

Radical Lineages: George Jackson, Angela Davis, and the Fascism Problematic

Down here we hear relaxed, matter-of-fact conversations centering around how best to kill all the nation's niggers and in what order. It's not the fact that they consider killing me that upsets. They've been "killing all the niggers" for nearly half a millennium now, but I am still alive. I might be the most resilient dead man in the universe. The upsetting thing is that they never take into consideration the fact that I am going to resist.

—George Jackson, *Soledad Brother* (1970)

Now even the façade of democracy is beginning to fall. . . .
So what we have to do is talk about placing the courts on trial. Oppressed people must demonstrate in an organized fashion to the ruling class that we are prepared to use every means at our disposal to gain freedom and justice for our people.

—Angela Y. Davis, "Prison Interviews" (1971)

Origins and Departures: Toward a Radical Intellectual Lineage

If one were to mark a political and theoretical point of departure for the genesis of radical prison praxis in this historical moment, the subversive texts generated by two of the most widely recognized imprisoned liberationists of the twentieth century would hold particular prominence. George Jackson and Angela Y. Davis offer a study in biographical contrasts, a fact not missed by a state-mediated popular discourse that obsessively and repeatedly rendered a racist and sexist narration of Davis as a middle-class black academic gone astray, somehow corrupted and

brainwashed by her poor and working-class, pathologized and precriminalized black male cohorts within the black liberation struggle.¹ (This narrative juxtaposition was most frequently invoked through archetypical representations of Davis’s relation to Jackson and her codefendant Ruchell Cinque Magee.)² Displacing the popular/state narrative that disparaged and degraded their personal-political solidarity, however, Jackson and Davis established a vibrant political legacy on which other imprisoned radical intellectuals would thrive: the simultaneity and strategic convergence of their intellectual production obtained significant political and cultural currency in a moment of severe social crisis.

Here I am less interested in describing the ways in which Jackson and Davis became iconic “celebrities” of the U.S. left (both in its hegemomically white “New Left” and more marginalized “black,” “Third World,” and “people of color” left variations) and revered figures for countless imprisoned people than in elaborating the ways these two radical activist intellectuals, working from the inside of the state’s essential total institution, generated a body of political work that spurred crucial points of departure within the lineage of contemporary U.S. prison praxis. A close reading and sustained (re)theorization of Jackson’s and Davis’s political-intellectual production demonstrates how a radical genealogy of the prison regime is simultaneously and necessarily entangled in a genealogy of the radical praxis articulated by its captives, who are perhaps the most focused and incisive “students” of the prison regime’s recent historical formation.

I am thus suggesting that George Jackson and Angela Davis should be conceptualized as *paradigmatic*, rather than superficially iconic, intellectual figures: on the one hand, Jackson and Davis constitute political-intellectual *origins* to the extent that both generated a coherent and accessible set of ideas, vernaculars, and political critiques that circulated widely within and beyond the space of the prison proper. On the other hand, both provided (and continue to provide) significant conceptual, theoretical, and practical points of *departure* for imprisoned and non-imprisoned political workers, who have subsequently inhabited while appropriating the legacies of their political labor.

As paradigmatic political figures, Jackson and Davis were fundamentally shaped by the influence and intervention of their imprisoned peers: in distinction from the numerous published American “prison narratives” that canonize themes of individual enlightenment and personal transcendence, the written works of these two imprisoned liberationists consistently reference critical dialogues, personal relationships, and (illicit) organizing projects *that occurred within the prison* as seminal influences on their political and social thought. The texts of Jackson and Davis must be understood as the organic production of their partnerships with imprisoned activists, some of whom remain imprisoned as of this writing (most notably Magee and Hugo “Yogi” Pinell, who, with Jackson, was pursued and punished by the state as one of the San Quentin Six).³

Davis, in the midst of her 1971 political incarceration and subsequent trial on charges of being an accomplice to murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy, argues from a condition of intimacy with her subject:

The offense of the political prisoner is political boldness, the persistent challenging—legally or extra-legally—of fundamental social wrongs fostered and reinforced by the state. The political prisoner has opposed unjust laws and exploitative, racist social conditions in general, with the ultimate aim of transforming these laws and this society into an order harmonious with the material and spiritual needs and interests of the vast majority of its members. . . .

Prisoners—especially Blacks, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans—are increasingly advancing the proposition that they are *political* prisoners. They contend that they are political prisoners in the sense that they are largely the victims of an oppressive politico-economic order, swiftly becoming conscious of the causes underlying their victimization.⁴

At the moment of this passage, Davis is speaking from a particular relation to bourgeois freedom—inside Marin County Jail—as a black professional intellectual criminalized and held in state captivity for her political work against racist state terror, affiliation with the Communist Party, and public critique of varieties of institutionalized white-supremacist

violence. She has, in the moment inscribed here, been decisively displaced from her tenuous incorporation into the nominal institutionality of bourgeois freedom (as a university professor) and *suddenly rendered its subaltern*. Writing around the same time, Jackson, a veteran California social-turned-political prisoner and proficient prison organizer, asserts:

The purpose of the chief repressive institutions within the totalitarian capitalist state is clearly to discourage and prohibit certain activity, and the prohibitions are aimed at very distinctly defined sectors of the class- and race-sensitized society. The ultimate expression of law is not order—it's prison. . . . Bourgeois law protects property relations and not social relationships. . . . The law and everything that interlocks with it was constructed for poor, desperate people like me.⁵

Jackson's *Blood in My Eye* (1972), from which this quotation is drawn, remains a durable, and for some a classical, text in radical political philosophy and revolutionary urban guerrilla warfare. Its rigorous theoretical dismantling of American liberal-democratic mythologies and extended meditation on revolutionary armed struggle foregrounds Jackson's status as a racial and political incorrigible, infamous to prison authorities for his antiauthoritarianism, effectiveness as a prison political educator, and inspiration of insurgencies across places and historical moments. For Jackson, *radical freedom* was beyond the realm of possibility in a social formation that defined and reproduced the "free world" of civil society against the violent unfreedom that was at once the bane of his existence and the core of his political intellectual identity.

Jackson and Davis are important to this study because both figures have produced an extensive, widely circulated written and published record that constitutes a discrete and accessible body of political texts. In this sense, they are exceptional and even privileged examples of radical intellectual formation under conditions of state captivity. Yet, both focused on theoretical, conceptual, and practical issues that defined a broader problematic, influencing their contemporaries as well as subsequent generations of radical intellectuals. Both spoke to the problematic of a

“fascist” United States of America, a conception that I will examine later as a theoretical and symbolic political gesture that fosters an epistemological break from the common sense of U.S. white supremacy and the regime of state violence on which it is premised. Rather than adhere to some conventional definition of fascism as a discrete governmental or nation-state form, Jackson (particularly in *Blood in My Eye*) and Davis (first in *If They Come in the Morning*, and again in later essays) implicate the historical trajectory of the U.S. prison regime as a way of identifying the broader relations of force that beset criminalized target populations in the post-1970s “law-and-order” era. The published work of these two radical intellectuals offers a useful mode of entry into the body of praxis generated by captive political workers who have since sustained and strengthened the political intellectual insurgency embodied by Jackson and Davis.

“A Revolutionary Literature”:

George Jackson and Guerrilla Warfare

The life praxis of assassinated radical intellectual George Jackson embodies much of the political possibility expressed in the work of imprisoned revolutionaries and (proto)radicals. Incarcerated in 1960 at the age of eighteen for a seventy-dollar gas-station robbery, Jackson was given an “indeterminate sentence” of one year to life. A visceral hatred of confinement spurred Jackson’s political and intellectual transformation within the prison. Shortly after notoriously racist correctional officer Opie G. Miller assassinated the widely respected black prison boxing champion, mentor, legal activist, and political organizer W. L. Nolen in January 1970 (as well as black prisoners Cleveland Edwards and Alvin Miller), Jackson, John Clutchette, and Fleeta Drumgo were accused of tossing a white prison guard over a the third-tier railing of Soledad Prison in retaliation.⁶ Asked by a television interviewer whether he was involved in (or “guilty of”) the act, Jackson responded in a manner befitting the circumstance:

INTERVIEWER: Was the incident for which you are charged now, was it a revolutionary act on your part?

JACKSON: You asking me to confess to something?

INTERVIEWER: No, unless you want to. Did you kill the man?

JACKSON: Look, one of the most important elements of guerrilla warfare is to maintain secrecy. I've killed nobody until, you know, it's been proven. And they'll never be able to prove anything like that.⁷

Jackson, alongside many of his peers, conceptualized and theorized the prison as a militarized focal point, or high-intensity war zone, within a larger geography and temporality of liberationist struggle against a white-supremacist (and capitalist) state. For many imprisoned black and Third World people, the vindicating narrative (and political symbolism) of the white guard's demise amplified the conception of guerrilla warfare as a primary resistance (and potentially revolutionary) strategy that was befitting the condition of the captive freedom fighter. At the same time, an antiracist movement was emerging in the "free world" as a collective response to the apparent upsurge of racist brutality, state terror, and state-proctored murder of imprisoned black, indigenous, and Third World people in California prisons. The case of Drumgo, Clutchette, and Jackson—who were known as the "Soledad Brothers"—became a center of gravity for this political mobilization, and Davis's involvement in the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee crucially shaped her political perspectives on, and participation in, the radical antiprison and black liberation movements. She writes in her *Autobiography*:

This was the beginning of the story of George Jackson, John Clutchette and Fleeta Drumgo. There was no evidence that they had killed the guard. But there was evidence that George, John and Fleeta were "militants"; they had been talking with their fellow captives about the theory and practice of liberation. The prison bureaucracy was going to hold them symbolically responsible for the spontaneous rebellion enacted by the prisoners.⁸

As Jackson's political stature and reputation grew among imprisoned people within and beyond California, in part through the celebrated publication of *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (1970),

he became a liability to state authorities because of his effectiveness as an organizer and educator of fellow prisoners—in fact, one can still encounter a significant number of imprisoned, formerly imprisoned, and “free” people who attribute either Jackson’s personal mentorship or his political influence as integral to their political formation.⁹ His praxis essentially guaranteed that he would never see the light of the prison’s outside—a fact that Jackson repeatedly acknowledged in both *Soledad Brother* and *Blood in My Eye*—and his brutal assassination by a prison sharpshooter on the grounds of San Quentin prison made a spectacle of his repression. It is a testament to the significance of Jackson’s political legacy that a wall in the San Quentin prison “museum” contains a mounted trophy case of the high-powered rifle that killed him on August 21, 1971, along with a bronze plaque enshrining the name of the guard who pulled the trigger.¹⁰ (Truly a spoil of carceral war.)

Jackson, in important ways, personified the political telos of Frantz Fanon’s paradigmatic revolutionary intellectual. In Fanon’s terms, Jackson’s widely read *Soledad Brother* and (not as widely read, and far less celebrated) *Blood in My Eye* emerged as “literatures of combat,” serving the dual capacities of theoretical texts and mobilizing tools. Close analysis of Jackson’s knowledge production reveals congruence with the third, revolutionary phase of Fanon’s developmental conception of the “native intellectual”:

Finally in the third phase, which is called the fighting phase, the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people. Instead of according the people’s lethargy an honored place in his esteem, he turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature. During this phase a great many men and women who up till then would never have thought of producing a literary work, now that they find themselves in exceptional circumstances—in prison, with the *Maquis*, or on the eve of their execution—feel the need to speak to their nation, to compose the sentence which expresses the heart of the people, and to become the mouthpiece of a new reality in action.¹¹

As Jackson found political agency in abrogating the image of the de-personalized, silent, debased prisoner, he recognized his own incarceration as the logical outcome of a collective plight. The destiny of human expendables, the surplus people left to languish under the advance of white-supremacist capital, was death, addiction, unemployment, and mass warehousing or social liquidation. Jackson consistently articulated the tortured severity of his relation to the world in these terms, rearticulating the essential American historical dialectic that rendered social antagonism, coercively structured deviance, and political disobedience the most generalized mode of existence for people like himself:

[T]hat's the principal contradiction of monopoly capital's oppressive contract. The system produces outlaws. It also breeds contempt for the oppressed. Accrual of contempt is its fundamental survival technique. This leads to the excesses and *destroys any hope of peace* eventually being worked out between the two antagonistic classes, the haves and the have-nots. Coexistence is impossible, contempt breeds resistance, and resistance breeds brutality, the whole growing in spirals that must either end in the uneconomic destruction of the oppressed or the termination of oppression.¹²

This epistemology of resistance and insurgency structured Jackson's political praxis, and his refusal to indulge banal discourses of idealized, hopeful, and (racially) reconciliatory civic "peace" or "coexistence" was amplified by his pedagogical commitment to stating the grounds of that principled refusal. Rather, Jackson believed that the structural inevitability of state repression formed a condition of resistance for imprisoned and nonimprisoned (black and Third World) people alike. *Embracing* this condition was the pretext of an existential suicide—the necessary condition for declaring war on the dominant power:

This monster—the monster they've engendered in me will return to torment its maker, from the grave, the pit, the profoundest pit. Hurl me into the next existence, the descent into hell won't turn me. I'll crawl back to dog his trail forever. They won't defeat my revenge, never, never. I'm part of a

righteous people who anger slowly, but rage undamned. . . . 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.¹³

For Jackson, the historic possibility of forging a utopian “new reality” could only emerge from the corporeal ashes of those who dared challenge the corporate racist state’s programmatic killing of oppressed people in and outside the United States. It was this imagination of a righteous political death, a glorified “descent into hell,” that allowed for the creative rearticulation of the imminent, violent consequences of repression.

In a single, creative, complex gesture, Jackson resists state violence *while embracing its inevitable fate*. He advocates a form of political rupture that defies the possibility of rehabilitation, a conception of social justice that requires the extermination of the existing order and its morphology. His analysis and anticipation of imminent bodily liquidation by the state reveal a fervent belief in the regenerative potential of a politics of refusal. Jackson’s contempt for contrived “peace,” his rejection of “rehabilitation” as a modality of assimilation into the fabric of an essentially oppressive and white-supremacist civil society, were inseparable from his declaration of war on the “haves,” the precondition for his “reparations in blood”:

As you know, I'm in a unique political position. I have a very nearly closed future, and since I have always been inclined to get disturbed over organized injustice or terrorist practice against the innocents—wherever—I can now say just about what I want (I've always done just about that), without fear of self-exposure. I can only be executed once.¹⁴

Jackson’s work merits extended theoretical attention because of his central role in producing a contemporary radical prison praxis as the catalyst figure for countless insurgencies and insurrections since his passing, as well as for the intellectual premises that his body of work establishes for a radical critique of—and living opposition to—current formations

of American (domestic) warfare and state violence. The context of his assassination, moreover, compels an extended theoretical engagement with genocide as the logical, dynamic, and constantly reproduced condition of racism and white supremacy: the killing of Jackson profoundly signified the peculiar and fatal American relation to a particular formation of insurrectionist black political subjectivity, and indicated the trajectory of the white-supremacist carceral state as an essentially homicidal endeavor. Omer Bartov's theorization of "industrialized killing" is especially useful here.

Bartov's sociohistorical analysis of the Nazi Holocaust argues that the ideological edifice that generates and is generated by the project of mass killing, containment, and repression is embedded in the reproduction of modernist social formations. Although the technologies, strategies, and human objects of industrial killing change over time, Bartov contends that "this is the crux of the matter: . . . the occurrence of industrial killing [in the Nazi Holocaust], inevitably accompanied by its representation, made its recurrence all the more likely."¹⁵ Bartov's conception of genocide as simultaneously a political, cultural, and military project facilitates a more nuanced understanding of relations of political force—in particular, formations of unmediated state and state-sanctioned bodily violence—as they develop within those formal liberal democracies that characterize the emergence of Western modernity.

Rather than assume a convenient historical distance from the most spectacular projects of mass containment and killing conducted or condoned by the state (as if "events" such as the Nazi Holocaust, Indian extermination in the Americas, and so forth were fundamentally disconnected from the historical conditions of one's own existence), Bartov's argument suggests that genocide may be understood as both the logical culmination of racism and the coldly rational constitutive logic of science, law, and the modern state's administrative bureaucracy:

It would seem that our main difficulty in confronting the Holocaust is due not only to the immense scale of the killing, nor even to the manner in

which it was carried out, but also to the way in which it combined the most primitive human brutality, hatred, and prejudice, with the most modern achievements in science, technology, organization, and administration. It is not the brutal SS man with his truncheon whom we cannot comprehend. . . . It is the commander of a killing squad with a Ph.D. in law from a distinguished university in charge of organizing mass shootings of naked women and children whose figure frightens us.¹⁶

The profoundly constructive and socially reproductive role of industrialized killing in modern Western societies during the first half of the twentieth century stands in theoretical and structural continuity with the rise of what Gilmore has called the “industrialized punishment” of the current massive U.S. policing, criminal justice, and prison apparatuses.¹⁷ As such, the political biography and carceral praxis of Angela Davis facilitates a critical engagement with Bartov’s conceptualization of the linkage between modernity and genocide.

Ambivalent Victories:

Angela Y. Davis as Imprisoned Radical Intellectual

As one of the most widely recognized (former) political prisoners of the twentieth century, Angela Y. Davis has participated in the growth of antiprison and penal abolitionist activism as a radical teacher, activist, scholar, and organizer. In contrast to Jackson, it is Davis’s survival of and nominal liberation from the political prison that sustains a living memory of counterhegemonic possibility among resistance workers of different kinds. At times railing against the popular cultural reflex that encases her in a “cult of personality” amenable to (white as well as “multicultural”) liberal or progressive (hence antiradical and pro-state reformist) sensibilities, Davis argues in the introduction to her 1974 *Autobiography* that no such thing as an “individual”—in the sense of an autonomous, free-willed, fully self-conscious and self-actualizing political subject—can exist under the American condition of normalized state violence. Reflecting on her political imprisonment and eventual acquittal on criminal

charges, Davis echoes Jackson in her critique of dominant narratives of rehabilitation and the vindicating telos of judicial procedure and “criminal justice”:

Many people unfortunately assumed that because my name and my case were so extensively publicized, the contest that unfolded during my incarceration and trial from 1970 to 1972 was one in which a single Black woman successfully fended off the repressive might of the state. Those of us with a history of active struggle against political repression understood of course, that while one of the protagonists in this battle was indeed the state, the other was not a single individual, but rather the collective power of the thousands and thousands of people opposed to racism and political repression. As a matter of fact, the underlying reasons for the extensive publicity accorded my trial had less to do with the sensationalist coverage of the prisoner uprising at the Marin County Courthouse than with the work of untold numbers of anonymous individuals who were moved to action, not so much by my particular predicament as by the cumulative work of the progressive movements of that period. Certainly the victory we won when I was acquitted of all charges can still be claimed today as a milestone in the work of grassroots movements.¹⁸

Davis was fired in 1970 by Governor Ronald Reagan from her professorship at the University of California, Los Angeles and, months later, framed and ruthlessly hunted by California and federal authorities for her alleged involvement in Jonathan Jackson’s armed attempt to free black prisoners William Christmas, James McClain, and Ruchell Magee from the Marin County courthouse. Facing a fabricated charge of “kidnap for ransom, murder, and conspiracy” that was overtly constructed as a criminalization of her political activities and ideological convictions, Davis went underground and became the objective of an enormous mobilization of state intelligence and paramilitary force. The third woman in history to be placed on the FBI’s “Ten Most Wanted” list, she eluded Reagan’s informal 1970 death warrant for two months before her apprehension and arrest later that year.

Spurred by Reagan's pretrial call for her execution, a community of resistance emerged in response to Davis's symbolic and material status as a racially gendered object of state repression as well as her public image as a political subject performing active subversion of the state's white-supremacist terror. Although many appropriations of Davis's biography and image re-create what Joy James refers to as the "'rehabilitative' reconstruction of revolutionaries as icons" that "makes them more palatable to mainstream American culture,"¹⁹ Davis's self-narrative (in the 1974 *Autobiography*) works contrary to this form of incorporation. Remembering the celebration of her juridical vindication, she insists on the necessity of generating political continuity between mass-based struggles to free prisoners of U.S. state repression:

Yet in the echoes of our laughter and the frenzy of our dancing there was also caution. If we saw this moment of triumph as a conclusion and not as a point of departure, we would be ignoring all the others who remained draped in chains. We knew that to save their lives, we had to preserve and build upon the movement.

This was the concern of the NUCFAD [National United Committee to Free Angela Davis and All Political Prisoners] staff meeting called by Charlene [Mitchell] on Monday evening, the very day after the acquittal. Fearing that some local committees might consider their mission accomplished, we decided to send out immediately a communiqué requesting that they all keep their operations alive. To ensure that this message filtered down to the masses, we decided that I would go on a speaking tour. While expressing our gratitude to the people who had joined the movement which achieved my freedom, I would appeal to them to stay with us as long as racism or political repression kept Ruchell [Magee], Fleeta [Drumgo], the Attica brothers or any other human being behind bars.²⁰

While imprisoned, Davis consistently struggled for physical proximity with fellow captive women, from whom she was repeatedly segregated in the manner of many political prisoners (in part, it was feared that Davis's Communist and insurrectionist pathogen would be contagious).

Davis repeatedly experimented with practices of radical collectivity that could facilitate a broadly pitched political critique of imprisonment as a form of mass, white-supremacist, and misogynist immobilization. Recounting an early rally outside the New York House of Detention for Women, Davis—in concert with fellow inmates—deconstructs the enforced invisibility of the prison while offering a subtle critique of the cult of personality that had already begun to manifest around her individual case:

On a cold Sunday afternoon a massive demonstration took place down on Greenwich Avenue. It was spearheaded by the bail fund coalition and the New York Committee to Free Angela Davis. So enthusiastic was the crowd that we [the prisoners] felt compelled to organize some kind of reciprocal display of strength. We got together in our corridor, deciding on the slogans we would shout and how to make them come out in unison—even though we were going to be spread down the corridor in different cells, screaming from different windows. I had never dreamed that such powerful feelings of pride and confidence could develop among the sisters in this jail.

Chants thundered on the outside. . . . After a while we decided to try out our chants. . . . While the [outside] chants of “Free Angela” filled me with excitement, I was concerned that an overabundance of such chants might set me apart from the rest of my sisters. I shouted one by one the names of all the sisters on the floor participating in the demonstration. “Free Vernell! Free Helen! Free Amy! Free Joann! Free Laura! Free Minnie!” I was hoarse for the next week.²¹

The momentary dialogue between the jail and the street, shouted and chanted across the walls and bars of this urban women’s detention center, communicates the context, conditions, and possibilities for collective political agency in the face of state capture. Although neither the women inside nor the protesters outside could pretend to harbor a determining, definitive, or discrete political agency, they found in their collaboration—verbal, performative, and defiant in its simultaneous politicization of the Greenwich Avenue sidewalk and the looming jail—

a form of resistance and radicalism that occupied a new political space while *reconstructing* it through acts of occupation and disruptive speech. Most important, this scene bespeaks a formation of political convergence and solidarity that denaturalizes the physical space and momentarily displaces the institutional integrity and authority of the prison, resulting in the fleeting formation of a strategic “trench” from which both imprisoned and free can sustain a Gramscian war of position, literally, *in concert with one another*.

The paradigmatic nature of the campaign around Angela Davis grows precisely from its inscription of a practical, philosophical, and allegorical “inside-outside” political collaboration that resulted in a nominal, exceptional, and thus all the more dramatic victory against state repression. Yet, the political-intellectual production emerging from Davis’s actual political imprisonment—a body of praxis that, in its production and circulation, did not presume Davis’s acquittal and nominal freedom, and instead anticipated the possibility of her long-term incarceration and, at worst, execution—provides a compelling, if often ignored and frequently decontextualized, theoretical template. I turn now to an examination of George Jackson and Angela Davis as critical theorists of the United States of America as a “fascist” social formation.

Fascism and “the Logical Conclusion”: The Problematic of Radical Prison Praxis

A schematic discussion of conventional academic conceptions of fascism offers contextualizing clarity here. Political-science definitions derive largely from studies of populist, party-based mobilizations in Europe during the years between World War I and World War II. The analysis of European (and some Third World) state formations, which usually reference the Mussolini regime and Hitler’s ascendant National Socialism as formative examples, generally consider fascism as a populist movement that is ideologically reactionary and totalitarian, and characterized by the large-scale incarceration or physical liquidation of targeted national populations. “Authentic” fascism—that is, fascism as a historically specific ruling/state order—is, in this sense, largely conceptualized in the academic

literature as an ideological and governmental relic of the intervening years between the world wars, a logical derivative of the popular disenchantment and economic disorder created by post–World War I political-economic transformations across the European nation-states:

World War I not only produced an unexpected and deep dislocation of the bourgeois-aristocratic class and status order and the identity of political units but also, reacting to these crises, an emergent group that perceived the war and these changes in an unique way.²²

Political scientists and other academic theorists of fascism similarly consider its precipitation in right-wing party organizations and its reactionary, antidemocratic trajectory to be the fundamental expressions of its historical conditions of existence.

It is, nonetheless, rather difficult to find academic consensus on a nuanced theoretical understanding of fascist ideology, politics, state formation, or populist movement. The term “fascism” is in some instances so loosely used and abused in academic and popular rhetoric that it has become little more than a sloppy political pejorative referencing undifferentiated forms of state or protostate “extremism.” Cold War (and some post–Cold War) appropriations of the word have even constructed socialist and communist movements as essentially “fascist” regimes, inscribing an American political exceptionalism that reifies its alleged liberal democracy as both unique and unassailable (see James Gregor’s *Interpretations of Fascism* for a prime example).²³ Acknowledging the variety of conflicting and diverging interpretations of fascism among political theorists, Roger Griffin has argued that

the phenomena denoted by the term “fascism” shrink, expand, and change in their historical and geopolitical extension according to which ideal type is applied. As a result, the definitional map being used for orientation within this field of studies can never be taken for granted: it has become an intrinsic part of the understanding of fascism itself.²⁴

Although corporatism, a closed economy, the totalitarian state, and the total “subordination of the individual to the state” are broadly viewed as elements of the European historical experience with fascist ruling parties, comparative discussions yield a slightly different understanding of its political substance.²⁵ Focusing on the mobilizing vision of fascist cadres in various sites, Linz’s essay “Some Notes toward a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective” suggests that the most useful conception of fascism across social-historical contexts may be a negative one:

Fascism is an anti-movement; it defines itself by the things against which it stands but this antithesis in the minds of the ideologists should lead to a new synthesis integrating elements from the political creeds they so violently attack. . . . The basic anti-dimensions of fascism can be summarized as follows: it is anti-Marxist, anti-communist, anti-proletarian, but also anti-liberal, anti-parliamentarian, and in a very special sense, anti-conservative, and anti-bourgeois. . . . Anti-individualism and anti-democratic authoritarianism and elitism are combined with a strong populist appeal.²⁶

Linz’s working definition is flexible enough to encompass mobilizations *against* existing hegemonies as well as actual state regimes, but it obscures the ways in which these “anti” characteristics may be ideologically embodied and institutionalized—dynamically, opportunistically, and selectively—by purportedly liberal democratic nation-states. Further, to privilege discrete and “original” sites of fascist politics, hegemony, and ideology (i.e., post-World War I Italy or Germany), as do most academic discussions, is to prematurely foreclose fascism’s capacity to recompose in and through already-existing, that is, hegemonic, social formations. Therein lies one of the most significant political-intellectual interventions of contemporary radical prison praxis, hallmarked by the incisive articulations of George Jackson’s polemical and theoretical writings, in critical conversation with Angela Davis’s early political essays, speeches, and public correspondence.

Fanon writes of the mundane violence of colonialism as a condition of existence for the subaltern “native,” who in turn manifests as a collective or deindividuated “object of violence” against which the ruling forces define and consolidate the colonial relation. In Fanon’s world, public and excessive violence is not simply utilized by the hegemonic powers as a last resort to maintain their place in the social hierarchy, but is instead a normalized facet of their ruling process. *Violence is at once imminent and actual, spectacular and mundane*. Most important, Fanon illustrates the ways in which a profound though stunningly normal violence finds expression in overlapping and intersecting experiential dimensions and geographic sites. He writes, in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

In the colonial countries . . . the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. . . .

The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values. It is not enough for the colonist to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better never existed in, the colonial world. The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. . . .

Colonial domination, because it is total and tends to oversimplify, very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. This cultural obliteration is made possible by the negation of national reality, by new legal relations . . . by the banishment of the natives and their customs to outlying districts . . . by expropriation, and by the systematic enslaving of men and women.²⁷

Fanon is naming a historical conjuncture wherein acute and socially disintegrating state and state-sanctioned violence and the banal everyday

of the colonizer's occupation become temporally and experientially simultaneous, structurally convergent, and at times indistinguishable in the eyes of the native. The blunt normalcy of colonial violence is signified by everything from the policing of geographic boundaries between settler and native communities to the eradication of the indigenous society's collective historical subjectivity. Fanon thus directs attention to the specificity of particular social and historical locations for considering violence as a *primary and productive* (rather than merely repressive) articulation of particular social formations, an insight that Jackson and Davis amplify throughout their work.

Jackson's conceptualization of American fascism rejects the static and contradictory definitions of academic political science, disrupting Griffin's "definitional map" in exchange for a conceptual privileging of Fanon's "language of pure force." As a political manifesto and blueprint of revolutionary insurrection, *Blood in My Eye* gives theoretical primacy to the historical *trajectories* of the American social formation rather than fetishizing the tedium of its coordinated policies, political institutions, and military or juridical rituals. Jackson thus offers a diagnosis of the United States of America at precisely the moment of its epochal reformation through a symbiosis of massive state violence, white-supremacist terror, and liberal political and economic "reform":

We will never have a complete definition of fascism, because it is in constant motion, showing a new face to fit any particular set of problems that arise to threaten the predominance of the traditionalist, capitalist ruling class. But if one were forced for the sake of clarity to define it in a word simple enough for all to understand, that word would be "reform." We can make our definition more precise by adding the word "economic." "Economic reform" comes very close to a working definition of fascist motive forces.

Such a definition may serve to clarify things even though it leaves a great deal unexplained. Each economic reform that perpetuates ruling-class hegemony has to be disguised as a positive gain for the upthrusting masses. Disguise enters as a third stage of the emergence and development of the fascist state. The modern industrial fascist state has found it essential to disguise the opulence of its ruling-class leisure existence by providing

the lower classes with a mass consumer's flea market of its own. Reform (the closed economy) is only a new way for capitalism to protect and develop fascism!²⁸

Far from reducing American fascism to the bare realm of “reformist” capitalism, Jackson considers the comprehensive scope of U.S. social development to be overdetermined by the violence of the ruling classes, manifested in and through large-scale technologies of state repression. This argument posits a theoretical move beyond the Marxist telos of historical class struggle, and suggests that the advance of capital and the hegemony of the ruling classes are inseparable from the consolidation and expansion of the state's policing and punishing powers. Rather than being the mere expression or “superstructural” tool of the dominant classes, Jackson's advanced fascist state becomes *the condition of possibility* for the emerging (nominally liberal-democratic) economic, juridical, and “racial” order.

The authoritarian state is, in this sense, a complex and sophisticated phenomenon that does not exclusively rely on brute military repression or dictatorial leadership, and does not only articulate (as in most orthodox notions of fascism) through formal one-party rule. Rather, it is precisely the violent excesses of the corporate-state formation that provide its sustenance, a notion that contradicts the common Marxist assumption that the overindulgences of the ruling classes create the basis for their own deterioration and self-destruction:

Corporative ideals have reached their logical conclusion in the U.S. The new corporate state has fought its way through crisis after crisis, established its ruling elites in every important institution, formed its partnership with labor through its elites, erected the most massive network of protective agencies replete with spies, technical and animal, to be found in any police state in the world. The violence of the ruling class of this country in the long process of its trend toward authoritarianism and its last and highest state, fascism, cannot be rivaled in its excesses by any other nation on earth today or in history.²⁹

Resonating with Fanon, this conception of fascism gives primacy to state violence as a productive dimension of capitalist hegemony, especially as it fosters a common condition of “law and order,” state containment, and white-supremacist repression. Jackson is, in this sense, diagnosing a new era of mass-based civic and social death, founded on the penal liquidation of the black and Third World captive (collectively, in Jackson’s terms, “slaves to property”).

From her own location of political incarceration, Davis poses an analysis of the United States of America that similarly emphasizes the historical trajectory of owning class and state violence:

Fascism is a process, its growth and development are cancerous in nature. While today, the threat of fascism may be primarily restricted to the use of the law-enforcement-judicial-penal apparatus to arrest the overt and latent revolutionary trends among nationally oppressed people, tomorrow it may attack the working class en masse and eventually even moderate democrats. . . .

[T]he key to fascism is its ideological victory over the entire working class. Given the eruption of a severe economic crisis, the door to such an ideological victory can be opened by the active approval or passive toleration of racism.³⁰

Distinguishing Davis’s use of “fascism” here is its insistence on imminence rather than actuality. It is the “threat” of complete repression, the emerging historical possibility of totalitarian authority, and popular consent to its ascendancy that Davis constructs as the formative elements of a new, right-wing social order. Grounding her analysis of this social condition is a skillful attempt to render a seemingly unique and spectacular *personal* experience as the normalized expectation of an *institutional* logic. Here, the conventional analytic distinctions between biography and history, self and society, personal and political, are intentionally blurred in order to communicate the *embodiment* of abstract relations of force.

Davis, in a key instance, links the legitimized state institutions of policing and law—commonly understood as the militarized protection

and judicial architecture of white civil society—to the direct and violent occupation of black communities, subjectivities, and experiences. Police and the law are, for Davis, the primary weaponry of a localized or domestic *warfare*:

The announced function of the police, “to protect and serve the people,” becomes the grotesque caricature of protecting and preserving the interests of our oppressors and serving us nothing but injustice. They are there to intimidate Blacks, to persuade us with their violence that we are powerless to alter the conditions of our lives. . . . They encircle the community with a shield of violence, too often forcing the natural aggression of the Black community inwards. Fanon’s analysis of the role of colonial police is an appropriate description of the function of the police in America’s ghettos.³¹

Here, the police-as-occupation constitutes a material and allegorical figure of repression, the personification of white-supremacist state violence, and the formidable bulwark against vindicating acts of resistance, defiance, and lawlessness by people whose conditions of poverty are enforced by bourgeois, white-supremacist jurisprudence. The dialectic between policing and racially pathologized criminality acquires a socially necessary character, producing the political and institutional context for the structural elimination and strategic militarized containment of civil society’s (gendered racial/class) “deviants.”

It is Davis’s explicit politicization of this dialectic that constructs a dynamic conception of resistance and survival, radically questioning the political assumptions of an advanced, racialized capitalist hegemony that self-narrates as a transcendent liberal democracy:

For Blacks, Chicanos, for all nationally oppressed people, the problem of opposing unjust laws and the social conditions which nourish their growth, has always had immediate practical implications. Our very survival has frequently been a direct function of our skill in forging effective channels of resistance. In resisting, we have sometimes been compelled to

openly violate those laws which directly or indirectly buttress our oppression. But even when containing our resistance within the orbit of legality, we have been labeled criminals and have been methodically persecuted by a racist legal apparatus.³²

Framed by broader relations of force, this passage suggests a brand of political criminality that posits repression as a logical inevitability. Open violations of the law, committed in the name of principled resistance as well as biological survival, here encompass both the pilfered loaf of bread and the slaughtered police officer: within the conditions of white-supremacist domestic warfare, insurrection and survival frequently become indistinguishable. Further, under the proctorship of a white-supremacist judiciary, the category of “criminality” itself takes on a monolithic character as the opening gambit in the mass-based immobilization, bodily disintegration, and (political) repression of the colony’s designated “natives.” Although Davis does not name this circumstance as a rearticulated fascism *per se*—in fact, she explicitly states her theoretical disagreement with Jackson on this point, instead elaborating a conception of the early 1970s United States as a pre- or protofascist social formation—her invoking of criminality as the discursive political site at which social control, latent insurgency, and relations of force converge is instructive.

Writing from the location of the political prison in *If They Come in the Morning*, Davis attempts to rearticulate the political rhetoric of the international campaign for her release. Contesting the implied insularity of the “political prisoner” label, she suggests the efficacy of constituting the emergent movement around a radically generalized conception of white-supremacist state violence:

To move to another level on which the fight around political prisoners must be waged, we must also link up the circumstances leading to the frameup of so many revolutionaries with the generalized genocidal attack on our people and thereby, relate the issue of the political prisoner to the concrete needs and interests of Black people.

. . . [A] major focus of the struggle around political prisoners ought to be offensive rather than defensive in character and should consist in placing the bankrupt judicial system and its appendages, the jails and prisons, on trial. *We must lay bare the whole system and concretely associate the movement to liberate political prisoners with the grassroots movements that are exploding in the dungeons all over this country.*³³

The manner in which the struggle around political prisoners (potentially) condenses as resistance to the totality of the “system” is crucial for both Davis and Jackson, to the extent that it reveals the centrality of state violence and white-supremacist terror to the U.S. social formation. Radical and militant (antifascist) struggle materializes as a collective confrontation with the twinned logics of mass-based immobilization and bodily disintegration, focusing on the emergent nexus of the policing-prison-juridical regimes and the technologies of power that they circulate.

In critical dialogue, Jackson and Davis focus their praxis on present conditions for the construction of a radical and socially transformative (revolutionary) historical bloc, a people’s movement that partly emerges from the prison’s inside and irrevocably alters the everyday of the nominal free world. Harlow speaks to the transformative potential of such a political vision when she considers the theoretical and political impact exerted by women political prisoners on revolutionary/resistance movements outside the prison:

For criminals, female as well as male, whether convicted of petty theft, prostitution, murder, or simply social deviance, the experience of prison can, at given times and in particular circumstances, provide the historically necessary conjunctural premises for reframing the stories of their individual “crimes” as constituted by a sociopolitical system of exploitation and political disenfranchisement. Political prisoners in turn, when confined together with “criminals,” must often reformulate their preconceived ideological constructs of “the people” and the entailed interaction between a vanguard party and its claimed popular constituencies.³⁴

Davis's and Jackson's political discourse inverted the circumstances of individual state confinement (a condition of hypersurveillance) to speak eloquently to the relations of force and structural excesses of a white-supremacist hegemony in crisis, thus reversing the individualization of the prison/captive spectacle and "looking back" through and against the state's surveilling lens. In so doing, they conceived a political problematic—framed by a rigorously elaborated and dynamic debate over the presence and meaning of U.S. "fascism"—that has deeply influenced radicalism inside and across the walls of the U.S. gulag.

The "Question" of Radical Prison Praxis: A Point of Departure

I conceptualize this theoretical departure in the form of a question: how might our political understanding of the United States be altered or dismantled if we were to conceptualize fascism as the *restoration* of a liberal hegemony, a *way out* of crisis, rather than as the *symptom* of crisis or the *breakdown* of "democracy" and "civil society"? On the one hand, this question requires a departure from the essentialist privileging of European sites as the paradigmatic examples of "authentic" fascism, totalitarian police states, and authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, it opens a mode of inquiry that facilitates a radical antagonism to the very premises of state power and "neoliberal" hegemony. This antagonism crystallizes on several different levels.

As a theoretical gesture, this question fosters a cognitive rupture from the common sense of liberal democracy by suggesting the centrality of repression, official violence, and white supremacy to the restoration and reproduction of "social order," or Goldwaterist "law and order." The common sense of the late-capitalist, white-supremacist, nominally liberal-democratic American "Homeland," sustained as it is by persistent declarations of formal equality under the law, persistently sheds the genocidal cloak of earlier eras of conquest and enslavement through convenient exercises in selective forgetting and the constant rewriting of patriotic master narratives.³⁵ Here, the telos of progress necessitates

sanitized portrayals of genocide that render the violence of such things as Indian killing, land conquest, enslavement, and imperial invasion the tragic excess of an otherwise progressive developmental national narrative (or bildungsroman). Contemporary “multicultural” literatures (including some “prison writing”) accomplish precisely this narrative form through liberal critiques of racism and historical unfairness that reach for resolution with the permanent, open-ended hope of the nation’s American Dream.³⁶

The question of fascism-as-liberalism ruptures this narrative by centering genocide as the condition of possibility for the nation’s formation as well as its ongoing social reproduction. Ward Churchill’s critique of genocide discourse provides a more precise definition for this frequently abused term: “[G]enocide means the destruction, entirely or in part, of any racial, ethnic, national, religious, cultural, linguistic, political, economic, gender or other human group, however such groups may be defined by the perpetrator.”³⁷ Churchill explains that the three primary forms of genocide involve physical killing, direct or indirect prevention of births, and cultural destruction. Recall, in this context, that George Jackson’s polemic in *Blood in My Eye* was premised less on an indictment of historical (past) genocides than it was on a fundamental critique of liberal (economic) reform as a restructuring of relations of unmediated violence between the plutocratic ruling classes and the “upthrusting masses.” Angela Davis’s identification of inchoate revolt with mundane black and brown disobedience to the law speaks similarly to the structural embeddedness of socialized killing within a white-supremacist capitalist formation. Such theoretical maneuvers drastically undermine hegemonic nationalist narratives: mass killing, slavery, human containment, and other forms of coercion become dynamic objects of analysis and intervention as they are understood to be the components necessary to the (past) making and (current) remaking of nationhood and civil society.

This problematic cannot recognize a narrative of “America,” nor can it imagine a “national” future, apart from the reproduction and “reform” of the United States’ fundamental technologies of existence:

namely, its racialized and gendered productions of genocide, (mass-based) captivity, and other strategically deployed militarizations that generate multiple scales of bodily disintegration and subjective disarticulation, premised on black chattel/penal enslavement (social death) and indigenous genocide (biological and cultural death).³⁸ This theoretical departure radically renarrates the United States' conditions of existence as it draws sustenance from the fatal dialectics of life/death, freedom/unfreedom, subjectivity/dehumanization that inspire and structure (rather than inhibit or derail) social reproduction and national formation.

As a symbolic political intervention, this problematic also compels a rearticulation of the very notion of a radical praxis that is specific to the historical moment: what, in other words, is “radical” within the historical circumstances of this moment? How does one distinguish between liberalism, progressivism, and radicalism at a moment when remnants of older ideologies and strategies have become elemental to the symbolic universe and institutional reproduction of hegemonic or dominant political structures and discourses (take, for example, the veritable institutionalization of popular college and university courses on the “civil rights movement” and progressive “social movements”)? The reintroduction of a conception of massive state and state-sanctioned violence as a *productive* (as opposed to merely repressive or punitive) factor within the equation of a nominal liberal-democratic hegemony suggests the necessity for new forms of praxis that strategically dramatize, subvert, or stretch thin the logic and capacities of a Jackson's durable and flexible “liberal” American fascism.

Finally, by rendering “fascism” as the primary operative theoretical term, this problematic refocuses attention on the regimes of state and state-sanctioned terror and violence that inhabit different spaces, afflict different communities and bodies, and condition social relations within allegedly liberal-democratic societies. This retheorized conception of fascism illuminates and elaborates a complex of forces that do not necessarily find static, permanent, or even altogether coherent institutional centers in state “institutions” such as police, legislature, prison, or school. Instead, massive state and state-sanctioned violence—as a

fundamental expression of a social rule that is hegemonic or dominant—becomes a constantly produced and reproduced practice of relationality between different social, state, and cultural regimes, which themselves constitute multiple “centers of gravity” for the articulation and expansion of fascism as a broadly operative technology of domination.

In this sense, specific civic, political, and institutional sites—for example, the “neighborhood,” “classroom,” “military base,” or “prison”—may temporarily cohere as strategic or tactical locations for the production and exercise of coercive state force: to simply identify the sites wherein state violence inscribes, defines, and produces itself is not especially difficult, especially in the midst of proliferating forms of state violence and domestic militarization/warfare. The central challenge of the reconceived fascism problematic, however, is to elaborate and analyze, with historical specificity, how different social, political, and institutional sites of hegemonic or dominant power such as the university, legislature, police station, and corporate boardroom—hegemony’s multiple centers of gravity—exert a force on those sites, such as the prison, at which state violence is repeatedly and ritualistically performed. In short, how does the production of civil society’s structure of “common sense” and “consent” (the theoretical bulwark of the Gramscian conception of hegemony) affect, transform, and enhance the proliferation of domestic war, in dialogue with Fanon’s “language of pure force”? Finally, how does the ideological glue of popular/national consensus create and reproduce strategic relations of direct state and state-sanctioned domination and subjection—mediated through regimes of mass-based immobilization and bodily disintegration—which in turn perform on targeted bodies, communities, and borders that are both momentarily (as in the Japanese-American internment of World War II) and permanently (as in the categorical subjection of black subjectivity under both enslavement and post-Emancipation racial regimes) constructed as *outside* the domain of Gramscian “consent”?³⁹ The dynamic, strategic relations of violence condensing within the American social formation at different times and in different places are neither accidental nor excessive, and the challenge of this reconceptualized fascism problematic is to comprehend the socially

reproductive capacities of coercive technologies and (proto)genocidal practice within the current order.

**Conclusion: “Eating Shit,”
Twenty-seven Years and Beyond**

It was precisely Angela Davis and George Jackson’s location within the (political) prison’s ritual circuits of bodily and psychic violence that made their sustained analysis of U.S. fascism so unavoidable. In recent years, Davis has elaborated the structure “invisibility” that enmeshes the emergence of the prison regime, invoking comparisons to the practice of mass “disappearance” (*desaparecido*) made infamous by U.S.-sponsored state terror in Argentina, Guatemala, the Philippines, Colombia, El Salvador, and elsewhere. Evaluating the convergence of popular, juridical, and legislative discourse in the production of the new prison hegemony, Davis argues for a reevaluation of the relation between coercion and consent, or violence and common sense, suggesting that the very coherence of U.S. civil society is increasingly structured by a mass-based, racialized social liquidation:

The dangerous and indeed fascistic trend toward progressively greater numbers of hidden, incarcerated human populations is itself rendered invisible. All that matters is the elimination of crime—and you get rid of crime by getting rid of people who, according to the prevailing racial common sense, are the most likely people to whom criminal acts will be attributed.⁴⁰

Davis demystifies the emergence of the prison regime and its institutional abstraction, the “prison industrial complex” by tracing its historical trajectory. Articulating with the racialized and gendered “class control” of the policing, juridical, and imprisonment apparatuses, a normalized structure of low-intensity social extermination and mass-based bodily immobilization has become central to the United States of America as a white-supremacist social formation.

Some twenty-five years after Jackson’s assassination and Davis’s

acquittal, Mumia Abu-Jamal, in *Live from Death Row*, states that “prisons are where America’s jobs programs, housing programs, and social control programs merge into a dark whole; and where those already outside of the game can be exploited and utilized to keep the game going.”⁴¹ Political prisoner Laura Whitehorn (released in 1999) similarly emphasizes the function of the prison as an expansive technology of human eradication and political repression. Her theorizing resonates with Davis’s statement that “prisons do not disappear problems, they disappear human beings.”⁴²

Prisons are implements of genocide and counter-insurgency. . . . On the one hand, the u.s. [*sic*] imprisons vast numbers of young Third World people, so that their lives are destroyed and the lives of their communities disrupted. On the other hand, the government metes out harsh punishments to those political activists and revolutionaries who dare to build militant resistance to injustice. *Together, these strategies produce an effective program of genocide.* . . . The massive incarceration of Black, Latino, and Native American women and men is meant to unravel the fabric of those communities, while the disproportionate sentences and conditions of confinement of political prisoners and POW’s is intended not only to destroy the political organizations that exist, but also to frighten others from attempting resistance.⁴³

In light of the insidious evolution of what Jackson, Davis, Whitehorn, and Abu-Jamal sequentially reference as fascism, genocide, and “the game,” the political logic of the prison regime’s genesis and proliferation sits comfortably within the United States’ profound lineage of state terror, mass killing, and programmatic social displacement and disappearance. This resonates with black political scientist Manning Marable’s prophetic discussion of oncoming large-scale, state-orchestrated black/brown premature death in *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (1983). Reflecting on the significance of the spectacular wave of antiblack, homicidal violence waged by white civil society (and generally sanctioned by the state) during the early 1980s, Marable contends:

[T]he existence of random violence against Blacks and civil terrorism is no accidental phenomenon. It is a necessary element in the establishment of any future authoritarian or rightwing government. . . .

[T]he direction of America's political economy and social hierarchy is veering toward a kind of subtle apocalypse which promises to obliterate the lowest stratum of the Black and Latino poor. . . . The genocidal logic of the situation could demand, in the not too distant future, the rejection of the ghetto's right to survival in the new capitalist order. Without gas chambers or pogroms, the dark ghetto's economic and social institutions might be destroyed, and *many of its residents would simply cease to exist*.⁴⁴

The dreadful nature of this passage is appropriate to the condition from which it speaks. At the time of Marable's writing, the crisis of white civil society and capitalist reformation was in the early stages of resolving a host of socioeconomic crises through the drastic expansion of the prison regime as a primary means through which to address, contrive, rearticulate, or eliminate figures of social crisis. By constituting the prison as a place where increasingly massive numbers of Marable's "lowest stratum" would "*simply cease to exist*," the 1980s saw an astronomical expansion of the prison regime's operating capacities: the total prison and jail population grew by 500 percent from 1980 to 1992, and has almost tripled since.⁴⁵ Under this police-prison hegemony, mass repression and human containment become ironically and perversely linked to the accompanying logic of profit, accumulation, expansion, and strategic annihilation that guide advanced global capital. As racially pathologized and historically disfranchised communities are effectively surplusd by capital's logic of exploitation and labor expropriation, they cease to be relevant as either exploited workers or consumer markets. Rather, these racially criminalized populations are incorporated into a strategic commodity relation that invokes the history of U.S. racial chattel slavery (see chapter 6). Political prisoner Linda Evans, with activist Eve Goldberg, has thus argued, "Like any industry, the prison economy needs raw materials. In this case the raw materials are prisoners."⁴⁶

It seems that the emergence of the prison regime has rearticulated

the common sense of “law and order” (now, “Homeland Security”) in the United States in terms similar to those foreshadowed by Jackson and Davis at the moment of the prison’s eruption into a tool for resolving social crisis.⁴⁷ As actual and socially marked prisoners-in-waiting disappear from civil society, a growing population of civically and socially dead people are funneled into a structure of absence from the normative intercourses of the “free world.”⁴⁸

The U.S. social formation constantly draws and redraws its own internal (domestic) geographies of human immobilization and (physical, biological, and cultural) genocide, at which the exercise of state and state-sanctioned violence becomes the condition of social reproduction. It is at these sites that these unmediated relations of force crystallize within the drama of popular consent. The late black liberationist and political prisoner Albert Nuh Washington, who died of liver cancer in 2000 at Cossackie Correctional Facility (New York), speaks to the logic of this symbiosis as he reflects on three decades of incarceration:

Assata Shakur once asked me what I would rather do, eat a nasty bowl of Nixon’s shit or do twenty years in prison. My reply was twenty years. She said she would eat the shit because every day in prison you eat shit and it is better to eat it all at once. For 27 years I have eaten shit each day, which brings its own indignities, being under the physical control of another who is basically hostile to you.⁴⁹

It would be inappropriate and trivializing to conclude this chapter with either prescriptive ruminations or utopian visions of resistance that elide the social truth of terror and survival mediated by imprisoned radical intellectuals. Instead, I look to Washington’s allegory as a point of departure for the following chapters, which further elaborate a genealogy of the prison regime’s entangled logics of terror and death.

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