, p. E10. The racial composition of the Davis jury was typically described as all-white, including in this editorial as well as by many supporters of Davis. In truth, however, one of the defendants was Chicano and identified as such. Still, because the editorial and most other media, including from Davis’ defense team and supporters, described the jury as all white, I offer this quote in the original context in which it appeared.

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- <sup>141</sup> UPI, "Reagan Says Davis Trial Vindicates U.S. Justice," *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1972, p. A23.
- <sup>142</sup> Louis Claiborne, "Angela Davis, Farewell," *Intellectual Digest* October 1972, p. 16; originally printed in *The Spectator*, June 17, 1972.
- <sup>143</sup> See, for instance, Kevin Leary, "The Joy Outside the Court," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 5, 1972, p. 3; Angela Davis, letter from the International Art Manifesto for the Legal Defense of Political Prisoners August 20, 1972, in JMP, Box 49, Folder 7.
- <sup>144</sup> "Jury Acquits Angela Davis on all 3 counts," *Globe*; page and date obscured, in ADM, Box 4, Folder 11.
- <sup>145</sup> There is, as of yet, no history of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression. Its work can be gleaned from the group's papers, some of which are housed at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
- <sup>146</sup> Karen Wald, "The San Quentin Six Case: Perspective and Analysis" in Tony Platt and Paul Takagi, eds., *Punishment and Penal Discipline: Essays on the Prison and the Prisoners' Movement* (San Francisco: Crime and Social Justice Associates, 1980), p. 171; Major, *Justice in the Round*, pp. 124-125. Author's repeated discussions with Claude Marks and interview with Kiilu Nyasha on October 22, 2009, were also helpful in describing the political background of the San Quentin 6, as were the programs housed in the Prison Movement audio files at the Freedom Archives.
- <sup>147</sup> The San Quentin 6 were charged with 46 counts stemming from the violence on August 21, 1971. Drumgo, Talamantez and Tate were acquitted on all charges and released from custody. Spain was found guilty of conspiracy and two counts of murder, Pinell of two counts of felony assault, and Johnson of felony assault on a guard. Johnson received a suspended sentence and three years probation, and was released from prison. Attorney Stephen Bingham, who the government claimed was responsible for bringing a gun in to Jackson on August 21, 1971, was also charged in the case. Bingham, however, fled the United States after Jackson was killed and did not return until 1984. He was tried and acquitted of conspiracy. Because the conspiracy charge rested on the presumption of Bingham's involvement, Spain used Bingham's acquittal to win a reversal on his own case. He was released in 1988. Pinell remains in prison at Pelican Bay State Prison, a control unit prison within the prison. See Andrews, *Black Power, White Blood*, pp. 175-232; Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, p. 262. See also *The San Quentin Six* (no author, circa 1974), p. 16 in RRS, Box 7, Folder 12.
- <sup>148</sup> Cummins, *The Rise and Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement*, pp. 259-260.
- <sup>149</sup> James R. Bendat, "The San Quentin Six Trial: Do Chains Have a Place," *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 1975, p. 7. Wald, "The San Quentin Six," p. 169. Tate quote appears in Alice Yarish, "What It's Like to be Free and one of the San Quentin 6" *San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle*, July 13, 1975.
- <sup>150</sup> "Johnny Spain Appeals 1976 San Quentin 6 Conviction," *Black Panther* May 20, 1978 p. 3.
- <sup>151</sup> The Prison Law Collective, "Adjustment Center Challenge by SQ6," in *The Conspiracy* April 1974, p. 13.
- <sup>152</sup> July 1, 1976, memo from San Francisco Special Agent in Charge to FBI Director, in HPNF, Series 2, Box 42, Folder 14; Wald, "The San Quentin Six Case"; *The San Quentin Six* pamphlet. See also the radio coverage of the case on the program Nothing Is More Precious Than, which originally aired on the Pacifica network and is housed at the Freedom Archives.
- <sup>153</sup> *The San Quentin Six*.
- <sup>154</sup> Bill Monning, "San Quentin 6: 'Justice' Shackled," *The Conspiracy*, pp. 3, 13, in National Lawyers Guild Papers (hereafter NLGP), Oversized Box 7, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.
- <sup>155</sup> Friends of the San Quentin Adjustment Center, "Attend the Hearing of the San Quentin 6" flyer, in SPC, Reel 20.
- <sup>156</sup> The grand jury was also criticized for not representing the racial and class backgrounds of the defendants, and therefore not being a jury of their peers. For this reason, Judge Vernon Stoll threw out the indictment in 1974, though it was reinstated on appeal. See Bendat, "The San Quentin Six Trial"; *The San Quentin Six* pamphlet; Wald, "The San Quentin Six Case"; and "Justice for the San Quentin Six" flyer and San Quentin Six Defense Committee May 2, 1974, press release, both in SPC, Reel 20.
- <sup>157</sup> James, *Resisting State Violence*, p. 25.
- <sup>158</sup> Michael Foucault, "The Eye of Power," in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 158.
- <sup>159</sup> Quoted in Aptheker, *The Morning Breaks*, pp. 296-297.

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<sup>160</sup> San Quentin 6 Defense Committee, April 1973 fundraising appeal letter, in JMP, Box 49, Folder 7.

<sup>161</sup> Quoted in Wald, “The San Quentin Six Case,” p. 172.

<sup>162</sup> Black nationalism has been among the most controversial elements of the 1960s black freedom struggle. For recent overviews of some of its dimensions, see James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*; Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) & Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Young, *Soul Power*.

<sup>163</sup> There is little written on the RNA to date. See Dan Berger, “‘The Malcolm X Doctrine’: The Republic of New Afrika and National Liberation on U.S. Soil,” in Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills and Scott Rutherford, eds., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009), pp. 46-55; Donald Cunnigen, “The Republic of New Africa in Mississippi,” in Judson Jeffries, ed., *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), pp. 93-115. For an insider history of the group and its relation to other efforts at New Afrikan politics, see Chokwe Lumumba, “The Roots of the New Afrikan Independence Movement,” in author’s files courtesy of Matt Meyer. The spelling of the group’s name changed; initially the group spelled Africa with a “c,” as is traditionally done in English. It ultimately switched to spelling it with a “k,” as I do here.

<sup>164</sup> Etienne Balibar, “The Nation Form,” in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 98.

<sup>165</sup> *Black Pride*, in JMP, Box 56, Folder 3. See also Alan Eladio Gómez, “Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972,” *Radical History Review* 96 (Fall 2006): pp. 58–86. Obadele also describes his prison organizing in *Free the Land!* (Washington, D.C.: House of Songhay, 1984), pp. 246–282.

<sup>166</sup> Each publication involved a different level of inside/outside collaboration and lasted for different lengths of time, but all were at least written predominantly by prisoners. There were other prison-based newspapers at this time that were not coming from or inspired by a New Afrikan perspective. In Indiana, for instance, a collective of outside prison activists working with radical prisoners in the state published four issues of a magazine called *The Real Deal*. I am grateful to Victor Wallis, who worked on the publication, for sharing copies of *The Real Deal* with me. For more on prisoners proclaiming themselves New Afrikans, see Geronimo Ji Jaga, “Every Nation Struggling to be Free Has a Right to Struggle, a Duty to Struggle,” in Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, eds., *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 75; and Kody Scott/ Sanyika Shakur, *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member* (New York: Grove Press, 1993).

<sup>167</sup> Acoli, *Sunviews*, p. 39.

<sup>168</sup> New Afrikan Prisoners Organization, “We Still Charge Genocide,” dated August 31, 1977, (no publisher), in NAPO vertical file, Freedom Archives.

<sup>169</sup> Atiba, “SPO Discussion Paper No. 1,” dated December 1976 (no publisher), p. 15, in author’s files courtesy of Nancy Kurshan and Steve Whitman. See also “An Introduction to the Words of James Yaki Sayles,” in James Yaki Sayles, *Meditations on Frantz Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth: New Afrikan Revolutionary Writings* (Montreal and Chicago: Kersplebedeb and Spear and Shield Publications, 2010), pp. 3-40.

<sup>170</sup> Abdul Shanna, e-mail interview with the author, January 8, 2010; Lorenzo Ervin, “Build a Mass Prison Movement,” *Midnight Special* volume 5, no. 12 (October 1977), pp. 10-11; see also the African National Prison Organization Solidarity Committee vertical file at Tamiment Library, NYU.

<sup>171</sup> Yaki Atiba Shanna and the New Afrikan Prisoners Organization in Stateville Prison led the effort to raise awareness of the Pontiac Brothers case. Abdul Shanna, a member of NAPO, remembers the case being important because it was a capital case—the largest involving black men since the Scottsboro case in the 1930s, and with even more defendants. While twenty-nine people were initially arrested, charges were dropped against twelve. The case was then split into two, one involving ten defendants and another involving seven. The ten were acquitted in May 1981; charges were then dropped against the others. Abdul Shanna, e-mail interview with the author, January 8, 2010. I am grateful to prison activists Nancy Kurshan

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and Steve Whitman for sharing their extensive files on the Pontiac case with me. See also the journalistic account of the riot and its aftermath by Kari Lydersen, available at [http://www.karilydersen.com/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE\\_user\\_op=view\\_page&PAGE\\_id=21](http://www.karilydersen.com/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=21) (accessed November 12, 2009).

<sup>172</sup> Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Race in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 45, 46.

<sup>173</sup> Former Black Panther and self-proclaimed New Afrikan Sundiata Acoli explained the spelling choice in an essay written from prison: "We of the New Afrikan Independence Movement spell 'Afrikan' with a 'k' as an indicator of our cultural identification with the Afrikan continent and because Afrikan linguists originally used 'k' to indicate the [hard] 'c' sound in the English language." See Sundiata Acoli, "An Updated History of the New Afrikan Prison Struggle," in Joy James, ed., *Imprisoned Intellectuals: America's Political Prisoners Write on Life, Liberation, and Rebellion* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), p. 138.

<sup>174</sup> Imari Abubakari Obadele, *Free the Land!* (Washington, D.C.: House of Songhay, 1984), [p. ii]. New Afrikan linguistic practices were also a response to the limited resources available inside. For instance, prisoners abbreviated words, such as "tho" or "thru," to fit more words on each piece of paper.

<sup>175</sup> New Afrikan Prisoners Organization, "We Still Charge Genocide," dated August 31, 1977, (no publisher), in NAPO vertical file, Freedom Archives.

<sup>176</sup> Cf., June Jordan, *On Call: Political Essays* (Boston: South End Press, 1985); Ronald L. Jackson II and Elaine B. Richardson, eds., *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>177</sup> The numbers of lawsuits filed is quoted in Heather Ann Thompson, "Black Activism Behind Bars: Toward a Rewriting of the American Civil Rights Movement," unpublished manuscript in author's files, p. 24. For an overview of the rise and fall of legal (and other) in the Texas prison system, see Robert T. Chase, "Civil Rights on the Cell Block: Race, Reform, and Violence in Texas Prisons and the Nation, 1945-1990," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, 2009)

<sup>178</sup> James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 9. More generally, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>179</sup> See, for example, *San Quentin News* in JMP, Box 44, Folder 2; and *The Echo* (Huntsville, Texas) in RRS, Box 26, Folder 15.

<sup>180</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), especially pp. 136-182. For a personal example of subversive communication in prison, see Sam Melville, *Letters From Attica* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1972).

<sup>181</sup> Printed in *Black Pride* June 1972, p. 9, in RRS, Box 6, Folder 30.

<sup>182</sup> Wahneema Lubiano, "Black Nationalism and Black Common Sense: Policing Ourselves and Others," in Wahneema Lubiano, ed., *The House that Race Built* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), pp. 232-252.

<sup>183</sup> No author, "'Black Movies and Twentieth Century Slaves,'" *Midnight Special*, volume 3, no. 10 (October 1973), p. 17.

<sup>184</sup> See the issues of *Black Pride* in JMP, Box 56, Folder 3.

<sup>185</sup> John L. Jackson, Jr., "The Social Science of Sincerity," *Contexts*, volume 4, issue 4 (Fall 2005), p. 40. More generally, see John L. Jackson, Jr., *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>186</sup> Atiba, "On Transforming the Colonial/Criminal Mentality," *Notes From an Afrikan P.O.W. Journal, Book One* (1977), pp. 2-11.

<sup>187</sup> Kalima Aswad, interview with the author, October 24, 2008; *Voices from Within San Quentin* issues 1 and 2 (released together in 1977), in author's files courtesy of Kalima Aswad.

<sup>188</sup> Diana Block, *Arm the Spirit: A Woman's Journey Underground and Back* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>189</sup> For more on PFOC, see Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), pp. 201-202, 225-244. For an insider account, see Block, *Arm the Spirit*.

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- <sup>190</sup> See “Message from the editors,” *Arm the Spirit* number 3 (May 1979), p. 2; George Jackson, quoted in *Arm the Spirit*; p. 1, see *Arm the Spirit* vertical file, Freedom Archives.
- <sup>191</sup> Major, *Justice in the Round*, pp. 307-308; Atiba, “Afrikan P.O.W.s & the U.N.,” *Notes of a Afrikan P.O.W. Journal, Book One* (1977), p. 12.
- <sup>192</sup> William L. Patterson, *We Charge Genocide* (New York: International Publisher, 1970 [1951]). For earlier examples of black internationalism as a political project, see Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- <sup>193</sup> Acoli, *Sunviews*, pp. 9, 11.
- <sup>194</sup> Quoted in “RNA Asks United Nations Help for ‘Prisoners of War’” in *Philadelphia Tribune*, October 17, 1978, p. 4. The article notes that Amnesty International considered Obadele to be in prison on charges that are “purely political.”
- <sup>195</sup> The petition is reprinted in Lennox S. Hinds, *Illusions of Justice: Human Rights Violations in the United States* (Iowa City: University of Iowa School of Social Work, 1978).
- <sup>196</sup> Acoli, *Sunviews*, pp. 23-28.
- <sup>197</sup> Acoli, e-mail to the author, January 30, 2010; Acoli, *Sunviews*, pp. 4-42; “Revitalizing the Movement: Black Seek Unity Over Prison Issue,” *Sun Reporter*, September 28, 1978, p. 3; African National Prison Organization Solidarity Committee Vertical File, Tamiment Library, NYU. While ostensibly a coalitional effort, ANPO was ultimately a project of the African People’s Socialist Party, an organization that had limited working relationships with other organizations in a climate of fracturing among the black left. More generally, see Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- <sup>198</sup> A. Jalil Bottom/ Jalil Muntaqim, “A Political Prisoner’s Journey in the U.S. Prison System,” available at <http://www.freejalil.com/life.html> (consulted January 22, 2010).
- <sup>199</sup> Burton I. Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), pp. 126, 184; “Vance Says He’s Chastised Young,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 1978, p. B2; “Political Prisoners in U.S., Young Says,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1978, p. A3. The *New York Times* printed other excerpts from Young’s interview, in which he said the Soviet system was far more repressive, both in the number of people it incarcerated as well as the reasons.
- <sup>200</sup> Prison Law Collective, “Lock Downs Set Ups,” *The Conspiracy* December 1974, p. 4, in NLGP, Oversized Box 7; Bert Useem and Peter Kimball, *States of Siege: U.S. Prison Riots 1971-1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 81-84.
- <sup>201</sup> “Defend the August 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade,” and “Communiqué No. 1,” *Breakthrough*, volume 2, no. 2 (Fall 1978), pp. 14-15; and “New Klan Offensive,” *Midnight Special*, volume 5, no. 12 (October 1977), p. 3. August 8<sup>th</sup> was the date of a strike at Naponoch prison.
- <sup>202</sup> “Saturday, August 24: George Jackson Day of Unity,” *Sun Reporter*, August 24, 1974, p. 6; Peter Magnani, “Demonstrators Protest Attacks on Black Prisoners,” *Sun Reporter*, August 25, 1977, p. 3; “Black Prisoners Call for San Quentin Demo,” *Sun Reporter*, July 27, 1978, p. 11.
- <sup>203</sup> Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 3.
- <sup>204</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1.
- <sup>205</sup> “Prison Demonstration Marks ‘Black August,’” *Sun Reporter*, August 23, 1979, p. 5; “Black August Month: Big Demo at San Quentin,” *Sun Reporter*, August 20, 1979, p. 3; and two Black August flyers in Prairie Fire Organizing Committee vertical file, Freedom Archives.
- <sup>206</sup> Untitled flyer, dated August 25, 1979, in Prairie Fire Organizing Committee vertical file, Freedom Archives.
- <sup>207</sup> Heather Ann Thompson, “Black Activism Behind Bars: Toward a Rewriting of the American Civil Rights Movement,” unpublished manuscript in author’s files courtesy of Thompson, pp. 9-10.
- <sup>208</sup> The program is reprinted in Imari Abubakari Obadele, *Foundations of the Black Nation* (Detroit: House of Songhay, 1975), pp. 73-106.
- <sup>209</sup> Atiba, *Notes of an Afrikan P.O.W. Journal, Book One* (1977), p. 16.



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<sup>210</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," in *Representations* no. 26 (Spring 1989), pp. 7-12.

<sup>211</sup> See, for instance, Kiilu Nyasha, "Black August 2009: a story of African freedom fighters," <http://www.sfbayview.com/2009/black-august-2009-a-story-of-african-freedom-fighters> (accessed August 13, 2009); Gabriel Gonzalez, "Black August: Resist!" *The Burning Spear*, July 31, 2006; Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, "Black August 2008: Resisting imperialist intimidation, terror, and displacement from the Gulf Coast to the Continent," [http://mxgm.org/web/images/stories/newsletter/MXGM\\_Spring\\_2008\\_Newsletter.pdf](http://mxgm.org/web/images/stories/newsletter/MXGM_Spring_2008_Newsletter.pdf) (accessed November 12, 2009).

Part II: Sacrifice and Honor

“La patria es valor y sacrificio.”

(“The nation is honor and sacrifice.”)

Pedro Albizu Campos

## CHAPTER 4: Spectacles of Nationalism, Specters of Independence

“In political life, what is real is often not visible.”

– Juan Antonio Corretjer<sup>1</sup>

“The past is not only a position from which to speak, but it is also an absolutely necessary resource in what one has to say.”

– Stuart Hall<sup>2</sup>

This chapter examines the prison, its visibility and the meaning created by its antagonists, from a related but somewhat different vantage point. I focus here on the ways the prison provided a metaphor through which Puerto Rican activists made sense of their colonial citizenship, including their diasporic place in American cities. I argue that diasporic nationalism shaped Puerto Rican protest by fueling an investment in nationalist history to shape a collective memory that affirmed dramatic actions against confinement. Nationalism is often described as the parochial resistance to a global cosmopolitanism. Yet the revival of Puerto Rican nationalism in the 1970s displayed a global yearning and diasporic consciousness. Brent Hayes Edwards writes that “black internationalism aims to translate ‘race’ as the ... shared and shifting ground of that ‘elsewhere,’” where “elsewhere” represents an idea, a longing for a place that does not yet exist. Paradoxically, I will argue that even though nationalism emphasized Puerto Rico as a place in its political imagination, it nevertheless provided a similar modality for Puerto

Ricans in the 1970s as that which Edwards identifies of black internationalism in the 1920s. Through a radical and diasporic nationalism, Puerto Rican activists crafted transnational alliances and racial identities. In this nationalism, Puerto Rico was an ideal as much as a place, much like the prison was both a metaphor and an institution.

I begin by identifying the contours of this diasporic nationalism. The visibility of the prison, and especially of particular nationalist prisoners, helped establish this diasporic nationalism by providing the symbolic valence through which people could reconstruct and re-present Puerto Rican nationalist history in the context of globalizing American society. This telling and retelling of nationalist history emerged out of and contributed to the visibility of the prison. As I argue below, history became one of the metaphors used in bonding Puerto Rican nationalist visibility. I conclude by examining the ways that *invisibility* was a resource in making the prison visible. Visibility always conjures and assumes invisibility, and Puerto Rican independentistas in the United States in the 1970s turned to invisible tactics in pursuit of a strategy of visibility. Much as the prison is a site of spectacular visibility and dramatic silences, so too do the efforts to see the prison proceed through invisibility. I examine several mechanisms by which a variety of spectacular protests by Puerto Rican activists utilized invisibility in their pursuit of a greater visibility. These include clandestine violence and public expressions of self-determination through spectacular performances of silence. This invisibility emerged at the moment when Puerto Rican activism and cultural production had produced an unprecedented publicity for Puerto Ricans. Visibility and invisibility reinforced one another in the practice of collective action against the prison.

This visibility became especially entangled with Puerto Ricans tried or incarcerated for acts of political violence. Increasingly throughout the 1970s the dissident Puerto Rican was symbolized by the prisoner. I examine the ways Puerto Rican political groups progressively emphasized Puerto Rican prisoners in their organizing and racial self-conception. The Puerto Rican Nationalist party, practically defunct by the late 1950s, loomed large as a catalyzing historical reference in this 1970s effort of Puerto Rican activists in the United States. In New York, this new generation of Puerto Rican nationalists first supported former Nationalist Party member Carlos Feliciano as he faced charges for acts of political violence committed there in 1969 and 1970. This focus, I will show, led them to emphasize other Puerto Rican prisoners and the prison more generally. The greatest focus of Puerto Rican visibility on the prison came through five Puerto Rican prisoners, all members of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party who had been incarcerated and largely invisible since the 1950s. The four men and one woman were incarcerated in prisons around the country for spectacular acts of violence carried out in 1950 and 1954 against symbols of U.S. authority. The visibility of the Nationalist prisoners helped bond a diasporic Puerto Rican identity: it connected Puerto Ricans in the United States to issues beyond what they faced in their particular locations, and it connected them to histories of dissent by Puerto Ricans on the island and in the United States. Bound up in the visibility of the Nationalist prisoners was the island of Puerto Rico; it too became visible in American cities and UN committees through the prisoners.

The five Nationalists, as they were collectively labeled, were made visible in the context of a population that had recently migrated to the United States. Puerto Ricans had been migrating to the United States since the island became an American colony in 1898

as a result of the Spanish-American War. After half a century of traditional colonial rule, Puerto Rico became a “freely associated state” (Estado Libre Asociado) and an “associated commonwealth” of the United States. This anomalous political status formed between 1950 and 1952 and has been in effect ever since. It allows Puerto Ricans to elect their own governor in a context in which they lack economic and political self-determination. Beginning in World War II, the U.S. Navy used two islands in the Puerto Rican archipelago, Culebra and Vieques, for military training practice until popular protest forced its removal (in 1975 and 2003, respectively). The island has no political representation within the United States; it has one congressional representative who has no voting power, and Puerto Ricans cannot vote for U.S. president. Neither self-governing nor under military rule, Puerto Ricans were, since 1917, U.S. citizens who could be drafted but not vote for president. American citizenship enabled Puerto Ricans to freely travel between the island and the United States. This mobility has led some observers to call Puerto Rico a “commuter nation,” though this back and forth migration has not been entirely voluntary. Puerto Rican citizenship has been useful to the U.S. military and to commercial elites: Puerto Ricans have fought in every U.S. war since World War I and were used as sources of cheap farm labor on American farms in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations has long considered the island to be a colonial possession of the United States, and scholars have described Puerto Rico as a laboratory for U.S. imperialism.<sup>4</sup>

While Puerto Ricans migrated to different parts of the country, particularly deindustrializing urban centers on the northeastern seaboard, they were disproportionately concentrated in Chicago and, especially, New York. As a result, these

two cities occupy my focus in the following analysis. It was there—not exclusively, but most visibly and dramatically—that activists imagined the prison as the ultimate expression of what confined not just prisoners but all colonial subjects. As first and second generation Puerto Ricans living in the United States engaged diverse meanings of home, they crafted racial identities in the face of what they described as the racialized constrictions of American society and the urban life of its impoverished denizens. They borrowed some of the politics, discourse and strategy from the Black Power movement, including its outgrowth in prison radicalism, that was coterminous and overlapping, parallel and perpendicular, with the rise of what was called simply the Puerto Rican movement.<sup>5</sup> As Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof notes, migration entails both an engagement with and a placement within the racial paradigms of the dominant country. For Puerto Ricans, this included crafting subjectivity in what Joy James has called a “national culture racially fixated on blacks.”<sup>6</sup>

As I discussed in chapter 1, the Black Power movement grew organically out of the rising tide of black protest following World War II. This protest grew alongside the migration of Puerto Ricans, who began arriving en masse to the United States in the 1940s as part of the U.S.-backed industrialization of the island that happened under the banner of “Operation Bootstrap.” One-third of the island’s population moved to New York between 1943 and 1960; there were almost 900,000 Puerto Ricans in New York City by 1960 and more than 32,000 in Chicago that year. Approximately one-third of the Puerto Rican population lived in the United States during the 1970s, a figure that has only increased since then.<sup>7</sup> These migrants and other Puerto Ricans already living in the United States were politically involved in various community projects—around issues

such as education, health care, and police brutality—and many had supported the civil rights organizing of African Americans throughout the 1960s. These projects fought for community control in diverse forms of city politics.<sup>8</sup> Yet a distinct, self-defined social movement among Puerto Ricans in the United States did not arise until the late 1960s. It blossomed, unevenly, throughout the following decade and put forth a collective identity for Puerto Ricans in the United States for the first time since the 1950s. Puerto Ricans, as I argued in chapter 1, had been made visible through social science texts that contributed to visibilizing the new immigrants as a diseased or dangerous population. Beginning in the late 1960s, however, grassroots organizing and growing literary production provided visibility for Puerto Ricans as an oppositional racial community. The prison became a significant site and concept in this nascent visibility. The prison as an abstract concept of colonial domination was ultimately made understandable through an emphasis on individual Puerto Rican prisoners incarcerated for political acts of nationalist defiance. This connection established the prison as a site of racial formation that was heavily inflected with diasporic nationalist meaning. It also revived the use of spectacular tactics to dramatize Puerto Rico's political status that had been dormant among Puerto Ricans since the Nationalist spectacles of the 1950s. The question of Puerto Rico's political status became bound up for independence activists in the 1970s with the fate of Puerto Rican Nationalists imprisoned in the United States.

Puerto Rican activists grew to emphasize prisons alongside the visibility of black incarceration. For instance, in Chicago, a street gang called the Young Lords turned into a political organization after gang leader José Cha Cha Jiménez met Black Panther leader Fred Hampton while both men were briefly incarcerated in 1967. After they both were



released, the pair brokered a truce between black and Puerto Rican gangs in Chicago, and the Young Lords began organizing in the Puerto Rican barrios in south Chicago. Members of a Puerto Rican political study group in New York met with the Illinois group to secure their blessing to start a similar organization in New York.<sup>9</sup> Both branches of the Young Lords proceeded with relative autonomy, although each one was modeled after the Black Panther Party and were vocal supporters of that organization and its fight against confinement. The Lords became a foundational organization in the revival of Puerto Rican revolutionary nationalism in the 1970s. In New York, the Young Lords Organization, later the Young Lords Party, adopted a thirteen-point program similar to the Panthers' ten-point program. Point ten demanded "freedom for all political prisoners and prisoners of war. No Puerto Rican should be in jail or prison, first because we are a nation, and amerikkka [sic] has no claims on us; second, because we have not been tried by our own people (peers). We also want all freedom fighters out of jail, since they are prisoners of the war for liberation."<sup>10</sup> This position, common to how Puerto Rican militants described the prison, identified a non-state national sovereignty as an exemption to and a critique of American juridical practices. In this analysis, the existence of a Puerto Rican nation provided a counterbalance to American power that exempted Puerto Ricans, even ones born and raised in the United States, from the criminal justice system because of racist colonialism. At the same time, articulating international law with counterculture bravado, the Lords argued that the experience of colonialism made any Puerto Rican arrested for political acts into a prisoner of war.

The context of black imprisonment influenced the burgeoning Puerto Rican radicalism. Out of that understanding, Puerto Ricans embraced the prison as a metaphor

to explain the colonial confinement they faced on the island and in the United States. The former expressed itself through the visible presence of the U.S. military and flag, as well as the political and economic control that the United States exhibited over Puerto Rico as a “freely associated state.” The prison served as a tool to mobilize dissent and the crafting of oppositional racial meaning through a paradigm that was both nationalist and internationalist. The established recognition of the prison as metaphor of Puerto Rican life within and as part of the United States—in other words, referring both to the experience of urban America and the U.S. colonial relationship to the island of Puerto Rico—made literal prisoners more visible within the Puerto Rican political imagination, especially within the United States. The prison became the basis of political solidarity fashioned across racial and national lines. The metaphor of imprisonment meshed with and became part of the material reality.<sup>11</sup> Thus, whereas black activists saw the prison from the inside out, what I called looking out from the slavery of the prison in the previous chapter, Puerto Ricans predominantly engaged the prison in this time period from the outside looking in.

The prison occupied a strategic place in the development of militancy in Puerto Rican neighborhoods of American cities throughout the 1970s. Looking outside-in, the genealogical work of this chapter pays more attention to the development of political organizations and the politicization of the prison in the context of burgeoning racial protest than I did in the previous section. This genealogical work is necessary, and not only because of the outside-in trajectory by which Puerto Ricans came to see the prison. There are historiographic reasons for this approach as well: unlike black protest in the postwar period, there are few studies of Puerto Rican activism in the United States.

Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans have been far less studied, especially as political actors. Scholars are only now beginning to examine the forms and content of Puerto Rican dissent. The few existing texts are mostly memoirs or other narratives of first-person participants in the collective mobilizations they describe. These texts are valuable but, as with any such material, they lack the broad historical overview needed to better understand the dimensions of such activism. This chapter is a contribution to historicizing Puerto Rican activism, as well as theorizing it. Tracing these streams is important to demonstrate the ways Puerto Ricans came to emphasize the prison as well as the contours of this visibility.

The general invocation of imprisonment transferred to a specific emphasis on particular prisoners, out of which dissidents engaged well-known events and ruptures in Puerto Rican history. The prison became a strategic tool that blended the history and ongoing reality of Puerto Rico's colonial status into a coherent narrative of revolutionary nationalism. In Puerto Rican radical discourse of the 1970s, the prison signified the historic and enduring injury of colonialism. The prison also provided an identifiable site against which a collective identity could form. Shaped by the context of life in the United States during the era of Black Power and the war in Vietnam, the re-emergence of Puerto Rican nationalism in the 1970s described colonialism less as an "illness" to be cured (as earlier generations of Nationalists did) than as a prison. This description made the prison visible as a target of anticolonial opposition. Witnessing from Leavenworth Prison the upsurge in Puerto Rican activism in Chicago and New York, Puerto Rican Nationalist Party member Rafael Cancel Miranda penned a poem titled "Don't Call Me Prisoner." Dedicated to his children and to the Young Lords, the poem described the prison as

incarcerating his national identity, described in masculine terms, as well as his physical person. By dedicating the poem to what was, at the time, the most visible and militant Puerto Rican group, Cancel Miranda posited self-determining constructions of racial identity, in the form of nationality, as potent challenges to the prison as a regime of colonial power.<sup>12</sup>

Through the prison in general and specific prisoners, radicals revived and laid claim to Puerto Rican nationalism. As with other anticolonial nationalisms, this restorative project turned historical events into a mnemonic narrative of redemption. “The master saga of nationalist struggles is built around the retelling of certain well-known and memorable events,” argues postcolonial theorist Shahid Amin.<sup>13</sup> As I argue below, these stories were retold verbally but also re-enacted through spectacles of nationalist discontent that took aim at imprisonment. Such protests appealed to collective memory through physical action, discursive framing, and temporal means: dramatic actions invoked the five Nationalist prisoners on dates of significance within Puerto Rican nationalist history. Puerto Rican nationalism in the 1970s therefore articulated nationalist history and specific prisoners in a framework at once symbolic and embodied.

This articulation of nationalism as the antidote to the prison of U.S. colonialism had, by the mid-1970s, yielded a strategic emphasis on the campaign to free five Puerto Rican members of the Nationalist Party that had been imprisoned and largely invisible since their arrests in the 1950s. The Nationalist Party had been largely destroyed as a result of the government response to numerous spectacular attacks against U.S. rule, in Puerto Rico and the United States, during the 1950s. The campaign for the release of the five Nationalists, which succeeded in freeing all of them by 1979, revived Puerto Rican

nationalism for a new generation. This resurrection of nationalism was profoundly shaped by the diaspora, by Puerto Ricans living (and in many cases raised) in the United States. Contrary to the traditional path of Puerto Rican migration, the campaign for the prisoners began in the United States and migrated to the island. This new nationalism responded to developments on the island, in the states, and around the world. Through individual prisoners, the prison came to symbolize the colonial-diasporic experience itself. Arising out of a series of community organizing and anti-prison initiatives, the campaign for the freedom of the five Nationalists dominated Puerto Rican activism for much of the decade. It serves as the anchor of my analysis in this chapter as well. I historicize the evolution of the five Nationalists as a political concern out of the landscape of Puerto Rican activism in the time period while also documenting the ways this campaign synthesized a metaphoric deployment of the prison with a reinvestment in Puerto Rican nationalism. This initiative bridged the two dominant expressions of Puerto Rican militancy in the 1970s: community organizing and armed struggle.

According to José López, director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center in Chicago and a key figure in the campaign to free the five Nationalists, political prisoners display an “ethical leadership.”<sup>14</sup> The Nationalist prisoners developed a widely acknowledged symbolic cache. They became ambassadors of Puerto Rico’s plight as well as harbingers of its possible future. They exhibited leadership through their symbolic example as people who committed spectacular actions and continued to advocate for independence without compromise despite incarceration. Their leadership was symbolic and mnemonic. Yet they did not attempt to wield organizational power or play a leadership role in the outside world other than in symbolic terms. Their symbolic valence was successful

because it was recognized as symbolic; activists invoked them more than, as with George Jackson, they looked to them for sustained political or theoretical guidance. The five Nationalists were involved in the campaign for their release, especially by insisting that they would only accept unconditional freedom. This hard-line was another example for supporters that the Nationalists retained their political clarity despite lengthy years of confinement. From that position, independence organizers extrapolated a demand for the island's unconditional release as well. Organizers for the freedom of Puerto Rican prisoners articulated particular legal cases with the ongoing imprisonment of Puerto Rico, both through the political economy of U.S. colonialism and the institution of U.S. prisons. This shared acceptance of prisoners as symbols generated equally symbolic tactics in the campaign for their release: spectacular mechanisms aiming to dramatize the Puerto Rican condition in regards to both colonialism and nationalism. This symbolic attachment ensured that the spectacles of nationalism presaged, at least to their creators, the specters of independence. The reliance on symbolic modes of action has translated into the historical record, where the Nationalist prisoners have thus far received consistent but brief mention in the few existing studies of postwar Puerto Rican dissent.<sup>15</sup> Historians have identified the Nationalists as a symbol of the spike in activism among Puerto Ricans at this time, but they have yet to describe the origins and development of the successful campaign for their release. This chapter aims to contribute to this historical gap while also demonstrating the ways visibility structured the goals, tactics, and strategies of this effort. I provide historical documentation of under- and unexamined phenomena while examining the ways history is a strategic device in collective mobilization.

## Race, Migration and the Pursuit of Nationhood

Nationalism provided a potent framework in which Puerto Rican and other Latin American-descended populations engaged in processes of racial formation within the United States. The embrace of nationalism grew alongside official recognition of Latinos as a group within American politics. This new visibility, as with other racial formations, owed to complex factors. These factors included rising migration by people from a number of Caribbean and Latin American countries following the 1965 change in immigration laws and the ongoing, U.S.-backed industrialization of these areas; growing protest by new migrants and their children, especially Mexicans and Puerto Ricans; and a presidential administration eager to prevent a multiracial coalition of civil rights activists. According to Hoffnung-Garskof, the Nixon administration “instituted bilingual education, despite its general resistance to civil rights programs, precisely in order to peel Latinos away from black social movements” and reward ethnic-group politics within a traditional assimilation-oriented paradigm.<sup>16</sup> The term “Hispanic” was introduced in 1974, after several years of increasingly publicized dissent by Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and others over issues of land rights, failing schools, labor conditions, and general urban politics. Indeed, visibility invited state and corporate efforts to dominate through classificatory schemes: the term “Hispanic” achieved official prominence alongside invocations of Marxist- and nationalist-influenced pan-Latino solidarities, as in the October 1974 Solidarity with Puerto Rico rally at Madison Square Garden. Even while fashioning (shaky) broader alliances, Latino politics often manifest in explicitly national terms—as Puerto Ricans, as Mexicans, as Dominicans, and so on. This visibility

therefore responded to and helped remake the American racial landscape by mapping the Caribbean political geography onto American racial schemas.<sup>17</sup>

As Lorrin Thomas argues, Puerto Rican activists in New York City during the late 1960s and early 1970s unwittingly revived a history of Puerto Rican organizing in that city dating back to the 1930s. While Puerto Ricans, as with most young militants of the 1960s era, tended to be disconnected from the earlier iterations of radicalism, the similarities of their conditions and experiences of racialization generated similar expressions of protest. Nationalism provided the strategic structure of feeling to rebuild a “diasporic and anticolonial way of demanding [group] recognition.”<sup>18</sup> The visibility of the nation was an act of naming and pursuing sovereignty by dramatizing the neglect and oppression that Puerto Ricans faced in the United States. As they increasingly located the cause of poverty and racism in their experiences as Puerto Ricans, these activists identified a connection to the problems they faced on the island as well. The more radical among them used this awareness to build further connections with groups of black, Chicano and Indian dissidents. Indeed, patterns of housing segregation often grouped black and Puerto Rican communities in overlapping neighborhoods, just as the visibility of black racial formation informed the development of Puerto Rican radicalism in the United States.

In this work, nationalism was a diasporic project whose visibility challenged the contradictions of American society. For the nationalist activists, Puerto Rico was a place and an ideal. It named the aspirations of Puerto Ricans in America for an antiracist, anticolonial future. In the nationalist imagination of the 1970s, Puerto Rican independence was a demand that referred to the barrios of New York City, Chicago and



other American cities, as well as to the island of Puerto Rico and other Third World sites. Nationalism was the way people made sense of a home they had never known, one that did not exist but could be imagined. Racialized populations utilized nationalism as a militant assertion over place in the context of denationalizing expressions of sovereignty.<sup>19</sup> Yet the appeal of nationalism was not simply an attachment to an imagined community and a glorious past. Radical anticolonial nationalism was both the expression of transnational political solidarity and the visible claim on urban space as naturalized sites for the production of racial meaning through challenging state power. Paradoxically, nationalism made visible the reality of Puerto Rican life in U.S. cities, its connection to the island and its global political imagination.

Activists invoked the image of the prison against the ideal of an independent Puerto Rico. As the nation represented the ideal of freedom, the prison named its opposite. From outside its walls, the Puerto Rican invocation of the prison as a strategic metaphor yielded a greater focus both on actual prisoners and on Puerto Rican history. The prison served as a heuristic for the development of what Walter D. Mignolo has called “border gnosis,” or knowledge produced from within the margins of empire. The term combines Chicana poet-scholar Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of the borderlands with V. K. Mudimbe’s discussion of African knowledge production as gnosis. Border gnosis connotes the formation of knowledge that is at once porous and restricted, ways of knowing that are shaped by the liminality of existing in the margins. Border gnosis is an attempt to shift the epistemological center to alternative modernities that interact with but are not subsumed by the West.<sup>20</sup> According to Mignolo and other scholars from the global South, whereas the West sees only modernity, people of the Third World

experience modernity through and as coloniality. This shift articulates modernity and coloniality as constitutive forces of epistemology, among other social structures.<sup>21</sup>

Building on Mignolo's theoretical work, I argue that the prison refracts modernity and coloniality as a mnemonic of border thinking. Making the prison visible, as an institution and as a metaphor of oppression, was a practice of visibilizing the coloniality of power, especially in relation to living histories of colonialism and forced migration. The prison in its itinerant stasis, an impenetrable institution yet a readily available metaphor through which to explain the dynamics of collective oppression, recalls state violence in the ongoing formation of Puerto Rican subjectivity. An epistemological site, one that is generative as well as repressive, the prison both shapes and punishes colonial subjects. As colonial forces fostered migration to impoverished and policed ghettos, many Puerto Ricans came to understand the United States as a condition of confinement.

Mignolo uses the neologism of border gnosis as a post-nationalist concept. I argue, however, that it can be a useful way of conceptualizing anticolonial nationalism. As both metaphor and material institution, the prison was a site of border thinking in the nationalist opposition to the colonialism of Puerto Rico and its denizens. Placing the prison at its center, Puerto Rican nationalists recognized the productive work of borders—they generated ideas and identities—without ascribing to the border a vaunted permanence, as some postnationalist critics have suggested.<sup>22</sup> Cultural studies has been among the most persistent frameworks to push diverse disciplines to displace the parochial limits of national boundaries. In this analysis, transnational circuits of exchange revoke both the geopolitical boundaries of nation-states and the conceptual boundaries of nationalism. This critique postulates globality and the borderlands as more generative,

and more clearly oppositional, concepts—able to transcend both the state and the nation as the legitimate modalities of political action. Such scholarship points to the itinerant nature of expressive culture, including music and literature, along with the migratory networks of people themselves, in order to reveal the isolation of nation or state to be illusory as both a normative ideal and a descriptive reality. Within Latin American Studies, and its subfield of Puerto Rican Studies, this global imperative has emphasized the border as a generative site in the production of knowledge and identities. Rather than signal only delimitation, borders also connote transgression. They are, in other words, made to be crossed.<sup>23</sup>

Yet people's innovative uses of borders do not make borders themselves innovative. The “art of making do,” as Michel de Certeau put it, should not distract us from the intransigent forces that put people in situations not of their own choosing or liking.<sup>24</sup> Themselves the product of imperial nationalism, borderlands arguably create an interstitial and diasporic nationalism. What proponents have labeled as revolutionary nationalism is this nationalism of liminality, formed by people at the borderlands and invested in international solidarity. Revolutionary nationalism troubles the simplistic, hard-and-fast divide between “political nationalism” and “cultural nationalism.” (There is a parallel phenomenon in studies of black nationalism that differentiates between political, cultural and “territorial” nationalism, as if urban-based nationalists did not seek to control territory as much as their rural counterparts.)<sup>25</sup> There are, of course, both big differences between and important similarities among a nationalism that has as its mission political change led by a certain group versus a nationalism that reifies the expressive practices of a chosen people. Among other similarities, both projects invoke a

proud past to solidify national unity. But the separation of politics from culture is an insufficient metric through which to examine nationalism. It misses the political aspirations of what gets labeled cultural nationalism and overlooks the cultural forms that characterize political nationalism. Perhaps most relevant, this separation fails to capture the ways that nationalism structures people's lives, actions, and affiliations. The challenge in understanding nationalism is to evaluate its political strategies and cultural impacts, rather than imposing a rigid demarcation between the two. Manifestations of nationalism cut across the political spectrum, from fascist to Marxist. Nationalism must therefore be evaluated on its particular practices. As Ana Ramos-Zayas demonstrated, nationalism has provided the framework in which U.S.-based Puerto Ricans have addressed issues of class, gender, and political orientation.<sup>26</sup> It has also been critical to their senses of racial formation, migration and public visibility.

The division between the global and the national neglects the global vision and practice of anticolonial nationalism, which has not been so isolationist or anti-modern as some critics have alleged. Indeed, the visibility of anticolonial nationalism among Puerto Ricans was, in the 1970s, a global, internationalist critique of the nation-state form by proclaiming affinities with the Third World as a project capable of redrawing received political geographies.<sup>27</sup> This radical nationalism used anticolonialism as the base around which to build global, cross-cultural alliances based on, as Mignolo terms them, "an Other Tongue, an Other Thinking, an Other Logic." Revolutionary nationalism hoped to undermine and rewrite borders. Puerto Rican revolutionary nationalism became the framework to assert Puerto Rican sovereignty while fostering multiracial and transnational solidarity among poor and working class Puerto Ricans.<sup>28</sup> This nationalism

pursued its global vision in part through the prison, which provided a universally recognized symbol of confinement that could connect diasporic experiences to those on the island. The prison helped make visible Puerto Rican nationalism and encourage international vision and allies—as a response to the prison of colonialism.

As nationalism became an increasingly utilized framework of political organization for Puerto Rican activists, the prison grew in visibility and significance. As I showed in chapter 3, nationalism was a source of mobilization for black prison activists. However, whereas black prisoners increasingly turned to nationalism alongside a growing invisibility, Puerto Ricans did so through a burgeoning visibility. Many black activists found or solidified nationalism while in prison, including Malcolm X and George Jackson, among others. Many Puerto Rican activists found the prison as they solidified their nationalist sentiments. In both cases, of course, nationalism provided the antidote to the prison: as both a discrete institution of control and a metaphor for dispersed regime of racist power. The nation, in this approach, was an idealized counterforce invoked in its most expansive imagined community to infuse it with a power strong enough to match that of the prison. Through nationalism, black and Puerto Rican militants upheld a collective bond against the atomizing imposition of confinement that, they said, characterized their lives as racialized and colonized subjects in the United States.

This racial formation linked radical Puerto Ricans to black activists through a shared emphasis on the urban condition. Puerto Rican militants identified the city as both a natural and an oppressive home. Following the Attica revolt, members of the New York City Puerto Rican organization El Comité described the violence of imprisonment as both

an extension of and a deviation from Puerto Ricans' so-called natural relation to land.

“The New York Spanish and Black communities understand what the brothers and sisters behind bars are saying. Attica is El Barrio, The tombs [sic] are the South Bronx and Bedford-Stuyvesant. We live these sub-human conditions every day and know what our brothers and sisters behind bars are talking about. Their time on Rikers Island or in any other American prison is only an intensification of all the oppression they have been living for years—before on the Streets. ... We're a street people. Whether you talk about Puerto Rico or New York we're outdoors. Suddenly in the Prison the style of that outdoors is rudely changed (Attica's four big barren yards) or completely taken away (Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan House of Detention).”<sup>29</sup>

Puerto Ricans made the prison visible as a way to make sense of their place in and as part of the United States, but also as a way to imagine something beyond that colonial relationship. This re-creation of nationalism, the pursuit of the nation from positions of diaspora, was shaped equally by generations of diasporic migration, extant anticolonial movements, and processes of racialization shaped especially by the visibility of black protest. Much as individual prisoners provided a symbolic focus of attention, so too did Puerto Rico itself provide an ideal of liberation for the revolutionary nationalists of the 1970s. The prison and the nation emerged as two sides of the coin of Puerto Rican visibility. Both of them were global concepts, referring both to the colonized status of Puerto Rico and the conditions Puerto Ricans faced within the United States. The prison and the nation were both, in this sense, epistemic tools in the development of Puerto Rican racial formation.

## History: A Metaphor of Protest

Puerto Rican activists encountered the prison first in metaphor, second in materiality. The prison emerged as a conceptual synthesis of the issues Puerto Ricans faced: poverty, racism, and state violence in the United States, along with the political and economic subjugation of the island itself. In this context, Puerto Ricans began to learn about national(ist) history. They began to embrace a national history whose story arc brought them to resuscitate nationalism and to remember the Nationalist Party members still incarcerated. Puerto Ricans learning about their history embraced the Nationalist Party as a vital precursor to their own efforts. As Puerto Rican activists increasingly invoked Nationalist Party history, the prisoners went from being iconic points of reference to being the focal point of a nationalistic campaign for their freedom, synecdochically representing a step toward Puerto Rican independence. As Puerto Rican nationalism came alive the imprisoned Nationalists gained in visibility. Describing the Nationalist Party in heroic terms was part of the effort to develop a contemporary heroism. This retelling of Puerto Rican history in general and the Nationalist Party in particular naturalized anticolonial nationalism as part of the Puerto Rican collective memory through empirical data and affective attachment. That is, it involved the learning and telling of names, places and events as well as the sentimental connection to notions of heroism and sacrifice. This combination owed to diasporic experience, imbuing the task with a restorative imperative—learning and knowing the specific elements of historical phenomena emanated from the fact of migration. While it invoked the condition of colonialism, this production of memory prided itself on its attention to historical details. The use of history, of retelling historical events and recounting key

figures to inculcate nationalist consciousness, affirms Foucault's assertion that "historical knowledge becomes an element of the struggle: it is both a description of struggles and a weapon in the struggle. History gave us the idea that we are at war; and we wage war through history."<sup>30</sup> Foucault described history as a usable and malleable force, something akin to memory yet more consciously epistemological. The popular production of history is the battleground of political struggle.

The prison in general and the five Nationalist prisoners in particular were critical in these efforts to revive Puerto Rican nationalism. The five Nationalists provided access to the history of Puerto Rican nationalism; their visibility owed and contributed to the revival of this nationalism, especially in the United States. As a result of their personal connection to the island and their political connection to its oppositional past, the five imprisoned Nationalists were potent symbols for a new generation of Puerto Rican activists. Access to their visibility sparked a revival of Puerto Rican nationalism as a diasporic project that provided a radical critique of U.S. policies and borders. The group was incarcerated for spectacular acts of violence: Oscar Collazo, along with Griselio Torresola, shot at President Harry Truman on November 1, 1950. Torresola was killed in the incident and Collazo sent to prison for life. Lolita Lebrón, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Irvin Flores Rodríguez, and Andrés Figueroa Cordero, shot inside the House of Representatives on March 1, 1954. All five were born and raised in Puerto Rico but living in New York City prior to their attacks in Washington, D.C. They were each longtime members of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party. Collazo had been chairman of the New York City branch of the party since 1942. He also recruited Lebrón and her brother into the Nationalist Party. A garment worker, Catholic mystic and ardent



nationalist, Lebrón then became one of the first women to hold a high-ranking military position in a nationalist movement. Cancel Miranda was raised in a Nationalist family and served two years in prison for refusing enlistment in the U.S. war in Korea. Flores fought in the “Grito de Jayuya,” the island-wide insurrection of October 1950 that sparked Collazo and Torresola’s shooting. Cordero was a longtime rank-and-file member of the Nationalist Party, both in Puerto Rico and New York City.<sup>31</sup>

The prisoners were individually bound up with a nationalist history that was being retold by U.S.-based independence activists. Further, the nationalist movement in the United States was largely crushed or driven underground through the persecution that followed the 1954 attack on Congress, much as it was in Puerto Rico following the 1950 revolt when more than 1,000 Nationalists, communists, independentistas and others were imprisoned.<sup>32</sup> Independence activists were subjected to widespread surveillance in both Puerto Rico and the United States since the 1930s, and the response to the 1950 revolt heightened widespread fears among non-Nationalists of political activism. By 1987, the FBI had collected files on an estimated 75,000 Puerto Ricans.<sup>33</sup> Incarceration stunted the spread of Puerto Rican nationalist history: it accompanied the near eradication of the party in the United States, meaning there were few people to continue organizing under that banner or to continue telling the story of that organizing. To see the Nationalist prisoners was to remember, even for the first time, a particular history that was made invisible with their incarceration.

As a political project, revolutionary nationalism attempts to make visible pasts hidden by colonial violence. Colonialism and nationalism both engage in hegemonic and epistemological battles: each one seeks to provide unquestioned, even unquestionable,

ideas about the present as an inexorable condition, an almost divinely bestowed fate owing to characteristics that are often described as innate or at least inevitable. History, said Foucault, is “a ritual that reinforced sovereignty.”<sup>34</sup> Control of historical narratives is therefore a central aim of both colonialism and nationalism, each one seeking to recuperate its political agenda through the mastering of history. Nationalism and colonialism share a modernist obsession with history as a force that vindicates, certifies, and erases by presenting a heroic and unified past. History is a claim of representation; its deployment fashions collective identities. History—as a construct rather than an assumed fact—is also, according to Chatterjee, “the source of nationhood.” In both colonialism and nationalism, appeals to history legitimate the imagined national community.<sup>35</sup> Yet the expressions of this history differ, at least in the realm of anticolonial nationalism, which seeks to restore a history “stolen” or “silenced” by colonial authority. Revolutionary nationalism proclaims its access to a “truer” or more authentic history, which it seeks to make visible as an explicit part of the opposition to colonialism. Frantz Fanon argued that “colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.”<sup>36</sup> This epistemological assault on Puerto Rican history, its visible absence in the established curriculum, made high school and college campuses productive sites of Puerto Rican activism throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Independence activists made Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans visible through battles over curriculum content and bilingual education.

Especially between 1968 and 1974, the start of this generation of militant Puerto Rican visibility, Puerto Rican groups routinely printed articles in their respective publications about the history of Puerto Rican colonialism and resistance. These media routinely invoked incidents of Puerto Rican history, key events or individuals, to shape a collective memory of dramatic collective action. Later in the decade, as these histories reached a certain level of saturation and as different organizations began or collapsed, the ritual expressions of historical sovereignty shifted. The need for such introductory articles decreased, as invocations of various historical details became more pervasive. Repetition ensured the saliency of historical information, and radicals began publishing books of Puerto Rican history as well as articles.<sup>37</sup> The period also witnessed a widespread visibility for a new, prolific cohort of Puerto Rican artists—novelists, playwrights, and poets—many of whom upheld nationalism as the logical expression of Puerto Rican desires. As with the Black Arts Movement, the cultural revolution of Puerto Rican artists in the 1970s identified a racial status that was in but not totally of the United States. In this visibility, Puerto Ricans were confined by the city and the conspiracies of racial capitalism, against which they fashioned a patois of English and Spanish.<sup>38</sup>

Media were not the only way Puerto Rican activists made (certain aspects of) their history visible. The lack of Puerto Rican or Latino history became a cause for mobilization around curriculum in secondary and post-secondary schooling. Student organizers argued that the lack of Latino history or visibility, including bilingual education, contributed to the low rates of admission and retention for Latino students. In Chicago, for instance, Edwin Cortés became an activist as a high school senior after his teacher informed him there were no Puerto Rican history classes because “Puerto Rico

had no history.”<sup>39</sup> As Chicago students faced similar obstacles, especially at the heavily Puerto Rican Tuley High School, they collaborated with a few school guidance counselors and local community organizers to establish an alternative high school oriented toward Puerto Rican students. While alternative education practices were common in 1960s protest—most notably, the freedom schools that civil rights workers established as part of their desegregation efforts in the South—the creation of an alternative institution to outlast a particular campaign or policy was of a different order.<sup>40</sup> Founded in 1972, the school opened in the basement of a small church with eleven students. The school acquired its own building the next year, and students named it Rafael Cancel Miranda High School, after one of the five imprisoned Nationalists. According to José López, one of the founders of the school, the adults involved wanted to name the school after Pedro Albizu Campos, the deceased former head of the Nationalist Party who remained a vital symbol of the revolutionary aspirations of Puerto Rican nationalism. But the students insisted on naming it after Cancel Miranda, at least until he was freed. Some of the students also began to correspond with Cancel Miranda. López remembers the students reading his letters aloud so that all could feel an attachment with him.<sup>41</sup> The school, then, became a part of the campaign to free the five Nationalists; its name recalled the militancy of prisoners while its programs reproduced the spirit of nationalist self-reliance. In both name and deed, then, the school recalled the memory of Puerto Rican nationalism, articulated through the Nationalist prisoners.

In an untitled poem written in prison, Cancel Miranda himself summarized the connection between knowledge, visibility and political action. The poem calls for vindicating nationalist history as a necessary step to make visible colonial domination;



poverty and racism in Puerto Rican communities. The effort of “trying to understand the complexity of the national question from the perspective of the diaspora,” of experimenting with the meanings of “independence” from within another country, compelled Puerto Rican militants to provide services in the context of political mobilization.<sup>43</sup> Service provision aimed to eradicate inequities in school, housing, garbage collection, and health care. By providing services, Puerto Rican activists developed social networks in neighborhoods that served to make visible Puerto Ricans as an identity and a community. Through combining Marxism, nationalism, and social work, such projects crafted a political biography that described colonialism as the cause of Puerto Rican migration and poverty. In other words, confinement followed Puerto Ricans from the island to the United States. Describing the lack of resources as a condition of confinement, Puerto Rican activists engaged the specter of the prison through their willingness to violate the law through the use of dramatic tactics to meet the needs of impoverished Puerto Ricans. These included the New York Young Lords hijacking a truck to conduct tests for lead poisoning and occupying a church in order to freely distribute food and clothing.<sup>44</sup>

“The community” is a vital concept of political mobilization. It is a construct that fulfills a similar catalytic purpose for those facing de jure racial segregation as “the people” does in populist contexts. With the civil rights movement as their exemplar, social movement theorists have identified community institutions and social relationships as the necessary yet not immediately visible building blocks that enabled black activists to build such sustained opposition to Jim Crow. Scholars have tracked these relationships across different generations, through the ebb and flow of activism, to identify the hidden

histories that enabled successful collective action by providing the groundwork, skills and resources needed.<sup>45</sup> Understanding these connections allows for a more sophisticated view of social movements, emphasizing the largely invisible dimensions that make possible the relatively rare moments of mass activity and high visibility. These studies have added nuance to conceptualizing social movements by uncovering what may be considered the pre-history of mass movements through an emphasis on established local institutions. However, militants create their own institutions as well as benefit from existing ones. Indeed, Puerto Rican activism throughout the 1970s emphasized institution building in the context of revolutionary nationalism. The provision of services helped structure political loyalties. It was, therefore, a protean expression of the nationalist desire for sovereignty, which I take from Foucault to mean an expression of power that is based in the control of land and the creation of a shared social subjectivity among a particular group and within a particular space.<sup>46</sup>

This community work provided the scaffolding of Puerto Rican nationalist sovereignty. Partha Chatterjee argues that “anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power.”<sup>47</sup> Puerto Rican militants developed institutions as part of their anticolonial nationalism—not in a direct bid for state power but to undermine its reach in the neighborhood and to spread an ethos of anticolonialism. Benedict Anderson’s famous notion of nations as “imagined communities” neglects, Chatterjee argues, the non-Western claims on modernity fashioned through the “spiritual” realm of religion, caste and the family.<sup>48</sup> It further neglects the performative dimension: nationalism, at least in its anticolonial variants, is made and mobilized through its embodied practices as much

or more than through print capitalism. Puerto Rican independence organizers materialized the metaphoric national community through neighborhood organizing and service provision. These institutions, then, demonstrated sovereignty through highly localized expressions of diaspora, understood, as Clifford and Gilroy have differently reminded us, through locations and settlements rather than through travel; culture travels, but people settle.<sup>49</sup> Designed for the benefit of “the Puerto Rican people,” such alternative institutions were fundamentally shaped by the streets of Spanish Harlem and the Lower East Side, of Humboldt Park and Lincoln Park. It was in particular urban enclaves that Puerto Ricans enacted global, diasporic logics. “Lincoln Park was our Puerto Rico,” declared Young Lords cofounder Cha Cha Jiménez, speaking of the area in South Chicago where the Lords formed and began their political organizing. Luis Rosa, who served almost twenty years in prison on charges of belonging to the clandestine Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional, identified Chicago as an extension of Puerto Rico. Imprisoned Nationalist Oscar Collazo called Harlem “a small Puerto Rico.”<sup>50</sup> Political actions and cultural affinities folded Puerto Rico and a sense of being Puerto Rican into parcels of Chicago and New York.<sup>51</sup> The specific neighborhoods Puerto Ricans called home were, especially in Chicago, constantly shifting as a result of the changing patterns of development and disinvestment in the 1970s.<sup>52</sup> Nationalism, specifically through the provision of services and the establishment of alternative institutions, attempted to create a sense of permanent attachment to place for racialized groups in the emerging neoliberal city.

These community projects pursued visibility in multiple forms: to draw attention to the often desperate conditions of the barrio, and to highlight them as expressions of



colonialism akin to the control the United States maintained over the island of Puerto Rico. This articulation made visible the island itself as a site of colonialism. The prison factored prominently in this chain of equivalencies. In the context of Puerto Rican activism in the 1970s, *the prison* signified U.S. imperialism while *prisoners* epitomized political struggle. The prison represented the negative expressions of diasporic consciousness, formed through repression, whereas the prisoners symbolized its positive valence as a form of identification.<sup>53</sup> The campaign to free them, proceeding first by remembering them, provided a narrative and symbolic lens through which to view the history of Puerto Rico and its fight for independence. Prisoners were the bridge connecting the two spaces of Puerto Rican racial formation: the barrio and the colony, the United States and the island.

The five Nationalist prisoners were this bridge. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, the Nationalists' presence in American prisons connected their U.S.-based supporters to the island. This connection was at first symbolic but grew more material as stateside activists built relationships with those on the island and as the prisoners became more visible on the island itself through the work of various organizations and committees. At the same time, and perhaps more usefully, the Nationalists provided a metonymic link that made the island visible in the consciousness and identity formation of U.S.-based Puerto Ricans. Even constructing "the five Nationalists" as a cohesive unit required a certain elision of historicity for the purpose of political utility, since one of the five was incarcerated four years ahead of the others and for a different incident. Yet their membership in the Nationalist Party rather than their legal charges made them a unified group in the popular imagination. In a typical such move, the Committee for the Freedom

of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Prisoners described the 1950 and 1954 shootings as two separate occurrences of the same one event—“an action of sublime heroism” undertaken by “a nation at [perpetual] war.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed the construction of the five Nationalists as a group rested on a notion of the colonial condition as a state of permanent war, regardless of location. Such descriptions naturalized the Nationalists’ actions and justified the re-emergence of a militant nationalism that had the prisoners at the center of their symbolic authority.

Through the imprisoned Nationalists, young Puerto Rican activists in the 1970s exposed themselves to the culture and politics of anticolonial nationalism. History, especially the visibility of the Nationalist prisoners, provided the entrée to re-presenting the memory of revolutionary nationalism. With some former members of the Young Lords and others, Carlos Feliciano, a former member of the Nationalist Party who had fought in the 1950 rebellion on the island but then moved to New York City, urged support for the Nationalists as part of a (failed) attempt to start a new Puerto Rican Nationalist Party in the United States.<sup>55</sup> Feliciano’s efforts were possible, even if unsuccessful, only as a result of the visibility he garnered from being a defendant in a publicized trial investigating the bombings of a Puerto Rican group. As I argue below his case was the first of the era to make the prison visible as a relevant site of Puerto Rican political and racial formation. While the 1970s iteration of Puerto Rican nationalism consistently recalled its 1950s forerunner, the two expressions differed considerably, particularly on questions of U.S. patriotism. In the 1950s, Puerto Rican Nationalism rejected U.S. control over Puerto Rico but did not confront the founding myths of the country itself. So, for instance, pacifist supporters of Oscar Collazo likened him to

George Washington and even called him an “American patriot” because they said his action was done to force the United States to better live up to its democratic ideals by freeing its colonial possessions.<sup>56</sup>

By the 1970s, few argued that Collazo and the other imprisoned Nationalists were American patriots aiming to improve the U.S. image. Even those who petitioned for their release on humanitarian grounds did not try to recuperate the Nationalists’ actions with images of U.S. nationalism. Rather they argued that the Nationalists had, by that time, served lengthy sentences and, as political activists, did not pose a criminal threat to society. The presentation of the Nationalists as nonthreatening owed to the visibility of Puerto Rican protest in the 1970s. The Nationalists were imprisoned for combating the invisibility of Puerto Rican colonialism. But by the 1970s, the politicization of Puerto Rico and the widespread growth (and publicity) of Puerto Rican militancy within the United States paradoxically implied that the prisoners would not return to acts of violence if released. The Nationalists retained their militancy; to the delight of many of their ardent supporters, they never apologized for their actions and even at their release they maintained that they “could not rule out” the use of violence.<sup>57</sup> But the visibility of Puerto Rican protest had created the conditions where they would not be protesting invisibility. Especially in the context of President Jimmy Carter’s frequent calls to improve human rights around the world, a move with contradictory expressions that were often dominated by Cold War anticommunism, activists made the Nationalists visible as a human rights issue for the United States.<sup>58</sup> They used the Nationalists’ continuing incarceration to demand that Carter live up to his human rights rhetoric by releasing the Nationalists.<sup>59</sup>

Nationalist supporters celebrated the prisoners as national heroes for their attacks on the American empire. Fueled by the fusion of Marxism and nationalism, activists in the 1970s rejected the United States as a global imperial power. The structures of feeling of Puerto Rican nationalism in the 1970s rejected any favorable comparisons of the imprisoned Nationalists to symbols of American nationalist mythology, as supporters in the 1950s had done. Instead, the five were positioned as forerunners to the decolonization movements sweeping the globe and whose closest domestic parallel was found in the black freedom struggle. As fighting to liberate Puerto Rico from a colonialism often described in carceral terms, many Puerto Rican activists increasingly described Puerto Ricans behind bars as “prisoners of war,” not just political prisoners. While this terminology could be found infrequently in the late 1960s indictments of Puerto Rican incarceration, it increased over the course of the 1970s. A 1976 statement that served as precursor to the founding of an organization called the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN, or National Liberation Movement) defined the five as “soldiers in a war of national liberation.” As such, and evidently following the self-description of the Nationalists, the statement described them as prisoners of war. As with other POWs, the Puerto Rican prisoners of war were symbols of national suffering. Describing them as captured soldiers emerged with a growing militancy, which, as I will show, made the Nationalists into a usable memory through a new round of spectacular violence. Their refusal to accept any conditional release (such as parole) generated some support for acts of clandestine militancy. Supporters of this approach insisted on the Nationalists’ visibility based on their symbolic defiance. The MLN formed in part to visibly support not only the release of the Nationalists but the actions that led to their incarceration. This

grouping hoped that the prisoners' visibility would inspire greater militancy (the Nationalists were right) rather than arguing for their release on humanitarian grounds (they had served enough time in prison—the unifying basis and common reason given in demands for their release). Supporting the actions, not just the freedom, of Puerto Rican political prisoners was, for the MLN, a crucial expression of solidarity with “the last resort an intervened nation has at its disposal.”<sup>60</sup> It made the prison visible as a target of opposition, a site that symbolized the confinement Puerto Ricans faced. This visibility highlighted the prisoners less as an issue of human rights than as an inspiration to act. A small group, the MLN, as I examine later in this chapter, established itself as a pole of visible militancy among Puerto Rican activists. Their support for the Nationalists accompanied a strategic orientation to the pursuit of visibility.

The burgeoning Puerto Rican militancy of the 1970s discovered the Nationalists as a usable memory. The Nationalists provided a living bridge connecting U.S.-based Puerto Ricans to island histories, a connection that was strengthened as the campaign for their release grew alongside the campaign for Puerto Rican independence. Just as activists deployed the Nationalists to remember Puerto Rican history, so too did their invocation rescue the prisoners from being forgotten. Independence groups in Puerto Rico had included calls for the freedom of Puerto Rican political prisoners since the 1950s, both those on the island and in the United States. Yet this demand was not implemented in any programmatic way until the 1970s. The campaign was begun by groups in the United States rather than in Puerto Rico. An island-based committee for their release did not begin until 1976, after Nelson Canals, a board member of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (NAARPR; see chapter 3),

moved back to Puerto Rico to escape the constant visits from the FBI that had begun to dominate his life. He brought with him a commitment to the Nationalist prisoners, shaped by his involvement with NAARPR and through his work visiting Puerto Rican prisoners as part of his job at the National Commission on Hispanic Affairs (NCHA) of the Episcopal Church. Using the NAARPR as a model Canals brought together representatives from different organizations on the island to work on the campaign for the Nationalists.<sup>61</sup> This initiative, profoundly shaped by the diaspora experience, revived the Nationalists as a political issue in Puerto Rico. Prior to the early 1970s, one of the five had not had a visitor in fourteen years; others received only annual or biannual visits from spouses or immediate family.<sup>62</sup>

In fact, the Nationalists owed their initial visibility to the abiding interest in dissident prisoners that black radicals had done so much to make visible. Michael Deutsch of the People's Law Office in Chicago, a collective of leftist lawyers involved in the prisoner rights movement, first met Rafael Cancel Miranda after the 1972 strike at Marion. The strike was one of several ways that the five intersected with imprisoned radicals; Lebrón was incarcerated briefly with convicted Black Liberation Army (BLA) member Assata Shakur and with Marilyn Buck, a white woman accused of aiding the BLA. Collazo, Flores, and Cordero were each involved in strikes and organizing at Leavenworth prison. And prior to his time at Marion, Cancel Miranda was incarcerated at Alcatraz with Rosenberg codefendant Morton Sobell.<sup>63</sup> Deutsch, who had no prior knowledge of Puerto Rican history or its colonial status, met Miranda at the suggestion of other prisoners he was representing in legal cases emanating from the Marion strike. Impressed by Miranda, his stature, eloquence and the respect he received across racial

lines by other, younger politically active prisoners, Deutsch began visiting the other Nationalist prisoners. He soon became the attorney of record for all five of the Nationalists in hopes that he could help “bring their case to the attention of the world.” Their refusal to accept U.S. authority included an unwillingness to file suit against the government as well as a rejection of parole as inapplicable to their predicament as Puerto Rican nationals. While the prisoners were intransigent in their stance, they gave Deutsch permission to file a lawsuit on behalf of their family members and political associates. Along with independence organizers from the United States and the island, Deutsch traveled around Puerto Rico enlisting friends and family members as plaintiffs in a class action suit on behalf of the prisoners. The lawsuit was a political, not juridical, move. It was an attempt to achieve recognition for the prisoners, drawing attention to their case after so many years of relative obscurity. The lawsuit helped catalyze a coordinated political campaign by making the prisoners visible in the U.S. court system for the first time since their arrests. Deutsch recalls that he and others on their legal team became “a conduit of information,” facilitating the Nationalists’ involvement in their campaign and the independence movement more broadly, as well as their ability to speak with one another. Their legal credentials facilitated their access but does not describe the work they did. The suit was short lived; a federal judge separated the case, assigning it to the relevant jurisdiction where each prisoner was held. By that point, Andres Cordero had become quite ill. Organizers concentrated their efforts on winning his humanitarian release, which succeeded on October 6, 1977.<sup>64</sup>

Deutsch’s serendipitous involvement coincided with other discoveries of the Nationalists, including the Chicago-based activists who started the Rafael Cancel

Miranda High School. The call to free the Nationalists synthesized the demand for Puerto Rican independence and the militancy of the prison movement. The visibility of the Nationalists lent support to both struggles. Calls for their freedom were visual as well as verbal. Several years before the Rafael Cancel Miranda High School opened in northwest Chicago, the Young Lords office in the southern part of the city featured a mural of the five Nationalists. Similar artwork, portrait drawings of the five, adorned the offices and brochures of various groups in the United States supporting Puerto Rican independence and prisoners' rights. These drawings often featured a picture of Lebrón in the foreground, with the other four encircling her like planets around the sun.<sup>65</sup> She had the most symbolic resonance of the group, in a proto-feminist recognition of how infrequently women held positions of military authority. Cancel Miranda and Collazo were the most vocal of the prisoners; well-educated men, they both wrote essays and gave interviews that supporters published. But Lebrón was the most visible of the group. Her name represented all five, much as the five were said to represent all of Puerto Rico.<sup>66</sup> Oscar López said he committed himself to working to free the Nationalists, a commitment that ultimately led him to join the clandestine FALN, after hearing a recording of the statement Lebrón made after being arrested. "After I heard her voice I made a commitment to work for the freedom of the five," he reflected forty years later<sup>67</sup>

While the five were re-presented in the 1970s under the Marxist-based nationalism that dominated independence organizing at the time, a spirit of militancy connected the generations. The Nationalists rejected the parole system and refused to file any legal claims directly on their own behalf, since to do so would acknowledge the authority of the U.S. government to hold both them and Puerto Rico itself in prison. The



Nationalists rejected all expressions of U.S. authority over their lives and believed themselves not to be subject to U.S. rule. Their refusal to accept or apply for parole or petition for release in any direct manner—even, in the case of Andrés Figueroa Cordero, if it meant being released sooner to receive treatment for a life-threatening illness—established a measure of sovereignty from behind prison walls. (This firm position dated back to Albizu Campos, who was ordered released from prison by Governor Muñoz Marín on the condition that he cease his political activities. Albizu Campos declined the offer and had to be forcibly removed *from* prison.)<sup>68</sup> “We don’t recognize the legality of the United States Government over Puerto Rico,” Rafael Cancel Miranda told a journalist in 1977 about his refusal to apply for clemency. “We know they have power, but power is not the same as authority.”<sup>69</sup> While they trusted their public representation to independence activists, the Nationalists maintained some sense of their political subjectivity by forcing the government to accept their terms. The visibility of their case and the calls for their unconditional release therefore came to symbolize the question of U.S. authority in the making and practice of Puerto Rican subjectivity, both on the island and in the United States. If, as Foucault argued, sovereignty and discipline are mutually exclusive modes of power—expressed as land versus body, visibility versus invisibility—sovereignty was a logical response to the disciplinary power of prison.<sup>70</sup> Their stance treated the prison as a metaphor of U.S. power: even if they could not abstain entirely from the disciplinary function of power within prison, they attempted to establish the terms on which they would leave prison. By rejecting the traditional routes toward incarceration, the Nationalists used visibility to undermine the prison’s ability to contain them. Unconditional release was the visibility of antidisiplinary protest, even if there

were limited possibilities for the Nationalists to undermine specific expressions of disciplinary power inside prison. By seeking to control the terms of their release, the Nationalist prisoners sought to demonstrate that they had greater authority than the prisons that held them. This power needed to be displayed in order to be understood and for the demand to have meaning. This display of sovereignty utilized synecdoche: as the Nationalists tried to overpower the prison from within, so too could Puerto Rico break free of U.S. control. This equivalence of the prisoners as specters of independence was shared by the prisoners and their most stalwart supporters, but it was not universally shared among all who called for their release.

The Nationalists' refusal to abide by standard American juridical practices made visibility a requisite element of the campaign. The only way their firm position could be met was if sufficient political pressure could be brought to bear on the U.S. government. At the same time, supporters made the Nationalists' refusal itself visible in order to inspire greater activism on behalf of the prisoners and on behalf of Puerto Rico. The Nationalists' demand for unconditional release endowed them and their actions during and since the 1950s with a certain purity of purpose. They came to embody a famous, now resurgent aphorism of Pedro Albizu Campos, who said that "the nation is honor and sacrifice" (*la patria es valor y sacrificio*). As the Nationalists became a symbol of national unity and pride, the idea of the (Puerto Rican) nation came to stand in for the family. The family has long served as a gendered metaphor of the nation.<sup>71</sup> As Hill notes, the family—especially the wife or mother of the accused—has also been a potent symbol in the defense campaigns of political dissidents.<sup>72</sup> Yet members of the Nationalist Party were encouraged to keep their family separate from the party due to the constant, violent

clashes it had with the colonial authority. As a result, the campaign to free the Nationalists was not based in their families, who were peripherally involved in the effort but often afraid to visit their incarcerated loved ones or be visibly involved in political action on their behalf. Instead, the campaign was rooted in a popular revival of nationalism led largely by a new generation of activists who did not have prior relationships with the prisoners.<sup>73</sup> Working to free the Nationalists provided a mnemonic connection to Puerto Rico through which young activists could recuperate a sense of national belonging—the nation-as-family rather than the family-as-nation.

As a humanitarian demand, the call for the release of the Nationalists united different sectors of Puerto Rican civil society—not just within the independence movement, but also among some advocates of commonwealth or statehood status. Its cross-class mobilization demonstrated the nationalist underpinnings of the campaign, specifically the visibility of the five Nationalists as symbolic representatives of Puerto Rico, even as this nationalism was not reducible to pro-independence sentiment. Their case grew in prominence until it became one of the central, shared demands across and beyond different sectors of the independence movement. It garnered the support of every living former governor of Puerto Rico, including Luis Muñoz Marín, the first elected governor of the island and the man against whom the 1950 revolt on the island was directed. Their support helped change the narrative within Puerto Rican media about the Nationalists. When the campaign first began in Puerto Rico in 1976, journalists described the Nationalists as terrorists; by the time they were released in September 1979, newspapers described them as national heroes. As U.S. government officials privately debated whether to release the Nationalists in 1978, they referred to them as

“independence fighters” rather than as fanatics or terrorists, motivated in part by Amnesty International’s support for the prisoners.<sup>74</sup> Several prominent figures in the United States ultimately supported their release, including twelve Congressional representatives, as well as other officials and many prominent international figures, especially in Latin America.<sup>75</sup>

Yet the campaign was organized by pro-independence nationalists, many of them at least influenced by Marxism. These women and men displayed a synecdochic identification with the prisoners as beacons of independence. Following a 1972 conference on Puerto Rican political prisoners in New York, Benjy Cruz identified this synecdoche as a linear connection: “free our prisoners to free ourselves!”<sup>76</sup> Flyers identified the Nationalists as “symbols of courage—victims of repression” and as a “banner [for independence] flying undauntedly in prison.” The Nationalists were “the embodiment of our strategy (revolutionary action) and of our goal (a free Puerto Rico).”<sup>77</sup> The developing momentum for the Nationalist prisoners likewise convinced many involved in the campaign that independence would soon follow their liberation. Former Young Lord Mickey Melendez fused the release of the Nationalists and the independence of Puerto Rico as a shared process. “The campaign for immediate and unconditional release of the Nationalists [sic] political prisoners enables us, in a very concrete form, to present the total question of independence in the capitol of imperialism. Furthermore, it enables us to reach into our historical roots and point out the continuity of our anti-imperialist struggle for generations.”<sup>78</sup> Nelson Canals, one of the main organizers of the island-based campaign for the release of the

prisoners, said he “expected their release would give a big push to forming a National Liberation Front in Puerto Rico and that their moral force and example would forge a new level of struggle.”<sup>79</sup> The *New York Times* noted that Cordero’s 1977 release raised the question of independence to new visibility. The freed prisoners were not immune from such pronouncements. At a rally celebrating her release in New York City, Lebrón estimated Puerto Rico would achieve independence within eighteen months from that point.<sup>80</sup>

But it did not happen. At their release, they stopped being a tightly bound group—the Nationalists—and became separate individuals with a shared history. As a group, one whose symbolic cohesion owed partially to their physical separation enforced by incarceration, the Nationalists represented the specter of independence. Their ability to bond Puerto Rican civil society owed to the visibility of their memory as national symbols. As people, though, they were disconnected from the movement that had made them a symbolic whole. Once released, their symbolic stature remained—a crowd of thousands in Chicago carried Rafael Cancel Miranda on their shoulders after his release—but more as inspirational figureheads than as political leaders. The campaign for the Nationalists, its cross-class pull throughout the diaspora and across political ideology, was based on a belief that they “belong[ed] to the entire [nation of] Puerto Rico.”<sup>81</sup> All sides understood their symbolic utility, which allowed them to be shared by different groups throughout and beyond civil society who may have disagreed over Puerto Rican independence or the means to achieve it. Their symbolic valence remained true after their release; they were (and the two living

ones remain) highly regarded spokespeople of anti-imperialist Puerto Rican nationalism. But their symbolic appeal could not sustain the level of mobilized unity once the group was freed from prison.<sup>82</sup> As with other collective memories, the Nationalists were potent catalysts while their visibility could be mobilized to serve particular ends. Their release removed the urgency of the campaign, weakening but not removing the connection between the Nationalist prisoners and the coming independence of Puerto Rico.

Campaigns to free prisoners attached to social movements mesh the symbolic and the sentient, making individuals the embodiment of collective pasts and future aspirations. The weight of history is a strategic resource in the development of visibility, especially where confinement limits public access. The construction of historical information creates a sovereignty that can develop a shared identity and direct the focus of visibility. Prisoners incarcerated for political acts associated with transnational social movements can become widely recognized symbols of diaspora and national heritage. This symbolic valence owes to the prisoners' lack of sustained, direct contact with publics. Once released, public attention became more diffuse and symbolic authority became less powerful. The individuals remained representative figures, but their ability to generate visibility decreased with the increased possibility for public exchange.

#### Concrete Elusions and the Subaltern Spectacle

The critique of invisibility still *uses* invisibility, much the way that forgetting is a strategic component of remembering. Invisibility can be mobilized, I argued in the

previous chapter, as evidence of oppression. In such instances, visibility, as self-determined representation, is pursued as the antidote to state-enforced silencing. But invisibility can also be used as a resource. The act of focusing public attention on a cause obscures other ideas or aspects of social reality. More than the selection of certain details over others, visibility uses invisibility to make itself known—at least regarding hidden places such as the prison. The isolation of the prison from public view generated invisible means to pursue the goal of visibility. In this way, visibility delineates legitimate and illegitimate modes of invisibility. One of the things visibility exposes to public view is invisibility itself.<sup>83</sup> Accordingly I argue that as Puerto Ricans gained increasing visibility beginning in the late 1960s and lasting throughout the 1970s, the prison was a metaphoric concept to understand the violence that daily occurred unnoticed. Making the prison visible illuminated other aspects of Puerto Rican life in the United States and on the island. As the prison provided a heuristic for navigating a public identity so too did it grow in material significance. Puerto Rican activists saw their fates increasingly bound up with those behind bars. With the prison demonstrating both metaphoric and material purchase, some militants pursued visibility through means that were self-consciously invisible. The visibility of invisibility, in the form of clandestine actions and public displays of silence, used the partiality of public representation as a demonstration of sovereignty. Those who used spectacular invisibility sought to increase the attention on hidden places or forgotten ideas by removing themselves from view. Invisibility was a tactical means by which to make visible, following Mignolo, Other ideas, Other places, Other subjectivities. In this way, invisibility was the dialectical response to the silence of confinement. As Walter Benjamin argued, “Truth is not a matter of exposure which

destroys the secret, but a revelation that does justice to it.”<sup>84</sup> The visible display of invisibility did not destroy the prison but revealed it as a place that was hidden yet contained a power that was ubiquitous.

I have been arguing that prisoners and prison activists have organized in ways that both pursue visibility and attempt to control its expression, experience, and example. We have seen how this approach has engaged questions of racial formation and political subjectivity, often in ways far different than its architects might otherwise have hoped. What I want to do here is query how visibility engages or might even be procured through silences. All social forces contain their opposite. As Paul Virilio has said, to invent the airplane is to invent the airplane crash.<sup>85</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that a strategy of visibility makes use of invisibility—not just as a target but as a tactic. My concern in the rest of the chapter is more specific than demonstrating what gets obscured through spectacle. Rather, I want to show that a strategy of visibility performs agency and deploys invisibility in diverse ways. I am concerned here not just with the invisibility of prisons, but the *use of invisibility* to make the prison, and its captives, visible. This effort developed out of the organizing within Puerto Rican communities to make Puerto Ricans visible as a political, racial and specifically national collective.

In seeing the prison, Puerto Rican militants utilized what can be considered the visibility of invisibility—what Taussig, following Hegel, calls the “labor of the negative.” Taussig examines the contemporary Zapatista movement of Southern Mexico, whose poetic spokesman, Subcomandante Marcos, always appears in a ski mask while criticizing the government for masking its misdeeds, to argue that masking can be revelatory in a media-saturated environment. “Indeed, there is a striking photogenicity



here; the more masked the reality, the more striking the drama and even the beauty of the photography, as if the masked face, here at least, is divinely preordained for the camera.”<sup>86</sup> In the realm of prison radicalism, where the mask hides not just the face but entire bodies, this labor of the negative engages invisible institutions through highly visible practices of invisibility. These are what I call concrete elusions, articulations of the unseen—the prisoner, the clandestine cell, the colony in the metropole—and the material—the prison, the materiality of violent attacks, the metropole in the colony. They are concrete in that they exist and refer to material factors and institutions, elusive in that they are hard to see, find or hear. Invisibility is a necessary resource of visibility. As Goldstein writes, the spectacle is “a means for producing and overcoming invisibility in the contemporary urban landscape. ... The spectacle is as much about obscuring what performers wish to conceal as it is about putting on a display: controlling what is to be seen, when, and by whom.”<sup>87</sup> The subaltern pursuit of visibility engages highly material matters of life and death; their spectacles are, as a result, concrete. Yet the institutions and experiences for which they seek visibility, as well as, in the case of clandestine acts, the means by which they do so is simultaneously hard to find or grasp. It is, in other words, elusive. Concrete elusions names the intertwined relationship of visibility and invisibility that come together in the form of spectacle. The term helps overcome what Murray Edelman has identified as the false division between symbol and reality by highlighting the intangible dimensions of spectacular actions.<sup>88</sup>

Concrete elusions manifest in Puerto Rican prison visibility, especially the campaign to free the Nationalists, manifest in three sites of spectacular silences that I will examine in the rest of this chapter: occupations, bombings, and negations. The latter

practice occurred in juridical contexts, as various activists engaged in legal organizing publicly refused to answer questions about those who carried out illegal acts. This opposition was a spectacle of silence that extended the spectacle first created by the bombings of a clandestine group called the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN, the Armed Forces of National Liberation). The FALN, not the first but the most active clandestine independentist group, was an effort to dramatize the confinement they maintained that all Puerto Ricans faced. The five Nationalist prisoners occupied a central place in the FALN's self-representation. Invisibility and silence were mutually reinforcing dimensions of imprisonment and clandestinity that bolstered nationalist sentiment. Living underground as a fugitive wanted in connection with FALN bombings, Oscar López remembers marking the release of the four remaining Nationalists in September 1979 with a moment of prideful silence. "And when the four—Lolita, Rafael, Irving and Oscar—finally were set free I made me a strong cup of coffee and in total silence celebrated what for me was a great victory for the Puerto Rican people."<sup>89</sup> Most who worked on or supported the campaign for their release joined the thousands of people who heard the Nationalists speak in Chicago and New York, and the thousands more who welcomed them home at the airport in San Juan. Yet for those who used clandestine means to advocate the release of the Nationalists, their celebration was found in quiet moments of contemplative joy.

Following de Certeau, we can think of clandestine strategies as hyperbolic extensions of the invisibility that marginalized populations already experience. They magnify invisibility to achieve visibility. De Certeau wrote that such groups "live...below the thresholds at which visibility begins."<sup>90</sup> The threshold below visibility

can be a resource, evading detection in pursuit of bigger projects of visibility. Critics have rejected the spectacle for mystifying social relationships: Debord and the Situationists argued that the image commodified life and obscured capitalist exploitation. More contemporary critics have objected to the spectacle on the grounds that it mistakes the dramatic for the systemic. Such views castigate the spectacular as an elaborate and well-managed distraction. They assume that the spectacle is an incident of hypervisibility that by its nature, by creating spectators, increases alienation and masks social structure.<sup>91</sup>

While valid, these arguments overlook the productive work of spectacles—the political, social, cultural and economic relations that are enacted and not just effaced through the spectacular.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, spectacles are often crucial elements in the development of social movements. The “strategic dramaturgy” of spectacular tactics, including but not synonymous with violence, has often marked the tipping point whereby an issue becomes recognizable as a political concern, or by which a population becomes visible as political actors.<sup>93</sup> As Singh argues, marginalized groups necessarily utilize spectacle to interrupt the invisibility that accompanies their exclusion from the realms of formal political legitimacy or social standing.<sup>94</sup> Further, juxtaposing a superficial hypervisibility against a systemic obfuscation lacks the nuance needed to assess how such spectacles, especially those of subaltern groups, are constructed. A tactic to interrupt structural invisibility, subaltern spectacles also make use of a strategic invisibility to visibilize a greater political critique of systemic power. The hypervisibility of the subaltern spectacle uses invisibility to indict invisibility.<sup>95</sup> The masked guerrilla challenges the state’s lack of transparency and unseen violence. The captive prisoner

speaks or is invoked by others from behind thick walls; her visibility therefore proceeds through positions of invisibility.

Beginning in the late 1960s, for instance, the first U.S.-based clandestine group of Puerto Rican militants began setting off bombs after business hours in New York City buildings. This group set off more than three dozen such incendiary devices in 1969 and 1970. The group who carried out these actions was called the Movimiento Independentista Revolucionario Armado (Armed Revolutionary Independence Movement). The Spanish acronym, MIRA, translates as a command: “look!” Yet the group released no communiqués; its existence was brought to light largely through the May 1970 arrest and subsequent trials of Carlos Feliciano, a former member of the Nationalist Party in Puerto Rico. Two others were later arrested for the MIRA bombings, though Feliciano was the most visible figure as a result of his previous involvement in the Nationalist Party. Feliciano was incarcerated with hundreds of others in Puerto Rico following the island-wide insurrection of 1950 commonly referred to as the Grito de Jayuya (The Cry of Jayuya, named after the city where the revolt was launched and achieved the most military success).<sup>96</sup> After getting out of prison in Puerto Rico, he moved to New York City, got married, had five children and seems to have been politically inactive while working as a carpenter and maintenance man. His case attracted attention from the burgeoning movement among young Puerto Rican dissidents and re-activated a dormant connection to older, predominantly white pacifists who had been ardent supporters of Puerto Rican independence and of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>97</sup> The visibility of Feliciano’s case focused attention simultaneously on the history of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and on its prisoners.

Feliciano expressed this connection in a talk to supporters, saying his case “is not my own. It is the case of my country and my people.” Feliciano was, according to Alfredo Lopez (a member of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party who worked on Feliciano’s defense campaign), “at once a symbol and a part of a struggle.”<sup>98</sup> This fusion connected the decimated Nationalist Party to the current upsurge in Puerto Rican activism. It made political tensions on the island visible in the life of New York City. Feliciano’s visibility served to reinforce this connection; to raise awareness of his case, activists wrote in chalk on the sidewalks of New York “Who is Carlos Feliciano?” The temporary graffiti hoped to make Puerto Rico, its colonized status, visible through Feliciano’s case.<sup>99</sup> The question was less about Feliciano than it was about Puerto Rico—its colonial status, its nationalist opposition, and why so many people from the island resided in the United States.

Feliciano’s case was a pivotal mechanism through which Puerto Ricans in New York City engaged the prison as an issue vital to their political and racial formation. By focusing on the prison, Puerto Rican activists developed their sense of history and called for greater racial unity in the form of national bonds. At the same time, they also mobilized for expanded political unity with multiracial groups, contributing to the political formulations posited by black prison radicalism at the time. Five months after Feliciano was arrested, a member of the Young Lords named Julio Roldan was found hanging in his cell in the Tombs, a pre-trial detention center in New York. Two other men, at least one of them Latino, were also found hanged in their cells not long after Roldan’s death. To the Young Lords, and others, it appeared that the men had all been murdered. The memory of Roldan fueled subsequent efforts: the Young Lords held a funeral procession through Harlem with other radical groups at which the Lords marched

displaying weapons. The group also opened the Julio Roldan Legal Defense Center to address abuse by police or prison guards. Writing in the Young Lords newspaper, *Palante*, Denise Oliver wrote that Roldan's death would inspire the group to "rip the rag off the eyes of justice, who is now blind." Making justice see would, Oliver wrote, "move us all towards the liberation of Puerto Rico ... [and] the liberation of all the prisoners in amerikkka's jails."<sup>100</sup> This language of justice as blind and therefore unfair was a common refrain in *Palante* in 1970 and 1971, where Young Lords members argued that a blind Justice was an unjust force. Instead, they argued that true justice needed to see to fulfill its task. This description, along with events such as those at the Tombs, led the Young Lords, as it did the Black Panthers, to see imprisoned Puerto Ricans. A group of Puerto Rican prisoners briefly joined the organization as an Inmates Liberation Front, and the prisoners at Attica requested the Young Lords serve on the negotiation team along with the Black Panthers, William Kunstler and other well-known advocates of racial protest, among others.<sup>101</sup>

Puerto Rican prison radicalism was shaped by the coterminous black prison radicalism as well as the discourse of imprisonment elucidated by figures such as Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party. Articles in the newspapers of Puerto Rican militant groups, including *Palante* (the Young Lords) and *Unidad Latina* (El Comité), as well as flyers urging supporters to attend the trials of Puerto Rican dissidents, continued to articulate the prison as a metaphor of racially inflected class oppression. They defined all Puerto Ricans, or all poor and oppressed people, as being in prison. As a result, the trial of Puerto Rican dissidents was the fate of the nation, and their testimony voiced the national desires. In an attempt to define their experience as a form of colonial subjection,

Puerto Rican dissidents made use of the contemporary vernacular of black radicalism in the articulation of Puerto Rican nationalism. For it was among black radicals that the critique of the prison as the tool, metaphoric and material, for separating citizens from non-citizens was most forcefully developed. Eduardo “Pancho” Cruz, for instance, was arrested with his brother in March 1971 and charged with setting off bombs as part of MIRA. Cruz described his arrest by lightly paraphrasing, without acknowledgment and by adding a Spanish translation, well-known lines of James Baldwin’s open letter to Angela Davis after her arrest. “I would have thought that by this time the mere sight of chains would be so intolerable that the people would rise to break them”<sup>102</sup> Blackness, or more specifically the challenges black activists raised against the normative assumptions of American democracy, provided a foundation upon which Puerto Rican nationalists in the United States developed their diasporic anticolonialism.<sup>103</sup> Both racial formations accomplished their task through the prison’s visibility.

These cases established organizing around Puerto Rican political prisoners as a possible vehicle through which to bring together pro-independence organizing more generally. Doing so defined colonized life as itself a prison. It also generated attention to Puerto Rican national(ist) history. Feliciano’s visibility, for instance, reintroduced the 1950 uprising on the island back into the American public. Defense attorney William Kunstler said that representing Feliciano “required learning Puerto Rican history.” Kunstler identified his education as a nationalist one; it included reading about deceased Nationalist Party head Pedro Albizu Campos and the 1950 revolt. It also involved his participation in the founding convention of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP).<sup>104</sup> Organizing for Feliciano and other Puerto Rican prisoners articulated the memory of

Puerto Rican Nationalism in the service of contemporary organizing. “We cannot talk about Carlos Feliciano unless we talk about what happened on October 30[, 1950],” wrote Alfredo Lopez.<sup>105</sup> By arguing that it was impossible to disarticulate the prisoners from the anticolonial struggle of which they were a part, Puerto Rican militants fused history and memory in the symbolic valence of the prisoners. Flyers about Feliciano’s case routinely printed a picture from the 1950 revolt that showed armed soldiers having lined up two dozen Nationalists, separated by gender. The picture attached both aspects of the 1950 revolt, insurrection and repression, to Feliciano’s contemporary case.<sup>106</sup> Supporters argued for Feliciano’s significance based on his symbolic cache: he was a cellmate of deceased Nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos following the 1950 uprising. A fiery orator in life, Albizu Campos remained a potent symbol of Puerto Rican nationalism after his 1965 death. As a result of his connection to a man held in almost saintly stature as an apostle of independence, Feliciano could be a potent “symbol to the Puerto Rican youth, both in Puerto Rico and the United states [sic] of the undefeatable [sic] struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico.”<sup>107</sup> Feliciano’s supporters constructed his visibility to make him just such a symbol. One flyer about his case featured a drawing of a man held down by three ball-and-chain shackles marked “USA.” The Puerto Rican flag hangs in the background. Other flyers and articles demonstrated Feliciano’s metonymic meaning as demonstrative of Puerto Rican colonial existence, describing “The man, The frame-up, The nation.”<sup>108</sup>

Puerto Rico’s colonial status, as well as the hardships migrants faced stateside, were made visible through the bodies and legal predicaments of militant Puerto Ricans in the United States. As the island’s political-economic status fused with the legal issues of



its diasporic dissidents, the prison became visible as a mechanism and metaphor of colonial domination. The prison joined the fate of Puerto Ricans in the United States with those living on the island: both were “political prisoners” confined by U.S. imperialism. This equivalency informed analyses of the Puerto Rican condition. It also structured the strategies used to ameliorate that condition. El Comité, a New York City organization focused on tenants’ rights, organized a conference in March 1972 dealing with Puerto Rican political prisoners. Through the conference, El Comité hoped to foster greater unity within the Puerto Rican Left of New York City by focusing on the issue of political prisoners. The conference was the first such gathering of Puerto Ricans in the United States to emphasize the five Nationalists and argue for the strategic necessity of their freedom. Indeed, the conference argued that the Nationalists were a political priority precisely because they had been “forgotten or ignored.” More than that, conference organizers argued that the existence of Puerto Rican political prisoners certified the existence of a (captive) Puerto Rican nation. “The cases of our political prisoners justifies our existence as a nation. They point out very clearly in Puerto Rico and here in New York the colonial status of Puerto Rico.”<sup>109</sup> Out of this analysis, conference organizers, among their promotional materials, listed “Puerto Rico” as one of those prisoners the conference aimed to liberate. Incarceration was not just *in* the United States but *of* and *by* the United States. Other conference materials presented a brief history of Puerto Rico, from the fifteenth century through the 1970s, as an uninterrupted process of repression.<sup>110</sup> The conference launched the Frente Unido Pro Defensa Presos Politicos Puertorriqueños (United Front for the Defense of Puerto Rican Political Prisoners), with representatives from nearly a dozen Puerto Rican organizations.<sup>111</sup> This position, that prisoners

“justif[ied] our existence and our dignity as a Nation,” was a neat inverse of the position common to black prison radicalism.<sup>112</sup> Whereas George Jackson and other black radicals declared that they were (always) in prison because of their blackness, El Comité and other Puerto Rican militants proclaimed that they were a distinct national group within American racial hierarchies because of the imprisonment of nationalist Puerto Ricans who activists claimed as symbols of the broader collective.

The conference also anticipated a rally two years later at Madison Square Garden, where 20,000 people from different sectors of the Left in the United States and Puerto Rico gathered to declare their support for Puerto Rican independence. The Madison Square Garden rally launched the Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee (PRSC), an organization based on a transnational notion of solidarity—people in North America supporting an island-based independence movement. Responding to colonialism, the PRSC made the island central to its constitution rather than the particular identities of its members; it therefore brought together a multiracial group of activists. The freedom of Puerto Rican political prisoners, and especially of the five Nationalists, was a central demand of the rally, which was the largest gathering of Puerto Rican independence activists in U.S. history.<sup>113</sup> Coming out of the rally, the PSP and the PRSC pledged to organize protests marking the bicentennial. The protest, a Bicentennial Without Colonies, brought tens of thousands of demonstrators to Philadelphia and San Francisco in July 1976 to redirect the spectacle of American nationalism to make visible the prison of colonialism.<sup>114</sup> By that point, Puerto Ricans had emerged as a highly visible racialized population within the United States. This visibility was facilitated not only by political protest but through various artistic expressions. These included the opening of the

Nuyorican Poets Café in New York City as a site of diasporic cultural production, as well as the award-winning production of Miguel Piñero's prisonhouse play, *Short Eyes*. The play premiered in 1974 and was made into a movie in 1977.

While all nationalism utilizes some synecdochic representation through which to delineate the boundaries of the national community, activist Puerto Ricans did so through the most radical among them. Incarcerated militants represented the nation, its obstacles and its aspirations, to the diasporic population living in the United States. The diasporic elements of this synecdochic attachment were critical: the prison joined the experiences of Puerto Ricans in the United States to those of the island by making visible the shared situations of repression. As José López argues, “the Puerto Rican reality in the United States is not different from that of Puerto Rico. . . . That independent of where we were at, whether we're in Ponce, Puerto Rico, or whether we were in Humboldt Park and West Town, or we were in the Bronx, we change space but not condition.”<sup>115</sup> Yet recognizing the significance of the change in space, the particularities of location and diasporic life, has been fundamental to the success of articulating a shared condition. The Young Lords Party named its ill-fated 1971 move to Puerto Rico, an attempt to open up a branch there, as *Ofensiva Rompe Cadenas*—“Break the Chains Offensive.” The title made visible Puerto Rican life as a condition of shared confinement, with the island occupying a privileged position as the natural homeland. But the move failed; independentistas on the island viewed the young, American-raised Puerto Ricans as interlopers out of step with the realities of political and social life on the island. The organization was also gripped with its dogmatism and lack of internal democracy that sabotaged its ability to transition to the new environment.<sup>116</sup> The move, transpiring at a time when the organization had

moved toward a more rigid Maoist political framework, also revealed the shortcomings of diaspora as a project of return to a mythic homeland rather than a process of meaning creation based on a set of certain shared attributes shaped by divergent factors.

Oppressive social institutions—the colony, the prison—are tangible and representational forces. As such, they enter public consciousness through means of both visibility and invisibility. While visibility and invisibility have often been described as opposite forces, they are coterminous elements of the spectacle. Spectacles use dramatic means to focus public attention, often for the purposes of persuasion (whether commercial appeal or, as in this example, political critique). As I will show in greater detail below, Puerto Rican radical spectacles used invisibility in form and content. That is, they used dramatic acts to oppose their absence from the public consciousness and to indict the use of imprisonment as a form of silencing. Such spectacular acts used the prison to make sense of Puerto Ricans within the American racial hierarchies. The prison named the experience of colonialism, poverty and incarceration. The development of an insurgent Puerto Rican publicity generated attention to the prison, first as a hermeneutic of confinement and next as a material matter of identity formation. The visibility of the prison focused attention both on historical details and community needs. Almost as if a self-fulfilling prophecy, the visibility of the prison as a metaphor fostered greater attention to the prison as an institution. Specific prisoners then generated nationalist sentiment, as both a glorious history and a set of contemporary demands. Representing the history of political militancy fueled contemporary initiatives. That the past was seen as being invisibilized by the prison facilitated the pursuit of visibility from positions of invisibility.

## The Silence in the Spectacle

As Puerto Rican militants emphasized international questions, placing Puerto Rico (not just Puerto Ricans) in the streets of major American cities, they focused their attention increasingly on the prison. The prison revealed the metaphoric and material dimensions of confinement: the ways colonialism both silenced its subjects and incarcerated its opponents. Radicals pursued visibility against colonialism as an unacknowledged force. Yet this pursuit often fought *through* shadows and not just against them. Spectacular action focuses attention through complex means of visibility and invisibility. To argue that spectacles contain silences is not just an acknowledgment that visibility is also an obfuscation. The processes of collective memory are again a useful point of comparison here. Remembering, as a process of selecting details and arranging them in a cogent narrative, is also an act of forgetting. Similarly, the spectacle “overdetermin[es] what is to be seen while masking that which the performers wish to observe.”<sup>117</sup> Like memory, the overdeterminance of spectacle obscures other possible narratives. It holds up certain details, practices and ways of knowing over others. Additionally, as I argue below, the means used to create situations of hypervisibility can also mask the source of the spectacle itself. In other words, the spectacular contains an absent presence or hides what might be otherwise obvious.

The embrace of spectacular tactics acknowledges the performative currency of symbolic authority in liberal democracies. Symbolic meaning is created “as the collective and intersubjective construction of imagery through expression and experience.”<sup>118</sup> Spectacular action interpellates actors and audiences in a shared performance with

divergent interpretations. In this way, spectacle shares many of the codes commonly associated with theatrical performance.<sup>119</sup> Yet spectacles seek to create or take advantage of ruptures in society by turning public space into theatrical space. The theatrical parallel and visual bias of spectacles suggest that they, in Handelman's terms, "taxonomize and present" the cultural worlds that birthed them. As with photographic evidence, spectacular performances are "selective and carefully crafted in their artifice" that can freeze time through displays so dramatic that they invite new periodization.<sup>120</sup> As tools of presentation, spectacles are concerned with the visibility of power. The spectacle treats visibility as a vital dimension of how people interpret and experience regimes of power. According to Baz Kershaw, "the synecdochic spectacle of protest challenges a system of authority *in its own terms*, because in such societies the *display* of power—its symbolic representation in multifarious forms of public custom, ceremony, and ritual, and then their reproduction throughout the media—has become in some senses more important to the maintenance of law and order than authority's actual powers of coercion and control." It follows, therefore, that those seeking to challenge authority would adopt similarly spectacular means. "[T]hey present a reflexive critique of the foundations of authority by showing that the assumption of power by the state, for example, may ultimately be based on nothing more substantial than the chimera of presumption .... [T]he performative becomes a powerful weapon of political conflict."<sup>121</sup>

The Nationalists' actions in the 1950s used violent performance to draw attention to the violence of colonialism, especially its invisibility within the metropolitan center. They attacked U.S. symbolic authority to enact their own such authority. Oscar Collazo maintained that he and Griselio Torresola did not go to Washington D.C. to kill President

Truman but to attack the highest symbol of colonial power and garner much-needed attention to the fact that the revolt began in Puerto Rico on October 30, 1950, was not a civil war but a battle over the island's colonial status. The invisibility, meaning here both a general inattention and a political failing to see the colonial machinations at work, compelled their violent assault on the symbol of U.S. authority. Collazo identified two levels of symbolism at play: Washington D.C. as the U.S. capitol and Truman as its head. The desire for the greatest symbolic impact trumped other considerations; so much so, in fact, that the pair did not realize until accidentally tipped off once they arrived in D.C. that the White House was under repair and that Truman was staying at Blair House. Collazo argued that the violent sacrifice of their lives—Torresola was killed and Collazo expected to be; the pair bought one-way tickets from New York City to Washington—would be the most effective way to draw attention to the repression happening in Puerto Rico. “It wasn't a matter of personalities. It was a question of the center of power,” Collazo said in an interview from prison. “The center of power was Washington. Whatever action was taken there would bring the attention [of the world]. Then the U.S. wouldn't be anbel [sic] to masscre [sic] thousands of people.” Collazo hoped that violent action would specifically interrupt the U.S. press reports that removed the United States from responsibility for the violence happening in Puerto Rico following the 1950 rebellion.<sup>122</sup>

Conversely, the attack on Congress four years later was not connected to a revolt on the island. But it too had as its aim the interruption of colonial invisibility through spectacular means. The shooting aimed to bring global attention the fact that Puerto Rico remained a colony, despite its newly reassigned status as a “Freely Associated State” and

its removal from a list of non-self-governing territories. (The shooting also coincided with the opening of the Tenth Pan-American Conference—a meeting sponsored by the Organization of American States and held in Venezuela, at which the U.S. delegation was expected to argue that Puerto Rico was a self-governing nation; after the shooting, the U.S. abstained from voting in a resolution condemning colonialism that was passed by the OAS gathering.) Five congressmen were wounded as Lolita Lebrón, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Irvin Flores Rodriguez and Andrés Figueroa Cordero opened fired in the chambers of the House of Representatives. One of the first women to hold a position of military leadership in a national liberation movement, Lebrón unfurled a Puerto Rican flag, shot up at the ceiling, and proclaimed “Viva Puerto Rico Libre!” (Long Live a Free Puerto Rico). Like Collazo, Lebrón and her comrades maintained that theirs was an assault against symbols and invisibility, not people.<sup>123</sup> And like Collazo, they expected to be killed for what they considered to be their national sacrifice. Lebrón carried a statement with her that offered her blood as a sacrifice for Puerto Rican independence.<sup>124</sup> Those involved in both shootings were U.S.-based members of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, making it an entity as diasporic as the population it claimed to represent. Indeed, the Nationalist Party had active juntas in both New York City and Chicago. The five Nationalists were all active in the New York City branch prior to their arrests, although they worked closely with those in Chicago. Lebrón’s brother, who cooperated with authorities following the 1954 attack, was previously a leader of the Chicago junta.<sup>125</sup>

The Nationalist approach to violence and even freedom itself built on Catholic notions of sacrifice. There was a pervasive Catholicism in much of the Puerto Rican



Nationalist Party from the 1930s through the 1950s. Catholicism is the dominant religion of Puerto Rico, and so it is not surprising that many Nationalists were Catholic or influenced by Catholicism. Even where individuals were not practicing Catholics, elements of the Nationalists' politics and strategy owed to Catholic logics. For instance, Collazo was not a religious man yet spoke of a "resurrection" of the independence movement following the March 1, 1954, attack on Congress.<sup>126</sup> The official uniform of the Nationalist Party featured black shirts, to represent the "slavery" colonialism was said to have enacted on Puerto Ricans, and white pants, to represent the "purity" of their cause. As a result, some accused them of being fascist.<sup>127</sup> The uniform reflected the party's investment in the communicative power of symbolic display, a logic that informed their actions as well as their dress.

The open embrace of spectacular actions led to the Nationalists' imprisonment, as can be spotted in their claims of having gone to Washington to "make a demonstration."<sup>128</sup> The terminology, emphasizing the productivity of a willful spectacle, reflects their deeply performative intent. In that, the use of violent spectacles by Puerto Rican Nationalists mirrored the pacifist "acts of conscience" by the Fellowship of Reconciliation in the World War II period. According to historian Joseph Kosek, the group used "extreme existential 'acts' that broke sharply with the law, social convention, and even the practitioner's own instinct for self-preservation." These acts were simultaneously "existential, ritual, and spectacular ... at once individual and social, at once sincerely spiritual and self-consciously spectacular," intentionally embodied and mediated.<sup>129</sup> (Seen in this light, it is perhaps not so surprising that a coterie of pacifists involved in the Fellowship of Reconciliation and related groups were among the few who

supported the Nationalists after their arrest in 1950 and 1954.) The campaign to free the Nationalists in the 1970s adopted similarly spectacular means. These spectacles happened alongside the traditional organizing practices of forging shared identities and petitioning officials for redress; sometimes by the same people and sometimes by people who sharply disagreed with the use of dramatic actions. Yet the use of spectacle is revealing, for it demonstrates that memory of the Nationalists inspired the adoption of certain tactical forms as well as the retelling of certain histories. The shootings in Washington D.C. sparked a short flurry of interest in Puerto Rican politics when they occurred—followed by a long period of general silence until the late 1960s. In telling the story of the 1950s attacks, Puerto Rican militants in the 1970s made visible Puerto Rico’s colonial status and the spectacular means that nationalists had used to fight for independence. The spectacle was a part of the story retold through invocations of the Nationalist prisoners. The Nationalists’ visibility was entangled with spectacular protest, much as their condition was shaped by the invisibility of the prison. The visibility of their history and current location increased support for the spectacle as a tactic along with support for the Nationalists as a symbol.

The reliance on spectacle brings us back to Foucault’s definition of history as a shifting terrain of contestation. Foucault described a point in the development of political criticism that he constituted as “‘a return of knowledge’ ... which we might describe as an *insurrection of subjugated knowledges*”<sup>130</sup> (emphasis in original). Foucault’s terminology is particularly apt in the case of Puerto Rican nationalism of the 1970s: as I argue below, insurrection could be found in the forceful new visibility of buried epistemologies that themselves generated acts of insurrectionary violence. From one

generation to the next, these spectacular attacks on invisibility were motivated by the silence in the heart of the metropole surrounding colonialism. Recall Mignolo's assertion, discussed above, that the West typically has seen only its modernity rather than the coloniality its subjects endure. The Puerto Rican Nationalists carried out their attacks at a time when anticolonial violence was beginning to make the issue visible in parts of Europe. But American colonial investments were still largely hidden from popular view. By the 1970s, with black radicalism and the war in Vietnam (or more precisely, its opponents) having raised the question of American imperialism, the contours of colonial invisibility were not as absolute. Invisibility as inattention was not as dire a problem as was the framing and reception of visibility. The visibility of colonialism in the 1970s was, in other words, attached to a fervent emphasis on its eradication. By disarticulating attention from subjectivity, independence activists in the 1970s placed greater emphasis on the presentation of visibility, the subjectivity it connoted. This type of visibility did not assume in the same ways as their predecessors that the political message was embedded in the spectacular action. Nationalists of the 1970s crafted spectacles that not only interrupted invisibility but sought to direct visibility. They therefore crafted tactics and strategies through a complex interplay of visibility and invisibility, speech and silence, presence and absence. The prison, the ultimate expression of the tensions embedded within these polarities, factored prominently in the development of such symbolic currencies.

Looking to their predecessors, Puerto Rican nationalists of the 1970s inscribed in nationalism an imperative of exposure and visibility. This telling provided a mandate for anticolonial nationalism within the United States. "The Puerto Rican struggle for national

liberation has always involved, through organization, the Puerto Rican people in the U.S.,” the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional wrote. “In 1950, when revolution broke out in Puerto Rico and the U.S. press covered it with a curtain of silence, two Puerto Rican nationalists in the U.S. attacked Washington’s presidential quarters at Blair House (the White House was under repair), and broke the silence with their guns.”<sup>131</sup> They narrated Puerto Rican radical history as a persistent struggle for the world’s attention, achieved through dramatic demonstrations of symbolic and material violence. This view of Puerto Rican history defined “breaking the silence” as a strategic necessity for anticolonialism. Violence was the means through which independence and decolonization became thinkable on the global public stage. It bolstered the diasporic argument that because Puerto Ricans shared a colonial condition across space, thereby justifying the use of similar tactics and strategies in pursuit of an anticolonial visibility. This view was not universally held; many groups in the Puerto Rican Left argued that Puerto Ricans were a national minority within the U.S. working class—a divided nation rather than a unitary one. But many of those leading the campaign to free the Nationalist prisoners defined all Puerto Ricans as belonging to a single, diasporic nation. Juan Antonio Corretjer summarized this sense of shared diasporic nationality in a poem written for FALN members Alicia and Lucy Rodriguez. The pair were raised in the United States; Alicia, the younger one, was born in Chicago and did not speak Spanish when she went underground. Corretjer titled his poem “Boricua en la luna,” Puerto Rican on the moon.<sup>132</sup> The poem ends with a strident affirmation of Puerto Rican identity: “And so I cry at the villain:/ I would be Puerto Rican/ even if I was born on the moon” (“Y así le grito al villano:/ yo sería boricano/ aunque naciera en la luna”). The poem described

being Puerto Rican not as an issue of language or residence but a question of political stance. To Corretjer, it was this militancy that determined one's Puerto Ricanness regardless of location.

These militants sought to do more than interrupt invisibility; they attempted to make invisibility itself visible. The attempt was, in Benjamin's terms, an attempt to do justice to the invisibility of confinement: it revealed the prison through both spectacle and obscurity. In the second half of the 1970s, this visibility of invisibility could be found primarily in three sites: clandestine actions, occupations, and public refusals to cooperate with grand juries investigating the guerilla violence. The prison was central to the visibility of each arena. This visibility included both the prison as a construct of repression and the (Nationalist) prisoners as symbols of redemption. In the case of grand jury noncooperation, the prison was made visible twice: first through the public proclamations of solidarity with the prisoners from those who refused to be witnesses and then again as these activists found themselves jailed for refusing to testify—for their silence. Each iteration, then, made invisibility visible through spectacular actions or dramatic stances. This visibility juxtaposed bodies and institutions: where one spoke the other was silent. Activists publicly indicted the use of grand juries as an undemocratic bludgeon against political movements yet refused to speak inside the closed courtroom. Invisible, often unknown activists bombed government and corporate buildings; they used the damaged buildings as a medium, along with their trenchant communiqués that claimed responsibility and provided a rationale for the attack. Occupations turned symbols of nation-state authority into visible sites of contestation.

In one of the most dramatic protest images of the 1970s, an ad hoc coalition of independence activists occupied the Statue of Liberty and draped a Puerto Rican flag over her face for eight hours on October 25, 1977. The action called for Puerto Rican independence and the release of the Nationalists. Timed to coincide with the anniversary of the 1950 revolt, the statue occupation conveyed at least two potent, nearly paradoxical messages: Lady Liberty blinded by the ongoing colonialism of Puerto Rico, and Puerto Rican nationalism overpowering race-blind American assimilation by making colonialism visible.<sup>133</sup> These occupations visibilized competing national affiliations through their dramatic conflict. Deeply embodied, they rested on the symbolic authority of place and time. The schisms exposed through these occupations utilized well-recognized historical queues to make visible forgotten places—the prison and the colony. The Puerto Rican flag was a particularly critical symbolic implement in this effort: while flags are by design symbolic expressions of the nation, U.S. control over Puerto Rico had made it illegal to fly the Puerto Rican flag without also flying the American one. So the visibility of the Puerto Rican flag by itself or overshadowing symbols of American power signified an insurrectionary thrust to nationalist expressions of sovereignty.

The other noteworthy occupation of the era by Puerto Rican militants occurred on July 4, 1978, when island-based independence activists Nydia Cuevas and Pablo Marcano seized the Chilean consulate in San Juan “to condemn the crimes of the Chilean fascists in that country, demand the release of the Four Nationalists, and a halt to the Fourth of July celebrations in San Juan, commemorating U.S. colonialism.”<sup>134</sup> These incidents added a spectacular component to the strident rhetoric of earlier Puerto Rican activism that similarly distanced themselves from the American citizenship that had been

bestowed upon them since the Jones Act of 1917. Through spectacular demonstrations that made visible the prison, Puerto Ricans separated themselves from the United States by visibly dramatizing their subjectivity as colonized yet anticolonial. Hearing of the actions through their own access to media, the Nationalist prisoners responded to the spectacle, thereby extending and analyzing their impact. This communication also fostered deeper connections between Puerto Ricans in the United States and those on the island while bolstering the symbolic authority of the prisoners as visible entities of Puerto Rican nationalism. In an open letter to Pablo Marcano, Rafael Cancel Miranda praised the occupation as a spectacular act of memory that continued to establish the prisoners' synecdochic power to represent the colonized nation. "My brother, the Yanki jailers know without a doubt that they have not been able to, nor will they ever be able to frighten us, it was good that you two reminded them, not so much for us as individuals, but for the people we represent."<sup>135</sup>

These occupations articulated independence (of the island) and liberation (of the Nationalist prisoners) through the spectacle. Dramatic spectacles grounded this articulation in concrete places of deeply symbolic character. The occupations of statues and embassies provided the greatest rupture: they were the infrequent repurposing of institutions symbolizing American benevolence and diplomacy. Two other sites of Puerto Rican protest in this period, albeit through less dramatic means, still served to visibly articulate independence and incarceration through dramatic protests: the United Nations and the prison itself. The UN had been a frequent target of Puerto Rican protest throughout the 1970s, as groups such as the Young Lords and the Puerto Rican Socialist Party often staged demonstrations there to draw attention to the issues Puerto Ricans

faced in American cities, schools, and prisons, as well as the overall political status of the island itself. As the decade progressed, Puerto Rican activists began to stage their protests inside the UN as well as outside it. Inspired by UN support for global decolonization, Puerto Rican militants, both in the United States and on the island, looked to that institution for redress. A panoply of activists testified at multiple hearings of the UN Decolonization Committee dedicated to Puerto Rico's status throughout the 1970s. The Cuban government was also a particularly strong ally; it even floated the possibility of exchanging the Nationalists for four Americans that had been imprisoned in Cuba for ten years. (While there were no formal talks, Cuba released the four American prisoners ten days after the four Nationalists were freed.)<sup>136</sup> The UN emphasis was the latest expression of anticolonial internationalist visibility around the prisoners. President Truman spared Oscar Collazo the death penalty in 1952 as a result of international protest coming especially from Latin America, including many heads of state, as well as others. Less dramatically, Lebrón remembers while in prison receiving supportive mail from the Soviet Union and from elsewhere around the world as a result of the global attention her case received.<sup>137</sup>

Meanwhile, U.S.-based Puerto Ricans held demonstrations at the gates of the prisons that confined the five Nationalists. Of particular interest was the prison medical facility in Springfield, Missouri, where Nationalist Andrés Figueroa Cordero was being treated for colon cancer. (Cordero's release had become a strategic priority since activists had learned of his illness; he had complained of symptoms for more than a year before receiving treatment, meaning that his condition was precarious by the time he was transferred to Springfield.) Hundreds of activists traveled across the country to attend



rallies at the gates of federal prisons located in rural Missouri (Cordero), West Virginia (Lebrón), Illinois (Cancel Miranda), and Kansas (Flores and Collazo). Public testimony and protest served to identify the sites that could help determine Puerto Rico's independent future. Both tactics made visible the issues of confinement, whether through political-economic colonialism or through the prison. Protests at the front of prison gates linked the Nationalists' incarceration to the colonialism of Puerto Rico, while testimony in front of the august body of decolonization demanded the release of the prisoners. Such articulations bound the fate of the island with that of the prisoners. Testifying in front of the UN Committee on Decolonization, José López argued that the "threat of death and incarceration are everyday realities for Puerto Ricans." As proof, López pointed to the Trilateral Commission's report *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975). In the section on the United States, Samuel Huntington argued that the government needed to restore its authority by securing the governability of those (racialized) populations who created tumult throughout the 1960s. López maintained that "the growing repression against third world people in this country" through arrests, imprisonment, murder, and legal harassment was a state strategy for restoring such governability.<sup>138</sup> Such repression, its threat and its actualization, imprisoned the bodies and incapacitated the cultures of people of color.

Goldstein argues that spectacles allow marginalized populations to press for national inclusion into a state that has neglected their interests. The use of spectacle allows groups to dramatize their challenges to the state by interrupting any presumption of social consensus. The spectacle draws attention to difference and to the empowerment of subordinated populations. The spectacle is therefore a means of communication, of

making visible prior exclusions and desired changes. According to Goldstein, “violence emerges as the socially subordinate and politically and economically powerless attempt to communicate—to themselves as well as to those powerholders whom they regard as having failed them—their grievances, their anger, and their political potential.”<sup>139</sup>

Dramatic and violent spectacles performed similar work for Puerto Rican militants, who used visibility to affirm national belonging. Yet they did so not, as in Goldstein’s study of migrants in urban Bolivia, through the idiom of citizenship but through one of diasporic nationalist identification. This claim of national belonging was also a protest against being incorporated into a colonial citizenship by promoting what Rafael Cancel Miranda called “a common citizenship of freedom.”<sup>140</sup> That is, the visibility of Puerto Rican national inclusion was also a spectacular critique of the American nation as a façade for state violence. The pursuit of national inclusion was understood in diasporic terms that disarticulated state from nation. Through the use of spectacular actions, Puerto Rican anti-imperialists made visible national bonds that stretched from the island to the United States. That such ruptures appealed to historical memory, taking place on historically significant dates and invoking the forgotten Nationalists, demonstrates that spectacles often place themselves in history. These dramatic actions contradict the view that holds the spectacle as an ahistoric mystification. Oppositional spectacles are not outside of history, nor are their architects necessarily trying to create anti-historical events. Indeed, the spectacular display of revolutionary anticolonialism used spectacular visibility to restore the nationalist history silenced by colonial domination.

In addition to the back-and-forth movement of Puerto Ricans between the island and the United States, this diasporic connection was made possible in part by the

visibility of the five Nationalist prisoners. Through them, the metaphoric prison of colonialism was made visible. Puerto Rican activists pointed to the incarceration of five members of an island-based political organization, even if for acts committed in the United States, as proof of the subjectivity denied them by colonialism. Those who created spectacular acts of anticolonialism cast themselves as bearers of popular justice for the nation against the colonial state. The use of extralegal, as well as illegal, acts to achieve an explicitly anti-statist popular justice sought to challenge the government's monopoly of force through visible displays of violent power. In that, the use of clandestine violence and public occupations can be seen as the other side of the coin of the parallel institutions and service provisions that Puerto Rican organizers endeavored. There was a personal connection between the two—several people charged with being members of the FALN attended or helped start the Rafael Cancel Miranda High School—but the parallels are political. Luis Rosa, one of eleven people arrested in 1980 and tried for being a part of the FALN, said that the group existed “to give an example of combat, resistance, of the legitimacy of the resistance. . . . The urban guerrilla, apart from serving to attack the enemy is a way of developing oneself and developing a freer and more independent spirit, more combative and more ready, to give everything for a cause.”<sup>141</sup> Through its spectacular actions but also through its clandestine existence, the FALN hoped to demonstrate anticolonial militancy as a provisional experiment of national sovereignty.

These strategies of violence, occupation and refusal developed in tandem with similar modes of collective action on the island. Armed violence had been a visible part of the Puerto Rican landscape since the 1960s, first in organizations such as the Comandos Armadas de Liberación (CAL; Armed Commandos of Liberation), and later

through the Fuerzas Armadas de Resistencia Popular (FARP; Armed Forces of Popular Resistance), the Organizacion de Voluntarios Para La Revolucion Puertorriqueña (OVRP; Organization of Volunteers for the Puerto Rican Revolution), and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Puertorriqueños – Ejercito Popular Boricua (PRTP – EPB, Revolutionary Party of Puerto Rican Workers – Boricua Popular Army, commonly referred to as the Macheteros, after the machetes that Puerto Rican sugarcane workers used and which had become a nationalist symbol of the Puerto Rican working class). These groups took responsibility for attacks similar to the FALN: bomb attacks against U.S.-based corporations with financial holdings in Puerto Rico, as well as against U.S. military presence there. Some of these groups engaged in retaliatory murders on several occasions.<sup>142</sup> They formed as mainstream politics on the island took a more conservative turn: in 1976, Puerto Ricans elected Carlos Romero Barceló as governor. Barceló's eight years as governor marked the end of twenty-five years of rule by the commonwealth party. It was first time that the statehood party held power. The New Progressive Party (PNP) came to power amidst a deep economic recession and an expansive militancy; its response included widening police power.<sup>143</sup>

Supporters of these groups hoped that the visibility of invisibility evident in these clandestine modes of action could be a source of unity. This hope built on the strategy articulated throughout prison radicalism of the period and the history of defense campaigns more generally: that repression could spark a closing of ranks behind the accused or the condemned. The action-oriented anticolonial nationalism of Puerto Rican independence emphasized its opposition to repression but focused on demanding independence. Puerto Rican national poet and general secretary of the Liga Socialista

Puertorriqueño (LSP; Puerto Rican Socialist League) Juan Antonio Corretjer praised the 1979 joint message from the four clandestine organizations as a harbinger of the unity necessary to actualize Puerto Rican independence. Corretjer defined independence as a performative task: “Whoever fights with all [they] have for the independence of Puerto Rico lives independence, is free, is sovereign, is independent, as all our people will be on the day of victory.”<sup>144</sup> Self-determination was made visible, in this analysis, through practices—even invisible ones, such as those of the FALN. Chicago-based organizers defined the assault on symbols of U.S. power as a disruption of the “U.S. political-military superstructure.” Militancy can cause “embarrassment,” which could force the U.S. to negotiate and resolve Puerto Rico’s colonial status—clearly intervening at the level of ideology and imagery. The language is particularly revealing: like Raymond Williams argued in his defense of culture as a site of contestation, this logic elevated political affinities over economic considerations as the primary determinant of collective consciousness. As with other spectacular demonstrations, bombs were, in this scenario, a dramatic attempt to reorder political loyalties by revising the connotative attachment that diverse publics had to symbols of authority.<sup>145</sup>

The FALN attacks created a spectacle of tarnished property and strident statements from a group whose members could not be found. The group was one of several leftwing clandestine organizations of the 1970s that sought a wide audience to circulate its politics through bombing empty, symbolically resonant buildings. Damaged property was its primary communicative modality. The FALN was the most active of these entities, taking responsibility for more than 100 such acts between 1974 and 1983. Most of these attacks occurred in and around New York or Chicago, the two most visible

sites in the United States of Puerto Rican militancy. As with other clandestine groups of the era, the FALN bombed banks, major department stores and government offices. But the FALN also raised the stakes beyond what most other such groups did—it bombed more buildings and caused more panic. The greater frequency of its violence also accompanied its effort to test the limits of invisibility. During the 1980 primaries, masked FALN members took over Carter and Bush campaign headquarters in Chicago and New York, respectively, on March 15, 1980. They tied up campaign workers and painted slogans demanding Puerto Rican independence.<sup>146</sup> However, the group did kill several people: on January 24, 1975, the FALN bombed the historic Fraunces Tavern in Wall Street during lunch time and without warning. The blast killed four people and wounded more than fifty. The bomb was said to retaliate for the January 11 bombing in the town of Mayagüez of a restaurant populated by independentistas and detonated an hour before a rally by the Puerto Rican Socialist Party; that bomb killed two and wounded eleven.<sup>147</sup> The group also killed an office worker in an August 3, 1977, bomb directed at Mobil Oil's New York City offices. That attack accompanied bomb threats made against dozens of locations throughout the city that day, forcing 100,000 office workers to abandon their buildings in a panic.<sup>148</sup>

FALN actions, dramatic bombs and furtive communiqués, drew attention to the invisibility of the organization. They highlighted its elusive but formidable presence. While all spectacles draw attention to themselves, the clandestine nature of the FALN focused attention on their absence. The spectacles caused by the FALN were still intensely visual in their damage, and the group arguably hoped its invisibility would heighten the impact of their actions and their rationale. If, as sociologist Georg Simmel

argued of secret societies, secrecy magnifies reality, the FALN's secrecy sought to magnify the reality that colonialism obscured Puerto Rican subjectivity.<sup>149</sup> The bombings targeted U.S. institutions largely in response to island-based occurrences. To their architects, the bombings used spectacle to make visible a unitary nation: U.S. dominance over Puerto Rico legitimated such attacks on U.S. soil by Puerto Ricans—most of whom, it turned out, had been raised in the United States—who used violence to make visible their attachment to the island: its wounds and its aspirations. The attacks demonstrated the saliency of Puerto Rico as an ideal. Violence was a visible display of power that could inform the content but not the interpretation of public consciousness.

This visibility of invisibility was apparent from the FALN's origins. The group first announced itself the night before the massive Puerto Rico Solidarity Day rally at Madison Square Garden by bombing four banks based in midtown Manhattan that had holdings in Puerto Rico and Latin America. The group released a statement claiming responsibility for the attack as an effort “to accent the seriousness of our demands for the release of the five Puerto Rican political prisoners, the longest-held political prisoners in the hemisphere ... and for the immediate and unconditional independence of Puerto Rico.” The statement acknowledged that the group had also bombed “major department stores for three consecutive days in late spring,” as well as the Newark Police Headquarters and City Hall. This communiqué was the first acknowledgment of those earlier attacks. The FALN hoped to use the massive visibility accompanying the rally, one of the largest events of the radical Left in the decade, to announce an invisible “People's Revolutionary Army.”<sup>150</sup> As Puerto Rican militants crossed a threshold of visibility, bringing 20,000 people to Madison Square Garden to call for an independent

Puerto Rico, invisibility emerged as a resource through which, some hoped, greater visibility could be achieved.

Critics, especially after the fatal Frances Tavern bombing, derided the FALN precisely for its invisibility. Many involved in the campaign for the release of the five Nationalists rejected the FALN for its invisible bombing campaign. Its invisibility raised questions of its motives, with some even suggesting that its clandestinity proved that the group was a CIA-sponsored initiative to destroy the credibility of the independence movement at a time of its growing visibility.<sup>151</sup> Paradoxically, because they had been in prison for more than twenty years, and for *public* acts of violence, the Nationalists were, by 1974, more visible within the independence movement than the FALN. The public nature of their historical acts, together with the length of their incarceration and the politicization around their confinement, made the Nationalists potent symbols of Puerto Rican radicalism. The FALN, with its current and clandestine use of violence, did not share such widespread symbolic resonance.<sup>152</sup> Whereas activists across the political spectrum, including those in the FALN, wanted the Nationalists to be seen and known, the FALN tried to remain anonymous and invisible. They hoped, in fact, that this invisibility would increase the attention given to the Nationalists. Spectacular invisibility was their way of revealing the prison as an invisible institution. Juan Antonio Corretjer, for instance, praised the FALN as a “specter [that] is haunting the federal police. The specter of the FALN; present and invisible.”<sup>153</sup> They were the related inverse of the Nationalist prisoners, whose symbolic resonance made them absent and visible.

The government made the FALN’s invisible presence more tangible through its own spectacles that also used invisibility as a resource in service of a broader law and



order visibility. Clarence Kelley, then-head of the FBI, said in 1976 that “Puerto Rican Nationalist groups are at this time among the FBI’s highest priorities.”<sup>154</sup> In search of the FALN, the FBI became an increasingly visible presence in Puerto Rican barrios. In Chicago, the police and the FBI set up roadblocks and checkpoints in Humboldt Park, stopping people and cars in search of alleged FALN members. Law enforcement agencies questioned hundreds of Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood and monitored the Rafael Cancel Miranda High School. The alternative high school remained a focal point of police surveillance. In the summer of 1983, after four more alleged FALN members were arrested, FBI agents conducted a predawn raid on the high school and the associated Puerto Rican Cultural Center.<sup>155</sup> Similar practices of surveillance were operative in New York City, leading to the arrest of four Puerto Rican activists on charges of being FALN members in 1978. The four were all members of the NYC Committee to Free the Puerto Rican Nationalists, which police had been monitoring as part of their attempt to arrest members of the FALN.<sup>156</sup>

This spectacle of policing came most dramatically in the form of grand juries. Grand jury proceedings encapsulated the visibility of invisibility in the government’s attempts to capture the FALN. Prosecutors trumpeted the existence of the grand juries to demonstrate the seriousness of their investigations. Yet the proceedings themselves are almost entirely secret. They are held in private; there is no judge present and witnesses are denied any legal representation in the room. The prosecutor is empowered to ask the witness questions about any aspect of her life; if she refuses to answer, she can be held in contempt of court for the length of the grand jury (up to eighteen months, although indefinitely renewable). This use of jail is supposed to compel testimony rather than

punish the would-be witness; if it can be demonstrated that incarceration is serving punitive but non-compulsory functions, the judge is obligated to free the person in question. Noncompliant witnesses, however, can be sentenced to criminal contempt for up to three years to punish their intransigence.

Prosecutors used grand juries throughout the 1970s (and 1980s) to investigate the whereabouts of clandestine fugitives, including the Symbionese Liberation Army and Patty Hearst, the Weather Underground, and the FALN, among others. In response, several committees formed to support subpoenaed witness in their attempt to not participate and to make the opaque grand jury process visible. These committees also tried to raise awareness about the incarceration of non-compliant witnesses.<sup>157</sup> The FBI stepped up its search for FALN militants after a safe house was discovered in 1976 with the fingerprints of four people; prior to this point, police had not positively identified anyone as being a part of the FALN. The FBI began subpoenaing well-known Puerto Rican activists in New York and Chicago. Several of those called to testify worked at the National Commission on Hispanic Affairs of the Episcopal Church, an advocacy organization where Carlos Alberto Torres, who rented the apartment that police described as a bomb factory, also worked. (Torres and the other three people whose fingerprints were found in the apartment disappeared after it was discovered in November 1976.)<sup>158</sup> The FBI believed that FALN bombings were coordinated among people involved in the commission—supplies stolen from the Southwest and ferried back east by commission staff under the pretense of business trips. In addition to personnel, the FBI maintained that the commission was funding the FALN. The commission was the first organization to bring together Puerto Rican and Mexicano issues in a shared pan-Latino framework.

The NCHA funded and supported civil rights and community projects in different parts of the country. It also had a program to help imprisoned Latinos with their legal situations. The commission staff—Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and people of other Latin American ancestries—reflected the eclecticism of its mission. Because commission staff were disproportionately the ones called before grand juries investigating the FALN at this time, the opposition to the grand jury became a venue of pan-Latino organizing and therefore a site of Latino racial formation as determined silence in the face of a law and order spectacle.

The use of grand juries coincided with growing divisions among independence supporters over the use of violence. The subpoenas forced the issue further, as activists debated the appropriate response to the grand jury and not just the FALN—although responses to the two were often intimately connected.<sup>159</sup> Most of those subpoenaed refused to answer any questions. In doing so, they appealed to the history of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and its position of *retraimiento*, a principle developed in the 1930s by Pedro Albizu Campos and Juan Antonio Corretjer. *Retraimiento* translates as reticence, though it meant a refusal to acknowledge any apparatus of U.S. power in Puerto Rico—including the federal courts, as well as the U.S.-controlled electoral system in Puerto Rico.<sup>160</sup> *Retraimiento* provided the theoretical justification for amplifying silence. According to Albizu Campos, Puerto Rico was “a nation intervened and still at war” as a result of the 1898 colonization by the United States.<sup>161</sup> In response, *retraimiento* celebrated the spectacle of silence as an expression of nationalist self-determination.

Silence was a controversial strategy. *Retraimiento* became a source of tension between activists and the state, but also among activists. A group calling itself the March

1 Bloc separated from the larger Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee (PRSC) in 1976 in order to make public support for grand jury resisters, armed struggle, and the five Nationalists a higher priority. The March 1 Bloc came together on the basis of shared support for the visibility of invisibility. The symbol of the Nationalist prisoners was especially prominent in this effort; the group's name recalled the date of the attack on Congress, and therefore subtly invoked their ongoing incarceration. When the group published its statement as a pamphlet, a drawing of the five adorned the cover. More directly, the statement argued that freeing the prisoners was a pressing political priority—both to win their freedom and support black and Indian political prisoners. The March 1 Bloc described its authors as a collection of Puerto Ricans and “North American” (i.e., white) solidarity activists in the United States. The statement identified multiracial solidarity through struggles against the prison as a strategic point of departure. “We should understand that by linking the campaign to Free the Five to the prison struggle and to the struggles to free other political prisoners, critical working relationships can be built between the solidarity movement and the Black, Mexican/Chicano, and Native American movements,” it argued.<sup>162</sup>

The following year, members of the March 1 Bloc formed the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (MLN). For its first five years of existence, the MLN joined Puerto Rican and Chicano nationalism into one organization. The national liberation it proclaimed in its name described an umbrella term to unite Latino groups with diverse histories but shared experiences of U.S. colonialism. This political position would then be the basis of its unity with other groups of people of color similarly organized as national liberation struggles. The MLN called for Puerto Rican independence and the “socialist

reunification of Mexico” with those present-day American states that became part of the United States as a result of the 1848 war with Mexico (California, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas).<sup>163</sup> Begun by authors of the March 1 statement, the MLN brought together members of the Free the Five Committee (which became, after Cordero’s release, the National Committee to Free the Four Puerto Rican Prisoners of War) and the Chicago Committee to Stop the Grand Jury. The foundation for the MLN lay in the National Commission on Hispanic Affairs of the Episcopal Church and the grand jury summons against independence activists who were current or former employees of the NCHA. The grand juries were based in Chicago and New York, sites of most FALN activity, but the FBI subpoenaed activists in regions where the commission was active, including the southwest.<sup>164</sup> The government subpoenaed several NCHA employees, including its former founder and its current director, and sought permission from the Episcopal Church to access the commission’s records. The Church, which had passed resolutions supporting freedom for the five Nationalists and Puerto Rican independence, assented to the FBI’s request. It turned over the commission’s records from 1970 through 1977.<sup>165</sup>

The MLN formed in part to help coordinate grand jury opposition; it was born from an effort to make visible the incarceration Puerto Rican and Chicano militants faced for supporting independence, the Nationalist prisoners, and the use of armed struggle to achieve both objectives.<sup>166</sup> Along with a shared political framework of national liberation within the borders of the United States, the visibility of silence—retramiento—provided the glue that bonded the MLN together as a pan-Latino organization. The MLN sought to synthesize and expand the practice of retramiento that grand jury resisters had utilized

since 1976. In 1970s the MLN was based in Chicago, New York and Denver, and had cadre in Los Angeles, Tierra Amarilla (New Mexico), El Paso, San Francisco, Boston and Hartford. Between 1975 and 1983, activists from throughout these regions were called to testify in front of grand juries in Chicago or New York investigating FALN bombings in those cities. The MLN believed that the visibility of repression, which included silence as an oppositional strategy, could provide the source of multiracial unity in the United States by creating a pan-Latino position of defiance. This sentiment was elaborated by the women and men who refused to cooperate with the grand juries. One of the grand jury resisters, Ricard Romero from Colorado (although jailed in a Chicago-based grand jury), said “I don’t mind going to jail to advance the cause of unity.” Upon being jailed for her silence in front of a New York grand jury in March 1977, Raisa Nemkin, secretary of the NCHA, said that resolute silence would build visibility and support for the Puerto Rican independence movement. Six months later, brothers Andres, Julio and Luis Rosado argued that their silence in front of the same grand jury could serve as catalyst for “a campaign *against* repression and *for* national liberation” (emphasis in original). Pedro Archuleta, an activist in New Mexico who was subpoenaed in both the New York and Chicago grand juries, identified his non-cooperation as a point of ethnic pride: “What I have done in refusing to talk to the Grand Jury, I have done with pride. You can put me in jail for a year or ten years, and I will never talk to you. Because I am proud of being a Chicano and fighting for justice.” One of the founders of the NCHA, Archuleta said that he learned about Puerto Rico and the independence movement in his time there. By the end of 1977, nine Latino activists (five Puerto Ricans, four Mexicans, and one Venezuelan; five of them worked at NCHA) were jailed for

refusing to testify in front of grand juries investigating the FALN. To their supporters, they joined the five Nationalists as symbolic exemplars of independence and radicalism.<sup>167</sup>

Their silence was a spectacular effort to draw attention to the grand jury system as a metonym of U.S. colonialism over Latin America, especially Puerto Rico and the area Chicano nationalists labeled Aztlán, the once-Mexican territories that became part of the United States as a result of the Mexican-American war in 1848. Testifying before the United Nations in 1984, José López said that grand jury resisters were “incarcerated for exercising the human right to silence before government prosecutors.”<sup>168</sup> By making silence a human right, Puerto Rican independentistas described the grand jury system as the manifestation of colonialism’s governmentality. Unable to compel compliance, colonial legality punished through confinement. The would-be witnesses used the spectacularity of their silence and its consequence (i.e., incarceration) as a way to dramatize their demand for self-determination. The markers of their personhood—their voices, fingerprints and handwriting—became the mechanisms through which they visibly demonstrated their tenacious commitment and their ungovernable position as colonial citizens.

Much as verbal explanations and conceptual affiliations aid the interpretation of visuals, so too did silence utilize spectacle in order to become a political strategy. Indeed, silence only made sense if it could be seen and even heard. *Retraimiento* required the visibility of muteness as active opposition rather than its traditional connotative meaning of docility. This visibility was accomplished by making grand jury resisters, regardless of whether they were imprisoned, into symbolic figures to be mnemonically recalled and

represented. They described their silence as simultaneously the result of government censorship and of principled opposition: the government was trying to quiet the movement, which could only be combated paradoxically, through a collective refusal to cooperate with the government. They turned their silence into a loud spectacle to challenge the spectacular silence of the grand jury as a closed proceeding in which prosecutors were empowered to ask about any aspect of the witness's life. The spectacle of their silence was accomplished similar to that of other prisoners. Outside of court, grand jury resisters were vociferous in explaining their opposition to journalists and in community meetings. Supporters then distributed these public statements through various means, and encouraged others to attend contempt hearings (the only public part of the grand jury process) or write letters of support to encourage the judge to release jailed dissidents. Their active silence became a metaphor of colonial domination, was the lengthy incarceration of the five Nationalists. Indeed, supporters noted that grand jury resister Raisa Nemikin had a three-hour meeting with Lolita Lebron in jail. More generally, literature supporting the grand jury resisters, and statements from the dissidents themselves, demanded freedom for the Nationalists as one of their demands—along with Puerto Rican independence and an end to the grand jury.<sup>169</sup>

Although the government was investigating the FALN, the campaign of grand jury resistance joined the underground with the imprisoned in a spectacle of anti-disciplinary opposition. In making the fight against repression a central point of organizational unity, the MLN, following the grand jury resisters, articulated the political subjectivity of Latino racial identity in the United States as an experience of confinement. They used the spectacle of silence, the visibility of invisibility, as a way to dramatize



colonialism and establish political demarcations. This position held that because it demonstrated self-determination through its obstinate negation of American juridical power, silence was a more militant and therefore more appropriate response for colonized subjects than parliamentary strategies of reform.<sup>170</sup> They pointed to repression as the material expression of the ways colonialism impacted both resources and the shaping of identity. Such a position rested on seeing those facing repression as representatives of the imagined national community within the broader United States.<sup>171</sup> This synecdochic identification structured the ways Puerto Rican (and Mexican) activists understood and made visible their subjectivity in connection to American racial hierarchies. With state violence, represented especially by the prison, as a symbol of U.S. nationality, Puerto Ricans made sense of their diasporic realities.

Although the Nationalists did acknowledge the court's jurisdiction enough to participate in their trials in the 1950s, they refused to recognize U.S. authority once imprisoned by not applying for and publicly stating their refusal to accept parole were it to be offered. The expression of *retramiento* in the 1970s recognized the growing enmeshment of political structures. The 1950s iterations displayed a firmer belief in the strength of national boundaries; while they did not believe U.S. law governed them as Puerto Rican nationals, they were more obliging of its juridical customs when on U.S. soil. However, independence activists of the 1970s rejected U.S. authority within its own nation-state boundaries. This position was shaped by the massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States, by the anticolonial movements of the time, and by the deindustrialization of urban space. They sought to practice an anticolonial sovereignty as Puerto Ricans, in the United States as in Puerto Rico.<sup>172</sup> *Retramiento* was the practice of

a sovereignty that lacked formal political power. It was a political principle shared by certain Puerto Rican militants against U.S. courts, even if the person was born and raised in the United States. The late 1970s saw retrainimiento used by Angel Cristóbal Rodríguez, a member of the LSP who was arrested in a demonstration against U.S. military presence in Vieques and refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the courts. (He was sentenced to six months in prison and found hanging in his cell in Tallahassee, Florida.)

Retrainimiento was also used by William Guillermo Morales, a former NCHA employee who was arrested in a Bronx apartment on July 12, 1978, after a bomb exploded in his hands and severed most of his fingers. Police described the house as a bomb factory, filled with supplies for incendiary devices. In court, Morales, born and raised in the United States, said the court was an illegitimate institution to judge him as a colonial subject. Morales maintained that he was a prisoner of war and needed to be tried by an international tribunal. In April 1979, he was sentenced to serve between twenty-nine and eighty-nine years for possession of explosives and other charges. His supporters maintained that in boycotting his trial, Morales “defeated his interrogators and torturers with his willfull and heroic silence.”<sup>173</sup> Writing from prison, Rafael Cancel Miranda praised Morales for extending retrainimiento beyond what the Nationalists had done during their trials. Morales’s militant silence was extended by his surprising return to invisibility: on May 21, 1979, he escaped from Bellevue Prison Hospital where he was being fitted for prosthetic hands. Morales evidently used an elastic bandage as a rope to escape the prison ward. An unknown person or group then helped him escape the area. In Puerto Rico, Juan Antonio Corretjer praised him as a “handless hero who slapped the face of god.” Morales fled to Mexico, where he was arrested by Mexican police in 1983.

The Mexican government tried Morales for the shootout that occurred at his arrest but refused to extradite him to the United States. Morales was freed in 1988 and took up residence as an exile in Cuba. The United States withdrew its ambassador from Mexico in protest of the decision.<sup>174</sup>

Morales's stance was a prelude to the "heroic silence" that would greet the arrest of eleven suspected members of the FALN on April 4, 1980. The group was arrested in Evanston, Illinois. Because of the ongoing hostage crisis in Iran, police initially feared that the conspicuous armed subjects they had captured were Iranians acting on U.S. soil. In court, all eleven proclaimed themselves prisoners of war and refused to recognize the legitimacy of the court to try them. As Guillermo Morales had done two years prior, they argued that only an international tribunal had the power to adjudicate their fate as combatants in a national liberation struggle. Police were ultimately able to get one defendant to cooperate against the others, although their non-participation made it easy for the state to receive convictions and lengthy sentences for the ten. In the next three years, five others would be arrested for FALN activities.<sup>175</sup> The cooperating defendant testified in these subsequent trials. While some participated in their trials more than those arrested in 1980, these subsequent defendants continued to assert their position as prisoners of war.

Two months after the last FALN bust, another group of independentistas carried out a dramatic spectacle on U.S. soil. A group called the Macheteros, which was responsible for several high-profile attacks against U.S. military power in Puerto Rico but had never been active in the United States, carried out what was then the biggest bank robbery in U.S. history. With the help of an inside man, members of the Macheteros stole

more than \$7 million from Wells Fargo in Hartford, Connecticut. Thirteen people were arrested in Puerto Rico in 1985; ultimately nineteen were tried, and many were convicted or accepted negotiated agreements. Trials took place in both the United States and Puerto Rico, although the government was unable to garner convictions in the island trials.

Filiberto Ojeda Rios, the reputed leader of the Macheteros (as well as founder of the earlier clandestine group in the United States, MIRA), was acquitted in Puerto Rico on the grounds of self-defense for having fired at FBI agents invading his home to arrest him. In 1990, while awaiting sentencing for the case in Hartford, Ojeda Rios removed the electronic monitoring bracelet attached to his ankle and disappeared. He periodically released statements from hiding until September 23, 2005, when he was shot and killed by an FBI sniper at his home in the town of Hormigueros. The FBI had surrounded his house and let the seventy-two-year-old fugitive bleed to death. As with the release of the Nationalist prisoners, the funeral of Filiberto Ojeda Rios brought out tens of thousands of people from across the political spectrum and widespread indictments of the FBI disruption of Puerto Rican sovereignty. Many Puerto Ricans were especially upset about the date on which Ojeda Rios was killed: Grito de Lares (the cry of Lares), an unofficial holiday celebrating the 1868 revolt against Spanish rule that many see as the consecration of Puerto Rico as a nation.<sup>176</sup> In 1990, Ojeda Rios chose Grito de Lares as the date on which he removed the bracelet monitoring his whereabouts and resumed a clandestine life. As with non-parliamentarian expressions of violence, state violence does not stand outside of memory. Three years later, five Puerto Rican activists in their 20s and 30s were subpoenaed to testify in front of grand juries; all pledged to resist them. Another alleged leader of the Macheteros, Avelino González Claudio, was arrested in February

2008 for the Wells Fargo robbery. He ultimately pled guilty and was sentenced to seven years in prison.<sup>177</sup>

Independence activists in the United States and Puerto Rico continued to rally behind Puerto Rican political prisoners as symbols of national redemption. Throughout the 1990s, grassroots campaigns to free the prisoners enlisted a wide range of support, including religious leaders, Nobel prize winners, and a variety of community activists. Their efforts succeeded in September 1999, when President Clinton freed eleven of these prisoners—all convicted of FALN bombings. (This action left three FALN members in prison: Haydee Beltran Torres, paroled in 2009; Carlos Alberto Torres, paroled in 2010; and Oscar López Rivera, still incarcerated.) Clinton also cut the sentence of three others, members of the Macheteros convicted of the Hartford robbery, in September 1999. The eleven were freed on September 10, thirty years to the day that the four Nationalists were freed. As with the Nationalist prisoners, many Puerto Ricans across the political spectrum greeted the freed FALN members as national heroes.<sup>178</sup> Unlike the Nationalists, however, many of the FALN prisoners returned home to Puerto Rico for the first time: most of them were raised in the United States yet chose to reside in Puerto Rico. Their return to the island was an acknowledgment of the nationalist history they took on in their actions. By moving to the island, they continued to juxtapose Puerto Rico against the prison as sites of freedom and confinement.

### Specters of Invisibility

Invisibility can seem like a totalizing force: it engages questions of access and epistemology, resources and consciousness. Invisibility describes the tensions that

accompany the unnamed inequalities that give rise to migration, inform education, and determine incarceration. Colonial dissidents reject the invisibility of the mechanisms that compelled their migration and the erasure of their history within the metropole.

Nationalism has provided a potent framework through which to resuscitate historical narratives as part of the struggle to control visibility. Nationalist opposition to colonialism produces racial formations within and beyond the existing hierarchies of American societies by articulating diasporic epistemologies through the specificities of local experience. The prison was a useful metaphor through which Puerto Rican activists navigated and created their identities as a diasporic population. It named many of the invisible antagonisms against which nationalist opposition took shape.

The revival of Puerto Rican nationalism sought to make visible the coercive forces that nationalists blamed for the creation of a Puerto Rican diaspora. At the same time, this visibility created nationalism as a heroic, counterhegemonic force of resistance best modeled through the examples of prisoners. Influenced by broader political currents within the United States at the time, the saliency of the prison as a metaphor of collective oppression put Puerto Rican militants in contact with actual prisoners. As the prison represented Puerto Rico's colonialism, nationalist prisoners signified the possibility of liberation. A new generation of Puerto Rican nationalists, fiercely diasporic, saw visibility for the five Nationalist Party prisoners as a harbinger for national independence. Their contact with prisoners placed these American-raised Puerto Ricans in contact with political histories and tensions on the island. Contact with and visibility of the Nationalist prisoners also revealed the diasporic character long prevalent within Puerto Rican

nationalism. As a result, nationalism was the language through which Puerto Rican militants made multiracial and international alliances.

Invisibility can be both a target of opposition and a defining feature of it. The use of invisibility emerged at a time of growing visibility for Puerto Ricans, accomplished in part through dramatic protests that increasingly concentrated on the prison as a conceptual tool for explaining colonialism. While an implicit presence in the construction of visibility, invisibility can also a resource. The achievement of visibility, especially through spectacular means, draws attention to that which is hidden—including, as was true of some expressions of Puerto Rican nationalism in the 1970s, the architects of spectacle. For the clandestine group or the grand jury resister, the self-referential nature of the spectacle focuses attention on conditions of invisibility. This use of invisibility emerged as the sincere response to conditions of invisibility: the inaccessibility of the prison, the silence that maintains colonial authority, the marginalization diasporic migrants face. These conditions each generate attempts for mass attention that cannot escape the invisibility that defines them. As an attempt to negate the authority of colonial power, invisibility is a practice of grassroots sovereignty. Invisibility was a strategic tool in pursuit of a broader visibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Antonio Corretjer, *Albizu Campos and the Ponce Massacre* (Chicago: National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War and Political Prisoners, circa 1980), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race, and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> Carlos Antonio Torre, Hugo Rodríguez Vecchini, and William Burgos, eds., *The Commuter Nation: Perspectives on Puerto Rican Migration* (Río Piedras, Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994); Ismael García Colon, "Claiming Equality: Puerto Rican Farmworkers in Western New York," *Latino Studies*, 6:3 (2008), pp. 269-289. Eileen J. Findlay is also conducting research on Puerto Rican farm workers in Michigan that promises to be illuminating. I was fortunate to read an early draft of part of this work for the Puerto Ricans in U.S. History symposium at Rutgers University, May 14, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Luis Muñoz Marín became Puerto Rico's first elected governor in 1948, following fifty years of Puerto Rico being controlled by American military officials or political appointees. An independentista in his youth, Muñoz Marín was the leader of the Popular Democratic Party (Partido Popular Democrático, PPD), which advocated limited self-government but not independence. Under his leadership, Puerto Rico became an Estado Libre Asociado, or freely associated state, in 1952. Under this relationship, island residents voted for governor but remained subject to U.S. authority, especially but not only economically, while being denied the right to participate in U.S. elections.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar has tracked some of these relationships; see, for instance, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2004), pp. 159-190; "Puerto Rico en mi Corazón: The Young Lords, Black Power and Puerto Rican Nationalism in the U.S., 1966-1972," *Centro: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, 18:1 (Spring 2006), pp. 148-169; and "Brown Power to Brown People: Radical Ethnic Nationalism, the Black Panthers, and Latino Radicalism, 1967 – 1973," in Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams, eds., *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 252-286.

<sup>6</sup> Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 98; Joy James, *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), p. 97.

<sup>7</sup> Johanna L. del C. Fernández, "Radicals in the Late 1960s: A History of the Young Lords Party in New York City, 1969-1974," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2004), pp. 17, 19; Maura I. Toro-Morn, "Boricuas en Chicago: Gender and Class in the Migration and Settlement of Puerto Ricans" in Carmen Teresa Whalen and Victor Vázquez-Hernández, eds., *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), p. 134. On Puerto Ricans in Chicago more generally, see Gina M. Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Andrew J. Diamond, *Mean Streets: Chicago Youths and the Everyday Struggle for Empowerment in the Multiracial City, 1908-1969* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Lilia Fernández, "Latina/o Migration and Community Formation in Postwar Chicago: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Gender, and Politics, 1945-1975," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2005); Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*. The population of Puerto Ricans in both cities, and elsewhere in the United States, continued to rise throughout the 1960s and beyond. In Chicago, for instance, the number of Puerto Ricans more than doubled between 1960 and 1970. For more on Operation Bootstrap, see Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*; Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Carmen Theresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> For more on Puerto Rican community organizing in relation to the civil rights movement, see Sonia Lee, "'Proud to be Maladjusted': Puerto Ricans, Black Americans, and the Building of a Latino Civil Rights Movement," unpublished book manuscript, in author's files.

<sup>9</sup> Johanna Fernandez, "Between Social Service Reform and Revolutionary Politics: The Young Lords, Late Sixties Radicalism, and Community Organizing in New York City," in Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940 – 1980* (New York:



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Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 259-260; Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010), pp. 44-45. More generally on the Young Lords, see Fernández, “Radicals in the Late 1960s”; Darrel Enck-Wanzer, “The Intersectional Rhetoric of the Young Lords: Social Movement Ideographs, Demand, and the Radical Democratic Imaginary,” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2007); Darrel Enck-Wanzer, ed., *The Young Lords Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2010); Michael Abramson, *Palante! The Young Lords Party* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971); Carmen Teresa Whalen, “Bridging Homeland and Barrio Politics: The Young Lords in Philadelphia,” in Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez, eds., *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1998), pp. 107-123; Pablo Guzman, “La Vida Pura: A Lord of the Barrio,” in Torres and Velázquez, *The Puerto Rican Movement*, pp. 155-172; and Frank Browning, “From Rumble to Revolution: The Young Lords,” in Francesco Cordasco and Eugene Bucchioni, eds., *The Puerto Rican Experience: A Sociological Sourcebook* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), pp. 231-245.

<sup>10</sup> The thirteen-point program, as revised in May 1970, is reprinted in Miguel Melendez, *We Took the Streets: Fighting for Latino Rights with the Young Lords* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003), pp. 238-241. This quote is from p. 241.

<sup>11</sup> For the material impact of metaphoric meaning, see Wahneema Lubiano, “Like Being Mugged by a Metaphor: Multiculturalism and State Narratives,” in Avery Gordon and Chris Newfield, eds., *Mapping Multiculturalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 64-75; Wahneema Lubiano, “Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means,” in Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), pp. 323-363.

<sup>12</sup> Rafael Cancel Miranda, “No Me Llamen Prisionero,” *Aztlán* 1:3, p. 4, in Raúl R. Salinas Papers (hereafter RRS), Box 7, folder 3, Green Library, Stanford University. Cancel Miranda published other poems in the newspaper that extolled other figures of nationalist anti-imperialism, including Pedro Albizu Campos, Che Guevara, and the Chinese Revolution. Common among some nationalists in the 1950s, the illness metaphor fed a conservative trope that defined Puerto Ricans as docile. For the trope of Puerto Rican colonialism as illness, see José Quiroga, “Narrating the Tropical Pharmacy,” in Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, eds., *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 116-126. See also Lee, ““Proud to be Maladjusted,”” pp. 11-12.

<sup>13</sup> Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922 – 1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> José López, interview with Michael Staudenmaier, November 14, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Cf., Ronald L. Fernandez, *Prisoners of Colonialism: The Struggle For Justice in Puerto Rico* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994); Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*; Torres and Velázquez, eds., *The Puerto Rican Movement*; Melendez, *We Took the Streets*. For an article about the campaign for their release, see Francisco Ortiz Santini, “The National Security Council during the Carter Administration and the Liberation of the Puerto Rican Nationalists in 1979,” *Centro Journal*, 19: 2 (2007), pp. 150-181.

<sup>16</sup> Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities*, p. 113.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117. More generally, see Lee, ““Proud to be Maladjusted””; Ernesto Chávez, “¡Mi Raza Primero!”: *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966–1978* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Carlos Muñoz, Jr., *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 2007); Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 356. See also Lawrence R. Chenault, *The Puerto Rican Migrant in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); Cesar Andreu Iglesias, ed., *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega: A Contribution to the History of the Puerto Rican Community in New York* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984); Jesús Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* (New York: International Publishers, 1982).

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<sup>19</sup> Cf., Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Mignolo acknowledges two epistemological debts for the phrase “border gnosis”: Chicano studies (concretized in Gloria Anzaldúa’s work) and Africana Studies (specifically V. Mudimbe’s scholarship). See Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories, Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999 [1987]); and V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). For an example of border gnosis used in the Puerto Rican context (and to argue against Puerto Rican nationalism), see Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Walter Mignolo, “Delinking,” *Cultural Studies* 21:2 (March/May 2007), p. 495.

<sup>22</sup> Soto-Crespo, for instance, argues that Puerto Rico is an example of a “borderland state,” a postnationalist form of governance that is part of but unassimilated by the United States. This formulation celebrates Puerto Rico’s ambiguous political status as a positive expression of globalization, combining the free flow of Puerto Ricans between the island and the United States with Puerto Ricans’ “cultural distinctiveness.” He upholds Puerto Rico as an unassimilated, autonomist and interdependent state. This and other postmodern appraisals of Puerto Rico’s condition, however, overlook the limited political-economic sovereignty that accompany U.S. dominance over the island. See Ramón E. Soto-Crespo, *Mainland Passage: The Cultural Anomaly of Puerto Rico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). In a more theoretical argument, Mignolo argues similarly for “critical assimilation” as the best possible response to globalization. See Walter D. Mignolo, “Coloniality of Power and Subalternity,” in Ileana Rodríguez, ed., *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 424-444. For an assessment of mixing as the mechanism of globalization, see Marwan M. Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Cf., Soto-Crespo, *Mainland Passage*; Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, eds., *Puerto Rican Jam*; Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*; Frances Negrón-Muntaner, ed., *None of the Above: Puerto Ricans in the Global Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Juan Flores, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993); José David Saldívar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). See also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Michel de Certeau, translated by Steven Rendall, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> Duany provides a useful examination of political and cultural expressions of nationalism between Puerto Rico and the United States, including the political utility of cultural nationalism. However, he neglects revolutionary nationalism. See Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*. In *Mainland Passages*, Soto-Crespo notes the slippage between them as cultural nationalism became political in the United States in the 1970s, although this view denies the cultural expressions common to what gets labeled political nationalism through figures such as Pedro Albizu Campos and Juan Antonio Corretjer, among others. Grosfoguel and Negrón-Muntaner, in collaborative and separate works, are among the most visible critics of nationalism in the field of Puerto Rican studies. For an overview, see their joint volume, *Puerto Rican Jam* or Grosfoguel’s monograph, *Colonial Subjects*. For a description of “territorial nationalism” in the Black Power movement, see William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965 – 1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 130-152. For a consideration of urban black struggles as battles for territory, see Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Critical debates on black nationalism can be found, among elsewhere, in Eddie Glaude, Jr., ed., *Is it Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Dean E. Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

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<sup>26</sup> Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race, and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> See Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007); and Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*; Michael González-Cruz, "Puerto Rican Revolutionary Nationalism (1956-2005): Immigration, Armed Struggle, Political Prisoners, and Prisoners of War," (Ph.D. dissertation, SUNY Binghamton, 2005). Both authors argue that, contrary to the typical middle-class dominance of nationalist expressions, Puerto Rican nationalism in the United States has been predominantly working class in origins. They maintain that this shift in class origins owes to migration and attendant racist patterns of housing and education. For more on the collaborative organizing of Puerto Ricans and African Americans, see Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*; Lee, "'Proud to be Maladjusted'"; and Fernández, "Radicals in the 1960s."

<sup>29</sup> El Comité, no title, *Unidad Latina*, volume 1, number 16 (October 23 – November 6, 1971), p. 5, in New Left Collection (hereafter NLC), Box 51, Folder: Misc. 1971, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003) p. 172.

<sup>31</sup> This brief biography of the five Nationalists is pieced together from many sources, including separate interviews I conducted with José López, Michael Deutsch, Lolita Lebrón, Juan Mari Bras, and Nelson Canals. Additional material was gathered from Stephen Hunter and John Bainbridge, Jr., *American Gunfight: The Plot to Kill President Truman—and the Shoot-Out that Stopped It* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005); Conrad Lynn, *There is a Fountain: The Autobiography of Conrad Lynn* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1993 [1979]), pp. 134-136; Robert J. Donovan, "Annals of Crime: A Demonstration at Blair House," *The New Yorker*, July 19, 1952; Irene Vilar, *The Ladies' Gallery: A Memoir of Family Secrets* (New York: Vintage Books 1998 [1996]); and from the full transcript of Jonah Raskin's interview with Oscar Collazo that Raskin provided for me.

<sup>32</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, p. 167.

<sup>33</sup> Ramón Bosque-Pérez, "Political Persecution against Puerto Rican Anti-Colonial Activists in the Twentieth Century," in Ramón Bosque-Pérez and José Javier Colón Morera, eds., *Puerto Rico Under Colonial Rule: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 13-48. Anecdotally, Juan Mari Bras was a student organizer in Puerto Rico until he was expelled for taking down the American flag at his university and raising the Puerto Rican flag. He came to the United States to study law and political science in Washington. He remembers police picking him up for questioning less than an hour after the attack on Blair House and again, four years later, two hours after the attack on Congress. The speed at which he was taken in for questioning suggests that he was being monitored. Juan Mari Bras, interview with the author, July 2, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*," p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 170.

<sup>37</sup> Cf., José López, ed., *Puerto Rican Nationalism: A Reader* (Chicago: Puerto Rican Cultural Center, 1977); People's Press Puerto Rico Project, *Puerto Rico: The Flame of Resistance* (San Francisco: People's Press, 1977). These self-published texts joined a trade focus on Puerto Rican radicalism in the 1970s, as exemplified in texts such as Abramson, *Palante!*; María Teresa Babin, *The Puerto Rican's Spirit* (New York: Collier Books, 1971); Juan Angel Silén, *We, The Puerto Rican People* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971); Manuel Maldonado-Denis, *Puerto Rico: A Socio-historic Interpretation* (New York: Vintage, 1972); Alfredo Lopez, *The Puerto Rican Papers: Notes on the Re-Emergence of a Nation* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973); Cordasco and Bucchioni, eds., *The Puerto Rican Experience*; Kal Wagenheim, *The Puerto Ricans: A Documentary History* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973); and Gordon K. Lewis, *Notes on the Puerto Rican Revolution: An Essay on American Dominance and Caribbean Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974);.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf., Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero, eds., *Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1975); Miguel Piñero, *Short Eyes* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975); Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997 [1967]); Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Lisa Sánchez González, *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora* (New York: NYU Press, 2001); Soto-Crespo, *Mainland Passage*. For studies of the Black Arts Movement and its relationship to the political struggles of its time, see James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford, eds., *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in González-Cruz, "Puerto Rican Revolutionary Nationalism," p. 207.

<sup>40</sup> Chicano activists in the Southwest had tried a similar initiative, opening an alternative high school in Denver in 1970. The school was named Escuela Tlatelolco, after the plaza in Mexico City where army troops shot scores of protestors—the exact number is unknown—in 1968 prior to the summer Olympics. That school inspired the effort in Chicago. See Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government's War on Dissent* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999); Rodolfo Corky Gonzales, *Message to Aztlán: Selected Writings* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2001). Oscar López acknowledged this inspiration in a September 1, 2009, letter to me. For discussion of similar efforts among Native Americans, see Elizabeth Castle, "The Original Gangster: The Life and Times of Madonna Thunder Hawk," in Dan Berger, ed., *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, forthcoming). For analyses of alternative modalities of education in black radicalism, see Charles M. Payne and Carol Sills Strickland, eds., *Teach Freedom: Education for Liberation in the African-American Tradition* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> The school still exists as a charter school, located in the heart of Humboldt Park, a largely Puerto Rican neighborhood in northwest Chicago. Starting in the 1960s, the neighborhood has been central to Puerto Rican visibility and settlement in Chicago. Humboldt Park is where the 1966 Division Street Riots took place, and it is now the site of Paseo Boricua, a stretch of Division Street set off on either end by giant steel Puerto Rican flags. Not long after Miranda was released, the school was renamed the Pedro Albizu Campos High School. Its library is named after Andrés Figueroa Cordero. My knowledge of the school's founding comes from my interviews with two of its founders: José López and Ricardo Jimenez. I also relied on materials in the archives of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center; a September 1, 2009, letter from Oscar López; and Jan Susler, "Unreconstructed Revolutionaries," in Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez, eds., *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), pp. 144-153. Scholars of Puerto Rican Chicago have also been especially useful. See especially Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story*; and Fernandez, "Latino/a Migration and Community Formation in Chicago."

<sup>42</sup> Rafael Cancel Miranda, untitled poem, in *Midnight Special* volume 5, number 3 (May 1975), p. 9, in *Midnight Special*, Tamiment Library, New York University.

<sup>43</sup> José López, interview with the author, May 24, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Cf., Melendez, *We Took the Streets*; Fernández, "Radicals in the Late 1960s"; Fernández, "Between Revolutionary Politics and Social Service Reform"; Lee, "Proud to be Maladjusted"; López, interview with the author, May 24, 27, and 29, 2009;

<sup>45</sup> This literature is exceptionally vast. For examples in social movement studies, see Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1986). Historians have also contributed to this emphasis, which has fueled a challenge to standard periodization by emphasizing the "long civil rights movement." See, for instance, Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008); Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); Matthew

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J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). For an interesting overview of community in social movements, see James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), especially pp. 69-99.

<sup>46</sup> Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended".

<sup>47</sup> Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>49</sup> James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9:3 (August 1994), pp. 302-308; Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1987]).

<sup>50</sup> Jiménez quoted in Serwer Secrist, "Construyendo Nuestro Pedacito de Patria," p. 63; Rosa quoted in González-Cruz, "Puerto Rican Revolutionary Nationalism (1956-2005)," p. 199; Collazo quoted in Raskin, interview transcript, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> For an analysis of this process regarding blackness in Harlem, see John L. Jackson Jr., *Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>52</sup> For Chicago, see Fernández, "Latina/o Migration and Community Formation in Postwar Chicago; Mérida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identity: Places of Memory and Personhood in Chicago's Puerto Rican Neighborhoods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); Studs Terkel, *Division Street, America* (New York: New Press, 1993); Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story*. For New York, see Joshua B. Freeman, *Working Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: New Press, 2001); Jonathan Mahler, *Ladies and Gentlemen, the Bronx is Burning: 1977, Baseball, Politics, and the Battle for the Soul of a City* (New York: Picador, 2005); Fernández, "Radicals in the Late 1960s.

<sup>53</sup> More generally on the positive and negative dimensions of diasporic consciousness, see Clifford, "Diasporas."

<sup>54</sup> Comité Pro Libertad de Los Presos Nacionalistas Puertorriqueños press release, August 17, 1975, Committee for the Freedom of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Prisoners, vertical file, Tamiment Library, NYU. The phrasing was that of Pedro Albizu Campos, although the release did not acknowledge it as such. See Peter Kihss, "'Sublime Heroism' Cited in Shooting," *New York Times*, March 3, 1954, p. 14.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid; Ruth Reynolds, undated letter to Jacinto [Rivera, former head of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party], circa 1974, in Ruth M. Reynolds Papers (hereafter RMR), Series II, Reel 5, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY. Because Feliciano still considered himself a member of the Nationalist Party, some Puerto Rican groups in New York City included Feliciano's case in with that of the other five, arguing that there were six Nationalists incarcerated. But the tactical and temporal circumstances of his case were different enough that few people linked his situation to the Nationalists in any direct manner.

<sup>56</sup> See unsigned and undated article, "Plea for Oscar Collazo's Life," probably authored by Ralph Templin in RMR, Series IV, Reel 2. Similar sentiments can be found in various printed matter of the Comité Pro Vida de Oscar Collazo (the Committee for the Life of Oscar Collazo, an organization that worked to prevent Collazo from receiving a death sentence), which can also be found here.

<sup>57</sup> Tony Schwartz, "2 Freed Puerto Rican Nationalists Say They Can't Rule Out Violence," *New York Times*, September 12, 1979, p. A1. The Nationalists did not disavow violence while incarcerated, so their post-prison statements on the matter were not surprising. See Megan Rosenfeld, "Lolita Lebron: The Conscience of a Puerto Rican Revolutionary," *Washington Post*, January 14, 1977, p. B1; Harold J. Lidin, "Figueroa Returns to P.R., Urges Freedom by Gunshot," *San Juan Star*, October 8, 1977, p. 1; Joanne Omang, "Puerto Rican Nationalists Retain Revolutionary Zeal," *Washington Post*, September 11, 1979, p. A1.

<sup>58</sup> Burton I. Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Derek N. Buckaloo, "Carter's Nicaragua and Other Democratic Quagmires," in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 227-245.

<sup>59</sup> Ortiz Santini, "The National Security Council during the Carter Administration and the Liberation of the Puerto Rican Nationalists in 1979." I am grateful to Francisco Ortiz Santini for sharing with me the National Security Council files he used in writing this article.

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<sup>60</sup> MLN, *The MLN and the Freedom of the Four*, p. 25.

<sup>61</sup> Nelson Canals, José Fortuño, and Rita Zengotita, interview with the author, July 1, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; Michael Deutsch, interview with the author, May 26, 2009; Juan Mari Bras, interview with the author, July 2, 2009; Martín Koppel with Rollande Girard and Jacob Perasso, “‘We Came Out of Prison Standing, Not on our Knees,’” *The Militant*, September 21, 1998, pp. 8-9; U.S. Committee to Free the Five Puerto Rican Nationalists, September 15, 1977, release, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 6. Despite the lack of any campaign or significant visibility for the Nationalists prior to the 1970s, the small, New York-based coterie of pacifist supporters of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party continued to discuss and protest the incarceration of Puerto Rican Nationalists in the U.S. and on the island. See, for instance, Carleton Beale et al., August 23, 1962, letter for a September 12, 1962, meeting and Ruth M. Reynold’s undated response, both in RMR, Series III, Reel 6; Ruth M. Reynolds, “Puerto Rican Political Prisoners—1964,” parts one and two in *Minority of One*, October (pp. 8-10) and November (pp. 9-11), 1964, respectively, in RMR, Series III, Reel 6; Americans for Puerto Rico’s Independence, “This Picketing is Undertaken in Protest Against the Imprisonment of Puerto Ricans for Opposing United States Rule in Puerto Rico” flyer for August 26 – 30, 1963, protest, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 1; Citizen’s Committee for the Release of All Political Prisoners of Puerto Rico, “Americans—Listen—Look—Act” flyer for September 21, 1965, protest at the United Nations, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 2; and Al Uhrie, Ralph Templin, and Ruth M. Reynolds, “A Call to Protest Political Imprisonment of Puerto Ricans,” *Peacemaker*, volume 13, number 14 (October 15, 1960), in RMR, Series IV, Reel 5.

<sup>63</sup> Sobell was released from prison in 1969 and published a memoir, *On Doing Time*, in 1974. He was a signatory in the founding of the U.S. Committee to Free the Nationalist Prisoners, and involved in the Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee, among other such efforts. Cf., “U.S. Committee to Free the Five Puerto Rican Nationalists,” September 15, 1977, letter, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 6. Sobell was also a signatory on the Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee. For Miranda’s time in prison with Sobell, see Drew Morita, “Former Alcatraz Inmate Speaks About His Time,” <http://www.examiner.com/x-25690-Alcatraz-Examiner~y2009m10d9-Former-Alcatraz-inmate-speaks-about-his-time> October 9, 2009 (consulted May 3, 2010). My knowledge of Lebrón’s time in prison comes from my July 1, 2009, interview with her as well as from Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987). See also Jonah Raskin, *Oscar Collazo: Portrait of a Puerto Rican Patriot* (New York: New York Committee to Free the Puerto Rican Nationalist Prisoners, 1978), and the unedited transcript of Raskin’s interview with Collazo, both in author’s files courtesy of Jonah Raskin.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Deutsch, interview with the author, May 26, 2009; AP, “Ailing Puerto Rican in 1954 Attack On Congress is Freed by Carter,” *New York Times*, October 7, 1977, p. 1. See also Raúl R. Salinas, letter to Michael Deutsch, September 16, 1972, in RRS, Box 6, Folder 20; U.S. Committee to Free the Five Nationalist Prisoners, “President Carter: Human Rights Begin at Home. Free Andres Figueroa!” flyer, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 6; Committee to Free the Five, “The Case of Andres Figueroa Cordero,” flyer, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 2. For more on the Marion events, see Alan Eladio Gómez, “Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972,” *Radical History Review* 96 (Fall 2006): pp. 58–86; and Raúl Salinas and Louis G. Mendoza, ed., *raúlsalinas and the Jail Machine: My Weapon is My Pen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

<sup>65</sup> Oscar López, letter to the author, September 1, 2009, alerted me to the Young Lords mural. Artwork about the Nationalists adorned many of the flyers for their release by organizations such as El Comité, the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee, the U.S. Committee to Free to Five (or Four, after Cordero was released), and the Young Lords Party. Many such documents can be found at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, private collection, and in RMR, Series IV, especially Reels 2, 5 and 6. As the campaign grew, images of the Nationalists were increasingly popular and could be seen in many places in the 1970s, including the back cover of *Sedition* (a San Jose radical newspaper), volume 5, number 3 (March 1976), in National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression Records (hereafter NAARPR), Box 1, Folder: Committee on Public Safety, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

<sup>66</sup> For instance, in a section on current political prisoners in *If they Come in the Morning*, Angela Davis lists only Lebrón’s name to introduce the section. The entry focuses disproportionately on her as well. See Angela Y. Davis, et al., *If They Come in the Morning* (New York: Signet, 1971), p. 98. Similarly, the first

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major collection of Nuyorican poetry features a poem dedicated to Lebrón but makes no mention of the others in her case. See Lucky CienFuegos, "Lolita Lebrón, Recuerdos Te Mandamos" (We Send you Our Love) in Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero, eds., *Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1975), pp. 59-60. Supporters published as pamphlets essays by and interviews with Collazo and Miranda. See, for example, Oscar Collazo, *Prisionero 70495*, and Rafael Cancel Miranda, *Lucha E Ideario de un Puertorriqueño*, both published by Editorial Coquí and archived in the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, private collection. Cancel Miranda published occasional poems in *Midnight Special* and, while he was in Leavenworth, in the Chicano prison newspaper there, *Aztlán*. Cordero published at least one poem in that newspaper as well. Copies of *Aztlán* can be found in RRS, Box 7.

<sup>67</sup> Oscar López, letter to the author, September 1, 2009. Lebrón carried a note in her pursue which read as follows: "Before God and the world my blood claims for the Independence of Puerto Rico. My life I give for the freedom of my country. This is a cry for victory in our struggle for independence, which for more than a half century has tried to conquer that land that belongs to Puerto Rico. I stated that the United States of America is betraying the sacred principles of mankind in their barbarous torture of our apostle of independence, Don Pedro Albizu Campos." Quoted in El Comité, "Nuestro Pueblo Se Respeta," *Unidad Latina*, volume 1, number 6 (May 26 – June 9, 1971), p. 3, from NLC.

<sup>68</sup> Lynn, *There is a Fountain*, p. 134.

<sup>69</sup> AP, "Puerto Rican, in Jail for 23 Years, Refuses Freedom," *New York Times*, December 24, 1977, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Deutsch, interview with the author, May 26, 2009; Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*."

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation," *Hypatia* (Summer 1998) 13:3, pp. 62-82; George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>72</sup> Rebecca N. Hill, *Men, Mobs and Law: Anti-Lynching and Labor Defense in U.S. Radical History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Nelson Canals, José Fortuño, and Rita Zengotita, interview with the author, July 1, 2009. For instance, Oscar López remembers being instructed as a child not to mention the Nationalist Party or the fact that his uncle was briefly incarcerated as a result of the 1950 revolt. This directive was based on a fear of the repression as well as a political disagreements; his immediate family supported Muñoz Marín and thought the Nationalists were "fanatics and terrorists." Oscar López, letter to the author, September 1, 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Fernandez, *Prisoners of Colonialism*, p. 197.

<sup>75</sup> Parren J. Mitchell et al., letter to President Jimmy Carter, December 5, 1978, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 6; Evangelical Council of Puerto Rico, "Resolution Requesting the Excarceration of the Nationalist Prisoners," in RMR, Series IV, Reel 5; Ruth M. Reynolds, "Report of the Ecumenical Visit to the White House on December 22, 1977[,] Seeking a Christmas Pardon for the Four Puerto Rican Nationalist Political Prisoners," in RMR, Series II, Reel 6; Nelson Canals, José Fortuño, and Rita Zengotita, interview with the author, July 1, 2009. The MLN published and distributed the text of the lawsuit Deutsch filed. See National Committee to Free the Four Puerto Rican Prisoners of War, "Discussion Document No. 1: 25 Years of Struggle, 25 Years of Resistance," (Chicago: n.p., circa 1978).

<sup>76</sup> Benjy Cruz, "Political Prisoners Conference—New York," *Palante*, March 31 – April 14, 1972, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> "Puerto Rican Nationalist Prisoners: Symbols of Courage—Victims of Repression," flyer by anonymous, circa 1973, in Bob Lederer, private collection; National Committee to Free the Four Puerto Rican Prisoners of War, *25 Years of Struggle, 25 Years of Resistance: Document 1* (Chicago: National Committee, circa 1978), p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Mickey Melendez, proposal to the Puerto Rico Solidarity Day Committee, February 20, 1975, in RMR, Series IV, reel 2.

<sup>79</sup> Nelson Canals, interview with the author, July 1, 2009. This view was echoed by others at the time. See, for instance, MLN, *The MLN and the Freedom of the Four* (n.p.: circa 1978), from Bob Lederer, private collection.

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- <sup>80</sup> B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., “Nationalist’s Return Spurs Island Debate,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1977, p. 27; Tony Schwartz, “2 Freed Puerto Rican Nationalists Say They Can’t Rule Out Use of Violence,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1979, p. A1.
- <sup>81</sup> José López, interviews with the author, May 27, 2009.
- <sup>82</sup> Nelson Canals, interview with the author, July 1, 2009; José López, interviews with the author, May 24, 27, and 29, 2009. Cancel Miranda and Lebrón, the two surviving members of the group, continue to participate in various political and cultural activities on the island. Lebrón joined the campaign to oust the Navy from Vieques by participating in nonviolent civil disobedience. Cancel Miranda writes and speaks frequently. Both have joined in various popular protests since their release, including the campaign for the release of other generations of Puerto Rican political prisoners.
- <sup>83</sup> See Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- <sup>84</sup> Cited in Taussig, *Defacement*.
- <sup>85</sup> Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1999), pp. 92-93.
- <sup>86</sup> Taussig, *Defacement*, p. 254.
- <sup>87</sup> Daniel M. Goldstein, *The Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 16.
- <sup>88</sup> Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).
- <sup>89</sup> Oscar López, letter to the author, September 1, 2009. Some people spelled Irvin Flores’s name as “Irving.” I am following the spelling Flores seemed to use.
- <sup>90</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 93.
- <sup>91</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 2006); Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Rebel Press, 1994); Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, translated by Paul Foss et al. (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007); Retort, *Afflicted Power: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London: Verso, 2005); Doug Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2003); Marjorie Garber, Jann Matlock, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds., *Media Spectacles* (New York: Routledge, 1993). For an analysis of the discursive elements in the making of spectacles, see Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Anthropological studies have also been useful in conceptualizing spectacular practices, as I will later argue. For a good overview, see Goldstein, *The Spectacular City*.
- <sup>92</sup> For contemporary analyses of or arguments for spectacles, see Stephen Duncombe, *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (New York: The New Press, 2007); Christine Harold, “Pranking Rhetoric: ‘Culture Jamming’ as Media Activism,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21: 3 (2004) pp. 189-211; Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam: How to Reverse America’s Suicidal Commercial Binge—and Why We Must* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2000); Goldstein, *The Spectacular City*. For a historical study, see Joseph Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
- <sup>93</sup> Doug McAdam, “The Framing Function of Movement Tactics: Strategic Dramaturgy in the American Civil Rights Movement,” in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 338-357.
- <sup>94</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, “The Black Panthers and the ‘Undeveloped Country’ of the Left” in C. E. Jones, ed., *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1998), pp. 57-105.
- <sup>95</sup> How *successful* this strategy may be is a different question from analyzing its inherent characteristics. This analysis must examine the tactical expressions of invisibility. There is, for example, a qualitative difference between the poetic invisibility of the EZLN’s Marcos and the military invisibility of the FALN.
- <sup>96</sup> On October 30, 1950, members of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party launched a revolt against the colonial administrators of the island. The revolt started in Jayuya, although fighting took place across the island. Nationalists attacked La Fortaleza, the palace in San Juan where the governor’s office was located. While the revolt had been planned, its timing was chosen to protest the passing of Law 53. Similar to the Smith Act in the United States, Law 53 criminalized membership in the Nationalist Party. The Nationalist rebellion was crushed within days, leaving twenty-five dead—more than the number of people who died in the Spanish-American War in Puerto Rico. More than 1,000 people were arrested in the aftermath. Most of



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those who participated were working class. By the 1970s, the Puerto Rican governor had pardoned all of the remaining Nationalists for their participation in the events of October 1950. For more, see Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, pp. 167-171; Hunter and Bainbridge, *American Gunfight*; José García, director, *La Patria es Valor Y Sacrificio* (Realidades, 1974).

<sup>97</sup> A coterie of nonviolent revolutionaries, largely people affiliated with the Christian Fellowship of Reconciliation and the secular War Resisters League, became ardent supporters of Puerto Rican independence in the 1940s. This move was largely serendipitous: the Harlem Ashram, a mission based in Spanish Harlem and inspired by the Indian struggle for independence, became tutored in the history of Puerto Rico and its ongoing fight for independence. The tutors included Julio Pinto Gandia, high-ranking member of the Nationalist Party, and Pedro Albizu Campos, the Harvard-educated black Puerto Rican and fiery orator who took the Nationalist Party from an elite club into a mass-based revolutionary organization. Through Pinto Gandia, members of the Ashram befriended Albizu Campos as he recuperated from the radiation he was exposed to while imprisoned for ordering the 1950 revolt. Members of the Ashram were involved in several organizations that advocated for Puerto Rican independence in the 1940s and 1950s, including the American League for Puerto Rico's Independence. See, for instance, "Biographical Data on Ruth M. Reynolds," in RMR, Series I, reel 1. Papers relating to the American League and other organizations from that era relating to Puerto Rico can also be found in the collection. See also Jean Wiley Zwickel, *Voices for Independence: Portraits of Notable Individuals in Support of Puerto Rican Independence* (Pittsburg, CA: White Star Press, 1988). Historians have yet to document the fascinating sixty-plus year connection between pacifists and Puerto Rican independentists.

<sup>98</sup> Lopez and Feliciano are quoted in Alfredo Lopez, "History: The Case and the Puerto Rican Movement," in The Committee to Defend Carlos Feliciano, *Carlos Feliciano: History & Repression* (New York, 1972). Ruth Reynolds, a white pacifist who had been a stalwart supporter of Puerto Rican independence since she met Nationalist Party leader Pedro Albizu Campos in the mid-1940s, was Secretary of the Carlos Feliciano Defense Committee. She wrote and spoke widely about his case. See RMR, Series IV, Reels 2, 4, and 6. Feliciano's bail was initially set at \$200,000, the highest in New York history at that point.

<sup>99</sup> José López, "Bring Them Home" meeting in New York City, December 12, 2009.

<sup>100</sup> Denise Oliver, "Murder!" *Palante* October 30, 1970, p. 2; Richie Perez, "Julio Roldan Center Opens," *Palante* October 30, 1970, p. 4. More generally see Fernández, "Radicals in the Late 1960s," pp. 228-242. Fernández notes that controversy over the deaths sparked an investigation by the Board of Corrections of the city.

<sup>101</sup> Fernández, "Radicals in the Late 1960s," pp. 238-239; for the Attica negotiation team, see Tom Wicker, *A Time to Die* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975).

<sup>102</sup> "Prionero de Guerra Eduardo Cruz," in RMR, Series IV, Reel 4.

<sup>103</sup> Iton provocatively titles this challenge to the normative assumptions of American democracy as the clash of citizen and nigger as polarities. See Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially chapter 5.

<sup>104</sup> Jose Yglesias, "Down Those Mean Streets: The Framing of Carlos Feliciano," *Ramparts*, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 3. For later attempts of Puerto Rican solidarity activists see

<sup>105</sup> Alfredo Lopez, "The Feliciano Case: Waiting for 1950," *The Village Voice*, November 12, 1970, pp. 7-8, 71-72.

<sup>106</sup> See "Free Carlos Feliciano; \$175,000 [bail money needed]" in RMR, Series IV, reel 3. Other Puerto Rican groups also utilized this picture to represent the longstanding and coterminous tension between insurrection and repression.

<sup>107</sup> Committee to Defend Carlos Feliciano, undated proposal to the National Executive Committee of the United Defense of All Political Prisoners, circa 1973, in RMR, Series IV, reel 2. Albizu Campos looms large in national, especially nationalist, histories of Puerto Rico. He remains one of the most well-known dissidents in Puerto Rican history, and frequent references to him can be found in most studies of Puerto Rican history. Yet there is no English-language biography of him. He has been the subject of much debate within Puerto Rican society, academic and otherwise. Non Spanish-speaking scholars must continue to rely on the fragmentary details about Albizu Campos that exist in English-language publications. For a good, brief overview, see Michael Staudenmaier, "Albizu Campos, Pedro (1891-1965)," in Immanuel Ness, ed., *International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 38-39.

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Ramos-Zayas discusses current struggles over the racial representation and political meaning of Albizu Campos in Chicago. See Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*, pp. 168-206.

<sup>108</sup> See, for instance, “Free Carlos Feliciano,” and “Government Frame-Up of Carlos Feliciano Continues,” both in RMR, Series IV, reel 3.

<sup>109</sup> “Marzo 19, Conferencia Presos Politicos,” *Unidad Latina*, March 1 – 15, 1972, p. 11 in A La Izquierda: The Puerto Rican Movement 1923-2002 (hereafter ALI), Reel 15, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.

<sup>110</sup> Untitled, undated, and unsigned ten-page document prepared for the March 19, 1972, El Comité conference, in RMR, Series IV, reel 6.

<sup>111</sup> These included El Comité, Puerto Rican Socialist Party, Coalicion Puertorriqueño, the Puerto Rican Independence Party, Resistancia Puertorriqueño, the Young Lords Party, and defense committees of several imprisoned Puerto Rican activists: Carlos Feliciano, Pancho Cruz, Humberto Pagan, and Martin Sostre. See “Subconference of Political Prisoners,” “Conference on Political Prisoners” and “Conferencia Pro Presos Politicos,” in RMR, Series IV, Reel 2; the United Front newsletter, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 3. For more on El Comité, see Rose Muzio, “Puerto Rican Radicalism in the 1970s: El Comité–MINP,” (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 2008); José E. Velázquez, “Another West Side Story: An Interview with Members of El Comité–MINP,” and Esperanza Martell, “‘In the Belly of the Beast’: Beyond Survival,” both in Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez, eds., *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), pp. 88-106, 173-191.

<sup>112</sup> El Comité, “Conference on Political Prisoners,” *Unidad Latina*, volume 1, number 21 (January 15 – January 29, 1972), p. 5, in NLC.

<sup>113</sup> See New York Solidarity Day Committee, “A Call to a National Demonstration at Madison Square Garden on October 27 in Support of the Independence of Puerto Rico,” May 1974, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 5; Juan Mari Bras, interview with the author, July 2, 2009.

<sup>114</sup> See José E. Velázquez, “Coming Full Circle: The Puerto Rican Socialist Party, U.S. Branch,” in Torres and Velázquez, eds., *The Puerto Rican Movement*, pp. 54-57; John Kifner, “2 Counterrallies in Philadelphia,” *New York Times*, July 5, 1976, p. 14. For the broader controversy surrounding the bicentennial, see Christopher Capozzola, “‘It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country’: Celebrating the Bicentennial in an Age of Limits,” in Beth Bailey and David Farber, eds., *America in the 70s* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), pp. 29-49; Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, pp. 143-182.

<sup>115</sup> José López, interview with the author, May 24, 2009.

<sup>116</sup> Melendez, *We Took the Streets*, p. 193; Fernández, “Radicals in the Late 1960s,” pp. 243-283.

<sup>117</sup> Goldstein, *The Spectacular City*, p. 17.

<sup>118</sup> Gary B. Palmer and William R. Jankowiak, “Performance and Imagination: Toward an Anthropology of the Spectacular and the Mundane,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11:2 (May 1996), p. 227.

<sup>119</sup> William O. Beeman, “The Anthropology of Theater and Spectacle,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993), pp. 329-393.

<sup>120</sup> Don Handelman, “Rituals/Spectacles,” *International Social Science Journal* 49 (1997), pp. 388, 396. See also Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Vintage, 1977).

<sup>121</sup> Baz Kershaw, “Fighting in the Streets: Dramaturgies of Popular Protest, 1968-1989,” *New Theatre Quarterly*, 13:51 (August 1997), pp. 255-276.

<sup>122</sup> The pair’s first thought was to go to Puerto Rico and participate in the revolt there, but surveillance of the Nationalist Party members in New York prevented this plan. See Raskin, *Oscar Collazo*, in author’s files courtesy of Jonah Raskin. The quote comes from the unedited transcript of the interview, which Raskin also provided for me, p. 2. For an interesting, which is not to say unproblematic, account of these events in a true-crime narrative, see Hunter and Bainbridge, *American Gunfight*. Describing Collazo and Torresola’s attack twenty-one years later, members of El Comité wrote of the attack’s symbolic mission for visibility. “In no instance did they think of killing the president, their one objective was to use the symbol of the Presidential house as a stepping stone to an international forum.” See El Comité, “La Patria Es Valor Y Sacrificio,” *Unidad Latina*, volume 1, number 6 (May 26 – June 9, 1971), p. 7.

<sup>123</sup> For journalistic accounts of the shooting in Congress on March 1, 1954, and its immediate aftermath, see Clayton Knowles, “Five Congressmen Shot in House by 3 Puerto Rican Nationalists; Bullets Spray from

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Gallery,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1954, p. 1; “FBI and Police Dig for Plot Roots Here,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1954, p. 1; Peter Kihss, “Puerto Rico Tightens Security After Report of Terrorist Plots,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1954, p. 8; “91 Puerto Ricans Rounded Up Here,” *New York Times*, March 9, 1954, p. 1; “Jury Convicts 4 in House Shooting,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1954, p. 1; Manuel Roig-Franzia, “A Terrorist in the House,” *Washington Post Magazine*, February 22, 2004; Ruth M. Reynolds “Why did they Do it,” October 2, 1977, statement, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 2; El Comité, “Nuestro Pueblo Se Respeta,” *Unidad Latina*, volume 1, number 6 (May 26 – June 9, 1971), pp. 2-3. El Comité asserted coincidence as intention by arguing that because the Nationalists opened fire while Congress was discussing a bill about Mexican migrant workers, the “history of Puerto Rico is once again related to our brothers and sisters in Latin America.” See also Meg Starr, “‘Hit Them Harder’: Leadership, Solidarity, and the Puerto Rican Independence Movement,” in Dan Berger, ed., *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, forthcoming). Interestingly, the prosecutor of Lebrón et al. had defended Collazo four years earlier; see Raskin, *Oscar Collazo*.

<sup>124</sup> I quote her text in note 67, above.

<sup>125</sup> Nelson Canals, interview with the author, July 1, 2009; Ruth M. Reynolds, “The Trial of the Puerto Ricans,” *Labor Action*, p. 3, in RMR, Series III, Reel 6. Gonzalo Lebrón Sotomayor was one of seventeen people charged with conspiracy stemming from the attack on Congress, and he was one of four who cooperated with authorities against the remaining thirteen (which included the four assailants). See “Plotter’s Brother Eyed,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1954, p. 15; Edward Ranzal, “Anti-U.S. Plot is Laid to 17 Puerto Ricans,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1954, p. 1; Peter Kihss, “Arms Hunt Opens Puerto Rican Case,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1954, p. 28; “Islander’s Trial Hears Ex-Plotter,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1954, p. 9; “Puerto Ricans Guilty of Sedition; 13 Face Six Years, \$5,000 Fine,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1954, p. 1; “4 Puerto Ricans Get Suspended Terms,” *New York Times*, November 2, 1954, p. 15. Collazo told Jonah Raskin that he brought Lebrón and her brother into the Nationalist Party. Raskin likened Lebrón’s collaboration to that of another famous case in the 1950s: the Rosenbergs, who were also betrayed by the brother of the accused (in that case, Ethel Rosenberg’s brother, David Greenglass). See Raskin, *Oscar Collazo*, and transcript, in author’s files.

<sup>126</sup> For a critique of how this Catholicism bred conservative views on gender, see Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*. A religious person before her arrest, Lebrón became increasingly spiritual while incarcerated. She claimed to have had a holy vision in her cell of global nuclear annihilation. This vision prompted her to write President Eisenhower, urging disarmament. As a result, she was temporarily placed in a psychiatric facility. Her granddaughter describes this incident as part of a history of matrilineal mental illness; see Vilar, *The Ladies’ Gallery*; the book’s original title, *A Message from God in the Atomic Age*, was the title of Lebrón’s message to Eisenhower. Conversely, José López describes Lebrón as part of a long tradition of Puerto Rican mystics. José López, interview with the author, May 27, 2009.

<sup>127</sup> Lewis, *Notes on the Puerto Rican Revolution*; Gordon K. Lewis, *Puerto Rico: Freedom and Power in the Caribbean* (New York: Harper, 1963); Raskin, *Oscar Collazo*. For a critique of Lewis, see Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>128</sup> See, for instance, Collazo’s testimony at his trial, which was included in *Collazo v. United States*, 196 F2d 573 (D.C. Circuit Court, June 2, 1952), available online: <http://vlex.com/vid/collazo-v-united-states-36640908>.

<sup>129</sup> Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>130</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 81.

<sup>131</sup> MLN, “Discussion Document#5: Unite the Many....[sic] Defeat the Few,” (Chicago: Rebeldia Publications, circa 1978), p. 21, in MLN vertical file, Freedom Archives.

<sup>132</sup> For an overview of the divided nation thesis in relation to 1970s Puerto Rican activism, see Andrés Torres, “Introduction: Political Radicalism in the Diaspora—The Puerto Rican Experience,” in Torres and Velázquez, eds., *the Puerto Rican Movement*, pp. 13-15. Corretjer’s poem was not published in any of his books. It can be found online at [http://www.virtualboricua.org/Docs/poem\\_jac.htm](http://www.virtualboricua.org/Docs/poem_jac.htm). The poem has also been put to music, most famously by independence singer Roy Brown.

<sup>133</sup> This picture adorns the cover of Torres and Velázquez, eds., *The Puerto Rican Movement*. Melendez provides a brief description of the occupation in *We Took the Streets*, pp. 199-212. Flyers urging support

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for the twenty-nine people arrested asked people to come to court less for that group than to “demand the immediate and unconditional release of the oldest political prisoners in the Western Hemisphere—Lolita Lebron [sic], Rafael Cancel Miranda, Irving Flores, and Oscar Collazo.” See NY Committee to Free the Nationalist Prisoners, “We Go to Court on November 22, 1977,” flyer in RMR, Series IV, Reel 2. For contemporary accounts of the occupation, see Mary Breasted, “30 in Puerto Rican Group Held in Liberty I. Protest,” *New York Times*, October 26, 1977, p. 30; “30 Seize Statue of Liberty, Nabbed,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 26, 1977, p. 1. The statue was occupied again in November 2000 to protest the U.S. military presence in the island of Vieques. One member of the 1977 group, Miguel Rodriguez, was an undercover police officer who had infiltrated the group responsible. He was arrested and convicted of trespassing, along with the other occupiers. In 2010, Rodriguez revealed that new Homeland Security measures have marked him as a security risk because of his arrest record. See John Marzulli, “Former NYPD cop Miguel Rodriguez flagged as terrorist after arrest during undercover role in 1977,” *NY Daily News*, March 21, [http://www.nydailynews.com/ny\\_local/2010/03/21/2010-03-21\\_terror\\_errors\\_stop\\_hero\\_cop.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2010/03/21/2010-03-21_terror_errors_stop_hero_cop.html) (accessed March 23, 2010).

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in MLN, “Discussion Document #7: The MLN and the Struggle of Vieques,” (Chicago: Rebeldia Publications, 1980), p. 4, in MLN vertical file, Freedom Archives.

<sup>135</sup> Rafael Cancel Miranda, “To Pablo and Nydia,” in *De Pie Y En Lucha* special edition (circa April 1979), p. 4, from Puerto Rican Cultural Center, private collection.

<sup>136</sup> John M. Goshko, “Cuba Offers U.S. a Swap of Prisoners,” *Washington Post*, June 14, 1978, p. A1; José Pertierra, “Gesture for Gesture,” *Counterpunch*, March 27-29, 2009, <http://counterpunch.org/pertierra03272009.html> (accessed March 30, 2009). See also Ortiz Santini, “The National Security Council during the Carter Administration and the Liberation of the Puerto Rican Nationalists in 1979.”

<sup>137</sup> Lolita Lebrón, interview with the author, July 1, 2009; Raskin, *Oscar Collazo*, and transcript, in author’s files; Donovan, “Annals of Crime,” *The New Yorker*, July 19, 1952. See also the letters by Thelma Mielke, Ruth Reynolds and other nonviolent activists connected to Peacemakers urging Truman to spare Collazo’s life, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 2.

<sup>138</sup> José López, “Statements of La Liga Socialista Puertorriqueña and the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional before the United Nations Committee on Decolonization,” August 31, 1978, in Bob Lederer, private collection. Huntington’s text can be found in Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York: NYU Press, 1975). An electronic copy can be found at the Trilateral Commission’s website: [http://www.trilateral.org/library/crisis\\_of\\_democracy.pdf](http://www.trilateral.org/library/crisis_of_democracy.pdf) (accessed March 30, 2009).

<sup>139</sup> Goldstein, *The Spectacular City*, p. 182.

<sup>140</sup> Rafael Cancel Miranda, undated open letter, p. 2, in RRS, Box 5, Folder 9.

<sup>141</sup> Quoted in González-Cruz, “Puerto Rican Revolutionary Nationalism (1956-2005)” pp. 202-203.

<sup>142</sup> See González-Cruz, “Puerto Rican Revolutionary Nationalism (1956-2005)” ; CISPRI et al., *Towards People’s War for Independence and Socialism in Puerto Rico*.

<sup>143</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Ricans in the American Century*, pp. 223-290.

<sup>144</sup> MLN, “Discussion Document #6: On the Question of Unity in Puerto Rico,” (Chicago: Rebeldia Publications, 1980), in Bob Lederer, private collection; see also “First Joint Message from the Clandestine Organizations to the People,” pamphlet (circa October 1979), in Elspeth Meyer private collection. Corretjer quote from CISPRI et al., eds., *Towards People’s War for Independence and Socialism in Puerto Rico*, p. 18

<sup>145</sup> MLN, “Discussion Document #3: Our Struggle from Within,” (Chicago: Rebeldia, circa 1978) p. 19, in Bob Lederer, private collection; Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” in *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005 [1980]), pp. 31-49. More generally, see Goldstein, *The Spectacular City*.

<sup>146</sup> David A. Andelman, “Groups Claiming FALN Ties Raid Offices of Bush and Carter,” *New York Times*, March 16, 1980, p. A1. Associated Press, “Suspect in Bombings by FALN is Seized,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1980, p. 1. The FALN had, five months earlier, placed “scare bombs”—that is, materials that looked like bombs but were not—in the New York campaign offices of both parties. The office occupation came after Bush won the Republican primary in Puerto Rico while campaigning for statehood.

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<sup>147</sup> UPI, "Puerto Rico Bomb Kills 2, Wounds 11," *New York Times*, January 13, 1975, p. 20. See also the January 24, 1975, communiqué printed in Committee in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence, May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization, October 30<sup>th</sup> Committee, Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, and Sojourner Truth Organization, *Toward People's War for Independence and Socialism in Puerto Rico: In Defense of Armed Struggle* (n.p.: 1979), p. 61. Tellingly, the book is dedicated to the four nationalists who were then still in prison (it was published after Cordero had been released), as well as the two people who occupied the Chilean consulate in Puerto Rico and, finally, William Guillermo Morales, who at that time had been the only suspected FALN member to be arrested. The dedication proclaimed these "prisoners of war" to be the "revolutionary inspiration for us all."

<sup>148</sup> Mary Breasted, "100,000 Leave New York Offices as Bomb Threats Disrupt City; Blasts Kill One and Hurt Seven," *New York Times*, August 4, 1977, p. 1. Panic was the mood that summer in New York: the FALN bombing of Mobil Oil came weeks after the citywide blackout that saw widespread looting in the context of massive urban blight, as well as the fear generated by the Son of Sam killer. See Mary Breasted, "Puerto Rican Arrested After Tip, But No Charge in Bombings is Filed," *New York Times*, August 5, 1977, p. 1. For a book-length journalistic account, see Mahler, *Ladies and Gentlemen, the Bronx is Burning*.

<sup>149</sup> See Georg Simmel, "The Secret and the Secret Society," in Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 307-378. For a more recent elaboration of Simmel's argument, see Taussig, *Defacement*.

<sup>150</sup> The communiqué is printed in Committee in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence et al., *Toward People's War and Socialism*, p. 58.

<sup>151</sup> See, for instance, the "Urban Terrorism Comes to New York" section in the *Village Voice*, February 3, 1975, p. 6; Robert Friedman, "FALN Doesn't Speak for Puerto Rico," *Daily News*, August 7, 1977; "Puerto Rico: 'Freely Associated' Colony," *Guardian*, August 17, 1977, in Bob Lederer, private collection.

<sup>152</sup> Michael Deutsch, interview with the author, May 26, 2009.

<sup>153</sup> Juan Antonio Corretjer, "Prisoner of War," in *De Pie Y En Lucha* special edition (circa April 1979), p. 5, from Puerto Rican Cultural Center private collection. The article originally appeared in the March 15, 1979, edition of the Puerto Rican newspaper *El Nuevo Dia*.

<sup>154</sup> Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee leaflet, "Grand juries attack Puerto Rican Independence Cause" circa 1976, RMR Series IV, Reel 5.

<sup>155</sup> "Profile of FBI Operations Against the Puerto Rican Cultural Center: 1972—1999," and *Chicago Committee to Stop the Grand Jury Newsletter* 1 (January 1977), in Puerto Rican Cultural Center, private collection.

<sup>156</sup> "The Frame-Up Continues" flyer, in RMR Series IV, Reel 2; Mary Breasted, "Puerto Rican Arrested After Tip, But No Charge in Bombings is Filed," *New York Times*, August 5, 1977, p. 1.

<sup>157</sup> Morton H. Halperin, Jerry J. Berman, Robert L. Borosage, and Christine M. Marwick, *The Lawless State: The Crimes of the U.S. Intelligence Agencies* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 209-220; Michael E. Deutsch, "The Improper Use of the Federal Grand Jury: An Instrument for the Interment of Political Activists," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 75:4 (Winter 1984), pp. 1159-1196; Margaret Ratner and Michael Ratner, "The Grand Jury: A Tool to Repress and Jail Activists," in Joy James, ed., *States of Confinement: Policing, Detention, and Prisons* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 277-286. For the use of grand juries in subpoenaing Chicano activists in Denver, see Vigil, *Crusade for Justice*, pp. 347-363. More generally, see the work of the Grand Jury Project in New York, some of whose papers (including some copies of its newsletter, *Quash*) can be found in the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression papers at the Schomburg Library. In addition to this and other archival work, my knowledge of grand juries was strengthened by my participation in a workshop on the subject at the University of Pennsylvania on March 6, 2010 led by criminal defense attorney and Harvard law professor Soffiyah Elijah.

<sup>158</sup> The apartment was discovered after a drug addict robbed it of dynamite and other bomb-making material while it was empty. He then tried to sell the material on the street. Undercover police officers purchased the dynamite and followed him back to the apartment, which had been rented by Torres. See Philip Wattle and Henry Wood, "'Bomb Factory' Found Here," *Chicago Tribune*, November 5, 1976, p. 1; Philip Wattle, "Reveal Secret 'Bomb Factory' Notebook," *Chicago Tribune*, November 6, 1976, p. S3; Mary Breasted, "3-Year Inquiry Threads Together Evidence on FALN Terrorism," *New York Times*, April

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17, 1977, p. 1; and Associated Press, “Suspect in Bombings by FALN is Seized,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1980, p. 1.

<sup>159</sup> Nelson Canals remembers that many in the independence movement was afraid of the grand jury resisters because of their opposition to the FALN. Nelson Canals, interview with the author, July 1, 2009. Author’s interviews with José López, himself a grand jury resister, were also helpful in my thinking about these dynamics.

<sup>160</sup> José López, interview with the author, May 30, 2009; Michael Staudenmaier, “Puerto Rican Independence Movement, 1898—Present,” in Immanuel Ness, ed., *International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 2766-2774. Retraimiento held that Puerto Rico was a nation prior to colonization; thus it needed to restore its sovereignty by rejecting the sovereignty imposed on it through U.S. domination. Retraimiento emerged in 1932, after Albizu Campos lost his bid for governor. In response to that defeat and in recognition of the electoral system as a sham of U.S. control, Albizu Campos urged non-participation in the colonial elections. This position has remained strong among nationalist supporters of Puerto Rican independence, partly explaining the small support independence gains at the polls (whether through the Puerto Rican Independence Party or in nonbinding straw polls on the island’s status). Albizu Campos argued that colonialism established a situation of war between the Puerto Rican nation and the United States. Juan Antonio Corretjer developed retraimiento as a stance of non-collaboration with grand juries in response to their use against the independence movement in 1936. Corretjer was jailed for a year rather than giving party documents to the grand jury. See Corretjer, *Albizu Campos and the Ponce Massacre*, [p. ii]

<sup>161</sup> March 1 Bloc, “Arguments and Proposals for the PRSC Conference,” (n.p., circa 1976), Puerto Rican Cultural Center, private collection.

<sup>162</sup> March 1 Bloc, “Arguments and Proposals for the PRSC Conference,” (n.p., circa 1976) [p. 7], Puerto Rican Cultural Center, private collection.

<sup>163</sup> The current borders of those states do not correspond exactly to the pre-1848 borders of Mexico, nor are those states listed in the text, all home to large Mexican-descent populations, the only ones taken in that war. Utah and parts of Wyoming were also conquered but do not factor prominently in the Chicano nationalist imagination. In 1983 the MLN split into two distinct groups, one Puerto Rican and the other Mexicano. Both continued to call themselves the MLN and maintained fraternal relations. The separation retained the ethnic origins that had always existed in the organization: the Midwest and East Coast branches of the MLN were heavily Puerto Rican and the Southwest branches heavily Mexicano. See MLN, “Program and Ideology of the MLN: First Congress of the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueño,” (Chicago: n.p., circa 1987), in author’s files courtesy of Matt Meyer.

<sup>164</sup> Breasted, “3-Year Inquiry Threads Together Evidence on FALN Terrorism.” For the evolution of the National Committee, see the February 2, 1980, Commemorative Program, “Bienvenidos Heroes Nacionales!” in Puerto Rican Cultural Center, private collection.

<sup>165</sup> Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee, “A Chronology of Repression and Harassment,” *Community Grand Jury Campaign*, in Bob Lederer, private collection; José López, interview with the author, May 27, 2009; Carol Brightman, “Grand Jury Nets Two in ‘Fishing Expedition,’” *Seven Days*, April 11, 1977, p. 12, and Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee West-Side Chapter, “Grand Jury Repression—On the Rise,” both in NAARPR, Box 2, Folder: FBI – Grand Jury; Terri Poppe, “Grand Abuse,” *Off Our Backs*, June 30, 1977, p. 4; Wendy Stevens, “The Power of Silence,” *Off Our Backs*, May 31, 1978, p. 7.

<sup>166</sup> For a self-description of the MLN as born out of repression, see MLN, “On the Principles of Non-Collaboration,” (Colorado: MLN, circa 1983), p. 2, in Bob Lederer, private collection.

<sup>167</sup> “Grand Jury Chronology,” flyer, in Michael Staudenmaier, private collection; Campaign to Free Lureida Torres, November 1978 statement, in NAARPR, Box 2, Folder: FBI – Grand Jury. See also The New York Committee Against Grand Jury Repression, *The Political Grand Jury: An Instrument of Repression* (Brooklyn, circa 1977). Archuleta and Moisés Moráles, another grand jury resister, had been long involved in land grant struggles in New Mexico. Both were students of Reies López Tijerina, head of the Alianza Federal de Mercedes Reales (Federal Alliance of Land Grants). See Rudy Busto, *King Tiger: The Religious Vision of Reies López Tijerina* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006). Convicted FALN members Carlos Alberto Torres, Oscar López Rivera and William Guillermo Morales also worked for the NCHA.

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<sup>168</sup> José López, speech before the U.N. Committee on Decolonization, August 1984, p. 1, in Puerto Rican Cultural Center, private files.

<sup>169</sup> See Brightman, "Grand Jury Nets Two in 'Fishing Expedition,'" *Seven Days*. This collection contains several useful documents from the Grand Jury Project, including public statements from grand jury resisters and brochures that supporters produced on their behalf. See also Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee, "Grand Juries Attack Puerto Rican Independence Cause," in RMR, Series IV, Reel 5; the *Grand Jury Campaign* newsletter (a temporary project of the Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee), in Bob Lederer, private collection; and the *Chicago Committee to Stop the Grand Jury Newsletter* 1 (January 1977) and the National Committee Against Grand Jury Repression (January-February 1978), both in Puerto Rican Cultural Center, private collection.

<sup>170</sup> Cf., MLN, "Our Struggle From Within: A Discussion Paper 3" (Chicago: Rebeldia, circa 1977), in Bob Lederer, private collection.

<sup>171</sup> MLN, "Repression: Physical Destruction of the Independence Movement and the Puerto Rican People," in John Brown Anti-Klan Committee, May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization, Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional, New Movement in Solidarity with the Puerto Rican and Mexican Revolution, Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, eds., *Repression/Resistance* (Chicago: Rebeldia Publications, circa 1982), in Bob Lederer, private collection. See also "War in America: Stop the Repression of National Liberation Struggles!" conference materials, in RMR, Series IV, Reel 3. The conference took place in Denver in May of 1982.

<sup>172</sup> For instance, Juan Mari Bras recalls being questioned by the FBI following the 1950 and 1954 attacks in Washington D.C. Not long after the shooting in Congress, Mari Bras returned to Puerto Rico. The FBI was eager to see him leave and asked for his flight details. Mari Bras cautioned the agents that he talked with them when they approached him because he was a guest in their country. But now that he was headed back to *his* country, he never wanted to see them again. Conversely, the grand jury resisters and other independence activists in the 1970s and 1980s rejected U.S. authority altogether by refusing to talk with any of agents of the state. Juan Mari Bras, interview with the author, July 2, 2009.

<sup>173</sup> "Guillermo Morales, Prisoner of War," *De Pie Y En Lucha* special edition (circa April 1979), p. 12, from Puerto Rican Cultural Center private collection. On his arrest, see Judith Cummings, "Apartment Blast Tied to Radicals," *New York Times*, July 14, 1978, p. B3.

<sup>174</sup> Selwyn Raab, "A Maimed Terrorist Flees Cell at Bellevue," *New York Times*, May 22, 1979, p. A1; "2 Subpoenaed in Terrorist's Escape," *New York Times*, May 24, 1979, p. B3; Judith Cummings, "Morales Fled U.S., Phone Caller Tells FBI," *New York Times*, May 26, 1979, p. 23; Robert D. McFadden, "Fugitive Puerto Rican Terrorist Arrested in Mexico," *New York Times*, May 28, 1983, p. 1; Robert D. McFadden, "Extradition of Terrorist from Mexico to be Sought," *New York Times*, May 29, 1983, p. 36; Associated Press, "Move to Extradite Morales is Pressed," *New York Times*, June 1, 1983, p. B3; Elaine Sciolino, "U.S. Recalls Mexico Envoy Over Militant's Release," *New York Times*, June 29, 1988, p. A3; Larry Rohter, "Mexicans Reject Criticism from U.S.," *New York Times*, July 1, 1988, p. A3. In Mexico, two of Morales' associates were killed in the melee surrounding his arrest. One was killed in a shootout; the other was killed in a car crash during an attempt to rescue Morales after he had been taken into police custody. Three police officers were also wounded, one of whom later died from his wounds. Corretjer praised Morales' escape from Bellevue in *Claridad*. See Hector Morales Jaime Martell, "The Completed: Tales of Juan Antonio Corretjer," *Claridad*, February 22-28, 1980, pp. 6-7.

<sup>175</sup> "Guillermo Morales, Prisoner of War," *De Pie Y En Lucha*, Special Edition, circa March 1977, p. 9. For the arrest and trials of the FALN, see Fernandez, *Prisoners of Colonialism*; González-Cruz, "Puerto Rican Revolutionary Nationalism"; and Reyes, "Law, Media and Political Dissent." See also the biographies of FALN members in Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, ed., *Can't Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S.* (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 1998), especially pp. 119-163.

<sup>176</sup> Ojeda Rios founded MIRA in the late 1960s, as well as the Macheteros in the 1970s. He received some of his political and military training in Cuba. The FBI alleged that MIRA was the precursor to the FALN in terms of personnel as well as ideology. See Selwyn Raab, "FALN Terrorists Tied to 10 Bombings Here and in Newark," *New York Times*, February 7, 1975, p. 1; Abby Goodnough, "Killing of Militant Raises Ire in Puerto Rico," *New York Times*, September 28, 2005, p. 17; Juan Gonzalez, "Slain P.R. Rebel Didn't Have to Die," *NY Daily News*, October 6, 2005, p. 18; Albor Ruiz, "P.R. Needs Answers in Militant's Killing,"

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*NY Daily News*, September 29, 2005, p. 6; Abby Goodnough, "A Moribund Independence Movement Stirs Anew," *New York Times*, November 6, 2005; González-Cruz, "Puerto Rican Revolutionary Nationalism," pp. 163-164; Juan A. Ocasio Rivera and Elma Beatriz Rosado, "Five Years Later: Remembering Filiberto Ojeda Rios," <https://nacla.org/node/6568> (accessed May 27, 2010). For more on the Macheteros, see Ronald L. Fernandez, *Los Macheteros: The Wells Fargo Robbery and the Violent Struggle for Puerto Rican Independence* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1987).

<sup>177</sup> See Dan Berger, "The Real Dragons: A Brief History of Political Militancy and Incarceration: 1960s to 2000s," in Matt Meyer, ed., *Let Freedom Ring: A Collection of Documents from the Movements to Free U.S. Political Prisoners* (Montreal and Oakland: Kersplebedeb and PM Press, 2008), pp. 18-20.

<sup>178</sup> Several crucial documents from the 1990s campaign for the next generation of Puerto Rican political prisoners, including petitions by faith communities and other grassroots appeals, are collected in Meyer, ed., *Let Freedom Ring*, especially pp. 311-361. See also Jan Susler, "Puerto Rican Political Prisoners in U.S. Prisons," in Bosque-Pérez and Colón Morera, eds., *Puerto Rico Under Colonial Rule*, pp.119-138. For a scholarly account, see Yanira Reyes, "Law, Media and Political Dissent: The Case of the FALN," (Ph.D. diss, Purdue University, 2002). González-Cruz describes the heroic greeting that accompanies Luis Rosa, the youngest of the FALN prisoners, in Puerto Rico. See "Puerto Rican Revolutionary Nationalism," pp. 199-203.



## Conclusion

“[W]e fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live. ...

And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our  
greatest strength.”

Audre Lorde

## The Prison and Its Metaphors

“Visually, textually, politically, the operation of a powerful state exercised and maintained its power by any means available to it, with the connivance of much of the press, the broadcast media, and the national public. And those places where power was least visible might well be where it was most present.”

– Wahneema Lubiano<sup>1</sup>

The prison is simultaneously visible and invisible. Like many state institutions, the prison is made most visible when there is a rupture from the standard procedure. But unlike libraries, schools, garbage collection or the military, the prison is thought to have a vested, normative interest in invisibility. It is less a public institution—something maintained by the government that people can use, join or attend—than a state institution—a place where state power is enacted through repression that is privately experienced and publicly unseen. While there are regulations governing such matters, prison officials ultimately control the terms by which prisoners and the rest of the world can access each other. This arrangement suggests that, more than other institutions, visibility can be a threat to the prison’s routine functioning. Even elaborate spectacles of state power that seek to bolster the prison’s authority—prisoners photographed naked, beaten and cuffed, whether in 1971 San Quentin or 2003 Abu Ghraib—bring unwanted

criticism upon the prison. Such public criticism may ultimately support the underlying practices of incapacitation, as it generally did in the California prison system and so far seems to have done in the War on Terror. Indeed, white powerbrokers greeted the visibility and celebrity of black and Puerto Rican prisoners with alarm, demanding punitive “law and order” solutions in response. But in both California and Iraq, visibility introduced the prison into public conversation, allowing critical voices to air their grievances against an institution that draws some of its power from its presence in the shadows. Critics argued for transparency as a necessary antidote to the prison’s authority.

This seeming paradox, being both visible and invisible, makes the prison a useful symbol. Like cancer or exile, the prison is a concept embedded in popular consciousness whose metaphoric utility owes to what we collectively imagine to be its totalizing imprint. Our conceptual understanding of it is more important, at least to its figurative use, than our personal experience with it. Its widely shared connotative meanings as a condition of repression make the prison a useful, transportable and multivalent analytic device. The prison is a potent metaphor that allows us to think about and name the constrictions we face and those we fear. As with other metaphors, the prison is useful to think about things beyond itself. Because many people share this connotative, even colloquial meaning, the prison is a highly visible concept. It reveals conditions of coercive isolation and subjugation, situations where people feel less than self-determining subjects. This figurative use of the prison has followed its entry into critical theory. Even Foucault, whose book *Discipline and Punish* emphasized the prison as a productive site for understanding power, used the prison as something of a metaphor: he focused on it as an exemplar of the ways power enacts itself through diffuse practices that people

internalize as both individuals and as collective members of society. Some contemporary social theorists have followed suit, describing the pervasive mechanisms of punishment dispersed throughout society.<sup>2</sup>

The prison as a metaphor of collective oppression is perhaps an inevitable signifier through which marginalized groups protest their subjection. Its prominence owes most immediately to the shared understanding of the prison as a site of coercion and confinement. The prison's invisibility also explains its resonance, for the prison is not just a site of extreme confinement but one whose severity owes to the fact that it is generally hidden from view. Invoking the prison signals an unseen condition of all-encompassing punishment. As politicized collectives try to name their position as one of confinement in a system (whether high school or homophobia) that tries to conceal its inequality and deny the subjectivity of those it represses, the prison emerges as an apt metaphor. The prison is therefore a potent metaphor for making sense of identity, with its complex attachments to seeing and being seen and its inextricable connection to the allocation of resources and the experience of systemic violence. As this study has shown, the prison facilitates racial formation in a country where racial identity has been inseparable from state-sponsored and -sanctioned subordination. The affective dimension of subjection is illustrative here, for it explains how even white middle class men could turn to the prison to explain the way they feel trapped by their identities. But the familiarity with violence has been a more powerful indicator of the prison's salience than the emotional burdens of racial identity. The prison has facilitated processes of racial identification for black and Puerto Rican activists whose racial formation has been intimately connected to state violence—in both spectacular and mundane forms—and

objectifying representations that bury group agency. The politicization of race in the context of pursuing racial justice or anti-imperialism perhaps inevitably makes use of confinement to understand and structure its opposition.

The prison is a premier site of state power, which itself participates in race-making practices that include the disproportionate incarceration of Puerto Rican and especially black people. The fact of racialized incarceration gave material evidence to the metaphoric use of the prison. It is, therefore, logical to expect allegorical narratives of the prison to arise with the initial visibility of racial protest, and to find a greater emphasis on the prison as an institution when such protest expands. Thus, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) and *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), among other works at this time, make mention of the respective author's time in prison as part of his coming to terms with racial oppression and his own sense of self as a political or artistic being. The prison here functioned as a literary device, the point of the author's personal transformation. George Jackson's *Soledad Brother* (1970) and Piri Thomas's second book, *7 Long Times* (1974), were published as black and Puerto Rican activists had been increasingly organized, as black and Puerto Rican identities were more visibly engaged in public debates and political challenges. These later texts studied the prison as a political site, making it visible as an institution as well as an allegory. Prison radicalism, especially in its racially inflected manifestations, emerges at moments of racial formation where protest is established and growing in frequency and militancy. The prison becomes visible alongside and through constructions of identity. It is the modality through which social justice movements confront the limits of reform or incorporation as they more stridently define the terms of their antagonism as a choice between freedom and

unfreedom. The prison provides the metaphor and the materiality through which to make visible conditions of unfreedom.

But the prison is also highly invisible. This invisibility has given the prison a mysterious allure that can, as it did in the 1970s, contribute to its visibility. Popular assumptions hold that the prisoner is a dangerous subject. When that assumption is challenged through eloquence or the exposure of injustice, the prisoner can emerge as a subject of public fascination. Moving from invisibility to hypervisibility, the prisoner is seen as being endowed with a more genuine understanding of life than others, precisely because of the prisoner's intimacy with invisibility. Visibility is a key component in the politicization of ideas or people typically ignored in the public imagination. Yet this popular visibility of the formerly invisible is by nature short-lived. As I have argued, visibility, a narrative shared and seen by broader publics, is too malleable and contingent to be forever sustained within a particular framework. Additionally, this visibility is incorporated into preexisting structures of feeling. While it can help shift certain ideas or policies, it does not do so in a vacuum. Visibility is always the process of machinations of time, space and politics.

These structuring factors of visibility compromise the display of visibility from what its architects envisaged to a more negotiated settlement. Especially for populations typically at a remove from the public eye, these factors shape a visibility that is incongruous. For as Ralph Ellison observed, "all life seen from the hole of invisibility is absurd."<sup>3</sup> The prisoner garners visibility for her or his insights into the violent traits of the human condition—those which led to incarceration or those which resist coercive silencing. This visibility highlights the violent extremes that comprise aspects of normal

life for the most desperate and destitute. Much as a celebrity is famous for being famous, the rare prisoner who becomes publicly known remains visible in part because of the mysterious and partiality of such visibility. By necessity confinement makes prisoners into symbols, even memories. The prisoner's unique insights into life are publicly valued to the degree in which she overcomes invisibility: the prisoner as critic, as survivor, as exile.

As Edward Said wrote of exile, the prison is “strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience.”<sup>4</sup> While its metaphoric terrors are widely imagined, its material ones are rarely visible. Actual prisons are, for most people, hard to see for reasons of both geography and ideology. Prisons tend to be located in rural, sparsely populated areas, making them removed from most people's view. In the popular imagination, reinforced in the twenty-first century through news reports, movies and other expressions of popular culture, the prison incapacitates frightening people: murderers, rapists, and terrorists. While we think we know prisons, we do not often see them. This invisibility of actual prisons fosters the visibility of the prison as a metaphor. Indeed, it may be that the use of the prison as a metaphor has increased with the mass incarceration that has made the United States the world leader in imprisonment. Writing about the metaphoric uses of disease, Susan Sontag noted that the metaphoric utility increases with the level of mystery attached to a condition: tuberculosis was a potent myth until it had a cure.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the prison will continue to describe experiences of confinement and be intimately linked with feelings of collective repression, as long as incarceration continues to treat social problems and be intimately linked in the production and reproduction of racial oppression.

Even before the contemporary “postracial” moment, some postmodern critics have implied that the prison was useful in making sense of race itself and not just racial oppression. Those who reject the totalizing tendencies of race have defined it as a prison: a confining system of restriction and authoritarian rule, regardless of where on the color line one may be placed or place themselves.<sup>6</sup> But rejecting race will not remove the prison of race, or the reality of racial formation through confinement as both a concept and a fact. This study has attempted to parse the connections between race and the prison by historically demonstrating and theorizing their articulations and disjunctures. I have shown that the prison has been a physical target and conceptual tool that has animated mobilizations by racialized groups. A variety of contentious practices—including policy debates, reform efforts, and anti-systemic protests—generated attention to the various institutions of racialization. The prison, used to describe the horrors of white supremacy and U.S. colonialism, was also an institution where race was being constantly made and remade through prisoner actions as well as those of officials. The fact of incarceration, especially on the scale that has been official policy since the 1960s, shaped the formation of black and Puerto Rican communities. Those populations, highly visible opponents to the prison regime in the 1970s, now comprise a disproportionate number of those in prison.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, race proved a useful compass for navigating the sharply polarized world of prison. Racial identity fashioned alliances in prison. Even radical prisoners, who sought to build unity across racial lines, often did so after establishing a connection with other black, brown, or white prisoners. As racial protest movements sought to make change through and alongside of the polarization of the 1960s-era, the prison became a visible site, with prisoners as visible guides. Indeed, the simultaneous



presence of racial pride and multiracial unity—a celebrated ideal that especially accompanied prison riots, if the reality was often more complicated—seemed to offer a feasible example for restructuring American society according to the radical nationalism that had then erupted among black, Puerto Rican and other communities of color.

Prison visibility, especially that garnered through racial protest, is especially entangled with nationalist sentiment. Such sentiments are, of course, shaped by gendered constructions of political subjectivity. Within the 1970s, race was described as the most pivotal lens through which to understand the prison. But as I have argued, the invocation of race was heavily shaped by and articulated through other metrics. Nationalism emerged as the framework for prison protest by the late 1970s. Prison activists turned to revolutionary nationalism to develop a collectivity strong enough to challenge the U.S. nation-state that was responsible for racial confinement up to and including the prison. Anticolonial nationalists embraced prisoners as national ambassadors, those most intimately and organically acquainted with what they described as the “oppressor nation.” This nationalism used race as an indicator while claiming to move beyond it, to its root in the formation and sublimation of nations. This nationalism, among both black and Puerto Rican activists, challenged the national myths of the United States while reviving and reproducing an anticolonial nationalist history along racial lines. Nationalists criticized the forced confinement in and of the United States—as slaves, as colonized subject, as prisoners.

Racial formation and the prison are intimately linked with the visible production of nationalism. This connection was solidified by a chain of equivalencies that connected race to prison to nation. Activists described themselves as being in prison as a result of

their racial identity. This position made the prison visible as the institution that epitomized the confinement of white supremacy. It also created space for prisoner dissidents to become visible to those on the outside, and for outside activists to come into contact, directly or indirectly, with prisoners. Because the prison became visible as an institution maintained by and representing the racial state, prison activism constituted itself through a racial subjectivity and political strategy that self-consciously targeted any juridical aspect of the state as a blow against the prison. Prison radicalism sought to negate the government's financial interests, military power, and authority to rule. As a result, prison activism challenged the accepted units of political power in society. Doing so brought it further into conflict with dominant national meanings, especially since the prison, as with any state institution, was held to signify the American nation-state writ large. Prison radicalism therefore made visible parallel and oppositional national affiliations to secure a base of power, discursively if not objectively, strong enough to counter the United States as a nation and a state.

This use of racial nationalism appealed to international bodies and alliances, in the process making the American racial regime visible to a global audience. Race is lived and experienced locally, but it is shaped by translocal phenomena that are political, economic, cultural, historical, and spatial. Seen as connected to racially specific geographies, including impoverished urban spaces, the prison makes visible black space, Puerto Rican space—and, implicitly, white space—such that the prison becomes a racially marked space in the public imagination. This sense of racially defined space created idealized notions of home in the form of the city or a free Puerto Rico. At the same time, it made the prison visible as a site with which black and Puerto Rican activists

were well acquainted as a result of white supremacist colonialism. Thus, the visibility of the prison as an institution of state power that especially impacts people of color contributes to making visible diverse and oppositional publics according to racial identity. This visibility contributes to shaping knowledge and experiences of race on both sides of prison walls.

As social movements create new fields of knowledge, prison radicalism made the prison thinkable in new ways—a site of political and artistic practice. As critical theorists of confinement, George Jackson, Angela Davis and countless other unnamed prisoners analyzed the prison well before scholars such as Michel Foucault. Yet their contributions were less known because the intellectual or cultural production of prisoners is not widely valued. At some point during the 1971 rebellion at Attica, a prisoner had etched into the walls a well-known poem by notable Jamaican-American author Claude McKay. The poem, “If We Must Die,” celebrated the possibility of oppressed people to have at least a heroic death in the fight against a more powerful enemy. The poem was originally published in 1919 in the socialist newspaper *The Liberator*, and McKay became a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance. Unaware of the poem’s origins, *Time* magazine praised the unknown prison author for the “crude but touching” sentiment expressed in the lines scrawled shortly before New York State Troopers retook the prison after the four-day standoff.<sup>8</sup> The unthinkability of prisoner artistic knowledge, much less the possibility of their sophisticated artistic creation, removed from consideration the possibility that prisoners could have or display aesthetic complexity. In response, artistic production has been central to prison visibility and efforts to change popular conceptions of who is behind bars. In the 1960s and 1970s, this cultural visibility centered on prisoners as

authors—poets, journalists, and memoirists. More recent efforts have also highlighted prisoners as visual artists: painters and sculptors.<sup>9</sup> Many of these new prisoner artists have paid homage to their predecessors through drawings of or poems dedicated to George Jackson, Lolita Lebron, Assata Shakur and other prison radicals of the 1970s.

Cultural production has shaped prisoner visibility, using art to argue that confinement cannot kill creativity and that creativity abrogates the need for confinement. This use of art seeks to challenge the ideological constructions of the danger prisoners pose to society. It can, however, slip into questions of authenticity, of judging subjects by their presumed innate worth. Doing so strips creativity of its many dimensions and limits the transformative potential of cultural or political labor. In its willful celebration of immutable characteristics, authenticity, as applied to people, is an act of spectacular invisibility: it takes the part for the whole and buries the rest. This invisibility of people's whole selves perpetuates the good/evil binaries that structure law and order ideologies, for the authentic criminal subject cannot help but prey on the authentic victim. While the two-dimensional character of mass publicity can often heighten concerns with authenticity, it is authenticity itself that poses the danger of invisibility as an act of erasure that supports invisibility as an act of confinement.

Recognizing the dangers imposed by the widespread visibility prison radicalism received, some of the prominent architects of the post-1960s incarceration boom argued that invisibility would best aid their efforts. In his published diaries, former White House Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman recalled Richard Nixon saying “that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to.” The war on crime, which led to the massive spike

in policing and incarceration, fulfilled this purpose.<sup>10</sup> The expanded war on crime overlapped with political scientist James Q. Wilson's self-appointed mission to shift public attention away from prison and onto crime. Through a series of articles and the book *Thinking About Crime* (1975), Wilson sought to establish bipartisan consensus around criminal justice policy by advancing positions more extreme than were common to the mainstream of either party. Wilson politicized crime as a pressing issue that demanded response at the local and state levels, as well as federally. Localizing the response to crime diffused the prison as an issue of national concern by dispersing authority regionally rather than placing it in the federal government, the ultimate signifier of the nation. Yet in the early 1980s, Wilson was glad that "presidential candidates in 1976 and 1980 ... scarcely mentioned [crime]." He greeted this silence because he believed it "reflected a growing consensus" about criminal justice policy.<sup>11</sup> This attempt to construct a new hegemony around battling crime has contributed to the conceptual articulation of prisoners as inherently dangerous people. This view has added to the invisibility of the prison by bolstering the stigma attached to having been incarcerated or having a loved one incarcerated, the "secondary marginalization" that political scientist Cathy Cohen has argued contributed to exacerbating the crisis of HIV/AIDS in black communities. This stigma, elaborated through invisibility, decreased the ability of prison-based social movements to exist. Invisibility fostered the construction of what David Garland has called a "culture of control," a society rooted in punishment that has led to what is now widely acknowledged to be a crisis of confinement.<sup>12</sup>

The prison's visibility remains a pressing, vexing concern in the United States in the early twenty-first century. This visibility concerns both the national political economy

of the carceral state, as well as the global export of U.S. modes of punishment. The globalization of American incarceration through military conflict is entangled with various degrees of seeing: the highly visible photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib, the public debate around an unseen Guantanamo (where revelation of torture but not the sight of it has dominated its presence in public consciousness), and the largely unmentioned prison camp at Bagram Air force base in Afghanistan or secret CIA prisons scattered throughout Eastern Europe and other parts of the world.<sup>13</sup> The prison's in/visibility as part of the War on Terror contributes to a variety of geopolitical tensions that also serve to produce and reinforce notions of race and nation within American culture about people from different parts of the world. The prison shapes how people around the world interpret and interact with the United States. This visibility, along with the unique severity of American carceral practices (including racialized mass incarceration, life sentences for juveniles, privately run prisons, and the use of the death penalty), has articulated the prison as more central to the U.S. nation-state than to other countries.

Domestically, the prison is a visible fixture within popular culture. Films, music and even reality television invoke the prison.<sup>14</sup> This visibility of the prison, and the criminal justice system more generally, in the cultural landscape is complemented by the growing invisibility of the prison politically. News organizations often cover prison construction, riots, or escapes but rarely report on conditions inside or attempt to understand the life of prisoners, as some journalists attempted in the early 1970s. Prisoners are not popularly seen as having unique insights into the human condition or poetic wisdom on matters of pressing concern. The spectrum of isolation possible in prison has expanded since the 1980s through a variety of "lockdown" units that prohibit

motion or access to a dwindling number of programs. The most recent of these, the Communication Management Units (CMU), became the target of a lawsuit in March 2010 for the spurious rationale given for isolating certain prisoners, almost all Muslims as well as an outspoken environmental activist, who have not violated prison rules. Similar prison units, in which surveillance and isolation are more intense, have been utilized several times since the 1980s. They join the construction of supermaximum prisons that are based on near-total confinement: geographically isolated, these prisons isolate their captives from one another, from programming, and from the outdoors.<sup>15</sup> The widespread use of lengthy isolation and lengthy sentences makes confinement in the United States somewhat different from how people in other countries experience it. The prison is a commonsense response to a wide variety of issues in the United States, from immigration to disaster relief, which makes it such a crucible in the formation of identity. Neoliberalism has exacerbated these tendencies, through widespread criminalization and private prisons—factors that have increased the saliency of the prison-slavery connection, not because they make money, but because they use capital as a standard to measure and enforce human bondage of disproportionately black people.<sup>16</sup>

In response to the growth of mass incarceration, contemporary prison radicalism continues to emphasize visibility. This iteration of prison visibility has been more consciously mediated, less deliberately violent in practice. The rise of new media and a more conservative political climate, alongside a reconsideration of the violent strategies of some 1970s prison militants, have yielded attempts at visibility rooted more in mediated discourse rather than spectacular action. Various grassroots organizations have attempted to harness diverse forms of media to highlight prison conditions and prisoner

organizing. These include radio programs that reach through prison walls and feature prisoners as commentators, audio and visual documentaries about prisoners, prisoner art shows, and various websites dealing with prison conditions or the cases of particular prisoners.<sup>17</sup> These media experiments join traditional organizing initiatives, from lobbying elected officials to making the prison visible through traditional media such as books, pamphlets and flyers. In making the prison visible as one node in a phalanx of structures and institutions that make confinement an acceptable and natural part of American society, some contemporary prison activists have called for the abolition of the “prison industrial complex.”<sup>18</sup> In attempting to popularize abolition, the organization Critical Resistance re-published what is considered to be the first handbook of prison abolition: *Instead of Prisons*, a manual of strategies for resisting and replacing prison through community-based solutions to the social problems that often result in imprisonment. The book was first published in 1976 by a coalition of mostly pacifist activists in upstate New York. Its reprinting, together with the campaigns aiming to free prisoners incarcerated for political actions undertaken in the 1970s, points to the fact that despite a significantly larger prison population, complete with dozens of new prisons, prison radicalism of the 1970s continues to influence this one.

The prison is one of the most crucial and generative sites within recent American history. Through the prison, physically and conceptually, we can study how people navigated and narrated post-civil rights racial formations, cultural productions, and protest mobilizations. Prison visibility articulated histories of racial oppression with the institution that has become among the most powerful forces in reproducing such hierarchies. Seeing the prison asks us to look spatially, intellectually, and politically.



Imagining something beyond the prison asks us to think differently and act diligently. The prison's visibility as a process of social change requires a series of disarticulations, separating the prison from justice, race from criminality, publicity from authenticity. Here again, 1970s prison radicalism can be informative for its insightful, if partial, critique. As the Prison Action Project declared forty years ago, "there will be no democracy, no justice, no freedom until we have a new language and a new reality where criminal is not equated with being poor and law is not equated with the protection of capital. Until then, freedom will only be found in the struggle."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wahneema Lubiano, “Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means,” in Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-gender-ing Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), p. 352.

<sup>2</sup> For sociological and political economic overviews, see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 2006 [1990]); Jonathan Simon, *Governing Through Crime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Loic Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For a theoretical synthesis, see David Garland, *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage International, 1995 [1952]), p. 579.

<sup>4</sup> Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 173.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Sontag, *Illness as a Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> While blacks had been disproportionately criminalized and incarcerated since the end of slavery, their rates of imprisonment grew dramatically after World War II. Cf., Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Robert Perkinson, *Texas Tough: The Rise of America’s Prison Empire* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Marie Gottschalk, *The Prison and the Gallows: The Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David M. Oshinsky, *“Worse than Slavery”: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York: Verso, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> H. Bruce Franklin, *The Victim as Criminal and Artist: Literature from the American Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 235. The original poem can be found in Claude McKay, *Selected Poems* (New York: Dover Classics, 1999), p. 43. For more on McKay’s cultural significance in the black Atlantic, see Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914 – 1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Local and national organizations such as Books Through Bars, the Fortune Society and the Prison Art Project, among many others, have coordinated prisoner art shows in different parts of the country. For anthologies and analyses of prisoner art, see, for instance, Stephen John Hartnett, *Incarceration Nation: Investigative Prison Poems of Hope and Terror* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003); Phyllis Kornfeld, *Cellblock Visions: Prison Art in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Bell Gale Chevigny, ed., *Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999); H. Bruce Franklin, ed., *Prison Writing in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in an Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> James Q. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983 [1975]), pp. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) ; David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Dan Berger, “Regarding the Imprisonment of Others: Prison Abuse Photographs and Social Change,” *International Journal of Communication* 1 (2007), pp. 210-237; Jane Mayer, *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Deborah Pearlstein and Priti Patel, *Behind the Wire: An Update to Ending Secret Detentions* (New York: Human Rights First, 2005); Julia Sudbury, ed., *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*.

<sup>14</sup> Bill Yousman, *Prime Time Prisons on U.S. TV: Representation of Incarceration* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009); Paul Butler, *Let’s Get Free: A Hip-Hop Theory of Justice* (New York: The New Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Robert Perkinson, “Shackled Justice: Florence Federal Penitentiary and the New Politics of Punishment,” *Social Justice* 21:3 (Fall 1994), pp. 117-132; Elihu Rosenblatt, ed., *Criminal Injustice:*

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<sup>16</sup> Cf., Mark Dow, *American Gulag: Inside U.S. Immigration Prisons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Dan Berger, "Constructing Crime, Framing Disaster: Routines of Criminalization and Crisis in Hurricane Katrina," *Punishment and Society* 11:4 (Fall 2009), pp. 491-510; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Michael A. Hallett, *Private Prisons in America: A Critical Race Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Tara Herivel and Paul Wright, eds., *Prison Profiteers: Who Makes Money from Mass Incarceration* (New York: The New Press, 2009); Perkinson, *Texas Tough; Wacquant, Punishing the Poor*.

<sup>17</sup> For an overview of some of these efforts, see Claude Marks and Rob McBride, "Recovering, Amplifying, and Networking the Voices of the Disappeared—Political Prisoners on Internet Media," *Social Justice* 30: 2 (2003), 135-142.

<sup>18</sup> CR10 Publications Collective, ed., *Abolition Now!: Ten Years of Strategy and Struggle Against the Prison Industrial Complex* (Oakland: AK Press, 2008); Julia Sudbury, "Maroon Abolitionists: Black Gender-Oppressed Activists in the Anti-Prison Movement in the U.S. and Canada," *Medians* 9:1 (2009), pp. 1-29.

<sup>19</sup> Prison Action Project, *Freedom On Our Terms: The Case Against the Adult Authority* (Oakland: n.p., circa 1971), p. 25, in author's files, courtesy of Tony Platt.

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