

*Blood in My Eye* was completed only days before the author died from bullet wounds during an alleged escape attempt from San Quentin Prison, California. Arrested at the age of eighteen for allegedly taking part in the robbery of a gas station netting \$70, George L. Jackson was sentenced to one year to life in prison. At the time of his death he had served eleven years behind prison walls, seven of those years in solitary confinement. This book testifies to how those years were spent, and why.

Written with the memory of his slain brother, Jonathan, constantly before him, it is an apocalyptic vision of America. It speaks to the poor, the jailed, and the disenfranchised throughout the world. Jackson's message to his revolutionary brothers is clear: "People are already dying who could be saved, generations more will die or live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act. Discover your humanity and your love in revolution. Pass on the torch. Join us, give up your life for the people."

*Blood in My Eye* takes up where *Soledad Brother* left off, and introduces the reader to the life force that was George L. Jackson.



# Soledad Brother

*Part One*

*George  
Jackson*

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SOLEDAD  
BROTHER  
*Part One*

GEORGE JACKSON

TO THE MAN-CHILD, TALL, EVIL, GRACEFUL, BRIGHT-  
EYED, BLACK MAN-CHILD — JONATHAN PETER JACKSON  
— WHO DIED ON AUGUST 7, 1970, COURAGE IN ONE  
HAND, ASSAULT RIFLE IN THE OTHER; MY BROTHER,  
COMRADE, FRIEND — THE TRUE REVOLUTIONARY, THE  
BLACK COMMUNIST GUERRILLA IN THE HIGHEST STATE  
OF DEVELOPMENT, HE DIED ON THE TRIGGER, SCOURGE  
OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS, SOLDIER OF THE PEOPLE; TO  
THIS TERRIBLE MAN-CHILD AND HIS WONDERFUL  
MOTHER GEORGIA BEA, TO ANGELA Y. DAVIS, MY  
TENDER EXPERIENCE, I DEDICATE THIS COLLECTION  
OF LETTERS; TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THEIR ENEMIES  
I DEDICATE MY LIFE.

degrees the whole year around. Every evening during the winter months there is a light rain to settle the dust. Eighty to 85 the whole year. The five oldest cities in the world are located in Africa. The oldest language is one spoken in Africa: Mande. The oldest relic of man's prehistoric existence was found in Africa, 25 million years old. You find all kinds of black types: with wide noses, thin noses, aquiline noses; all types of hair; all shades of skin from the lightest ivory to blue black. You should be more specific about what you want to know because it would take a month, and a letter the size of a telephone book, to delineate all the resources of Africa.

Speaking just for me I would like Tanzania on the East coast if I had to choose a spot to settle. Julius Nyerere is an enlightened and intelligent leader who identifies with the Eastern world. The country is developing fast, and has unlimited potential in mining, agriculture, and light industry. Its problem, as with all the African states, is the absence of capital to expand the economy at a rate which will realize the rising expectations of the people and close the gap with the Western world. Tanzania has invited the Eastern societies to help them instead of the U.S. and Western Europe, so they will be better off. China charges no interest on loans. When the Chinese set up a factory, they hire Africans and train African managers and leave. The U.S. is motivated by the profit-and-loss thing. They leave U.S. managers and claim 90 percent of the gross as their just share of the profits. They say it's their reward for helping to develop the country. Some African leaders go for this; Julius does not. Does it seem stupid of China to lend without interest, and build without taking over or capitalizing? Must be love.

Lester

do well alone. Now it follows that if everyone pays, everyone should get proper returns. The streetlights should be the same in Watts and Bel Air. It seems that some dereliction of duty has indeed taken place.

George

FEBRUARY, 1968 19

Dear Robert,

Too bad about Jon; I suggested upon your last visit that he may be getting too much TV. Anyway, you are absolutely correct in that these are his crisis years. You had better give him something good in the way of purpose, identity, and method. It should be taken for granted that he is getting nothing along this line in school; if anything, these things are being trained out. . . so that he will be a good Negro, an individual, a nonperson, an intellectual dependent. If you do not know the definition of "purpose," "identity," and "method," it is already too late for Jon. I do not want to be addressed as George any longer. You will please respect my wishes enough to use my middle name from this day on. I won't respond to any other. My work goes well here. I am in health. I hope you are well.

Take care of yourself.  
Lester

MARCH, 1968 6

Dear Robert,

I received the money today. Thanks. I got the forms off too. I hope you told them about the life thing. If not, please do it right away. I hope also my age was passed along as a reminder. People would look at you and think that I would have to be in my teens.

Africa is a most wonderful continent. They have everything in the way of human and natural resources. Oil in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Nigeria. Copper, diamonds, cobalt, and gold in Zambia. There are large deposits of iron ore in Liberia, a whole mountain of it in fact. You name it, and it is found in some part of Africa. In the savanna area south of the Sahara Desert and all the way south to the Cape, you find the most fertile farmland in the world. Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania are all just like a big park. The temperature never fluctuates more than 5

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## September 23, 1941 — August 21, 1971

*George L. Jackson*

In 1960, at the age of eighteen, George Jackson was accused of stealing \$70 from a gas station in Los Angeles. Though there was evidence of his innocence, his court-appointed lawyer maintained that because Jackson had a record (two previous instances of petty crime), he should plead guilty in exchange for a light sentence in the county jail. He did, and received an indeterminate sentence of one year to life. Jackson spent the next ten years in Soledad Prison, seven and a half of them in solitary confinement. Instead of succumbing to the dehumanization of prison existence, he transformed himself into the leading theoretician of the prison movement and a brilliant writer. *Soledad Brother*, which contains the letters that he wrote from 1964 to 1970, is his testament.

In his twenty-eighth year, Jackson and two other black inmates — Fleeta Drumgo and John Cluchette — were falsely accused of murdering a white prison guard. The guard was beaten to death on January 16, 1969, a few days after another white guard shot and killed three black inmates by firing from a tower into the courtyard. The accused men were brought in chains and shackles to two secret hearings in Salinas County. A third hearing was about to take place when John Cluchette managed to smuggle a note to his mother: “Help, I’m in trouble.” With the aid of a state senator, his mother contacted a lawyer, and so commenced one of the most extensive legal defenses in U.S. history. According to their attorneys, Jackson, Drumgo, and Cluchette were charged with murder not because there was any substantial evidence of their guilt, but because they had been previously identified as black militants by the prison authorities. If convicted, they would face a mandatory death penalty under the California penal code. Within weeks, the case of the Soledad Brothers emerged as a political cause célèbre for all sorts of people demanding change at a time when every American institution was shaken by Black rebellions in more than one hundred cities and the mass movement against the Vietnam War.

August 7, 1970, just a few days after George Jackson was transferred to San Quentin, the case was catapulted to the forefront of national news when his brother, Jonathan, a seventeen-year-old high school student in Pasadena, staged a raid on the Marin County courthouse with a satchelful of handguns, an assault rifle, and a shotgun hidden under

is their willingness to always help their brothers in Africa and Asia. They understand the need and power of ethnic solidarity. When they look in the mirror they see themselves, when they look at us they see their fathers and brothers. Brother, brother, is the way we’ll call it.

Jon is well, I hope. Can you imagine how foolish a stranger would be trying to turn me against Jon? I have no love for strangers, regardless of the fact that they own the sweatshop I am forced to labor in.

George

FEBRUARY, 1968 12

Dear Robert,

Congratulations on the birthday. I may not be so lucky, but my values are a little different from yours. I am concerned with living fully, living well, rather than living long. And since I have a measure of control over the former, and none whatever over the latter, this makes sense to me.

I’ve been to Mexico. I have also been all over the U.S. I’ve spent several days in the neighborhood where you were born. . . . That neighborhood is far poorer than anything I saw in Mexico. But since Mexico is a colony of the U.S. also (just as our communities are), all I can make of this fact that blacks here are worse off than Mexican nationals in that the U.S. colonial masters think more of Mexicans.

So your taxes do all the things you say including some you omitted, such as school-educational matters, prisons, police wages, armies, H-bombs, spy ships, gas chambers, Tucker’s farms, etc. But it is very curious to note who benefits by it all. Which streets get lighted best? Which child goes to school half a day in a trailer, or to a school that is so crowded and understaffed that he might as well not go for all the attention he gets? The police stopped me 5 times (5 different cars) in the space of 3 blocks in Los Angeles once. All the brush wars the U.S. has fought in the last 20 years were against men of color around the world!! I could go on all week about how your tax money is being used, but let it suffice for me to say it is not being used to help you or yours. You are getting no return on your investment. This is what taxes are supposed to be all about, an investment in the community, the society, a pooling of each individual’s resources so that the administration can be financed, so that the administration can perform the jobs which must be done to ensure public welfare, and the jobs which no individual can



FEBRUARY, 1968 8

Dear Robert,

I think you have gotten stuck in the mud somewhere down the road. There has never been any question as to whether or not we will be allowed to work. There has never been any question in my mind about the folly of one of us attempting to make himself acceptable to the established standard so that he will be tolerated.

Am I for sale and at such a price? Can true self-determination be won working for wages and salaries? What are the chances of the employee one day owning the manufacturing plant?!! What do I lose by allowing myself to be programmed, regimented, and assimilated. Has any people ever been independent that owned neither land nor tool? Isn't what you are calling for, you and the people who wrote the article, more of the same, the hewing of wood and the carrying of water?! Do I want to identify with a loser and a fool? Can I help myself by helping one who is looked upon as the wretched of the earth? This is the question. Don't get sidetracked by specious argument.

I know the answer to all the above questions, but I plan to keep it to myself for now. And of course we are talking about groups of people, our masses (not to be confused in any way with my personal chances for success. I know how to look out for me as an individual).

I agree with what you say about brains, nothing could be clearer. Every mass movement in history has been led by one person or a small group of people. Although everyone is born with a brain only a few choose to use it. The difference between successful and unsuccessful mass movements is in the people who lead them. Successful ones are led by persons gifted with a delicate balance of both mental and physical forcefulness. Brains are useless without the nervous equipment and the muscle required to execute their orders.

I also agree with what you say about the Chinese. They are poor. They went through the same thing we went through for the same reason (a skin problem), and they suffered it at the hands of the same wretched force. It may be a while yet before they get over the last hundred years, but, and I know you agree, they are wonderful and aggressive, industrious people. They will make out. What I like most about them

his coat. Educated into a political revolutionary by George, Jonathan invaded the court during a hearing for three black San Quentin inmates, not including his brother, and handed them weapons. As he left with the inmates and five hostages, including the judge, Jonathan demanded that the Soledad Brothers be released within thirty minutes. In the shootout that ensued, Jonathan was gunned down. Of Jonathan, George wrote, "He was free for a while. I guess that's more than most of us can expect."

Soledad Brother, which is dedicated to Jonathan Jackson, was released to critical acclaim in France and the United States, with an introduction by the renowned French dramatist Jean Genet, in the fall of 1970. Less than a year later and just two days before the opening of his trial, George Jackson was shot to death by a tower guard inside San Quentin Prison in a purported escape attempt. "No Black person," wrote James Baldwin, "will ever believe that George Jackson died the way they tell us he did."

Soledad Brother went on to become a classic of Black literature and political philosophy, selling more than 400,000 copies before it went out of print twenty years ago. Lawrence Hill Books is pleased to reissue this book and to add to it a Foreword by the author's nephew, Jonathan Jackson, Jr., who is a writer living in California.

## Foreword

*Jonathan Jackson, Jr.*

I was born eight and a half months after my father, Jonathan Jackson, was shot down on August 7, 1970, at the Marin County Courthouse, when he tried to gain the release of the Soledad Brothers by taking hostages. Before and especially after that day, Uncle George kept in constant contact with my mother by writing from his cell in San Quentin. (The Department of Corrections wouldn't put her on the visitors' list.) During George's numerous trial appearances for the Soledad Brothers case, Mom would lift me above the crowd so he could see me. Consistently, we would receive a letter a few days later. For a single mother with son, alone and in the middle of both controversy and not a little unwarranted trouble with the authorities, those messages of strength were no doubt instrumental in helping her carry on. No matter how oppressive his situation became, George always had time to lend his spirit to the people he cared for.

A year and two weeks after the revolutionary takeover in Marin, George was ruthlessly murdered by prison guards at San Quentin. Both he and my father left me a great deal: pride, history, an unmistakable name. My experience has been at once wonderful and incredibly difficult. My life is not consumed by the Jackson legacy, but my charge is an accepted and cherished piece of my existence. It is out of my responsibility to my legacy that I have come to write this Foreword to my uncle's prison writings.

Today I read my inherited letters often — those written from George to my mother with a dull pencil on prison stationery. They are things of beauty, my most valuable possessions, passionate pieces of writing that have few rivals in the modern era. They will remain unpublished. However, the letters of Soledad Brother demonstrate the same insight and eloquence — the way George's writings make his personal experience universal is the mainstay of his brilliance.

When this collection of letters was first released in 1969, it brought a young revolutionary to the forefront of a tempest, a tempest characterized by the Black Power, free speech, and antiwar movements, accompanied by a dissatisfaction with the status quo throughout the United States. With unflinching directness, George Jackson conveyed

that is," I'll have to wait and take the situation in for myself, though. If you happen to be correct about that, I'm buying me a little sailboat and heading for the Indian Ocean area; be a bum, no wife, no kids, no competition, bananas, coconuts, pineapples, fish, and sunshine. I could never bear what you have borne. I hope you arrived home without incident. I heard the weather was pretty bad.

I almost got sucked into some more foolishness yesterday. All the blacks tilting at windmills again. Mindless, emotional, childish abandon, without a thought of winning. Just an attempt to prove their manhood to themselves, to any who may be watching. The result, further humiliation and a month in a dark hole. I'm still in my cell. I had to turn my back on them when they wouldn't listen. Never, never will I take part in any foolishness. They have me locked up with a bunch of 20-year-old cretins who don't know anything about the ways of the world, hate books, can't think, and won't listen. Things are not getting any better. They are, if anything, getting worse. Bitter experience seems to be bringing out the worst in us instead of our best. Instead of growing thoughtful and determined, they get more emotional and mindless. You swallow a camel and gag on a nut; you accept a certain condition and treatment with apparent ease, but balk at the suggestion of returning the same.

It doesn't matter a great deal to me either way. On an individual basis, I will always make out. I see this world just as it is, the whole thing, and most important I see myself in relation to it. So I will be able to spring in any direction in which my mind tells me the rewards are greater.

I'm going to frame a letter soon to you discussing the social contract, and where the individual stands in relation to the state. None of it will be original. It will be the accepted dialectics of all those past and present who are in a position to know. You don't seem to know why you pay taxes and what you should expect in the way of returns. It should be clear that when one contributes to any enterprise, he has a return coming, and it is equally clear that when I place or allow an individual or group of individuals to administrate and regulate affairs that involve my bosom interest, these affairs must be handled in a judicious manner. When they are not, it is my right to replace these individuals any way that I can.

Take care of yourself.  
George



They are only leading you on. I hope you have lost no money, but I warned you about this before. It is clear that I must handle this thing myself the best way that I can.

Take care of yourself.  
George

JANUARY, 1968 16

Dear Robert,  
Nothing new to report, same situation here. No progress. Went before a couple of persons responsible for the administration of this unit last week. They changed the rules to justify keeping me locked up another six months until June at least. There is a rule that reads: "If an inmate is involved in an assault upon another inmate and a weapon is associated in the incident the inmate responsible must do at least one year locked up in close confinement." Well, I've done my year for the thing that happened in January '67. Now I must do another for the affair in June '67 where the only weapons involved were those used against me! I think perhaps the time has come to get legal help for me. We can discuss it when you come up next time. These things are not being handled properly. Or fairly. I am the only one still suffering the effects of those two occurrences. Everyone else has been transferred to other institutions and is in the main population there. And I'm the only one who didn't write a writ at the time the thing took place. I tried to just shrug it off, but I see that that does not work. They have accused me of leading something when all the evidence points to the contrary. I was the only one to cross the picket line during the strike or one of the few. In June I never raised my hand against an official. In fact, in all the seven years I've been in the prison here I have never attacked an official. I have difficulty leading myself, directing my own affairs. At the very least I need a transfer. I cannot get fair treatment otherwise.

Take care of yourself.  
George

JANUARY, 1968 31

Dear Robert,  
I seriously believe that you have incurable middle-class attitudes, but nonetheless you may be right. Regarding the blacks "not letting me,

an intelligent yet accessible message with his trademark style, rational rage. He illuminated previously hidden viewpoints and feelings that disenfranchised segments of the population were unable to articulate: the poor, the victimized, the imprisoned, the disillusioned. George spoke in a revolutionary voice that they had no idea existed. He was the prominent figure of true radical thought and practice during the period, and when he was assassinated, much of the movement died along with him. But George Jackson cannot and will not ever leave. His life and thoughts serve as the message — George himself is the revolution.

The reissue of Soledad Brother at this point in time is essential. It appears that the nineties are going to be a telling decade in U.S. history. The signposts of systemic breakdown are as glaringly obvious as they were in the sixties: unrest manifesting itself in inner-city turmoil, widespread rise of violence in the culture, and international oppression to legitimize a state in crisis. The fact that imprisonments in California have more than tripled over the last decade, supported by the public, is merely one sign of societal decomposition. That systemic change occurred during the sixties is a myth. The United States in the nineties faces strikingly analogous problems. George spoke to the issues of his day, but conditions now are so similar that this work could have been written last month. It is imperative that George be heard, whether by the angry but un-channeled young or by the cynical and worldly mature. The message must be carried farther than where he bravely left it in August of 1971.

Over the past twenty-five years, why has George Jackson not been an integral part of mainstream consciousness? He has been and still is underexposed, reduced to simplistic terms, and ultimately misunderstood. Racial and conspiracy theory aside, there are rational reasons for his exclusion. They stem not only from the hard-line revolutionary aspects of George's philosophy, but more importantly from the nature of the political system that he existed in and under.

Howard Zinn has pointed out in *A People's History of the United States* that "the history of any country, presented as the history of a family, conceals fierce conflicts of interest (sometimes exploding, most often repressed) between conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, capitalists and workers, dominators and dominated." U.S. history is essentially that type of hidden history. Without denying important mitigating factors, the United States of today is strongly linked to the

values and premises on which it was founded. That is, it is a settler colony founded primarily on two basic pillars, upheld by the Judeo-Christian tradition: genocide of indigenous peoples and slave labor in support of a capitalist infrastructure. Although the Bible repeatedly exalts mass slaughter and oppression, Judeo-Christian morality is publicly held to be inconsistent with them. This dissonance, evident within the nation's structure from the beginning, informs the state's first function: to oversimplify and minimize immoral events in order to legitimize history and the state's very existence simultaneously.

Ironically, traditional Judeo-Christian morality is a perfect vehicle for genocide, slavery, and territorial expansion. As a logical progression from biblical example, expansion and imperialism culminated in the United States with the concept of Manifest Destiny, which held that it was the colonists' inherent right to expand and conquer. Further it was a duty, the "white man's burden," to save the "natives," to attempt to convert all heathens encountered. Protestant Calvinism provided a set of ethics that fit perfectly with the colonists' conquests. Max Weber, in his definitive study on religion, *The Sociology of Religion*, wrote, "Calvinism held that the unsearchable God possessed good reasons for having distributed the gifts of fortune unevenly"; it "represented as God's will [the Calvinists'] domination over the sinful world. Clearly this and other features of Protestantism, such as its rationalization of the existence of a lower class,<sup>1</sup> were not only the bases for the formation of the United States, but still prominently exist today. "One must go to the ethics of ascetic Protestantism," Weber asserts, "to find any ethical sanction for economic rationalism and for the entrepreneur." When a nation can't admit to the process through which it builds hegemony, how can anything but delusion be a reality? "The monopoly of truth, including historical truth," stated Daniel Singer in a lecture at Evergreen State College (Washington) in 1987, "is implied in the monopoly of power."

Clearly, objective history is an impossibility. This understood, the significant problem lies in how the general population defines the term; history implies that truth is being told. It is an unfortunate fact that history is unfailingly written by the victors, which in the case of

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<sup>1</sup> Called bootstrap ideology, this tenet holds that all the poor need to do is "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" to be materially successful. Accordingly, those who do not do so deserve to be in their situation and are considered unworthy.

the superstitious individual who will whistle or sing a happy number as he passes the graveyard.

Confinement in this small area all day causes a buildup of tension. The unavoidable consequence is stupidity, a return to childish behavior, overreaction. I refuse to let myself be punished with stuff like this. Locked in jail, within a jail, my mind is still free. I refuse ever to allow myself to be forced by living conditions into a response that is not commensurate with intelligence and my final objective.

This will apply even more on the other side of the wall, out there where you are. What if there was nothing on earth that could be taken from me which would result in my discomfort. What if a person was so oriented that the loss of no material thing could cause him mental disorganization? This is the free agent. He is nameless, faceless, emotionless, loveless. He is without habit, without the weaknesses of the flesh. He travels light and only in the company of those who like himself prize self-determination above baseball and beer. Only the free agent can win for us the necessary control over the direction of our unrewarding lives.

You should know that I only do what I think is best, and most appropriate. I'm a man with few alternatives.

George

JANUARY, 1968 6

Dear Robert,

I hope you are in health. Have you been bothered by the sickness, flu, Asian flu they call it. Everyone on the tier, everyone in the building really, has had it, or still has it, except me. I have been lucky. I hope I do not catch it. We have no medicines.

I have both of your letters here; I did not send the forms requesting a package because I didn't want you spending any money on unnecessary things. If I had money I would never buy anything like that for myself. I am completely indifferent about pleasure, temporary amenities: "a crust of bread and a corner to sleep in, a moment to laugh and an hour to weep in" — well, I don't even want the moment. If that is all that I have coming I don't want it. I don't know who you have been talking to about my condition here. Whoever they are, stop wasting your time.

I'll write again when I get the final word. Penelope wrote me a letter last week stating that you and Mama sent a box of stuff up here to me after all, in spite of my asking you not to bother. I appreciate the sentiment but you should not have done it. I probably will not be allowed to have it. You should know that I have to send a formal request from here, etc. They won't send it back either — they will keep it. Things will be much better between us when you start taking me seriously.

Take care of yourself. You'll be able to retire when I get out in '69.

George

DECEMBER, 1967 23

Dear Robert,

This is Saturday: there is so much noise on the tier that even my earplugs are useless. Grown men are acting like high-school girls. The guards have some kind of sports on the radio. Everyone is happy, emotion-filled cries of joy come from every cell. They're trying to forget their problems or pretend that they have none. It is easier that way, easier than grabbing the bull by the horns. Music and sports. Their whole life, perhaps a little pimping or gambling. I got my official notice on the board meeting.

They denied me another year, I go back next December. It will be eight years then.

Take care of yourself.

George

JANUARY, 1968 1

Dear Robert,

It's 5:40 A.M. All the noisemakers are asleep; they've worn themselves out through the night making merry, laughing, singing, pretending. It is strange indeed that a man can find anything to laugh about in here. But everyone in here is locked up 24 hours a day. They have no past, no future, no goal other than the next meal. They're afraid, confused and confounded by a world they know that they did not make, that they feel they cannot change, so they make these loud noises so they won't hear what their mind is trying to tell them. They laugh to assure themselves and those around them that they are not afraid, sort of like

the United States are not only the original imperialists, but the majority of the "founding fathers," dedicated to uniting and strengthening the existing mercantile class among disjointed colonies. There can be no doubt that from the creation of this young nation, history as a created and perceived entity moved further and further away from the objective ideal. Genocide, necessary for "the development of the modern capitalist economy," according to Howard Zinn, was rationalized as a reaction to the fear of Indian savages. Slavery was similarly construed.

The personalization of history, the process by which we construct heroes and pariahs, is a consequence of its dialectical nature. Without fail, an odd paradox is created around someone who, by virtue of his or her actions, becomes prominent enough to warrant the designation "historical figure." There is a leap on the part of the general public, sparked by the media, to another mindset. Sensational deeds are glorified, horrible acts reviled. A few points are selected as defining characteristics. The media, conforming to their restrictions of concision (which make accuracy nearly impossible to attain), reiterate these points over and over. Schools and textbooks not only teach these points but drill them into young minds. Howard Zinn comments that "this learned sense of moral proportion, coming from the apparent objectivity of the scholar, is accepted more easily than when it comes from politicians at press conferences. It is therefore more deadly."

A few tidbits, factual or not, incomplete and selective, are used to describe the entirety of a person's existence. They become part of mainstream consciousness. We therefore know that Lincoln freed the slaves, Malcolm X was a black extremist, and Hitler was solely responsible for World War II and the Holocaust. All half-truths go unexplained, all fallacies go unchallenged, as they appear to make perfect sense to the everyday, non-critically thinking American. The paradox has been created: The more famous a person becomes, the more misunderstood he or she is. This accepted occurrence is incredibly counterintuitive: the public should know more, not less, about a noteworthy individual and the sociopolitical dynamics surrounding him or her.

This historical mythicization is not, for the most part, a consciously created phenomenon. The media don't go out of their way to mislead the public by constructing false heroes and emphasizing the mundane. Fewer "dimly lit conferences" take place than conspiracy theorists believe. It is the existing political system that is responsible for the information that reaches the general public. The state's control of

information created the system, and it continually re-creates it. Propagated by schooling and the media, information that reaches the public is subject to three chief mechanisms of state control: denial, self-censorship, and imprisonment.

Denial is the easiest control mechanism, and therefore the most common. If events do not follow the state's agenda or its ecumenical ideology and might bring unrest, they are denied. Examples are plentiful: prewar state terrorism against the people of North and South Vietnam and later the bombing of Cambodia; government funding and military aid to the Nicaraguan Contras; and support of UNITA and South Africa in the virtual destruction of Angola, among many others.

Denial goes hand in hand with self-censorship. The media emphasize certain personal characteristics and events and de-emphasize others, in a pattern that supports U.S. hegemony. The information that reached the public after the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989 is telling. It was not until much later, after the heat of controversy, that the average citizen had access to the scope of the devastation. The effectiveness of self-censorship in this case was maximized, as the full details of the Panama invasion were patchwork for years.

While we may assume that the media have an obligation to accurately convey such an event to the public, the media in fact perpetuate the government's position by engaging in their own self-censorship. Noam Chomsky points out in *Detering Democracy*, "With a fringe of exceptions — mostly well after the tasks had been accomplished — the media rallied around the flag with due piety and enthusiasm, funneling the most absurd White House tales to the public while scrupulously refraining from asking the obvious questions, or seeing the obvious facts."

Denial and self-censorship create a comfort zone for the U.S. citizenry, generally uncritical and willing to accept digestible versions of historical personalities and world events. The reasoning behind denial and self-censorship: do not make the public uncomfortable, even if that means diluting, sensationalizing, or lying about the truth. Ultimately, when denial and self-censorship may not be sufficient for control of information, the state resorts to imprisonment. All imprisonment is political and as such all imprisonments carry equal weight. Society does, however, distinguish two categories of imprisonment: one for breaking a law, the other for political reasons. A difference is clear: American

And Frances, are you keeping up with the movements of the guy she tied up with. I'll be wanting to see him first thing upon my arrival there. It's cold up here this year but since I don't go out directly in it too very often it doesn't bother me much.

Frances is supposed to be angry with me because I wouldn't let her get in any of her silly cliches last time you brought her up here. I didn't make things any better either when she wrote two months later decrying my supposed rudeness. When I explained to her that she was not supposed to hold any opinions other than those of her menfolk, she stopped writing. Tell her that I feel no ill will toward her, but when she hears us debating method and policy, she is supposed to be silent, listen, and try to learn something. Penny will sit and listen and try to understand. When she doesn't understand she asks intelligent questions. I've bummed across this country three times, seen everything eight times, now what am I going to do with some advice from a twenty-three-year-old girl who has been sheltered from the real world all her life.

It is terrible that we have all been so divided. The social order is set up so as to encourage this, the powers that be don't want any loyal loving groups forming up. So they discourage it in a thousand subtle ways. And as it is said, when poverty comes in the door, love leaves by the window! Too bad! I give up! Blood is not thicker than water. I was wrong ever to let my thoughts pass my lips. From now on you people's reactionary ideals are your own. I never want to discuss anything serious with you again, and if you don't hear from me here too regularly it is because I have nothing to say.

Take care of yourself.  
George

DECEMBER, 1967 19

Dear Robert,  
I went to the board yesterday; they told me that if I kept this next year clean and clear of disciplinary infractions I would have eighteen months clean next time I saw them. Of course I have not seen the official results yet (maybe Friday I will) but it was pretty clear that I got another year to do.

of course we must learn to fight our own battles. This way we can die alone, one at a time. This is a very old and proven idea. It has worked wonderfully up to now and that is why 1967 finds us all so secure and well placed. My trouble is that I have expected too much of you. You're already doing your best: what you feel is right. How can I expect more?

George

DECEMBER, 1967

Dear Robert,

I'm all right; no change here. They gave me a little job in here where I am locked up but took it back right away, I think to get a reaction. It has started to rain almost every day up here now and it is rather cool. It is strange but I think I prefer cool weather to warm.

Have you heard anything from my friend? I don't trust many people very far but I have very strong feelings that this guy will not abandon me or our ideas. Things must be very difficult for him or he would have had a lawyer up here for me by now, or done something along that line. Of course, we never really get to know anyone to an absolute degree, but I saw this guy in many different situations and he never showed the slightest weakness or reservation or self-interest. We need people like that. When we cannot even put confidence in them we're through.

Take care of yourself.

George

DECEMBER, 1967 13

Dear Robert,

Hope you are well. I received your note and all is normal here. No new problems. I've got six months clean now, since June 8. That is not much and surely not enough to satisfy my warders but by June of next year it will be twelve months clean. True!

How is Penny doing on the job? Post office isn't it? Tell her I miss her and the child. Is that guy she married honoring his financial commitment.

Indian Movement leader Leonard Peltier, serving a federal sentence for his supposed role at Wounded Knee, is considered a different type of prisoner than an armed robber serving a five-to-seven-year sentence.

State policy reflects institutional needs. When the state as an institution cannot tolerate an outside threat, real or perceived, from an individual or group, the consequences at its command include isolation, persecution, and political imprisonment. All may occur in greater or lesser form, depending on the degree of threat.

Political incarceration removes threats to the political and economic hegemony of the United States. Even though in 1959 George Jackson initially went to prison as an "everyday lawbreaker" with a one-year-to-life sentence, it was his political consciousness that kept him incarcerated for eleven years. In 1970 George wrote:

International capitalism cannot be destroyed without the extremes of struggle. The entire colonial world is watching the blacks inside the U.S., wondering and waiting for us to come to our senses. Their problems and struggles with the Amerikan monster are much more difficult than they would be if we actively aided them. We are on the inside. We are the only ones (besides the very small white minority left) who can get at the monster's heart without subjecting the world to nuclear fire. We have a momentous historical role to act out if we will. The whole world for all time in the future will love us and remember us as the righteous people who made it possible for the world to live on. If we fail through fear and lack of aggressive imagination, then the slaves of the future will curse us, as we sometimes curse those of yesterday. I don't want to die and leave a few sad songs and a hump in the ground as my only monument. I want to leave a world that is liberated from trash, pollution, racism, nation-states, nation-state wars and armies, from pomp, bigotry, parochialism, a thousand different brands of untruth, and licentious usurious economics.

Nothing is more dangerous to a system that depends on misinformation than a voice that obeys its own dictates and has the courage to speak out. George Jackson's imprisonment and further isolation within the prison system were clearly a function of the state's response to his outspoken opposition to the capitalist structure.

Political incarceration is a tangible form of state control. Unlike denial and self-censorship, imprisonment is publicly scrutinized. Yet



public reaction to political incarceration has been minimal. The U.S. government claims it holds no political prisoners (denial), while any notice given to protests focused on political prisoners invariably takes the form of a human interest story (self-censorship).

The efficacy of political incarceration in the United States cannot be denied. Prison serves not only as a physical barrier, but a communication restraint. Prisoners are completely ostracized from society, with little or no chance to break through. Those few outside who might be sympathetic are always hesitant to communicate or protest past a certain point, fearing their own persecution or imprisonment. Also, deep down most people believe that all prisoners, regardless of their individual situations, really did do something “wrong.” Added to that prejudice, society lacks a distinction between a prisoner’s actions and his or her personal worth; a bad act equals a bad person. The bottom line is that the majority of people simply will not believe that the state openly or covertly oppresses without criminal cause. As Daniel Singer asked at the Evergreen conference in 1987, “Is it possible for a class which exterminates the native peoples of the Americas, replaces them by raping Africa for humans it then denigrates and dehumanizes as slaves, while cheapening and degrading its own working class — is it possible for such a class to create a democracy, equality and to advance the cause of human freedom? The implicit answer is, ‘No, of course not.’”

How does a person — inside or outside prison — confront the cultural mindsets, the layers of misinformation propagated by the capitalist system? Sooner or later, what can be called the “radical dilemma” surfaces for the few wanting to enter into a structural attack/analysis of the United States. Culturally, educationally, and politically, all of us are similarly limited by these layers of misinformation; we are all products of the system. None of us functions from a clean slate when considering or debating any issue, especially history as it pertains to the United States. George Jackson struggled against the constraints of denial and self-censorship, to say nothing of his physical and communicative distance from society. Political prisoners are inherently vulnerable to an either/or situation: isolating silence or elimination. For George, his vociferous revolutionary attitude was either futile or self-exterminating. He was well aware of his situation. In *Blood in My Eye*, his political treatise, he wrote:

Perhaps later if we both live to see the outcome of all this, I will be able to explain myself better, but for now you surely don’t need me and I have never needed anyone. Life has failed me. People I have had a right to expect something of, in the past, have failed me. And I fail myself almost every day. But I suffer no lasting effects from any of this because I derive my force and energy from no outside quarter. Your inability to understand and support me puts me at a loss, but I cannot allow this to influence my course. I must follow my mind. There is no turning back from awareness. If I were to alter my step now I would always hate myself. I would grow old feeling that I had failed in the obligatory duty that is ours once we become aware. I would die as most of us blacks have died over the last few centuries, without having lived.

You have misjudged the depth of my feelings on these matters. They mean everything to me. If we could have found grounds for compatibility within the framework of my ideals the purely mental aspect of my job could have been less difficult. I anticipated failure in this from the start, so I am not shocked or surprised now that the last has been said and we find ourselves poles apart. I’ll be all right from here, Robert. I have the nervous equipment and I’ll spend my remaining time here checking my emotions and developing the clinical approach. You owe me nothing. Anything you may think you owe me I absolve you of entirely. Because we look a lot alike, because the same blood flows in our veins, I thought we could perhaps pool our resources, plan great things, produce some remarkable changes and conclusions, and write a few pages of history. But I cannot see myself as well as other people see me and perhaps you are justified in feeling ashamed of me. The most important abutment of our relation has disappeared; perhaps it never existed. This is certainly my loss, but I cannot see any reason for us to communicate with each other again from this day until such time as I can demonstrate the usefulness of my ideals and methods. Please take care of yourself.

Respectfully,  
George

DECEMBER, 1967 1

Dear Robert,  
I guess there is something to be said for a person who does as he is told, lives by the routine set up by his self-appointed bosses, etc. And



thing. Now it would be a great loss to me, but I feel that I could forgive that too. Now I say this at the risk of seeming immodest but to further illustrate my healthy outlook on the matter in question, let me remind you that in spite of all I am human and I have myself done things that require forgiveness from others — I have transgressed against my fellows in moments of weakness and madness. It's hard, my friend. Because of my temperament it's even harder. I hope I can make it.

Take care of yourself.  
George

NOVEMBER, 1967 6

Dear Robert,  
Are you well? The changes are as slow as ever here. No new problems, however, except perhaps with my health. It may be failing. Headaches all the time and a skin condition that started some time back. Look at that picture I sent you of me taken upon my graduation. You may be able to see the discolored spots in my face. Well, the condition is growing worse — it is all over my face now, huge discolored spots. I look like a leper. If you have a connection who is a dermatologist perhaps you could pass me on some information on it. It is only on my face now, but it is progressive. It is spreading. I'd like to know what to do about it and what may be the cause. The cause, however, may be most important. I've been thinking that it is probably the food. Quality and quantity. My knee has gone down some and is not too sore anymore. I hope everyone there is well. Give my special regards to Penny and Jon.

Take care of yourself.  
George

NOVEMBER, 1967

Dear Robert,  
This last word from you in Jon's presence convinces me that we can never reconcile our differences. I never realized that I was a source of embarrassment to you, I thought most blacks, especially those of our economic level, understood, vaguely at least, that these places were built with us in mind, just as were the project houses, unemployment offices, and bible schools.

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.

George was equally aware that revolutionary change happens only when an entire society is ready. No amount of action, preaching, or teaching will spark revolution if social conditions do not warrant it. My father's case, unfortunately, is an appropriate indicator. He attempted a revolutionary act during a reactionary time; elimination was the only possible consequence. The challenge for a radical in today's world is to balance reformist tendencies (political liberalism) and revolutionary action/ideology (radicalism). While reformism entails a legitimation of the status quo as a search for changes within the system, radicalism posits a change of system. Because revolutionaries are particularly vulnerable, a certain degree of reformism is necessary to create space, space needed to begin the laborious task of making revolution.

George's statement "Combat Liberalism" and the general reaction to it typify the gulf between the two philosophies. George was universally misunderstood by the left and the right alike. As is the case with most modern political prisoners, nearly all of his support came from reformists with liberal leanings. It seems that they acted in spite of, rather than because of, the core of his message.

The left's attitude toward COINTELPRO is a useful illustration. COINTELPRO, the covert government program used to dismantle the Black Panther Party, and later the American Indian Movement, is typically cited by many leftists as a damning example of the government's conspiratorial nature. Declassified documents and ex-agents' testimonies have shown COINTELPRO to be one of the most unlawful, insidious cells of government in the nation's history. COINTELPRO, however, was really a symptomatic, expendable entity; a small police force within a larger one (FBI), within a branch of government (executive), within the government itself (liberal democracy), within the economic system (capitalism). Reformists in radicals' clothing unknowingly argued against symptoms, rather than the roots, of the entrenched system. Doing away with COINTELPRO or even the FBI would not alter the structure that produces the surveillance/elimination apparatus.

In George's day, others who considered themselves left of center, or even revolutionary, concerned themselves with inner-city reform issues, mostly black ghettos. The problem of and debate about inner cities still exists. However, recognition of a problem and analysis of that problem are two very different challenges. The demand to better only predominantly black inner-city conditions is unrealistic at best. In the capitalist structure, there must be an upper, middle, and especially a lower class. Improving black neighborhoods is the equivalent of ghettoizing some other segment of the population — poor whites, Hispanics, Asians, etc. Nothing intrinsic to the system would change, only superficial alterations that would mollify the liberal public. As Chomsky asserts in *Turning the Tide*:

Determined opposition to the latest lunacies and atrocities must continue, for the sake of the victims as well as our own ultimate survival. But it should be understood as a poor substitute for a challenge to the deeper causes, a challenge that we are, unfortunately, in no position to mount at the present though the groundwork can and must be laid. Failure to understand the radical, encompassing viewpoint in the sixties led to reformism. In effect, the majority of the left completely deserted any attempt at the radical balance required of the politically conscious, leaving only liberalism and its narrow vision to flourish.

Nobody comprehended the radical dilemma more fully than George Jackson. Indeed, he developed his philosophy not out of mere happenstance, but with a very conscious eye upon maintaining his revolutionary ideology. He writes in *Blood in My Eye*:

Reformism is an old story in Amerika. There have been depressions and socio-economic political crises throughout the period that marked the formation of the present upper-class ruling circle, and their controlling elites. But the parties of the left were too committed to reformism to exploit their revolutionary potential.

George's involvement with the prison reform movement should therefore be seen as a matter of survival. Unlike the reformist left, prison oppression was directly affecting him. His balanced reform activities — improving prisoners' rights while speaking out against prison as an entity — were required to make living conditions tolerable enough for him to continue on his revolutionary path. Simply, he did what he had to do to survive — created space while simultaneously pursuing his radical theory.

People only learn Latin these days so that they can read that thing they call the bible in the Latin and sound mysterious. It's a lot of European ritual, a lot of hocus-pocus from the dark ages of Europe. The time he puts into that totally useless pursuit could be spent on math or science!

Take care.  
George

NOVEMBER, 1967 2

Dear Robert,  
I received both your letters today dated the twenty-ninth and thirtieth. True I may forget myself sometimes and I'll have to redouble my efforts to control this. I know it is wrong and I know the proper method. It is the application of method that sometimes causes me trouble. But I'll redouble my effort to get over this. Emotion has much to do with it. All of my past life has been victimized by my emotions. I have struggled mightily with myself these last couple of years in an attempt to erase all emotion. The only method that can succeed is the clinical approach, the analytical technique of treating our problems. It is said and with some justification that the greatest battle is with oneself, so if I can gain a victory here the real work shouldn't be too hard.

On the subject of injury, there is the real and the imagined. You have made several references to the subject in the last month or two and I have let them pass. By telling me that Jon has no chip on his shoulder, you attempted to make me feel alone and isolated in my attitudes. But you are wrong in trying to second-guess me, because I have no chip on my shoulder. I know the simplest way to handle an injury whether real or fancied is to forget it. I bear no one on earth any ill will. I have felt the sting of the knout and I live in the shadow of the ovens. I am the object of the severest ridicule (coon, monkey, shoe, a shoe is something to be walked on incidentally, buck, savage, and child), but even in the face of all this I have not one chip on my shoulder. Aren't I a truly marvelous and forgiving person? Almost every day I have something to forgive and forget. Perhaps most of this is fanciful and illusionary, but every day I have the opportunity to practice this almost godlike facility I have built into myself. But then to be honest with myself, it is not merely or solely due to strength of character that I am able to call up just a little more forgiveness, I also have this thing going with myself about not wanting to get killed. I don't know about that getting-killed

time. He was just a baby when first I came here to the concentration camp. It's been seven years, one month now.

Take care of yourself.  
George

OCTOBER, 1967 24

Dear Robert,  
I'll be considered for transfer again this week, they'll probably approve Folsom for me this time. It is a maximum security prison like this, so there will be no change in my fortunes. One prison is like the other, except perhaps the minimum security places in the southern part of the state where they have a less aggressive atmosphere where if one can get around the local constabulary, the chances for parole are greater. That is part of the reason that the guy who was arrested with me went home four years ago and I am still here. Right before I was forced into that situation in Soledad and sent here, he was sent to Chino. But his folks had money to pass around.

No new problems here, the same old things. I'm getting plenty of work done with my time. I am not trying to lose weight, I'm not eating as I should, but we discussed that before. You forget things too fast. But maybe that is good. I'm not sure. Perhaps if I could forget, I could have some peace of mind. But I don't forget anything, wounds scar my mind much worse than they scar my body. But I don't let such things as food, warmth, comfort, and lack of material things cause me any great distress. I'm doing as well as I can expect to, because I don't expect anything. Anything good, that is.

Take care of yourself.  
George

OCTOBER, 1967 26

Dear Robert,  
Jon tells me they have him studying Latin. I find this very depressing. No one has spoken Latin in fifteen hundred years! They are teaching the poor kid a dead language! Wasting his precious time! His precious talent! A great blunder is again being made regarding your offspring, Robert.

The reform George Jackson did accomplish was and still is incredible, transforming the prison environment from unlivable to livable hell, from encampments that he called reminiscent of Nazi Germany to at least a scaled-down version of the like. With his influence, these changes occurred not only in California, but throughout the nation. Only now is his influence beginning to slip, with reactionary politics bringing about torture and sensory deprivation facilities such as Pelican Bay State Prison in California, as well as the reintroduction for adoption of the one-to-life indeterminate sentence. This type of sentence is fertile ground for state oppression, as it is up to a parole board to decide if an inmate is ever to be let go. A prison can easily and effectively create situations that transform a one-to-life into a life sentence. (Tellingly, the indeterminate sentence is being promoted not by the right, but by a California senator formerly associated with mainstream liberal causes.)

Politically, George Jackson provided us all with a radical education, a viable alternative to viewing not only the United States but the world as a political entity. He gave the disenfranchised a lens through which they could clearly see their situation and become more conscious about it. He wrote in April 1970:

It all falls into place. I see the whole thing much clearer now, how fascism has taken possession of this country, the interlocking dictatorship from county level on up to the Grand Dragon in Washington, D.C.

Crucially, George's treatment is a concrete, undeniable example of political oppression. Race is more times than not the easy answer to a problem. Among people of color in the United States, the quick fix, "blame it on whitey" mentality has become so prevalent that it shortcuts thinking. Conversely, stereotypes of minorities act as simple-minded tools of divisiveness and oppression. George addressed these issues in prison, setting a model for the outside as well: "I'm always telling the brothers some of those whites are willing to work with us against the pigs. All they got to do is stop talking honky. When the races start fighting, all you have is one maniac group against another." On the surface, race has been and is still being put forth as an overriding issue that needs to be addressed as a prerequisite for social change. In fact, although it seems to loom as a large problem, race as an issue is again a symptom of capitalism. Of course, on a paltry level and among the relatively powerless, race does play a part in social structure (the racist cop, the bigoted landlord, etc.), pitting segments of the population against each other. But revolutionary change requires class analysis that

drives appropriate actions and eliminates race as a mitigating factor. Knowing these socioeconomic dynamics, George Jackson was first and foremost a people's revolutionary, and he acted as such at all times without compromise. His writings clearly reflect his belief in class-based revolutionary change.

Considering the many structural elements affecting him, it is easy to see why George and his message have been misinterpreted. The quick takes on him are abundant: it's assumed that he was imprisoned and oppressed because he was black, because he had publicized ties with the Black Panther Party and was a well-known organizer within the prison reform movement. Although George became a "prison celebrity," a status that certainly didn't help him in terms of acquittal and release, ignorance of the actual forces responsible for his prolonged imprisonment is inexcusable. The radical viewpoint is absolutely indispensable when regarding both George's life circumstance and philosophy. His life serves not as a mere individual example of prison cruelty, but as a scalding indictment of the very nature of capitalism.

In these times, there are two very different ways to be born into privilege. First and most obvious in the system of capital is to be born into wealth. Second, and not precluding the first, is to have an intellectual, politically conscious base from which to grow as a person philosophically and spiritually. Radical figures in modern society — Lenin, Trotsky, Ché Guevara, my father, Jonathan Jackson, and my uncle George Jackson — have the capability of providing this base through their examples and writings.

Those not born into privilege can achieve a politically conscious base in different ways. No veils separate the lower class from the realities of everyday life. They have been given the gift of disillusion. Bourgeois lifestyle, although perhaps sought after, is in most cases not attainable. Daily survival is the primary goal, as it was with George. Of course, when it finally becomes more attractive for one to fight, and perhaps die, than to live in a survival mode, revolution starts to become a possibility. Not a riot, not a government takeover by one or another group, but a people's revolution led by the politically conscious.

This consciousness doesn't simply appear. Individuals must grow and work into it, but it's an invaluable gift to have insight into and access to an alternative to the frustration, a goal on the horizon.

OCTOBER, 1967 17

Dear Robert,

The time slips away from me. I'm surrounded here by fools, degenerates, and phonies. I suffer a constant bombardment of nonsense from all sides. There is no rest from it even at night. Twenty-four hours a day all my senses must endure the shock of this attack from the lunatic fringe. So I insert my earplugs, and bury myself in my thoughts and my work. The days, even the weeks lapse one into the other, endlessly into one another. Each day that comes and goes is exactly like the one that went before. If I am lax in my duties toward you, forgive me. I am living under strain. I am sorry to hear about your friend. The same has happened to some of mine here. I think I know how you feel; however, I try to think of those things as releases. How was my letter to Jon received? Mama may have torn it up. If Jon wants to go to the trouble of framing those parts that trouble him into a letter, I have a fair understanding of math. No new problems here. Just waiting it out. Time is on my side. I'm twenty-six now, and I'll be twenty-six when I leave here. Be it 40 years from today.

Take care.  
George

OCTOBER, 1967 18

Dear Robert,

How is Penny and the little guy? I guess I miss them quite a bit. What a difference their presence makes here. My language studies are coming along well. I guess if I don't get out before January — and it's not very likely that I will — I'll go into Arabic next. With four languages plus English I'll be able to communicate with three-fourths of the people on earth. I am presently working on Spanish and Swahili. Spanish is spoken by most peoples from Mexico to Chile in what is the fastest-growing population area in the world. Swahili is spoken by all of eastern Africa. I may find communication with these peoples important in my work. All that remains is for me to learn Arabic and Chinese. Perhaps I'll start on these two next year, I've done well with the Spanish.

I trust you are well. Don't work yourself too hard. You cannot get rich on wages. I have had no response from Jon to my last two letters. What's happening? Has he forgotten his brother; it has been a long

feelings of mass discontent must break their bounds. It's just as natural and predictable as the sunrise. I am ready now. When they are ready, nothing, nothing will be able to countervail our march to victory. In Jon's case it is simply a matter of what we need most and how can he be best equipped to survive the crisis that now grips us. I think we need tough, well-informed, and loyal additions to the tribe. Can he develop these characteristics at this terrible place you advocate? You have been living in the big city now for 25 years. It is almost unbelievable that you have not discovered that the guys who will be training him there are 90 percent sex deviates (homosexuals, etc.) and 10 percent free-loading incompetents who couldn't get food and shelter any other way. I would never make a charge like this unless I had firsthand evidence. I hope that you were merely ignorant of these things. I hope that you have not intentionally sold out Jon's bosom interests. Robert has sheltered you from the world to some extent. You have not come in contact with things he sees daily, so let him have some say.

George

OCTOBER, 1967 11

Dear Robert,

I received the letter with the money in it all right, thank you. I'm going pretty good here, no problems, no new ones anyway. I went before a formal two-man review committee here recently. They gave me at least four more months to do here in the adjustment center. I guess we can call this improvement of a sort since I'm usually told nothing. You say Jon is having trouble with math. And that you feel it's just a matter of his settling down to his work. I wondered when you mentioned this just what it was that is keeping him from his studies. How does he spend his time? Is there anyone there to help him with his studies? Of course, you are right that all he has to do is apply himself to his work. At this stage of the schooling structure, nothing is really difficult. Math is never difficult, since its laws are positive. All that needs to be done is take the necessary time and learn the formulas and principles. Of course, if too much time is spent in class on religious matters, the teacher is at fault, not the student. In fact if any time is spent on religious matters during the school hours the student is being cheated.

Take care of yourself.

George

The nineties are an unconscious era. The unimportant is all-important, the essential neglected. What system than capitalism, what time period than now, is better suited to naturally create the scape-goat, the seldom-heard political prisoner, misunderstood in his cult-of-personality status, held back in a choke hold from society? It is not only our right, but our duty, to listen to and comprehend George Jackson's message. To not do so is to turn our backs on one of the brilliant minds of the twentieth century, an individual passionately involved with liberating not only himself, but all of us.

Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are dying who could be saved, that generations more will die or live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act. 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.

—George Jackson

Jonathan Jackson, Jr.  
San Francisco  
June 1994



## Recent Letters and Autobiography

*George Jackson*

JUNE, 1970 10

Dear Greg,<sup>2</sup>

I probably didn't work hard enough on this but I'm pressed for time — all the time.

I could play the criminal aspects of my life down some but then it wouldn't be me. That was the pertinent part, the thing at school and home I was constantly rejecting in process.

All my life I pretended with my folks, it was the thing in the street that was real. I was certainly just pretending with the nuns and priests, I served mass so that I could be in a position to steal altar wine, sang in the choir because they made me. When we went on tour of the rich white catholic schools we were always treated very well — fed — rewarded with gifts. Old Father Brown hated me but always put me down front when we were on display. I can't say exactly why, I was the ugliest, skinniest little misfit in the group.

Black men 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 black men to the prison gate. I was prepared for prison. It required only minor psychic adjustments.

It always starts with Mama, mine loved me. As testimony of her love, and her fear for the fate of the man-child all slave mothers hold, she attempted to press, hide, push, capture me in the womb. The conflicts and contradictions that will follow me to the tomb started right there in the womb. The feeling of being captured . . . this slave can never adjust to it, it's a thing that I just don't favor, then, now, never. I've been asked to explain myself, "briefly," before the world has done with me. It is difficult because I don't recognize uniqueness, not as it's

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<sup>2</sup> The editor who asked for the author's autobiography.

mind. They can be worked on in spare time, ten or twenty minutes a day. I consistently work on both: especially vocabulary, out of small paperback pocketbooks sold in the canteen and in the prison bookstore. But since I have much more study time than you, I go one hour or so on each daily. There are dozens of these little books published today. Every time I see a different one I try to make it part of my collection.

Are you well, my friend? I am getting thin as a rail, feel all right, however. Give my regards to Jon and Penny.

Take care of yourself.  
George

OCTOBER, 1967 3

Dear Georgia,

A thank-you note for money and letter. I can always use money, but discharge your obligations at home first. I can do without. If I were you, I would treat Pop a little better. He has been pretty good to us all, when one considers the shocks and strains he has had to live with. As a woman, you just do not (and I guess never will) understand what it means to be a man in this particular situation here in the U.S. Women just don't suffer the mental mortification of defeat and emasculation that we men do. Robert has lived with it for many years, trying to rationalize it, justify it, pretend that it does not affect him, but it has affected him very deeply. Imagine how he must feel when his woman won't even let him run the house. For you to just outright countermand his wishes on a matter concerning the education of his son must be a bitter dose for him to swallow indeed. After what he must accept from the outside world everyday of his life, to come to his home and also be made to carry water and cut wood and take orders is adding insult to injury.

Though you may not see much evidence of it, Robert still harbors the desire to be a man and assert himself. He is not completely dead inside. The years and years of regret and grief, discomfort, and defeat he has endured since the depression years of his childhood, all the forgetting and pretending and cheek-turning he has had to do, cannot be denied. It lives with him, still jammed back in the dark corners of his mind. I've seen it, Georgia, believe me, I've seen it in him and in many others of his generation. One day in the near future these



SEPTEMBER, 1967 14

Dear Mama,

I hope this year's birthday finds you well. I would like to be able to give you things, and take you places, but I've been unfortunate, and slow learning. But I have learned well. Perhaps next year I'll be able to give you a villa in Tanzania. I'm fine; my work progresses well. Seems that all I've predicted is now coming true, though, much sooner than I thought, I must admit.

Take care of yourself.

George

SEPTEMBER, 1967 24

Dear Robert,

Received your letter. All is well here. You have everyone back there with you except Delora now. That is good in a way. You have another chance to teach them how to live, arrange their values and attitudes so that they correspond with our situation, our aspirations, our newly reestablished identity. Penny expressed the thought to me that since you do not have much to say around there, you don't care much about them and their little problems. She expressed the feelings of all those there who do not understand you in saying this. Women and children enjoy and need a strong hand poised above them. They need direction and someone to show concern for them and you may have to make your presence felt there, a little anyway. Of course I'm not talking about being a tyrant, but just some rational, moderate, but persistent pressure to the left. I imagine I'll really be able to get down to fighting weight now. I told you what happened to the noon meal. I really don't miss it though.

Take care of yourself.

George

SEPTEMBER, 1967 30

Dear Robert,

Getting plenty of work done. How is your scholastic project going? Are you still attending the night classes? I thought that was a wonderful idea. Speed reading and vocabulary power are foremost in elevating the

applied to individualism, because it is too tightly tied into decadent capitalist culture. Rather I've always strained to see the indivisible thing cutting across the artificial barricades which have been erected to an older section of our brains, back to the mind of the primitive commune that exists in all blacks. But then how can I explain the runaway slave in terms that do not imply uniqueness? I was captured and brought to prison when I was 18 years old because I couldn't adjust. The record that the state has compiled on my activities reads like the record of ten men. It labels me brigand, thief, burglar, gambler, hobo, drug addict, gunman, escape artist, Communist revolutionary, and murderer.

I was born as the Great Depression was ending. It was ending because the second great war for colonial markets was beginning in the U.S. I pushed out of the womb against my mother's strength September 23, 1941 — I felt free.

My mother was a country girl from Harrisburg, Illinois. My father was born in East St. Louis, Illinois. They met in Chicago, and were living on Lake Street near Racine when I was born. It was in one of the oldest sections of Chicago, part ghetto residential, part factory. The el train passed a few yards from our front windows (the only windows really). There were factories across the street and garage shops on the bottom level of our flat. I felt right in the middle of things.

Our first move up the social scale was around the corner to 211 North Racine Street, away from the el train. I remember every detail of preschool days. I have a sister 15 months older than myself, Delora, a beautiful child and now a beautiful woman. We were sometimes allowed to venture out into the world, which at the time meant no further than fenced-off roof area adjoining our little three-room apartment built over a tavern. We were allowed out there only after the city made its irregular garbage pickups. The roof area was behind the tavern and over an area where people deposited their garbage. But, of course, I went out when I pleased.

Superman was several years old about then, I didn't really confuse myself with him but I did develop a deep suspicion that I might be Suppennigger (twenty-three years ahead of my time). I tied a tablecloth around my neck, climbed the roof's fence, and against my sister's tears would have leaped to my death, down among the garbage barrels, had she not grabbed me, tablecloth and all, and kicked my little ass.

Seeing the white boys up close in kindergarten was a traumatic event. I must have seen some before in magazines or books but never in the flesh. I approached one, felt his hair, scratched at his cheek, he hit me in the head with a baseball bat. They found me crumpled in a heap just outside the school-yard fence.

After that, my mother sent me to St. Malachy catholic mission school. It was sitting right in the heart of the ghetto area, Washington and Oakley streets. All of the nuns were white; of the priests (there were five in the parish) I think one was near black, or near white whichever you prefer. The school ran from kindergarten to 12th grade. I attended for nine years (ten counting kindergarten). This small group of missionaries with their silly costumes and barbaric rituals offered the full range of Western propaganda to all ages and all comers. Sex was never mentioned except with whispers or grimaces to convey something nasty. You could get away with anything (they were anxious to make saints) but getting caught with your hand up a dress. Holy ghosts, confessions, and racism.

St. Malachy's was really two schools. There was another school across the street that was more private than ours. "We" played and fought on the corner sidewalks bordering the school. "They" had a large grass-and-tree-studded garden with an eight-foot wrought-iron fence bordering it (to keep us out, since it never seemed to keep any of them in when they chose to leave). "They" were all white. "They" were driven to and from school in large private buses or their parents' cars. "We" on the black side walked, or when we could afford it used the public buses or streetcars. The white students' yard was equipped with picnic tables for spring lunches, swings, slides, and other more sophisticated gadgets intended to please older children. For years we had only the very crowded sidewalks and alley behind the school. Years later a small gym was built but it just stood there, locked. It was only allowed to be used for an occasional basketball game between our school and one of the others like it from across the city's various ghetto areas.

Delora and I took the Lake Street streetcar to school each morning, and also on Sundays when we were forced to attend a religious function. I must have fallen from that thing a hundred times while it was in motion. Each time Delora would hang on to me, trying to save me, but I was just too determined and we would roll down Lake Street, books and all, miraculously avoiding the passing cars. The other black children who went to public school laughed at us. The girls had to wear

much different since our development was forced along similar lines. Of course he has had a slightly better chance or atmosphere to build the things necessary for the changeover from man-child to man. That school Mama was sending him to did him great harm but not irreparable harm since in his case you were on the job after school sowing pride and knowledge of self and kind, and explaining the promise and problems in acquiring self-determination and control over all the circumstances surrounding our existence. Of course you have been explaining that this control must never be allowed to remain in the hands of strangers or incompetents, etc. So I hope he is not as awed and confused as I was then. Give him my regards. Tell him I said he is charged to take good care of his mother and sisters, that since he has grown so big and strong so soon, he should brace himself to his duties early. Tell him that I said that life is serious and we must be careful, one misstep can cause us "years of regret and grief, and sorrow without relief."

Take care of yourself.  
George

SEPTEMBER, 1967 12

Dear Robert,  
I am doing well, no new problems. Please say nothing else about the leg to anyone. You could cause me trouble. I'll live. I stay in reasonably good condition just for occasions like this. I can see about it if I get out next year. You should know about protesting with the mouth. It never avails us anything but grief. I no longer do so in any form, for it indicates naiveté. It means that subconsciously one may still be looking for justice or humanity from places that we have ample proof of it not existing. I worry about Penny and I would like to see her there with you. I have not seen or heard from her since you were here last. Perhaps she feels she doesn't need or want any of us. Have you heard from her? Perhaps it's my fault. I push people away by expecting too much of them. I probably used the wrong presentation with her and frightened her. Or she may not care to hear about clean living and high ideals. People tend to run like hell at the mention of sacrifice and responsibility. Give everyone my regards and take care of yourself.

George

The last principle is the only one worthy of intelligent parents: shame. If a child does not react in the proper way and carry out his duties toward parents and peers he should be taught to feel shame or lose face as the Eastern people call it. The child feels that he has let himself down when he fails to do the proper thing. Only constant and calm, rational reproof can cause this feeling in a kid. In other words, it takes brains and persistence on the part of the parent to shape the child's thinking. It should be clear that becoming frantic and beside oneself, beating and cussing is going to give the child a new experience and leave an impression that may not be wholesome. Felix Greene wrote that in all the time he spent in a certain country in the East he never saw a child throw a tantrum. He asked one of the social workers there about it, describing the features of a childish tantrum. The Eastern social worker's shocked expression and complete ignorance of any such things happening to the children caused Greene to investigate further and deduce that they don't go through emotional breakdowns "because they have no precedents from their parents." Take care.

George

AUGUST, 1967 26

Dear Robert,

The paper started one week ago, Saturday. Everything is all right. I'll do as you say about the patience. Perhaps I expect too much from people. Hospital and X rays any day now. I expect help from certain people only, but I'll take your advice and look no more. Of course this doesn't mean that I am going to stop helping others as much as I can. I'll continue to give as good an example of how we should treat each other as I can, but as you indicate I shouldn't expect this to influence anyone else to treat me similarly.

Take care of yourself.

George

SEPTEMBER, 1967 1

Dear Robert,

Jon is about the same age as I was when we first moved out here. I remember well my attitudes and confusion at that time. He can't be too

a uniform, the boys wore white shirts. I imagined that the nuns and priests were laughing too every time they told one of those fantastic lies. I know now that the most damaging thing a people in a colonial situation can do is to allow their children to attend any educational facility organized by the dominant enemy culture.

Before the winter of my first-grade year, my father, Lester, prepared a fifty-gallon steel drum to store oil for our little stove. As I watched, he cleaned the inside with gasoline. When he retreated from his work temporarily for a cigarette he explained to me about the danger of the gas fumes. Later when he had completed work on the barrel, I sneaked back out to the roof with my sister Delora trailing me like a St. Bernard. I had matches and the idea of an explosion was irresistible. As soon as my sister realized what I was going to do, she turned her big sad eyes on me and started crying. I lit a match as I moved closer and closer to the barrel. The I lit the whole book of matches. By now Delora was convinced that death was imminent for us both. She made a last brave effort to stop me but I was too determined. I threw the matches across the last few feet. Delora shielded my eyes with her hand as the explosion went off. She still carries her burns from that day's experiences. I was injured around the lower face but carry no sign of it. Our clothes were burned and ripped away. I would probably be blind if not for this sister.

My parents had two more children while we were hanging on there at North Racine, Frances and Penelope. Six of us in the little walk-up. The only thing that I can think of that was even slightly pleasant about the place was the light. We had plenty of windows and nothing higher about us to block off the sun. In '49 we moved to a place in the rear on Warren near Western that was the end of the sun. We had no windows that opened directly on the street, even the one that faced the alley was blocked by a garage. It was a larger place but the neighborhood around the place was so vicious that my mother never, never allowed me to go out of the house or the small yard except to get something from one of the supermarkets or stores on Madison and return immediately. When I wanted to leave I would either go by a window, or throw my coat out the window and volunteer to take out the garbage. There was only one door. It was in the kitchen and always well guarded.

I spent most of the summers of those school years in southern Illinois with my grandmother and aunt, Irene and Juanita. My mother, Georgia, called it removing me from harm's way. This was where my mother grew up and she trusted her sister Juanita, whose care I came under,

completely. I was the only man-child and I was the only one to get special protection from my mother. The trips to the country were good for me in spite of the motive. I learned how to shoot rifles, shotguns, pistols. I learned about fishing. I learned to identify some of the food plants that grow wild in most areas of the U.S. I could leave the house, the yard, the town, without having to sneak out of a window.

Almost everyone in the black sector of Harrisburg is a relative of mine. A loyal, righteous people; I could raise a small army from their numbers. I had use of any type of rifle or pistol on those trips downstate and everyone owned a weapon. My disposition toward guns and explosions is responsible for my first theft. Poverty made ammunition scarce and so . . . I confess with some guilt that I liked to shoot small animals, birds rabbits, squirrels, anything that offered itself as a target. I was a little skinny guy; scourge of the woods, predatory man. After the summer I went back up north for school and snowball (sometimes ice-block) fights with the white kids across the street.

I don't remember exactly when I met Joe Adams, it was during the early years, but I do recall the circumstances. Three or four of the brothers were in the process of taking my lunch when Joe joined them. The bag was torn, and the contents spilled onto the sidewalk. Joe scrambled for the food and got all of it. But after the others left laughing, he returned and stuffed it all into my pockets. We were great friends from then on in that childish way. He was older by a couple of years (two or three years means a lot at that tender age), and could beat me doing everything. I watched him and listened with John and Kenny Fox, Junior, Sonny, and others sometimes. We almost put the block's businessmen into bankruptcy. My mother and father will never admit it now, I'm sure, but I was hungry and so were we all. Our activities went from stolen food to other things I wanted, gloves for my hands (which were always cold), which I was always wearing out, marbles for the slingshots, games and gadgets for outdoorsmen from the dime store. Downtown, we plundered at will. The city was helpless to defend against us. But I couldn't keep up with Joe. Jonathan, my older brother, was born about this time.

My grandfather, George "Papa" Davis, stands out of those early years more than any other figure in my total environment. He was separated from his wife by the system. Work for men was impossible to find in Harrisburg. He was living and working in Chicago — sending his wage back to the people downstate. He was an extremely aggressive man,

this monster, one unaccustomed to power and its use, a foolish man grown heady with power and made drunk, dizzy drunk from the hot air that inflates his ego. I am his victim, born innocent, a total product of my surroundings. Everything that I am, I developed into because of circumstantial and situational pressures. I was born knowing nothing; necessity and environment formed me, and everyone like me. Please accord me at least the social morality that springs from its contorted brain center. I'm through with weakness and cowardice. I've trained it out. Let come what comes. I can never delude myself into thinking that I love my enemies. I can hardly do any worse than I am doing now; if worst comes to worst that's all right, I'll just continue the fight in hell.

George

AUGUST, 1967 10

Dear Robert,

Things are looking up, I have a promise on my injured leg, should be seeing about it anytime now. I'm in pretty good shape and it won't kill me. Good move you made on your way out. I could never say anything like that for myself. No one would believe me. Doing good, minding my business, won't let you down. Delora is quite handsome, you know that was the first time I'd seen her in seven years. There are three ways to enforce and build discipline in a child: through terror, through guilt, and through shame. The first principle is the worst and involves keeping the child in constant fear of beating or harsh reprimand. This is not conducive to all-round adjustment. Either the child becomes a confirmed coward or at best unstable and erratic. A child with feelings of insecurity (lack of confidence) may later on try to prove himself by deliberately doing things against what he has been taught is right. Think on that a moment! Then the guilt concept: it finds expression in convincing the child that he will suffer god's wrath (religion) or be looked upon as a fool, knucklehead, buffoon, or evil and maligned person by the rest of mankind. This is not good in that it causes the child to be too dependent. He cannot develop or become creative for fear of disapproval from on high. Then, what man can live up to the expectations of god. Then there are those among us who cannot live up to the expectations of other men, society. What happens to the child who cannot live up to god's or man's expectations, the child trained or disciplined through guilt feelings. His confidence is forever destroyed and he becomes the ubiquitous temporizer, the listless apathetic.



JULY, 1967 28

Dear Georgia,

For me, the word “soul” has yet to be properly defined. I have seen or felt no evidence of its existence. I have heard the word and listened to the theory connected with it, but it is abstract and academic at best. The theory of an existing and benevolent god simply doesn’t make sense to anyone who is rational. A benevolent and omnipotent god would never allow such imbalances as I see to exist for one second. If by chance I am wrong, however, I must then assume that being born black called for some automatic punishment for sins I know nothing about, and being innocent it behooves me to defy god. I seriously fail to understand when someone speaks of my soul, but I do know what my body needs. I know what my mind incessantly craves. Gratification of these is what I must pursue. As a woman I can understand your being naturally disposed to servitude. I can understand your feelings but what I can’t understand is why you would have me feel the same, considering that I am a man. Why have you always attempted to implant womanly ideas into my character. Of course it is your option to do as you please, but please don’t feel that I love you less simply because I fail to respond, or feel that I love you any less because I do not have time to explain myself.

Love has never turned aside the boot, blade, or bullet. Neither has it ever satisfied my hunger of body or mind. The author of my hunger, the architect of the circumstantial pressures which are the sole cause of my ills will find no peace, in this existence or the next, or the one following that; never, never. I’ll dog his trail to infinity. I hope I never will feel I’ve love for the thing that causes insufferable pain. What I do feel is the urge to resist, resist, and never stop resisting or even think of stopping my resistance until victory falls to me. Extreme, perhaps, but involved is my self-determination, and control of the environment upon which my existence depends, and the existence of my father, mother, Delora’s and Penny’s sons, and all that I feel tied to. We are in an extreme situation. I didn’t create this impasse. I had nothing to do with the arrival of matters at this destructive end, as you infer. Did I colonize, kidnap, make war on myself, destroy my own institutions, enslave myself, use myself, and neglect myself, steal my identity and then, being reduced to nothing, invent a competitive economy knowing that I cannot compete? Sounds very foolish, but this is what you propose when you place the blame on me or on “us.” It was a fool who created

and since aggression on the part of the slave means crime, he was in jail now and then. I loved him. He tried to direct my great energy into the proper form of protest. He invented long simple allegories that always pictured the white politicians as animals (jackasses, toads, goats, vermin in general). He scorned the police with special enmity. He and my mother went to great pains to impress on me that it was the worst form of niggerism to hook and jab, cut and stab at other blacks.

Papa took me to his little place on Lake and fed me, walked me through the wildest of the nation’s jungles, pointing up the foibles of black response to crisis existence. I loved him. He died alone in southern Illinois the fifth year that I was in San Quentin, on a pension that after rent allowed for a diet of little more than sardines and crackers.

After Racine Street we moved into the Troop Street projects, which in 1958 were the scenes of the city’s worst riots. (The cats in those projects fell out against the pig with heavy machine guns, 30s and 50s that were equipped with tracer ammunition.)

My troubles began when we were in the projects. I was caught once or twice for mugging but the pig never went much further than to pop me behind the ear with the “oak stick” several times and send for my mortified father to carry me home.

My family knew very little of my real life. In effect, I lived two lives, the one with my mama and sisters, and the thing on the street. Now and then I’d get caught at something, or with something that I wasn’t supposed to have and my mama would fall all over me. I left home a thousand times, never to return. We hoboed up and down the state. I did what I wanted (all my life I’ve done just that). When it came time to explain, I lied.

I had a girl from Arkansas, finest at the mission, but the nuns had convinced her that love — touching fingertips, mouths, bellies, legs — was nasty. Most of my time and money went to the other very loose and lovely girls I met on the stairwells of the projects’ 15-story buildings. That was our hangout, and most of the time that’s where we acted out the ritual. Jonathan, my new comrade, just a baby then, was the only real reason that I would come home at all; a brother to help me plunder the white world, a father to be proud of the deed — I was a fanciful little cat. But my brother was too young of course. He’s only seventeen now while I’m twenty-nine this year. Any my father, he

was always mortified. I stopped attending school regularly, and started getting “picked up” by the pigs more often. The pig station, a lecture, and oak-stick therapeutics. These pickups were mainly for “suspicion of” or because I was in the wrong part of town. Except for once or twice I was never actually caught breaking any laws. There just wasn’t any possibility of a policeman beating me in a footrace. A target that’s really moving with evasive tactics is almost impossible to hit with a short-barreled revolver. Through a gangway with a gate that only a few can operate with speed (it’s dark even in the day) up a stairway through a door. Across roofs with seven- to ten-foot jumps in between (the pig is working mainly for money, bear in mind, I am running for my life). There wasn’t a pig in the city who could “follow the leader” of even the most timid ghetto gang.

My father sensed a need to remove me from the Chicago environment so in 1956 he transferred his post-office job to the Los Angeles area. He bought an old ‘49 Hudson, threw me into it, and the two of us came West with plans to send for the rest of the family later that year. I knew nothing of cars. It was the first car our family had ever owned. I watched my father with great interest as he pushed the Hudson across the two thousand miles from Chicago to Los Angeles in two days. I was certain that I could handle the standard gearshift and pedals. I asked him to let me try upon our arrival in Los Angeles that first day. He dismissed me with an “Ah — crazy nigger lay dead” look. We were to stay with his cousin Johnny Jones in Watts until the rest of the family could be sent for. He went off with Johnny to visit other relatives, I stayed behind with the keys and the car. I made one corner, down one street, waited for a traffic light, firmed my jaw, dry-swallowed — took off around the next corner, and ended the turn inside the plate-glass window and front door of the neighborhood barbershop. Those cats in the shop (Watts) had become so immune to excitement that no one hardly looked up. I tried to apologize. The brother that owned the shop allowed my father to do the repair work himself. No pigs were called to settle this affair between brothers. One showed up by chance, however. I had to answer a court summons later that year. But the brother sensed that my father was poor, like himself, with a terribly mindless, displaced, irresponsible child on his hands, probably like his own, and didn’t insist upon having the gun-slinging pig from the outside enemy culture arbitrate the problems we must handle ourselves.

JULY, 1967 23

Dear Robert,

I feel relieved to know that you are taking Jon out of catholic school. Man, falling under the conservative influence of those admen and fakes was the worst thing that ever happened to me. How could you have ever allowed it. It was Mama’s idea but you should never have let her sell it to you.

I remember Chicago all right, in fact I remember too much. I was very much confused and dissatisfied during those years. They had much to do with the development of my character. I’ve had to unlearn and reexamine all that I experienced in those years. But what you were really referring to was how it stayed hot all night, with people sleeping on the beaches and such.

I remember the garage roof where I was virtually held prisoner sometimes, there at North Racine Street. It is criminal to do that to a child. And no parks near enough to go to, no yard front or back to play with the neighbors’ kids, no neighbors really except the ones on Lake Street. I remember glimpses of our place over there on Lake also. This is a dog’s life, Pop, you had nothing then. You have worked hard, hard, and obeyed the laws of our masters but you still have nothing. Is it idle dreaming for me to want an end to something like this?

I wrote Mama three letters three months ago. She didn’t answer or acknowledge any. I owe her loyalty just for being my mother, but she is adult and I never baby adults. She resents me because I won’t accept her views on method and means of getting by in this rat race. She once told me that I had a complex that made me view the world as I do. In so many words she was telling me that I shouldn’t be complexed about being of the lowest social class or in our case caste. She was saying that I should be indifferent about being used and abused like a goat or milk cow or something. I understand her and all black women over here. Women like to be dominated, love being strong-armed, need an overseer to supplement their weakness. So how could she really understand my feelings on self-determination. For this reason we should never allow women to express any opinions on the subject, but just to sit, listen to us, and attempt to understand. It is for them to obey and aid us, not to attempt to think.

George



of these last couple of years, I have completely retrained myself and my thinking to the point now that I think and dream of one thing only, 24 hours of each day. I have no habits, no ego, no name, no face. I feel no love, no tenderness, for anyone who does not think as I do. There can be no ties of blood or kinship strong enough to move me from my course. I'll never, never trade my self-determination for a car, cheap mass-produced clothes, clapboard house, or a couple of nights a week at the go-go. Control over the circumstances that surround my existence is of the first importance to me. Without this control, or with control in someone else's hands, I am forever insecure, subject at all times to the whim and caprice of the man in control, and you and I know how whimsical some men can be. Well, Pop, I'll be going outside to court the seventh of August to testify for a friend. I'll get a glimpse of the world at large, if you can call San Rafael the world at large.

I hope you are doing well. I would have written before now but I was in isolation up until the eleventh of this month, as you know.

Do you have time to read? I'll suggest some books if so, next letter. Take care.

George

JULY, 1967 19

Dear Robert,

I wrote you a letter about two weeks ago. It was returned to me today. It never got out of the institution. Received your letter of the 15th today, no change here. I have that address I asked you for. I got it through other channels. I was spelling and pronouncing the name wrong. Tell A.A. to get busy and make my woman start writing. A visit every now and then would be nice also. Tell him to send me her new address that I may send her a correspondence form. You don't know her, but he will.

Penny has not been up to see me since you came, no letter either, hope she is all right. Locked up 24 hours a day now. It's all right, though — gives me plenty of time at my work. My cell faces north, and there is a window in front of it. Plenty of fresh air comes into my cell.

George

My father fixed the brother's shop with his own hands, after buying the materials. No charges were brought against me for the damages. My father straightened out the motor bed, plugged the holes in the radiator, hammered out some of the dents and folds from the fender, bought a new light, and taped it into place on the fender. He drove that car to and from work, to the supermarkets with my mother, to church with my sisters, for four years! It was all he could afford and he wasn't the least bit ashamed of the fact. And he never said a word to me about it. I guess he was convinced by then that words wouldn't help me. I've been a fool — often.

Serious things started to happen after our settling in L.A. but this guy never abandoned me. He felt shame in having to bail me out of encounters with the law but he would always be there. I did several months in Paso Robles for allegedly breaking into a large department store (Gold's on Central) and attempting a hijack. I was 15, and full grown (I haven't grown an inch since then). A cop shot me six times point-blank on that job, as I was standing with my hands in the air. After the second shot, when I was certain that he was trying to murder me, I charged him. His gun was empty and he had only hit me twice by the time I had closed with him — "Oh, get this wild nigger off me." My mother fell away from the phone in a dead faint when they informed her that I had been shot by the police in a hijack attempt. I had two comrades with me on that job. They both got away because of the exchange between the pigs and me.

Since all black are thought of as rats, the third degree started before I was taken to the hospital. Medical treatment was offered as a reward for cooperation. At first they didn't know I had been hit, but as soon as they saw the blood running from my sleeve, the questions began. A bullet had passed through my forearm, another had sliced my leg, I sat in the back of the pig car and bled for two hours before they were convinced that lockjaw must have set in already. They took me to that little clinic at the Maxwell Street Station. A black nurse or doctor attended. She was young, full of sympathy and advice. She suggested, since I had strong-looking legs, that instead of warring with the enemy culture I should get interested in football or sports. I told her that if she could manage to turn the pig in the hall for a second I could escape and perhaps make a new start somewhere with a football. A month before this thing happened a guy had sold me a motorcycle and provided a pink slip that proved to be forged or changed around in some way. The

bike was hot and I was caught with it. Taken together these two things were enough to send me to what California calls Youth Authority Corrections. I went to Paso Robles.

The very first time, it was like dying. Just to exist at all in the cage calls for some heavy psychic readjustments. Being captured was the first of my fears. It may have been inborn. It may have been an acquired characteristic built up over the centuries of black bondage. It is the thing I've been running from all my life. When it caught up to me in 1957 I was fifteen years old and not very well-equipped to deal with sudden changes. The Youth Authority joints are places that demand complete capitulation; one must cease to resist altogether or else . . .

The employees are the same general types found lounging at all prison facilities. They need a job — any job; the state needs goons. Chino was almost new at the time. The regular housing units were arranged so that at all times one could see the lockup unit. I think they called it “X”. We existed from day to day to avoid it. How much we ate was strictly controlled, so was the amount of rest. After lights went out, no one could move from his bed without a flash of the pigs' hand-light. During the day the bed couldn't be touched. There were so many compulsories that very few of us could manage to stay out of trouble even with our best efforts. Everything was programmed right down to the precise spoonful. We were made to march in military fashion everywhere we went — to the gym, to the mess hall, to compulsory prayer meetings. And then we just marched. I pretended that I couldn't hear well or understand anything but the simplest directions so I was never given anything but the simplest work. I was lucky; always when my mind failed me I've had great luck to carry me through.

All my life I've done exactly what I wanted to do just when I wanted, no more, perhaps less sometimes, but never any more, which explains why I had to be jailed. “Man was born free. But everywhere he is in chains.” I never adjusted. I haven't adjusted even yet, with half my life already spent in prison. I can't truthfully say prison is any less painful now than during that first experience. In my early prison years I read all of Rafael Sabatini, particularly *The Lion's Skin*. “There once was a man who sold the lion's skin, while the beast still lived, and was killed while hunting him” This story fascinated me. It made me smile even under the lash. The hunter bested, the hunted stalking the hunter. The most predatory animal on earth turning on its oppressor and killing it. At the time, this ideal existed in me just above the conscious level. It helped me to

reacted as you did concerning that incident with the Hudson car, fixing it with your hands and driving it for five years in that condition. False pride would have forced anyone else into radical and uneconomic acts. I felt real bad about that, but I didn't understand life then as I do now. I'm deeply sorry for the weak, silly transgressions of my past, and I'm sorry that I won't be able to conduct my relations with the world as you would have me conduct them. I see the big picture where you may never have. I think I see the larger historical concept in its full detail. The obligation you felt toward us, I feel toward history. I must follow my call. It is of great importance to me that you understand this and give me your blessings. I don't care about anyone else. I don't feel I must explain myself or be understood by anyone else on earth.

George

JULY, 1967 15

My Friend,

I got your letter of June 5. I have it here before me. I told Les to cooperate with your efforts for me. I sure do need some of the benefits of togetherness now. As I explained I am in adjustment center here for an undefined amount of time.

Les speaks of me coming home with optimism, but I would benefit largely from a transfer. No one, among the officials that is, ever calls me out of my cell anymore to speak with me of my progress or my future. I'm just locked down and forgotten. Can a lawyer do anything about getting me a transfer? He would have to go through Sacramento. The justification for such action is obvious: I cannot adjust here, the officials have preconceived notions about my behavioral patterns and consequently look for the worst in me. The atmosphere here is aggressive, and I'm too far away from home. I cannot get regular visits and thus miss the beneficial influence of you and my parents.

My friend, my thinking has changed somewhat since I saw you last. That fellow who sent pictures of his Cadillac auto up here can explain some of the workings and progress of my thoughts. I hope he doesn't betray himself with that fast living I hear he is doing. Seems he has learned nothing from bitter experience!! I have trained away, pressed out forever the last of my Western habits. You remember I never got intoxicated or spent any money or time on trifles, but in the passing

as I do”? I don’t think, well I know that they are not serious, not sincere. I think they are employing another trick, a ploy to further confuse us and use us, I think what they mean is not “Do as I do” but “Do as I say”! In the 1770s the Europeans over here wanted to pull away from the Europeans of England. They called it a freedom fight. Now we men of color here in the U.S. want to pull away from these Europeans and they call it subversion, irresponsibility, etc. I don’t even speak to them anymore. I go my way and hope to be left alone.

George

JULY, 1967 13

Dear Robert,

I’m in regular adjustment center — segregation again. They have let me have my personal property, books, toilet articles, envelopes, that is minus 90 percent of it. It happens every time I transfer from one part of the prison to another or go to isolation, my stuff gets ripped off. I get robbed. I’m sure it wasn’t the officials. They are such nice, efficient people, so I won’t complain here with my pencil. I’ll need a few dollars to replace the necessary things (envelopes, dictionary, etc.), when you can afford it.

Your physical appearance hasn’t changed at all over the years, Pop. Clean living has preserved you marvelously. Do you ever drink any alcoholic beverages? I have never known you to, but that doesn’t mean that you don’t. How much sleep do you average a day? Perhaps I won’t live to be as old as you are, but if I do I won’t look as good. The loose skin on my face is already starting to wrinkle, and strange as it seems, I tend toward obesity if I eat certain foods. I must have picked that up from Mama. How is she? Tell her I’m going to be a good boy from now until I can get out of here.

I worry about Penny, does she know that she can come home if the circumstance make it necessary? She respects you for what you have done for us and accepts you as you are. So do I, Pop. I recall that you never had more than one suit or two pairs of shoes all throughout the early years. I never remember you having a moment’s personal gratification during those years. No one believes me when I tell them you never went to a nightclub or finger-poppers’ party during the twenty years that I remember. I don’t think any other man in the U.S. would have

define myself, but it would take me several more years to isolate my real enemy. I read Jack London’s, “raw and naked, wild and free” military novels and dreamed of smashing my enemies entirely, overwhelming, vanquishing, crushing them completely, sinking my fangs into the hunter’s neck and never, never letting go.

Capture, imprisonment, is the closest to being dead that one is likely to experience in this life. There were no beatings (for me at least) in this youth joint and the food wasn’t too bad. I came through it. When told to do something I simply played the idiot, and spent my time reading. The absentminded bookworm, I was in full revolt by the time seven months were up. I went to school in Paso Robles and covered the work required for 10th-year students in the California school system, and entered Manual Arts for the 11th year upon my release. After I got out I stopped in Bakersfield, where I planned to stay no more than a week or two. I met a woman who felt almost as unimpressed with life as I did. We sinned, I stayed. I was 16 then, just starting to get my heft, but this wonderful sister, so round and wild, firm and supple, mature . . . in one month she reduced my health so that I had to take to the bed permanently. I was ill for eleven days with fevers and chest pains (something in the lungs). When I pulled out of it I was broke. I’d collected a few friends by that time. Two of them would try anything. Mat and Obe. We talked, borrowed a car, and went off.

A few days later we were all three in county jail (Kern County) on suspicion of committing a number of robberies. Since the opposition cleans up the books when they find the right type of victim, they accused us of a number of robberies we knew nothing about. Since they had already identified me for one, I copped out to another and cleared Mat and Obe on that count. They “allowed” Obe to plead guilty to one robbery instead of the three others they threatened him with. They cleared Mat altogether. Two months after our arrest Mat left the county jail free of charges.

I was in the “time tank” instead of the felony tank because they had only two felony tanks (that was the old county jail) and they wanted to keep the three of us separated. After Mat left, a brother came into the time tank to serve 2 days. The morning he was scheduled to leave I went back to his cell with a couple of sheets and asked him if he would aid me in an escape attempt. He dismissed me with one of those looks and a wave of the hand. I started tearing the sheet in stripes, he watched. When I was finished he asked me, “What are you doin’ with

that sheet?" I replied, "I'm tearing it into these strips." "Why you doin' that?" "I'm making a rope." "What-chew gonna do with ah rope?" "Oh — I'm going to tie you up with it."

When they called him to be released that morning, I went out in his place. I've learned one very significant thing for our struggle here in the U.S.: all blacks do look alike to certain types of white people. White people tend to grossly underestimate all blacks, out of habit. Blacks have been overestimating whites in a conditioned reflex. Later, when I was accused of robbing a gas station of seventy dollars, I accepted a deal — I agreed to confess and spare the county court costs in return for a light county jail sentence. I confessed but when time came for sentencing, they tossed me into the penitentiary with one to life. That was in 1960. I was 18 years old. I've been here ever since. I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels, and Mao when I entered prison and they redeemed me. For the first four years I studied nothing but economics and military ideas. I met black guerrillas, George "Big Jake" Lewis, and James Carr, W.L. Nolen, Bill Christmas, Torry Gibson and many, many others. We attempted to transform the black criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality. As a result, each of us has been subjected to years of the most vicious reactionary violence by the state. Our mortality rate is almost what you would expect to find in a history of Dachau. Three of us were murdered several months ago by a pig shooting from 30 feet above their heads with a military rifle.

I am being tried in court right now with two other brothers, John Clutchette and Fleeta Drumgo, for the alleged slaying of a prison guard. This charge carries an automatic death penalty for me. I can't get life. I already have it. When I returned to San Quentin Prison last week from a year in Soledad Prison where the crime I am charged with took place, a brother who had resisted the logic of proletarian-people's revolutionary socialism for the black man in America sent me these lines in a note:

"Without the cold and desolation of winter there could not be the warmth and splendor of spring! Calamity has hardened my mind, and turned it to steel!! Power to the People"

George

MAY, 1967 28

Dear Robert,

I've been a good boy lately, kind, polite, forgiving. Don't know if it will do any good though since people invariably mistake kindness for weakness. I really cannot imagine how anyone can stay detached and complacent for any period of time and still maintain social contacts on any level. It no longer surprises me, but I still find the general acceptance and widespread practice of the more deranged products of Western culture disturbing. Prying, nosy, schizophrenic, domineering, psychoneurotic people press you from all sides. They remain in a continual state of agitation, always on the brink of doing something maniacal! Capitalism, I believe, the capitalizing on the next man's labor, on the next man's weakness, has contributed greatly to the development of the anomalous "Western man"; capitalism, competitive enterprise, man competing against man for the necessary things, for status symbols, for power to repress his competitors and secure his personal well-being to exercise his ego, his fancy. I just cannot get used of the idea of some petty, stereotyped, bureaucratic official, patently suffering from some mental disorder, asking me questions, calling on me to explain myself. It is odd, and ironical, the trickery and turnabout that has gone down these last few generations.

Chew on this a few moments: a colonizer, a usurer, the original thief, a murderer for personal gain, a kidnapper-slaver, a maker of cannon, bombs, and poison gas, an egocentric parasite, the original fork tongue, the odd man is trying to convey to us that we must adjust ourselves to his warp, that we must learn to be more like him, that because we're not we're backward, underdeveloped, unsophisticated! This is strange and contradictory.

I am deeply sorry that I ever told a lie, stole anything robbed and cheated at anything — mainly because it is so much like conforming to Western ways. To all appearances they are upset with me for doing these things. That privilege is supposed to be reserved for them I guess. So what do they mean by saying that we must get in with them, be like them, adopt capitalism, clothe ourselves in Western ways? This is a strange and contradictory thing. If we the colored and black of the world adopt capitalism where would we have to seek our colonies, Europe, the U.S.?! Who would we capitalize on if we used their history as a pattern? Them I should say!! Who would we kidnap, murder, lynch, enslave, and then neglect!! So what do they mean by saying, "Do



to understand. Uncle George is too much like Uncle Tom and Uncle Ben (of rice-box fame) for comfort!

I trust you are well. I am holding off the ill effects of the concentration camp as best I can. It seems a losing battle, however. I've had to take to wearing glasses of considerable strength due to failure of my eyesight. Living in this constant half-light, I guess. When you told me a while back of Frances' serious eye problem, I resolved upon my release to have one of mine transplanted into her head. But this will no longer be any bargain for her.

I have been having trouble with my eyes for a year. When I finally was able to maneuver an eye test, I was surprised at the amount of money they took from my account (money that you have sent me that I have not used yet). I was even more surprised when I finally got the glasses two months later with their strength and how much they improved my vision.

Speaking of money and accounts, Pop, I'm flush for now, by flush I mean I have stocked up on envelopes and toothpaste, I've come to realize that I don't need much to eat to stay alive and I don't smoke. I can get fat on what the average man may starve on. So the money you have been sending me can be put to use at home there, your books, or perhaps something for Jon, he also needs supplementary reading material. I am sorry that you and Mama don't make each other happy. European-Anglo-American brainwashing is at the bottom of it. Those empty pseudo-middle-class ideas that we have adopted from the opposition make us unhappy in the same way the middle class itself is unhappy. Then too when poverty comes in at the door, loves leaves by the window. We all know who has caused our poverty. I have experienced the same thing with women and men. All the women I've had tried to use me, tried to secure through me a soft spot in this cutthroat system for themselves. All they ever wanted was clothes and money and to be taken out to flash these things. I no longer have time for such small ideas or small people. Blacks that I've met here who exhibit such characteristics I disdain and ignore. The same with any woman I may have when I get out. She must let me retrain her mind or no deal.

George

APRIL, 1970

Dear Fay,<sup>3</sup>

On the occasion of your and Senator Dymally's tour and investigation into the affairs here at Soledad, I detected in the questions posed by your team a desire to isolate some rationale that would explain why racism exists at the prison with "particular prominence." Of course the subject was really too large to be dealt with in one tour and in the short time they allowed you, but it was a brave scene. My small but mighty mouthpiece, and the black establishment senator and his team, invading the state's maximum security row in the worst of its concentration camps. I think you are the first woman to be allowed to inspect these facilities. Thanks from all. The question was too large, however. It's tied into the question of why all these California prisons vary in character and flavor in general. It's tied into the larger question of why racism exists in this whole society with "particular prominence," tied into history. Out of it comes another question. Why do California joints produce more Bunchy Carters and Eldridge Cleavers than those over the rest of the country?

I understand your attempt to isolate the set of localized circumstances that give to this particular prison's problems of race is based on a desire to aid us right now, in the present crisis. There are some changes that could be made right now that would alleviate some of the pressures inside this and other prisons. But to get at the causes, you know, one would be forced to deal with questions at the very center of Amerikan political and economic life, at the core of the Amerikan historical experience. This prison didn't come to exist where it does just by happenstance. Those who inhabit it and feed off its existence are historical products. The great majority of Soledad pigs are southern migrants who do not want to work in the fields and farms of the area, who couldn't sell cars or insurance, and who couldn't tolerate the discipline of the army. And of course prisons attract sadists. After one concedes that racism is stamped unalterably into the present nature of Amerikan sociopolitical and economic life in general (the definition of fascism is: a police state wherein the political ascendancy is tied into and protects the interests of the upper class — characterized by militarism, racism, and imperialism), and concedes further that criminals and crime arise from material, economic, sociopolitical causes, we can then burn all of the

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3 Mrs. Fay Stender, the author's lawyer.



criminology and penology libraries and direct our attention where it will do some good.

The logical place to begin any investigation into the problems of California prisons is with our “pigs are beautiful” Governor Reagan, radical reformer turned reactionary. For a real understanding of the failure of prison policies, it is senseless to continue to study the criminal. All of those who can afford to be honest know that the real victim, that poor, uneducated, disorganized man who finds himself a convicted criminal, is simply the end result of a long chain of corruption and mismanagement that starts with people like Reagan and his political appointees in Sacramento. After one investigates Reagan’s character (what makes a turncoat) the next logical step in the inquiry would be a look into the biggest political prize of the state — the directorship of the Department of Correction.

All other lines of inquiry would be like walking backward. You’ll never see where you’re going. You must begin with directors, assistant directors, adult authority boards, roving boards, supervisors, wardens, captains, and guards. You have to examine these people from director down to guard before you can logically examine their product. Add to this some concrete and steel, barbed wire, rifles, pistols, clubs, the tear gas that killed Brother Billingslea in San Quentin in February 1970, while he was locked in his cell and the pick handles of Folsom, San Quentin, and Soledad.

To determine how men will behave once they enter the prison it is of first importance to know that prison. Men are brutalized by their environment — not the reverse.

I gave you a good example of this when I saw you last. Where I am presently being held, they never allow us to leave our cell without first handcuffing us and belting or chaining the cuffs to our waists. This is preceded always by a very thorough skin search. A force of a dozen or more pigs can be expected to invade the row at any time searching and destroying personal effects. The attitude of the staff toward the convicts is both defensive and hostile. Until the convict gives in completely it will continue to be so. By giving in, I mean prostrating oneself at their feet. Only then does their attitude alter itself to one of paternalistic condescension. Most convicts don’t dig this kind of relationship (though there are some who do love it) with a group of individuals demonstrably inferior to the rest of the society in regard to

the exact opposite, if I actually sense or see confusion, war, inflation, recession, depression, death, and decay, is it not reasonable that I should become perplexed? If my instructor tells me that sex is evil, bad, base, and I happen to like sex, is it not reasonable to assume that I will develop mixed emotions concerning sex? If this instructor relates to me that sex is bad, thinking of it is lustful, and lust is a sign of my moral decay, what opinion will I have of myself? This is what they will do to Jon at that catholic school. But that is just part of it. He will also learn that J.C. was white, which is a lie. That the Egyptians were white, which is a lie. That the people of India are white under their black skin. That Chinese are yellow, when they range from brown to the blackest black. He will get a lot of this misinformation in public school too, but not nearly as much. With a little effort after school from you this can be corrected. Tell him that these men don’t always tell the truth. Make him read histories by Ronald Segal, Du Bois, etc. Make him read the pro-Eastern writers, so that he will have a good cross section of all there is to be heard. Show him how to masturbate, and explain to him that making love with a woman is the most natural thing on earth. Explain how he can do so without getting the girl pregnant. Tell him that “there is no hell, no heaven, and no immortality, and that all things are permissible,” as long as the next man’s feelings are considered.

None of those at home who contest you in your judgment know nearly as much about life as you. So you must be firm and decisive. None of the Western European cultures know anything about philosophy (love of knowledge). They know nothing of the proper way that men should carry on their relations with other men. Proof of this — who originated the passport laws, tariff laws, atom bomb, competitive enterprise, etc., etc. They only excel in one area, technology. So let Jon learn chemistry at school. You give him his economics, history, and philosophy at home!!

George

MAY, 1967 21

Dear Robert,

Penny was here again last week. She has taught the little guy how to say Uncle George. So “Uncle George” was ringing the length of the visiting hall for a couple of hours. However, I was less than pleased. I tried to get him to change it to “Comrade George,” but he didn’t seem

MAY, 1967 9

Dear Robert,

That's great about the classes. You passed the exams pretty easy, didn't you? It's wonderful to have a pop with brains. I was approved for a transfer, but it is not official yet. When it is I'll inform you of the details.

I've been getting a lot of work done lately. My mind is fast becoming clear and I am slowly harnessing my emotions, I can go days without speaking a word. With the pursuit of food and shelter relegated to the state, I have been able to channel all my thoughts to important things, significant things, So I attempt to bend this experience to our benefit rather than let them weaken and destroy me, as they would like. You are aware that these places, this one in particular, will either bring out the best in an individual or ruin him entirely. Wherever they send me, Robert, I will try as hard as my character will allow to avoid all involvement in those situations that lead to trouble. But I can promise nothing, the future holds no surprises for me. I expect anything, including trouble, especially trouble, considering the times. I have adopted, these last several months, a new attitude, however, that will limit the scope of my troubles.

Take care of yourself.

George

MAY, 1967 16

Dear Robert,

That is good reasoning concerning the school issue. It was a wise decision in every way you look at it. The other way (catholic school) you pay more for less education, plus they make emotional pansies of the boys with that sanctimonious dogma. Dear Pop, I'm not just talking for the sake of talking. I am deeply concerned for Jon and you all. Much thought goes into all I attempt to convey. Whenever a man builds an image of himself and of his surroundings that he cannot live up to and that does not conform to the de facto situation, the end result must be confusion and emotional breakdown. If my instructor tells me that the world and its affairs are run as well as they possibly can be, that I am governed by wise and judicious men, that I am free and should be happy, and if when I leave the instructor's presence and encounter

education, culture, and sensitivity. Our cells are so far from the regular dining area that our food is always cold before we get it. Some days there is only one meal that can be called cooked. We never get anything but cold-cut sandwiches for lunch. There is no variety to the menu. The same things week after week. One is confined to his cell 23½ hours a day. Overt racism exists unchecked. It is not a case of the pigs trying to stop the many racist attacks; they actively encourage them.

They are fighting upstairs right now. It's 11:10 A.M., June 11. No black is supposed to be on the tier upstairs with anyone but other blacks but — mistakes take place — and one or two blacks end up on the tier with 9 or 10 white convicts frustrated by the living conditions or openly working with the pigs. The whole ceiling is trembling. In hand-to-hand combat we always win; we lose sometimes if the pigs give them knives or zip guns. Lunch will be delayed today, the tear gas or whatever it is drifts down to sting my nose and eyes. Someone is hurt bad. I hear the meat wagon from the hospital being brought up. Pigs probably gave them some weapons. But I must be fair. Sometimes (not more often than necessary) they'll set up one of the Mexican or white convicts. He'll be one who has not been sufficiently racist in his attitudes. After the brothers (enraged by previous attacks) kick on this white convict whom the officials have set up, he'll fall right into line with the rest.

I was saying that the great majority of the people who live in this area of the state and seek their employment from this institution have overt racism as a traditional aspect of their characters. The only stops that regulate how far they will carry this thing come from the fear of losing employment here as a result of the outside pressures to control the violence. That is O Wing, Max (Maximum Security) Row Soledad — in part anyway.

Take an individual who has been in the general prison population for a time. Picture him as an average convict with the average twelve-year-old mentality, the nation's norm. He wants out, he wants a woman and a beer. Let's say this average convict is white and has just been caught attempting to escape. They may put him on Max Row. This is the worst thing that will ever happen to him. In the general population facility there are no chains and cuffs. TVs, radios, record players, civilian sweaters, keys to his own cell for daytime use, serve to keep his mind off his real problems. There is also a recreation yard with all sorts of balls and instruments to strike or thrust at. There is a gym. There are movies and a library well stocked with light fiction. And of course there is

work, where for 2 or 3 cents an hour convicts here at Soledad make paper products, furniture, and clothing. Some people actually like this work since it does provide some money for the small things and helps them to get through their day —without thinking about their real problems.

Take an innocent con out of this general population setting (because a pig “thought” he may have seen him attempting a lock). Bring him to any part of O Wing (the worst part of the adjustment center of which Max Row is a part). He will be cuffed, chained, belted, pressured by the police who think that every convict should be an informer. He will be pressured by the white cons to join their racist brand of politics (they all go under the nickname “Hitler’s Helpers”). If he is predisposed to help black he will be pushed away — by black. Three weeks is enough. The strongest hold out no more than a couple of weeks. There has been one white many only to go through this O Wing experience without losing his balance, without allowing himself to succumb to the madness of ribald, protrusive racism.

It destroys the logical processes of the mind, a man’s thoughts become completely disorganized. The noise, madness streaming from every throat, frustrated sounds from the bars, metallic sounds from the walls, the steel trays, the iron beds bolted to the wall, the hollow sounds from a cast-iron sink or toilet.

The smells, the human waste thrown at us, unwashed bodies, the rotten food. When a white con leaves here he’s ruined for life. No black leaves Max Row walking. Either he leaves on the meat wagon or he leaves crawling licking at the pig’s feet. Ironic, because one cannot get a parole to the outside prison directly from O Wing, Max Row. It’s positively not done. The parole board won’t even consider the Max Row case. So a man licks at the feet of the pig not for a release to the outside world but for the privilege of going upstairs to O Wing adjustment center. There the licking process must continue if a parole is the object. You can count on one hand the number of people who have been paroled to the streets from O Wing proper in all the years that the prison has existed. No one goes from O Wing, Max Row straight to the general prison population. To go from here to the outside world is unthinkable. A man must go from Max Row to the regular adjustment center facility upstairs. Then from there to the general prison population. Only then can he entertain thoughts of eventual release to the outside world.

among us blacks here in the U.S. As a defense, we look at life through our rose-colored glasses, rationalizing and pretending that things are not so bad after all, but then day after day — tragedy after tragedy strikes and confuses us, and our pretense fails to aid or dispel the nagging feeling that we cannot have security in an insecure society, especially when one belongs to an insecure caste within this larger society. I believe sincerely that you will be a very unhappy and perplexed woman for as long as you try to pretend that you have anything in common with this culture, or better, that this culture has anything in common with you, and as long as you pretend that there is no difference between men, and as long as you try to be more English than the English, while the English ignore your attempts and use your humility to their advantage. I suggest no action, no physical action that is, for I know you have never been a woman of action, but I do suggest that you purge your mind little by little of some of your Western notions. Direct your nervous animosity at the right people and their system, and stop, for your own sake please stop blaming yourself. If you were, right now, walking toward your kitchen with the whole family’s life savings in your hand, let’s say, and I sneaked up behind you and pulled the rug from under you and you fell and broke your arm, leg, nose, and the money flew into the burning fireplace, would you get up blaming me for pulling the rug, or would you just lay there and blame yourself and pretend that you didn’t really fall, or that the whole thing made no difference anyway? The analogy is perfect.

Do you know who I blame for what has happened to me the last 25 years, and before to my ancestors? I would be narrow-minded indeed if I blamed any of you, my folks. I don’t blame you for not teaching me how to get what I wanted without getting put in jail, nor do I blame myself. I was born knowing nothing and am a product of my total surroundings. I blame the capitalistic dog, the imperialistic, cave-dwelling brute that kidnapped us, pulled the rug from under us, made us a caste within his society with no vertical economic mobility. As soon as all this became clear to me and I developed the nerve to admit it to myself, that we were defeated in war and are now captives, slaves or actually that we inherited a neoslave existence, I immediately became relaxed, always expecting the worst, and started working on the remedy. Can you play chess? It relaxes, builds foresight, alertness, concentration, and judgment. Learn, so we can play next year.

George

to resist and defeat our enemies. What is wrong with you, Mama? No other mama in history has acted the way you act under stress situations. I won't be a good boy ever.

Love,  
George

MARCH, 1967 26

Dear Robert,  
Why, my friend, did Papa go out alone and hungry. Did Frances and Mama ever talk to you of his condition when they returned from Illinois last year. Was it ever put to him that he could stay with you people and eat when you ate and fast when you fasted, I wonder? "When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window."

Can you see the division among us and its effect? This is our greatest obstacle. I sometimes wonder how this will turn out. Before we can ever effectively face down the foe, we must have had long since learned to share, trust, communicate, and live harmoniously with each other. Our new state governor has decreed that the daily food allowance for each convict be cut exactly in half. We get almost no "grade one" protein now. Stuff like eggs, meat, and milk products is seldom seen now. So my experiments in self-discipline are now paying off. Everyone else is hungry now, while I feel nothing. And this is just the beginning: the reactionary, repressive forces presently at work will bring things to such a crisis soon that Baldwin's warning of "The fire next time" must soon be borne out with all its sinister accompaniments.

Take care of yourself, Pop. Comfort Mom as well as you can and tell her I'm all right, healthy, happy, content. Of course, this is a lie, but she likes to be lied to.

George

MARCH, 1967 27

Dear Mama,  
Please don't take what I expressed in my last letter too seriously. I was feeling extremely bad. Try to relax; the mental depression you are presently gripped by comes from a very common cause, particularly

One can understand the depression felt by an inmate on Max Row. He's fallen as far as he can into the social trap, relief is so distant that is very easy for him to lose his holds. In two weeks that little average man who may have ended up on Max Row for suspicion of attempted escape is so brutalized, so completely without holds, that he will never heal again. It's worse than Vietnam. He's dodging lead. He may be forced to fight a duel to the death with knives. If he doesn't sound and act more zealous than everyone else he will be challenged for not being loyal to his race and its politics, fascism. Some of these cons support the pigs' racism without shame, the others support it inadvertently by their own racism. The former are white, the latter black. But in here as on the street black racism is a forced reaction. A survival adaptation.

The picture that I have painted of Soledad's general population facility may have made it sound not too bad at all. That mistaken impression would result from the absence in my description of one more very important feature of the main line — terrorism. A frightening, petrifying diffusion of violence and intimidation is emitted from the offices of the warden and captain. How else could a small group of armed men be expected to hold and rule another much larger group except through fear?

We have a gym (inducement to throw away our energies with a ball instead of revolution). But if you walk into this gym with a cigarette burning, you're probably in trouble. There is a pig waiting to trap you. There's a sign "No Smoking." If you miss the sign, trouble. If you drop the cigarette to comply, trouble. The floor is regarded as something of a fire hazard (I'm not certain what the pretext is). There are no receptacles. The pig will pounce. You'll be told in no uncertain terms to scrape the cigarette from the floor with your hands. It builds from there. You have a gym but only certain things may be done and in specified ways. Since the rules change with the pigs' mood, it is really safer for a man to stay in his cell.

You have work with emoluments that range from nothing to three cents an hour! But once you accept the pay job in the prison's industrial sector you cannot get out without going through the bad conduct process. When workers are needed, it isn't a case of accepting a job in this area. You take the job or you're automatically refusing to work, even if you clearly stated that you would cooperate in other employment. The same atmosphere prevails on the recreation yard where any type of minor mistake could result not in merely a bad conduct report and



placement in adjustment center, but death. A fistfight, a temporary, trivial loss of temper will bring a fusillade of bullets down on the darker of the two men fighting.

You can't begin to measure the bad feeling caused by the existence of one TV set shared by 140 men. Think! One TV, 140 men. If there is more than one channel, what's going to occur? In Soledad's TV rooms there has been murder, mayhem, and destruction of many TV sets.

The blacks occupy one side of the room and the whites and Mexicans the other. (Isn't it significant in some way that our numbers in prison are sufficient to justify the claiming of half of all these facilities?)

We have a side, they have a side. What does your imagination envisage out of a hypothetical situation where Nina Simone sings, Angela Davis speaks, and Jim Brown "splits" on one channel, while Merle Haggard yodels and begs for an ass kicking on another. The fight will follow immediately after some brother, who is less democratic than he is starved for beauty (we did vote but they're 60 to our 40), turns the station to see Angela Davis. What lines do you think the fighting will be along? Won't it be Angela and me against Merle Haggard?

But this situation is tolerable at least up to a point. It was worse. When I entered the joint on this offense, they had half and we had half, but out half was in the back.

In a case like the one just mentioned, the white convicts will start passing the word among themselves that all whites should be in the TV room to vote in the "Cadillac cowboy." The two groups polarize out of a situation created by whom? It's just like the outside. Nothing at all complicated about it. When people walk on each other, when disharmony is the norm, when organisms start falling apart it is the fault of these whose responsibility it is to govern. They're doing something wrong. They shouldn't have been trusted with the responsibility. And long-range political activity isn't going to help that man who will die tomorrow or tonight. The apologists recognize that these places are controlled by absolute terror, but they justify the pig's excesses with the argument that we exist outside the practice of any civilized codes of conduct. Since we are convicts rather than men, a bullet through the heat, summary execution for fist-fighting or stepping across a line is not extreme or unsound at all. An official is allowed full range in violent means because a convict can be handled no other way.

small consolation. I loved him dearly and thought of him as one of our most practical and level-headed kin. You probably don't remember the long walks and talks Papa and I used to take, or the long visits when he lived on Lake Street and we lived on Warren. But I remember. He used to say things, probably just thinking aloud, sure that I wasn't listening or would not comprehend. But I did, and I think I knew him better than most. Do you remember how I used to answer "What" to every question put to me, and how Papa would deride me for this? He later in the course of our exchanges taught me to answer questions with "Why" instead of "What." Another of our games helped me greatly with my powers of observation. When we would walk, he told me to always look at the large signboards as deeply as possible and after we had passed one, he would make me recite all that was on it. I would never remember as much detail as he, but I did win a kind word or two on occasion. We played this same game at his house with pictures and objects spread out on the table or bed.

I wish he could have survived to see and enjoy the new world we plan to create from this chaos. If I could have gotten out of here last year he would never have gone out on sardines and crackers. I don't know how anyone else views the matter and don't care, but now for me his is one more voice added to the already thunderous chorus that cry from their unmarked and unhallowed graves for vindication.

Don't wait for me to change or modify my attitudes in the least. I cannot understand, as you put it, or as you would have me understand. I am a man, you are a woman. Being a woman, you may expect to be and enjoy being tyrannized. Perhaps you actually like walking at the heel of another, or otherwise placing yourself beneath another, but for me this is despicable. I refuse to even attempt to understand why I should debase myself or concede or compromise any part, the smallest part, of anything on earth to anyone who is not of my kind in thought and form.

I love you, Mama, but I must be frank. Why did Papa die alone and hungry? Why did you think me insane for wanting a new bicycle instead of the old one I stole piece by piece and put together? Why did you allow us to worship at a white altar? Why even now, following tragedy after tragedy, crisis after crisis, do you still send Jon to that school where he is taught to feel inferior, and why do you continue to send me Easter cards? This is the height of disrespect you show me. You never wanted me to be a man nor Jon either. You don't want us



You know I have grown very, very tired of talking, and listening to talk. King and his kind have betrayed our bosom interests with their demagogic delirium. The poor fool knows nothing of the antagonist's true nature and has not the perception to read and learn by history and past events. In a nonviolent movement there must be a latent threat of eruption, a dormant possibility of sudden and violent action if concessions are to be won, respect gained, and the established order altered. That nonviolent theory is practicable in civilized lands among civilized people, the Asians and Africans, but a look at European history shows that anything of great value that ever changed hands was taken by force of arms.

I cannot let my feelings become involved. I must not fall victim to a play of emotions, because it would limit my ability to act in my defense.

You know the world. The depressed peoples of the world are very shortly going to grow tired of being wooed and lulled into passivity and quiet endurance by chromium and neon lights. The soft music from the many well-placed public-address loudspeakers and car radios will no longer serve as balm to the thwarted hopes, defeated aims, and brutal suppression of needed change. They'll come out of their coma with a bloodlust and justified indignation for social injustice that will sweep the asphalt right from under the empire builders. This is the only reason I hang on. I want to be in the vanguard.

My cell partner puts it this way: "Every sickness ain't death, every good-bye ain't gone, and every big man ain't strong." I say: "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch of the ranged empire fall" and "The jungle is still the jungle be it composed of trees or skyscrapers, and the law of the jungle is bite or be bitten."

Take care.  
Son

MARCH, 1967 26

Dear Mama,  
Papa<sup>12</sup> has had the "true release, and at last the clasp of peace." For him to have received this at such a great age and without violence is no

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<sup>12</sup> George Davis, the author's grandfather.

Fay, have you ever considered what type of man is capable of handling absolute power. I mean how many would not abuse it? Is there any way of isolating or classifying generally who can be trusted with a gun and absolute discretion as to who he will kill? I've already mentioned that most of them are KKK types. The rest, all the rest, in general, are so stupid that they shouldn't be allowed to run their own bath. A responsible state government would have found a means of weeding out most of the savage types that are drawn to gunslinger jobs long ago. How did all these pigs get through?! Men who can barely read, write, or reason. How did they get through!!!? You may as well give a baboon a gun and set him loose on us!! It's the same in here as on the streets out there. Who has loosed this thing on an already suffering people? The Reagans, Nixons, the men who have, who own. Investigate them!! There are no qualifications asked, no experience necessary. Any fool who falls in here and can sign his name might shoot me tomorrow from a position 30 feet above my head with an automatic military rifle!! He could be dead drunk. It could really be an accident (a million to one it won't be, however), but he'll be protected still. He won't even miss a day's wages.

The textbooks on criminology like to advance the idea that prisoners are mentally defective. There is only the merest suggestion that the system itself is at fault. Penologists regard prisons as asylums. Most policy is formulated in a bureau that operates under the heading Department of Corrections. But what can we say about these asylums since none of the inmates are ever cured. Since in every instance they are sent out of the prison more damaged physically and mentally than when they entered. Because that is the reality. Do you continue to investigate the inmate? Where does administrative responsibility begin? Perhaps the administration of the prison cannot be held accountable for every individual act of their charges, but when things fly apart along racial lines, when the breakdown can be traced so clearly to circumstances even beyond the control of the guards and administration, investigation of anything outside the tenets of the fascist system itself is futile.

Nothing has improved, nothing has changed in the weeks since your team was here. We're on the same course, the blacks are fast losing the last of their restraints. Growing numbers of blacks are openly passed over when paroles are considered. They have become aware that their only hope lies in resistance. They have learned that resistance is actually possible. The holds are beginning to slip away. Very few men

imprisoned for economic crimes or even crimes of passion against the oppressor feel that they are really guilty. Most of today's black convicts have come to understand that they are the most abused victims of an unrighteous order. Up until now, the prospect of parole has kept us from confronting our captors with any real determination. But now with the living conditions of these places deteriorating, and with the sure knowledge that we are slated for destruction, we have been transformed into an implacable army of liberation. The shift to the revolutionary antiestablishment position that Huey Newton, Eldridge Cleaver, and Bobby Seale projected as a solution to the problems of Amerika's black colonies has taken firm hold of these brothers' minds. They are now showing great interest in the thoughts of Mao Tse-tung, Nkrumah, Lenin, Marx, and the achievements of men like Che Guevara, Giap, and Uncle Ho.

Some people are going to get killed out of this situation that is growing. That is not a warning (or wishful thinking). I see it as an "unavoidable consequence" of placing and leaving control of our lives in the hands of men like Reagan.

These prisons have always borne a certain resemblance to Dachau and Buchenwald, places for the bad niggers, Mexicans, and poor whites. But the last ten years have brought an increase in the percentage of blacks for crimes that can clearly be traced to political-economic causes. 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. Somewhere along the line they sensed this. Life on the installment plan, three years of prison, three months on parole; then back to start all over again, sometimes in the same cell. Parole officers have sent brothers back to the joint for selling newspapers (the Black Panther paper). Their official reason is "Failure to Maintain Gainful Employment," etc.

We're something like 40 to 42 percent of the prison population. Perhaps more, since I'm relying on material published by the media. The leadership of the black prison population now definitely identifies with Huey, Bobby, Angela, Eldridge, and antifascism. The savage

You know when they locked me up this time all my personal property came up missing. I'll have to replace everything — two personal chess sets, toilet articles, the black sweat shirts. I had four of these but saved only the one I had on. Even the plastic tumblers I used to drink with in the cell, everything is gone. I'm not sure about the typewriter, I can't get any information on it. I know that I don't have it here; whether it is safe somewhere else I don't know. Then, too, several of us blacks were locked up at the same time for just about the same thing. They go to the small adjustment center yard each day for two hours; I am forced to remain in my cell, no fresh air, no sun, twenty-four hours a day in here. It doesn't bother me, though. I've trained myself not to be disorganized by any measure they take against me. I exercise in here, and pursue my studies. That fills my day out nicely. Since I know that I am the original man and will soon inherit this earth, I am content to just prepare myself and wait, nothing can stop me now! But I do sometimes wonder just exactly how they got the way they are. I know beyond question the extent of the evil that lurks in their hearts; I see the insane passion, inherent in their characters, to dominate all that they come in contact with. What aggressive psychosis impels a man to want his dessert and mine too, to want to feast at every table, to want to cast his shadow over every land? I don't know what they are; some folks call them devils (doers of evil). I don't know if this is an adequate description. It goes much deeper. From their footprints I see that they are descendants of Pithecanthropus erectus like ourselves, but here the similarity ends. I refuse to compare myself with a man who for one truth will tell ninety-nine lies; with a vampire who cannot stand in the sun and do a day's work; and with someone who thrives upon the blood, sweat, and tears of any who fall within his power. But doomsday is dawning; on this most awesome day all imbalances and contradictions must be resolved, and it will be some of us who will be left to rebuild this world and people these lands with civil men.

George

MARCH, 1967

Dear Mother,

I guess Robert told you what happened to me here. My comrades have prevailed upon me to desist for a time, but I must decide for myself. In any event I won't lose my head. This is a terrible price to pay just to stay alive, or I should say just to exist; I have never really lived.

about this. If she doesn't get a client out, she returns his money. If Robert borrowed it and got me out I would of course return it. If I don't get a new sentence for the stuff I am locked up for now, that is what we must do. Just discuss it with Robert for now. I'll let you know in a few months if you should take definite steps in that direction. First I must ascertain whether or not they plan to fix me with the blame for these recent events.

I must now start doing all that is humanly possible to get out of prison. I can see great ill forecast for me if I don't find some way to extract myself from these people's control. "If we must die let it not be like hogs, hunted and pinned in an inglorious spot, while around us bark the mad and hungry dogs making their mock at our accursed lot; if we must die then let us nobly die, so that our precious blood may not be shed in vain. Then even the monsters we defy shall be constrained to honor us though dead. We kinsmen must meet the common foe, though far outnumbered, let us show us brave, and for their thousand blows, deal one death blow. What though before us lies the open grave, like men we'll face the murderous pack, pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back." I don't mind dying but I'd like to have the opportunity to fight back. Take care.

George

FEBRUARY, 1967 1

Dear Mother,

Things are normal here, the usual turmoil. I hope you are well. I hope you are doing enough light exercise each day to work up some perspiration and not eating the wrong things — pork, sugar, white bread, etc. I'm very careful in this respect and enjoy almost perfect health and great reserves of energy and strength in spite of my circumstances. But I do heavy exercises, maybe two hours worth a day, every day. In close confinement where I cannot get to any workout facilities, as now, I work out somewhat differently. I take neat piles of books and magazines tied together and exercise with them. For you I imagine some deep knee bends, touch your toes, and say some push-ups would be fine. You would do five sets of ten of each exercise. For example, start by doing ten push-ups, rest a minute or two, do ten more, rest a few minutes, etc., until you get to five sets, then go to the next exercise. Stay young and firm that way. Resistance to bodily disorders stays high, or builds up.

repression of blacks which can be estimated by reading the obituary columns of the nation's dailies, Fred Hampton, etc., has not failed to register on the black inmates. The holds are fast being broken. Men who read Lenin, Fanon, and Che don't riot, "they mass," "they rage," they dig graves.

When John Clutchette was first accused of this murder he was proud, conscious, aware of his own worth but uncommitted to any specific remedial action. Review the process that they are sending this beautiful brother through now. It comes at the end of a long train of similar incidents in his prison life. Add to this all of the things he has witnessed happening to others of our group here. Comrade Fleeta spent eleven months here in O Wing for possessing photography taken from a newsweekly. It is such things that explain why California prisons produce more than their share of Bunchy Carters and Eldridge Cleavers.

Fay, there are only two types of blacks ever released from these places, the Carters and the broken men.

The broken men are so damaged that they will never again be suitable members of any sort of social unit. Everything that was still good when they entered the joint, anything inside of them that may have escaped the ruinous effects of black colonial existence, anything that may have been redeemable when they first entered the joint — is gone when they leave.

This camp brings out the very best in brothers or destroys them entirely. But none are unaffected. None who leave here are normal. If I leave here alive, I'll leave nothing behind. They'll never count me among the broken men, but I can't say that I am normal either. I've been hungry too long. I've gotten angry too often. I've been lied to and insulted too many times. They've pushed me over the line from which there can be no retreat. I know that they will not be satisfied until they've pushed me out of this existence altogether. I've been the victim of so many racist attacks that I could never relax again. My reflexes will never be normal again. I'm like a dog that has gone through the K — 9 process.

This is not the first attempt the institution (camp) has made to murder me. It is the most determined attempt, but not the first. I look into myself at the close of every one of these pretrial days for any changes that may have taken place. I can still smile now, after ten years of

blocking knife thrusts and pick handles, of anticipating and faceless sadistic pigs, reacting for ten years, seven of them in Solitary. I can still smile sometimes, but by the time this thing is over I may not be a nice person. And I just lit my seventy-seventh cigarette of this 21-hour day. I'm going to lay down for two or three hours, perhaps I'll sleep . . .

Seize the Time.

JUNE, 1970 12

You know I had a visit yesterday from an old friend, Joan. They told her she couldn't come back again, an economy move. It costs the state too much to supervise my half-hour visits, so I'll be held incommunicado it seems. They turned my sister away today. Someone is going to have to come up with some guts. These fools must be stopped. Absolute power in the hands of idiots! It makes me think of Rome and England. Do you know where the barbarians and guerrillas are going to come from to destroy Imperial Amerika, from the black colonies and these concentration camps. The three of us are the only convicts in this joint who have to accept half-hour visits, with a special guard, handcuffed and chained. Now it seems we won't even get that. My sister, my brother can't visit me in what could be the last days of my life! Well, one good thing comes from this experience; no question remains in the minds of any member of my family as to where their energies would best be spent. My father will have a whole den of Panthers there to feed.

With each attempt the pigs made on my life in San Quentin, I would send an SOS out to my family. They would always respond by listening and writing letters to the joint pigs and Sacramento rats, but they didn't entirely accept that I was telling them the truth about the pig mentality. I would get dubious stares when I told them the lieutenants and the others who propositioned some of the most vicious white convicts in the state: "Kill Jackson, we'll do you some good." You understand, my father wanted to know why. And all I could tell him was that I related to Mao and couldn't kowtow. His mind couldn't deal with it. I would use every device, every historical and current example I could reach to explain to him that there were no-good pigs. But the task was too big, I was fighting his mind first, and his fear of admitting the existence of an identifiable enemy element that was oppressing us because that would either commit him to attack that enemy or force him to admit his cowardice. I was also fighting the establishment's public relations

were not doing too much better than I am now. You probably were not in prison. Well, I know you were not, but was your standing socially and economically speaking any better than mine? I guess it was, since you at least had limited freedom of movement. I have none here.

Although I would very much like to get out of here in order to develop a few ideas that have occurred to me — although I would not like to leave my bones here on the hill if it is a choice between that and surrendering the things that make me a man, the things that allow me to hold my head erect and unbowed, then the hill can have my bones. Many times in the history of our past — I speak of the African here in the U.S. — many times we were presented with this choice, too many times, too many of us choose to live the crippled existence of the near-man, the half-man. Well, I don't care how long I live. Over this I have no control, but I do care about what kind of life I live, and I can control this. I may not live but another five minutes, but it will be five minutes definitely on my terms.

George

JANUARY, 1967 31

Dear Frances,

Sorry to have neglected you for so long; things are very complicated for me here. I stay very busy, all of the time. I never have enough time to do the things that I must. I have made inroads into political economy, geography, forms of government, anthropology, archaeology and the basics of three languages, and when I can get hold of them some of the works on urban guerrilla warfare. I can use some assistance on the language aspect, though. Next time you pass a bookstore ask about a book dealing with Swahili, a self-teaching Swahili book. Get the proper title and the publisher's name and also a good self-teaching book on Arabic.

Last year Mama suggested that a lawyer could possibly help me get out of here, by sitting in and representing me at the board. I wish I had gone along with it. A couple of people have gotten out like that. There is a lady lawyer up here in San Francisco who specializes in that. She says a grand in her hand, several months before the board, is all that is required to get a date, if a person has his minimum in. My minimum is one year, so I've got seven times more than necessary. Talk to Robert

the last time. It's all a matter of course to me now. My outlook is clear and the future holds no more terrors for me. Just existing, life without joy, without real meaning does not appeal to me at all. I am very tired of waking up each morning wondering if I will be worked for nothing again today, or wondering if I will be insulted, humiliated, injured, or even done to death today. There are a few things that I must be decisive about, a few things that I know to be so, then there are things which my faith tells me could possibly be so. I have faith in the fact that we, the majority of peoples (5 to 1) on earth, can live with and complement each other's existence if we rid the earth of the barbarous influence spread by this inhuman, unnatural minority! My faith in life holds still to the principle that we men of color will soon make a harmonious world out of this chaotic travesty of fact. But first we must destroy the malefactor and root out all of his ideals, moralities, and institutions. It is to this end that I have long since dedicated myself, to extinguish forever the lights of a perverted science in any way that I can, by any and all means. To accomplish this we can no longer woo false gods or invoke half measures. Please understand that though I would miss you and all the others, though I love you dearly, I do not want to live in this world as it is. I do not think of myself as one small person among so many. I know what I can do, I know I can build and can cause things to happen, but I also can be hurt.

L. is my closest consort, a true friend, the most trustworthy man I have ever met. This is saying a lot, believe me, trust is a difficult thing to build between men brought up under Anglo-American or Western cultures. I learned much from him. He is also tired of seeing himself through the eyes of others on Amos 'n' Andy and I Spy. This individual comes to you with my highest recommendation. He will help me. You help him to help me. His intelligence and character are unquestionable.

George

JANUARY, 1967 23

Dear Robert,

I tried to write several times these last couple of weeks but my letters all came back with a note attached explaining what I can and cannot say.

Have you been well? How old are you now, pop? Where were you and what were you doing when you were my age, twenty-five? I'll bet you

and propaganda machine. The prisons all use the clean, straight faces, or the old, harmless-looking pigs to work in areas where they must come in contact with free people. And these pigs are never allowed to use their tusks. Regarding the racism, my father would remind me that there were black pigs too. But, of course, that means nothing at all. They simply work around the blacks when necessary. One guard or two guards working together is all that's needed to murder any con in the joint. But it isn't really necessary to work around the black pigs. They'll all cooperate or turn their heads.

The black cop could be a large factor in preventing our genocide. But no help can be expected from that quarter. The same stupidity and desperation that brought him to the gates prevents him from interceding. The job, the wage means too much to him. Often he feels compelled to prove himself, prove that he is loyal to the force, prove that he is not prejudiced in favor of us, prove that he is honest. His honesty prevents him from dealing in contraband as every white pig does. Look, I was in San Quentin for seven straight years. I knew everything that was brought in and by whom. The white pig actually considers it his privilege to supplement his income by bringing in and selling narcotics, weapons, and, of course, pornography. The black pig is afraid, too unsure of his position to be dishonest.

This same fear will cause him to show more zeal in the "club therapy" sessions than even the whites manage. If the victim is black, he's going to get so mad that the white pigs will have to stand back and let him swing. If they don't have murder planned for that session, they'll have to pull that nigger off of you. A pig — is a pig. It all falls into place. I see the whole thing much clearer now, how fascism has taken possession of this country. the interlocking dictatorship from country level on up to the Grand Dragon in Washington, D.C.

The solidarity between the prison here and the court in Salinas, between the judge and grand jury, the judge and the D.A. and other city officials. The institution has effectively cut me off from any relief. The unmeek have taken over this whole county, the state, the entire country. They work together, to the same end, effective control.

I knew of these links before this, long before this, but seeing it in operation is pretty frightening. What force binds them together? I'm referring to the intermediary, the physical thing, not the ideal. What is it that really ties that fat rat with a chain of department stores to a



uniformed pig? The fat rat wants the country and world policed, made safe for his business to expand. But how does he sell the ideal to the man who must do the policing? Money is the bond I think. They're in it for the money, these pigs and skinny rats. The fascist ideal doesn't really take hold until one gets into the upper levels of the power pyramid. Then any ideal that preserves becomes attractive.

People's government would decentralize this power that they hold over us — these men must be stopped.

Power to the People.  
George

JUNE, 1970 13

Dear Fay,  
No one here knows about the scheduled court hearing. They say we're not going. The prison doesn't like moving us, so somehow they have managed to arrange with the judge to leave us out of our own trial! Or pretrial. Can they try us in absentia (is that the term??)? Some bull (pig I mean) just said that the judge under no circumstances wants us in his court. In that case they shouldn't mind dropping the whole thing or sending us to another county for trial. Berkeley perhaps. But as you've said more than likely it'll be Orange County.

Why do we accept this sort of thing? We have numerical superiority — but they have guns and money. And then the righteous don't like to cut throats, so we languish in misery.

When you finally get me out of this mess, you'll have to send me away somewhere for a while, somewhere like Cuba or China or Tanzania, so that I can reorient myself. My understanding had been strained to the utmost.

JUNE, 1970 14

I don't think we can afford to be nice much longer, the very last of our protection is eroding from under us. There will be no means of detecting when that last right is gone. You'll only know when they start shooting you. The process must be checked somewhere between now and then, or we'll be fighting from a position of weakness with our

free aid. If Penny felt that she had no choice in the matter, no help, she would accept ill treatment forever. But then an offer of help must seem freely and honestly given to be of value. Are you well, my friend? The climate here is terrible, and I am not talking about the weather, each day is a trial. I stay close to my cell these days, reading, working on my book. Take care of yourself.

George

JANUARY, 1967 3

Dear Mama,  
I have at least another fourteen or eighteen months to do. Of course I could do the rest of my life here, not taking into account a possible change in the system of government and economics, a change of hands, that is. They gave me no consideration at the board, the same people that gave me their promise last year. I was not surprised, I was completely prepared for this.

Take care of yourself.  
George

JANUARY, 1967 12

Dear Mama,  
Your letter was well received; it left me feeling better than I have felt for years. I have never felt as close to any human as I do to you now. Your thoughts mirror mine exactly. Why have you left me alone to my struggle so long? I know the answer to this must be that we hesitate to reveal or acknowledge the existence of ugliness to the ones we love, even though the knowledge of such may better equip them to resist the effects of evil.

I am going into my seventh year here. I have learned as much as I possibly could in this time; I have studied myself closely, I have studied people, human and inhuman, wanting to know and understand. I am given to understand that it is the strong who rule the weak but, in turn, the wise rule over the strong. So you see that I recognize the value of what you have stated concerning faith and wisdom. What is happening to me here, what has happened, what will happen, can never surprise or upset me again. My nerves have been fractured, my sensibilities outraged, for

school and that you plan to pay my way completely through it upon my release. We must decide now what will be said for their benefit upon this matter now. Let me know in your next letter which will be easier for you to do. Get me a job offer or state that our plans include school with your full backing. Send it to the Department of Corrections in Sacramento.

Take care of yourself,  
George

DECEMBER, 1966 2

Dear Robert,  
The typewriter is being repaired again. Never buy a plastic typewriter. Though good for some things, plastic is too flexible for that type of machinery. It keeps the parts out of trim. I received your letter and nothing that develops from this mess will surprise me. I have taken all possibilities into account, in advance. I have nothing going for me and any good or favorable turn of event will be only luck, good fortune.

You don't really think that I mind not being liked by them, do you? I sincerely feel that it is a tribute to my character that they do not. I said what I did only to help you understand my position, and in turn understand any future action I may undertake. But I don't want you to trouble your mind, or lose any sleep about the seriousness of my position either. When things become too hard for everyone else, that's when I start enjoying myself. Just understand in the light of future events that I am guided by necessity and that my needs are different than yours. The board meets during the last few days of the month.

Take care of yourself, my friend,  
George

DECEMBER, 1966 3

Dear Robert,  
I am worried about Penny. Does she still write you? Have you let her know that should she need a refuge or a strong arm she can find them in her father. Women need to know these things. It is tormenting to them to know that they are alone, can look to no quarter for string-

backs against the wall. (I think we still have the advantage now.) We of the black colony know about that kind of action, fighting off of the wall. It's not the best way to get down.

It's getting tighter here, they're taking our visits. It looks as if they're stopping our court appearances. They also made a mistake concerning our "money draw" this month. This means we'll be without the little things even.

You may never read this letter either, our mail is being held back, returned, thrown away somewhere. Nice people aren't they? They richly deserve anything we can do to them. This man who just passed my cell counting, he'll never listen to reason. His mind isn't constructed that way. While we reason with him in ideals and ideas, he isn't listening. He is thinking about which rule he'll quote to dismiss us. When he walks away, you'll see the little code book protruding from his ass pocket. That's where he carries his mind, in his ass pocket. When we attack the problem with intellectualism we give away the advantage we have in numbers.

I'm with Bobby! We are going to have to kick him where he keeps his brain, in the region of the ass.

Power.  
George

## Letters: 1964 — 1968

JUNE, 1964<sup>4</sup>

Dear Mother,

Are you well? I think of you often and would write more regularly than I do if I could but find the time. The things that I am working on demand a great deal of time. I guess this is so because it is my lot to have no one to help me.

Mama, and I mention this without vanity, I have made some giant steps toward acquiring the things that I personally will need if I am to be successful in my plans; aside from the factual material acquired from books and observations there is, as you know, a certain quality of character needed to perform the thing that I have in mind. I have completely repressed all emotion; have learned to see myself in perspective, in true relation with other men and the world. I have enlarged my vision so that I may be able to think on a basis encompassing not just myself, my family, my neighborhood, but the world. I have completely arrested the susceptibility to think in theoretical terms, or give credence to religious, supernatural, or other shallow unnecessary things of this nature that lock the mind and hinder thinking.

When a man does something or possesses something that is complementary to his character, it is virtually impossible for him to hide this thing, keep it to himself, keep from telling it to those he wishes to impress; this is natural egoism, the need for attention and flattery asserting itself. I have quietly removed this need; neglect and loneliness have no effect whatever on me anymore. I feel no pain of mind or body, and the harder it gets the better I like it. I must rid myself of all sentiment and remove all possibility of love. Though I owe allegiance to no one other than myself I clearly understand that my future rests with the black people of the world. I am trying in every way possible to adjust my thinking habits so that their ways of life won't seem as strange and alien to me as these people over here would have it. After I am finished with myself, an observer who could read my

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<sup>4</sup> All previous letters were accidentally destroyed. They were described by the author as "extremely bitter."

Maybe I'll get out next year and if I still feel the inclination I'll buy a few courses. Take care of yourself.

George

OCTOBER, 1966 20

Dear Robert,

Just received your letter of October 15, good to hear that Jon is well, and that your studies are coming along. I wanted to exhaust the possibilities of getting that free course in drafting here. I wanted to know if I was going to remain here in this prison at least until board before I asked you to put yourself out in sending it. Well it is conclusive that I will not be able to take it here. The school is carrying the course but there is no room for folks like me, just right now, maybe next year. I have found conclusively that I will not be transferred either. So, my friend, if you will, and whenever you can, send the course from LaSalle. I will be able to finish much sooner than you think. My math is excellent and I have nothing but time. I'll suspend my other endeavors in deference to the speedy and satisfactory completion of this course. Upon closer examination of all the facts involved in my doing something like this in here I also find that plastic tools are not necessary. I can have and use anything necessary for the course. LaSalle sends all of these tools right along with the course, so things are not as complicated as I thought them at first to be.

Very likely I will be given a parole date this year. If so, or perhaps to increase the possibility, I should have a job offer here on record. You could correspond with some machine shops or the like right now and tell them that I have completed or am just about to complete an accredited course in drafting, and I need a statement from them on record here to be released. Don't worry about me not being prepared by then. I have thought everything out. But any offer from almost any area will suffice to get me out. If you are not able to get someone to send me in a job offer then there should be a lengthy statement here on record that you are willing to support me while I go to school. I hope you understand what I am saying. I have to have something on record for the board to gain the impression all is secure financially for my release. It may be less difficult just to state officially that I am going to

I have broad plans for the future though. A large villa for you in the Maldiv Islands, with an extra-deep bomb shelter. All is the same here. Each day that comes and goes is like the one before; being a good boy, going to church, reading about the saints, and getting good ratings on my job for the proper attitudes.

Are you well, are you getting any of the pleasant things that life in these United States offers? That reminds me of a thing I read recently concerning China. One of the top political leaders came to an elementary school to lecture (they take education pretty seriously). He told the children to put their heads on the desk and pray to god for ice cream. After fifteen minutes of serious and sincere effort all the children lost interest and grew restive. He then told them to pray to him and the party for ice cream, whereupon a few minutes later they raised their heads from their desks and found, guess what, ice cream. Isn't that disgusting, Mama, to distort the thinking of children like that. . . . Now how is Jon? How much does he weigh? You don't say much about the folks in the Midwest, are they well? Take care of yourself.

Love,  
George

SEPTEMBER, 1966 25

Dear Robert,  
What has happened to Penny? Is she having troubles with her man? You were going to send me her address, have you forgotten? I have been trimming down my weight some, more exercise and less food, I'm getting ready for December. I don't want to stand out. I must fit in with the rest of the herd and look as ordinary as possible. I want my system to grow accustomed to little or no food at all without it causing me the normal distress that it causes others. You would be surprised how little food an adult really needs. I went for two weeks on nothing but three slices of bread and "one" tumbler of water a day without noticeable loss mentally or physically.

Are you well, my friend? Glad to hear you are becoming interested in things of the mind. The school idea is truly out of the ordinary. Most others of your caste and peer group have given up. There are two or three things that I would like to take, but cannot take them here in prison: language (Chinese and Arabic), electronics, and chemicals.

thoughts and watch my actions would never believe that I was raised in the United States, and much less would he believe that I came from the lowest class, the black stratum of slave mentality.<sup>5</sup>

I have been meaning to ask you how Delora was doing with her husband in jail. I sincerely hope she is not finding it too hard, but life on the treadmill can be expected to be hard; if you will send me her address and ask her if she wants to write me, I will send the necessary forms to her. Hang on, I'm going to make everything all right.

Your son,  
George

SEPTEMBER, 1964

Dear Mother,  
I went up yesterday and I'll have to say that it does not look too hopeful. I think my black brother crossed me, the one you met when you were here last. They made mention of my going to school. One of them told me in so many words to bring back a diploma. Maybe this was his meaning, maybe not. I will not know for sure until my official results come in on Friday of this week. I'll write you again then.

Lavera<sup>6</sup> came to see me this weekend, and said she will come again next weekend. I will tell her Saturday what I got at the board; she can contact you. But there is no need for that much disquiet; if I should get an immediate release there would still be weeks of formalities to go through.

We have birthdays this week. Though I have lost all of my sentimentality, I know you people still cling to the old, so I'll observe the social amenities by wishing you health on your birthday. Really though, is it not silly, the little pat phrases, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, etc.? They (the Europeans) have reduced all life to a very dull formula. All natural feelings have been lost.

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<sup>5</sup> During his early years in prison, the author explained to the editor that he had completely lost faith in American blacks and their ability to become a truly revolutionary force. The only thing he wanted was to get out of prison and fight for Roberto in Angola or Lumumba in the Congo.

<sup>6</sup> The author's mother's niece.

I have work here in my cell to do, see you soon.

Love,  
George

DECEMBER, 1964

Dear Father,

I guess you are right in what you say about Mother's position. If she wishes to occupy the corner set aside for us in this society and be happy with such then let it be. I merely speak of better and different things in a society greater (in my humble opinion) and more conducive to advancement for people of my kind. Always bear in mind that though I may sound intolerant and pressing at times, all I say is by way of discourse and nothing by way of advice. You see I understand you people clearly. You are afflicted by the same set of principles that has always governed black people's ideas and habits here in the U.S. I know also how we arrived at this appalling state of decadence. You see, my father, we have been "educated" into an acceptance of our positions as national scapegraces. Our acceptance of the lie is consciously based on the supposition that peace can and must be preserved at any price. Blacks here in the U.S. apparently do not care how well they live, but are only concerned with how long they are able to live. This is odd indeed when considering that it is possible for us all to live well, but within the reach of no man to live long! My deepest and most sincerely felt sympathies go out to all of you who are not able to resolve your problems because of this fundamental lack of spirit. The morass of illusionment has claimed your souls completely. I do not care about the other millions of blacks here in the land of tears, their fate is of their own choosing; but because you and the others of our family have always been close to me whatever successes I wring from the eternal foe you will share. Until I do this I know it is expecting too much for you to be impressed with the ideals I put forward. It's always been this way I imagine. One has to be shown the fruits and feel the rewards of a new or different thing before perceiving its merits.

In the airmail letter you sent it is not altogether clear to me what you were trying to say, so I won't leap to any conclusions but let me state that I have a singular incapability, which is my strongest point, my first principle. I could never in this existence betray my kind. Love of self and kind is the first law of nature, my father. What N. did to me in

here seem to like being told when to celebrate this and that, so should you also feel this way, let me acknowledge the custom and wish you as pleasant a Mother's Day as is possible under our circumstances.

Take care of yourself. . .  
Love,  
George

SEPTEMBER, 1966 9

Dear Mama,

Hope you are better; the typewriter is being repaired so this comes by hand.

We are in agreement on many things. All is as well as it is possible to be between two who are human and subject to human error. You have done much for me and I am sincerely in your debt; your returns will be soon forthcoming. That which you didn't do I never expected, for you are after all a woman and think as a woman should. The attitudes and methods that I have developed on my own have no reflection on you, but on the nature of our life circumstances and situational pressures. Is Jon in health? I have some pictures of you on your trip back East. You surely look well and unchanged.

I go to the board in December and as I have stated before I have met all of their terms. My release is almost assured.

What is Penny's new address? I will send her a letter on her birthday and discuss things as they are said to be, and as they really are. She must be having a pretty bad time; that guy seems to be pretty Anglo-Americanized.

Take care of yourself.  
Love,  
George

SEPTEMBER, 1966 16

Dear Mama,

I wish you many happy returns in the birthday department. It sounds pretty empty I know but that's all I have to offer right now, a wish;



What any man has done before me I can do. If there is a god, Mama, he hates me and I'll have to resist what he or it is doing to us. All my life, Mama, I've had to work things out for myself. I've had help from no quarter. I've been alone now for a long time. This is why I've had so much pain and trouble. Robert gave me nothing. You gave me god and that horrible church. Even god managed to take something away from me. I have nothing left but myself.

Love,  
George

APRIL, 1966 17

Dear Mama,  
I received, your card, nice of you to think of me on Easter. Getting that card sure made me feel a lot better. You know how important Easter is to me. Are you any better? Have you resolved the insurance problem? Don't worry too much about these things; solutions cause new and sometimes even worse problems to spring up. All of our difficulties will never be worked out. I guess perhaps this existence is merely a constant choosing of the lesser evil.

Penny came to see me last week; I recall a time when all she wanted was to get away from the family group, but now that she's on her own, she didn't want to talk about anything else but you and the past. She is devoted to you. She is a sweet, well-balanced, and wonderful woman, deserving of much more than this life here offers us.

But the weather is fine here, plenty of sun lately. I exercise in the sun an hour every day, I'm getting very big and very black.

Fare you well,  
George

MAY, 1966 8

Dear Mama,  
All is well here, I'm going to night school again, and have encountered no trouble of late.

Are you well? They say that today is Mother's Day. I can't make much sense out of it, though. I love mine every day. But these guys around me

1958 I can never forgive.<sup>7</sup> I can understand why she betrayed me to the whites and can even explain why she thought herself right in doing so, but I can't forgive her because she has not made any effort to change her completely backward sympathies. It is the same thing today with her as it was yesterday. She would betray me a second time if I allowed it. You know that I love my mother dearly for many reasons, she always (through your labor of course) provided for me materially the best she knew how, but she failed me bitterly in matters of the mind and spirit. My education she put in the hands of the arch-foes of my kind. This is a betrayal of the worst kind, because of this I've had to learn everything I now know on my own by trial and error. I have almost arrived but look at the cost. I would not be in prison now if she hadn't been reading life through those rose-colored glasses of hers, or if you would have had time and the wisdom to tell me of my enemies, and how to get the things I needed without falling into their traps. She kept telling me how wrong I was and making me feel guilty. All of this I now understand, but again cannot forgive because she is still doing this same sort of thing!!

I got the nuts and cake today thanks, socks and handkerchiefs also.

Take care.  
Son

DECEMBER, 1964

Dear Father,  
Everything was in order, concerning the package that is. They brought it right in front of the cell and opened it.

Mama sent me a card with a picture of some white people on the front of it. I guess she just can't perceive that I don't want anything to do with her white god.

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<sup>7</sup> "In 1958 I escaped from Kern County Jail and fought the pigs, all the way back to the midwestern area of my birth, '.45 smokeless' in hand. I lost them altogether in Chicago. The pigs gave up on me after about three months. I ended up in Harrisburg to await the return of my mother's half-brother, Amide Walker. I was hoping that he would help me get out of the country. While I was waiting for him, my aunt discovered through my family in California that I was on the run from the law. She turned in my name and I was recaptured."

I am still confined to this cell. It is nine by four. I have left it only twice in the month I've been here for ten minutes each time, in which I was allowed to shower. Did I tell you? They have assured me that I have not been given a bad-conduct report. It is just that they felt I was about to do some wrong. It's always suspicions. What I was supposed to have done or was about to do, never, never what they caught me doing as it should be. The last time I was in a cell like this three months, from February to May (1964) for reasons that are not altogether clear yet! I have had no serious infraction in almost three years now. You know I had at least \$125 on me when I was arrested in 1960 and they took it. I assume it was to cover the \$70 that was missing as the result of the robbery. So I'm thinking that I shouldn't owe them too much more. You know in fact I'm fast awakening to the idea that I may not owe anyone anything and that they even might owe me. I have given four-and-a-half years of life, during which I have had to accept the unacceptable, for \$70 that I didn't take — I protest. I protest.

If you knew how much I protested, how seriously I felt about the matter, you and Mother and anyone who has a natural affinity with me would surely be trying to convince me that you were on my side.

The events of the Congo, Vietnam, Malaya, Korea, and here in the U.S. are taking place all for the same reason. The commotion, the violence, the struggles in all these areas and many more spring from one source, the evil and malign, possessive and greedy Europeans. Their abstract theories, developed over centuries of long usage, concerning economics and sociology take the form that they do because they suffer under the mistaken belief that a man can secure himself in this insecure world best by ownership of great personal, private wealth. They attempt to impose their theories on the world for obvious reasons of self-gain. Their philosophy concerning government and economics has an underlying tone of selfishness, possessiveness, and greediness because their character is made up of these things. They can't see the merit in socialism and communism because they do not possess the qualities of rational thought, generosity, and magnanimity necessary to be part of the human race, part of a social order, part of a system. They can not understand that "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" is the only way men can live together without chaos. There is a species of fly that lives only four hours. If one of these flies (June fly I believe they are called), if one of these flies was born at twelve o'clock midnight in darkness and gloom, there would be no way

MARCH, 1966 20

Dear Mama,

We have to order books from a bookstore owned by one of the staff here. It is contrary to institution policy for someone to send us books from outside. This is the rule, the law, so I guess it cannot be helped. Situations of this type are what this country is built on, the wonderful system that made it great.

I've read as much St. Augustine as I could stomach. If you don't know about him and Jerome, Leibniz, and the rest of that lunatic fringe yet, my love, you are hurting. Why do you say things like that to me? You know how I feel about those people. You know that I am completely aware of all of them. I can never be deceived again by them. I know their awesome capacity for evil, I'm victim of it now. That Pope Pius XII, the guy you let us pray for, gave Mussolini his blessing as he was about to embark upon his misadventure in Ethiopia. I could give you thousands of examples of this type. I have explained my feeling to you many, many times, so I won't go any further with this. If children being blown out of this existence while attending church services, men being lynched for a gesture, colonialism, the inquisition, and H-bombs haven't affected you, nothing I say here can help you. If you could live my life one week and see the things I see, feel the pain I feel, and die a little bit each day as I do, all your illusions and apparitions would vanish. You talk to me like I was born yesterday, like I was still a little boy. All my life now you have told me about European gods and European christians who were supposed to be knowledgeable. When do you plan to say something that will help me? You may not know any better. If not, I am wrong in saying what I have, but I find it hard to admit that my mother could be so insensitive to the truth! You disrespect me, Mama, when you talk to me like that. It's like you saying to me, "George, you're a fool. You do not have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a brain to interpret, so I'll tell you any kind of outrageous story." Ordinary people, the mediocre, need to feel or believe in something greater than themselves. It gives them false security and it makes them feel that help may be forthcoming. This is self-delusion in the extreme. I cannot partake in any foolishness. Do you want me to be mediocre like the rest of the herd! When I need strength, Mama, I reach down within myself. I draw out of the reserves I've built — the necessary endurance to face down my opposition. I call on myself, I have faith in myself. This is where it must always come from in the end — yourself. I place no one and nothing above myself.

MARCH, 1966 3

Dear Mama,

Always good to hear from you, though it makes me sad to know that you are not well. Just hold on though and circumstances will take a definite turn for the better, no ifs or ands about this. The way lies open for us. I'm not just talking or hoping, I know there is a better life for us. I know what there is to be had and of all there is to be had I plan to claim for us the lion's share.

You are right of course in what you contend. The black woman has in the past few hundred years been the only force holding us together and holding us up. She has absorbed the biggest part of the many shocks and strains of existence under a slave order. The men can think of nothing more effective than pimping, gambling, or petty theft. I've heard men brag about being pimps of black women and taking money from black women who are on relief. Things like this I find odious, disgusting — you are right, the black men have proven themselves to be utterly detestable and repulsive in the past. Before I would succumb to such subterfuge I would scratch my living from the ground on hands and knees, or die in a hail of bullets! My hat goes off to every one of you, you have my profoundest respect. I have surrendered all hope of happiness for myself in this life to the prospect of effecting some improvement in our circumstances as a whole. I have a plan, I will give, and give, and give of myself until it proves our making or my end. The men of our group have developed as a result of living under a ruthless system a set of mannerisms that numb the soul. We have been made the floor mat of the world, but the world has yet to see what can be done by men of our nature, by men who have walked the path of disparity, of regression, of abortion, and yet come out whole. There will be a special page in the book of life for the men who have crawled back from the grave. This page will tell of utter defeat, ruin, passivity, and subjection in one breath, and in the next, overwhelming victory and fulfillment.

So take care of yourself, and hold on.

Love,  
George

possible for him in his lifetime to ever understand the concept of day and light. This is the case with the Europeans.

They are small men with their petty intrigues and prejudices. "In shallow men the fish of small thoughts cause much commotion, in magnanimous oceanic minds the whales of inspiration cause hardly a ruffle" (Mao Tse-tung).

George

FEBRUARY, 1965

Dear Mother,

I promised myself that I wouldn't write you again from here. I only take pen in hand when feeling moves me to do so. My feeling seems to be wasted on you. You know beyond question what my feelings are, I never think of anything trite or inconsequential anymore. I've forgotten the feeling of joy. I've long since had my last smile wrung unceremoniously from my hollow soul. I write home to you people, my people, the closest of my kind for understanding and advice. I attempt to advise you in areas of which experience has made me better informed. I get no understanding. If I followed the advice I receive it would only serve to enslave me further to this madness of our times. My advice falls upon deaf ears!

This is my reason for not wanting to write. What can I say further? It is clear you don't love me when you refuse to aid me the only way you can, the only way I expect! By telling me I am right and that I have your blessings. You see I am being frank: though I care about your feelings, I care more for your well-being. There are things brewing now that could ruin you completely if, when they break, you are in sympathy with wrong. Robert is the same way, he pretends or he may earnestly not feel the effects of the circumstances I attempt to explain. He is sympathetic to wrong. But I can overlook him more readily because of his almost complete lack of mental training. His past experiences have been very limited regarding the stimulus of academic learning, he is innocent. But not so with you, though your exposure was not all that it should have been, you are equipped with the basic fundamentals needed to guide one to the truth, should it be truth one favors. When I consider my own experience bought at the cost of these terrible years, supplemented in love and concern by your own experience and

learning, what am I to think but that something is radically wrong, that I am being betrayed and have been betrayed. The question is one of grave proportions to me. I cannot stress this point too clearly. I mean to make sure this doesn't happen to me again or to my seed. If a person doesn't stand with me, he stands against me to my way of thinking.

I feel that you have failed me Mama. I know that you have failed me. I also know that Robert has never held an opinion of his own. You have influenced his every thought ever since you have known him. You have always had the running of things. You have done him a disservice. You are doing Jon a disservice now. You are a woman, you think like a bourgeois woman. This is a predatory man's world. The real world calls for a predatory man's brand of thinking. Your way of viewing the world is necessarily bourgeois and feminine. How could I, Robert, Jon, or any of the men of our kind accomplish what we must as men if we think like bourgeois women, or let our women think for us. This is what's happening all over this part of the world! Robert should have been stronger, should have had more time and freedom of movement. So should Grandfather, and Great-Grandfather. But they didn't and it isn't their fault. The cruelest and most suppressive treatment has always fallen to the males because they have not that tender defense the woman is born with. So understand me once and for all. I speak no further on the matter. You conceived and Robert sired a man. Nothing can turn me from my resolve. Make no further attempts. I am going to give my all to this thing, and if the victory is to fall to me, you and people like you must stand beside me, not lean or lie on me.

Robert tells me you are sick. I am writing to ask about the nature of your illness. I know a hope will not aid you any, but by whatever gods there be I hope and wish you well. There is much sickness and tears to come, some will fall to me also I guess, but my condition can only improve from where I stand now.

Fare you well.  
Son

FEBRUARY, 1965 25

Dear Mother,  
Your letter reached me late for some unknown reason. Has your health improved? I think you should relax; all has not been said or done yet. You are a little confused now for understandable reasons; things will

I know that it probably will not come true, but may this be your year, our year to realize the promise that being born a man brings.

George

FEBRUARY, 1966 23

Dear Mama,  
I have been hoping that you would write and acknowledge my last letter. I hope it doesn't worry you too much that I will not be considered for release for some time yet. It worries me enough. I hope your health gets no worse at least. I'll be with you as soon as I can. I've got some clean time in now already and plan to do as well for the rest of this year so that in December they will let me go. They have promised me this anyway. I don't put any confidence whatever in what they say, but the hope remains.

I am in the main population now. I was released from the adjustment center lockup today (because of good conduct) and have a good program set up for me, one conducive to parole consideration. I have learned something by the experience: never again to look for mercy, never again to expect or hope for justice, never to look for quarter without strings being attached. The last illusion has been shattered; I know the way from here; ask no quarter of fate and give none.

That thing you mentioned concerning Frances has had me perturbed for a week. Some just are not going to make it, some of us have just slipped too far to ever get back. This guy, I promise you, will be sorry a long, long time. Right here at this juncture of time we as a people have nothing, absolutely nothing but each other, some fresh air, the blue and gold of day and silver at night, a clean conscience, and the promise of cloudless days to come. But some do not enjoy these things enough, don't understand the nature of our circumstances and commit unpardonable crimes, unnatural crimes that must in the end bar them from partaking in the benefits of the liberation that is planned for tomorrow. In the end a requiem will be sung over the whole vast complex of disorder.

Please inform me of any new developments there. Help Jon to become a man. Fare you well.

George

JANUARY, 1966 1

Dear Robert,

I received your gratifying letter. Was it an expression of your love, an indication of your gracious sympathy for the position we were both born into, and that I am presently feeling the cramping convulsions of? I got the money. If I feel like a burden to you, it is best that we suspend exchanges until I've struggled on back to my feet. You probably don't feel that you owe me anything, and I guess you don't since you have accepted the values and customs of these people we live among. In that light, I owe to you the unquestionable honor of my struggle within this American dream.

What can I say to you, my friend? I've been wondering if it would be best to lie to you and hide myself, say only what I know so well that you like to hear. I hesitate to do this because you have been lied to so much already. To add to this may be my last and greatest and most unpardonable crime against you. You are the older of the two of us. You are a man in your way and there is much merit in the manner you have conducted yourself these last 25 years. To have lived through the period of your early youth is in itself a qualifier for respect. The following shocks and strains were surely enough to drive the strongest man to distraction. All the honor that you are due I freely give. However, we, the humble representatives of the future generations, have at our disposal all the accumulated knowledge and experiences of all past generations to build our thoughts. I have made no mark as yet to be sure, but why is it that we cannot communicate? What is it that bars our efforts to exchange thoughts and ideas? The fault could lie in my presentation. If so, I will make every effort to correct my deficiency because it is to the interest of us both that we meet on the same level. Can you understand that a meeting of the minds will have to precede any advancement of our combined fortunes? The question is whether we will be able to overcome the malicious efforts and forces that divide us and be able to put group interests before personal petty prejudice and preconceived notions. Or will we all end by turning our backs on each other and going our way in anger?

I'm tired, my friend, real tired. I've got a pain deep in my stomach and I'm tired pretending that the obvious doesn't exist and that this is the best of all possible lives. It is not, and if a concentrated effort isn't made to finally learn and use the lessons set forth in history, unthinkable chaos will result!

be made clear before long. I should be out of here this year. I have complied with all of their demands: group counseling, school, clean conduct record. I go to board next time they meet. You could start writing letters to the Adult Authority now, the more the better. You know what to say: that I was young then and you see a vast change in my character now. Also say that you can and will help me with a place to stay.

I asked Robert to send me some shoes. Check with him on it. They have to be sent from Sears by the salesman, cost no more than \$25, have the price or sales slip in the box, and in the way of type and size I want some old folks' comforts with high tops, 9 — B. Nothing else, my feet need therapy in the worst way. Soon as you can on this, I want to get rid of these corns and sores before I get out.

I'm glad you weren't a singer or dancer. Pop was wise in that. The image held of the blacks in this part of the world is that we are proficient in but one or two areas only, the service trades or the physical entertainment fields (singers, dancers, boxers, baseball players).

Would you like to support the theory that we are good for nothing but to serve or entertain our captors? In the society of our fathers and in the civilized world today, women feel it their obligation to be ever yielding and obedient to their men. Life is purposely made simple for them because of their nature, and they are happy. When the women outnumber the men in the black societies, the men take as many wives as they can afford, and care for them all equally. In the white for some nebulous reason the men can take only one . . . the rest are left to become prostitutes, nuns, or lesbians. In the civilized societies the women do light work, bear children, and lend purpose to the man's existence. They train children in the ways of wisdom that history has shown to be correct. Their job is to train the children in their early life to be men or women, not confused psychotics! This is a big job, to train and propagate the race!! Is this not enough? The rest is left to the men: government administration, the providing of means of subsistence, and defense, or maintenance of life and property against any who would deprive us of it, as the barbarian has and is still attempting to do. The white theory of "the emancipated woman" is a false idea. You will find it, as they are finding it, the factor in the breakdown of the family unit. Mama, all this struggle is unnecessary. Let's not create an atmosphere of competition among ourselves as they have done. Life is too short. There is too much for us to restore to its proper order and we are too



wise. What do you think made the white guy write that life is “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing” — he felt frustrated and stupid.

Son

MARCH, 1965 12

Dear Mama,

The things you speak of are uppermost in my mind and my heart. I am not too manly or sophisticated to say that I love you and all the rest with a devotion and dedication that will continue to grow until I pass from this existence. Anything that will please you, and that falls within human accomplishment, I will carry out. I say this with confidence because of my certainty that you would never ask me to please you by surrendering my mental liberty and self-respect; I wouldn't want to live were these, my last two real possessions, to be lost.

Any confidence you put in me, Mama, will be well placed. This is not mere talk, my ego is nowhere involved. If we are to surmount these barriers standing between us, and finally work things around to our advantage, on a few points we must be agreed. You must listen to me. I've been trying to say something. Stop closing my voice off from your mind! My hair has started to turn gray and I'm beginning to look like an old man. My best efforts up to now have all fallen far short of their intended goals. I know, however, just as sure as day follows night that I will win the last round. That is the one I always win, the important one. I feel that you understand the situation better than most who live on your level. From your last letter, I know you are intelligent enough to understand. I have it before me now and I glean much to indicate that this is so. But there is much that has escaped your understanding, and it is quite reasonable that this be true. You have no way of learning and bettering. However, if you will honor my humble voice, I would very much like to pass on to you just a thought or two I have had. All that I ask is that you hear me, and think about what I say. Do not just read over the lines. Think of what I say in relation to things past, and the vague possibility that is our future. I'm not just another convict or “Negro.” I'm one who really loves you and who has been observing with a practiced eye and an almost photographic memory. But first let me clear up one other incidental thing. Robert has never said anything unattractive or belittling about you. Each of his letters expresses almost

me. About parole, I can't say, but I am not alone. I don't feel so distressed when I look around me and see others like myself experiencing the same thing. The uniformity of our condition seems to lend support to each of us. I don't think the administrators fully understand. I have the strangest feeling that they may not understand how this atmosphere they foster nurtures a mindless, hopeless mass. It is suicidal incompetence. The strong can afford to be incompetent or wrong sometimes without loss of face. Even the mightiest and most capable of men are only human. But he who attributes to himself omnipotence must never be wrong. For once a weakness is found, no matter how small, in one who claims omnipotence he is completely exposed. The fall from omnipotence ends only with insignificance. May this New Year coming be your year, our year. Take care.

Love,  
George

DECEMBER, 1965 29

Dear Robert,

The photographs were nice. Penny sent me one of her baby also. I thought him very beautiful. Send me her address, also send Delora's. Delora looks well. Tell her I love her and that the baby looks just like her. She has two babies now hasn't she? I'm an uncle three times.

Jon should be the main concern now. By now you should have seen enough to know how to proceed with his development. He doesn't look too healthy to me. He looks thin, pale, and soft. Those weights would improve his circulation and make his veins stand out. If he works out in the backyard in the sun every evening in a year, he could be a paragon. He needs that and he needs to be told the truth. He can get these things only from you. That school won't teach him anything except possibly a few Latin prayers, but if you haven't caught on yet, nothing I can say in this letter will help. Don't forget I've been over the road he is straining on now. Maybe it is a little different now with him. You can afford to give him bikes and baseball gloves, but the loose-living thing is going to seem awfully exciting to him in a few years when he compares it against the artificial world of those catholics. I'm doing all right here I guess. You take it easy.

George

I will relish the transfer part. All of the officers here have preconceived notions about my patterns of behavior now. Consequently it is somewhat hard for me to avoid falling under suspicion for almost every misdeed perpetrated by a black. But no matter, if I do have to stay here I am determined to circumvent the little traps.

I sincerely hope your health is improving, or at least becoming no worse. I feel awful disconcerted that I am unable to render any assistance. However, I feel this inability is only temporary. I intend to surge back with a tenacity uncontainable in its relentlessness.

Fortune must soon smile on me because sincere effort is always rewarded. Nature allows no such imbalances as this. I am assured and completely self-possessed in the knowledge that all contradictions and conflicts must one day be resolved. Give my love to all the women there, please take care of yourself.

Love,  
George

DECEMBER, 1965 23

Dear Mother,

I got the food you sent me today; it was very nice, and fills a real need. I almost didn't get it though. You see we are supposed to send out a slip to the correspondent when we wish someone to send us something and you are supposed to send the package with this slip you get from me as proof that you are an authorized correspondent. I didn't send a slip out this year because of the trouble it might involve for you, and the money could possibly have been better placed. I hope your health is improving. I am doing quite well in that respect, all things considered. You may not know me when you next see me. I find a few new gray hairs every time I look in the mirror. If I live to be thirty, I guess it will be all white.

I'll start writing Jon a couple of letters a week. If you would like me to, let me know. I would tell him as much of the truth as is advisable in one of these letters, but if you don't feel that what I represent is correct for him, then I'll refrain. How old is he now?

I guess I'll be getting a transfer, or going out to the main population soon. A couple of months more of this and I think they will let up on

total grief for the condition of your health. He blames me even, then himself, but never the right people. He feels he has failed you, me, and all the others, and he keeps trying to learn if I also blame him. Of course I do not blame him or you, or myself. I place the blame for the social ills that have caused us discomfort and unhappiness squarely upon the shoulders of those responsible: the people in control!!

It is mainly on this subject that I am going to speak now. To get it across I am going to write two letters, this one and another sheet also tonight. This should be read first for the idea to follow in logical order.<sup>8</sup> I am going to do exactly as you say concerning the show of good conduct here. I have never raised my hand against any man, since I've been an adult that is, except in self-defense, but there has been an element of aggressiveness in the way that I have handled these incidents. I'll have to always defend my person, but I promise you that unless there is a direct threat to my existence I will never have another bit of trouble here. Understand though that you do not live in the real rip-and-tear world. You have escaped it by surrendering your self-determination and freedom of thought in a tranquilizing conformity to the wishes of whoever may hold the strings. Consequently you do not know how hard it is to live in peace even for a short period with people who defy violence, and vilify peace and harmony.

George

MARCH, 1965 12

Dear Mama,

I will try what you advised. I know it to be the best way at this point in the little game. But should I fail you are not to say, "George is no good." You must try to understand that now, just as in the past, there are other considerations and influences that enter into the course of events that turn our lives one way or the other. Have you ever wondered how you and I and all our kind lost their identity so fast? The last blacks were brought into this country only 75 to 80 years ago, three generations at most. This is too short a time for us to have lost as much as we have. No other people have completely been divorced from their own as we have in such a short period. I don't even know my name. Have you

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<sup>8</sup> California prison regulations limit the length of convict letters to both sides of one standard 8½ by 11 ruled sheet.

ever wondered about this? The answer is found in the fact that we lost control of the circumstances surrounding our lives. We were alienated from our sources, isolated, and remolded to fit in certain forms, to fill a specific purpose. No consideration was or has ever been given to our being anything other than what we were originally intended to be (I ask for electronics or drafting and I'm told to be practical). You must realize, understand fully, that we have little or no control over our lives. You must then stop giving yourself pain by feeling that you failed somewhere. You have not failed. You have been failed, by history and events, and people over whom you had no control. Only after you understand this can you then go on to make the necessary alterations that will bring some purpose and value to your life; you must gain some control! I have said this to Robert a hundred times but it makes no impression at all. He writes back in the same vein as he did the time before I said anything. He just doesn't have the mental equipment. Will you look deeper and think on the matter and then explain to him? I was born knowing exactly nothing. I had no one, no one, to teach me the things of real value. The school systems are gauged to teach youth what to think, not how to think. Robert never had the time to say even hello, and neither of you really knew anything to give my anyway, because your parents knew nothing. Do you see where the cycle brings us, to the real source of the trouble, the alienation and the abandonment, the pressure from without, the system and its supporters? I didn't know either. So we must look to the people whose responsibility it is to see to it that the benefits of society pass down to all concerned for an answer. If a good god exists then they are the ones who must make an appeal to him for forgiveness: forgiveness for relinquishment and dereliction of duty! I don't need god, religion, belief, etc. I need control, control of the determining factors relating to the unquestioning support and loyalty of my mother, father, brothers, sisters. You need Robert and I need him and he needs you. We all need each other. The standards and emotions we have used in the past to regulate our relations defy all nature and run contrary to all known precedent. When did blood cease to be thicker than and more binding than all else? We must look to each other and destroy the barriers placed between us with trust, and love. I am committed and I will do all that I have to. I am equal to anything that is required. Help me when you can, the only way you can, by trying to understand.

I don't want a package this year; save the money; save all you can. I am living very badly now and just to stay alive is an ordeal, but I see

OCTOBER, 1965 3

Dear Robert,

I have the typewriter in my possession here, so all is well. They didn't, however, produce the instruction book or paper. They let me have the two extra ribbons. I can get an instruction book. Paper isn't too much of a problem. All things considered, it turned out very well. You can take a chance if you care to on the shorthand book. Put it in an envelope like you say, but also write a letter stating right in the front, in the first lines, that it is a shorthand book. Mail the letter and the book together. If they don't think it's some kind of cryptogram we have going, it may be allowed or overlooked, but you can't just leave it up to them to figure out what it is. That would be asking for too much. Just read in the Monitor that ".6 parts of insecticide to one billion parts of water will kill most all marine animals in salt water or fresh"! Be sure to look into the course on speed reading. It costs sixty cents. I know it is a great help. I would be nice for me to have someone to talk to.

Take care, and keep your eyes open,  
George

NOVEMBER, 1965 7

Dear Robert,

Nothing has changed. I'm still losing. I'm alive though, so there's still the possibility. . . How is Georgia? Don't tell her anything about my condition.<sup>11</sup> It isn't necessary for you to reveal to her all that I tell you. She doesn't need to know. It can only worry her needlessly. I hope you are well.

George

NOVEMBER, 1965 13

Dear Mother,

I am alive and well, and am at present working my way through the adjustment center here. It is an overall improvement in my condition. The prospects of getting out or getting a transfer to a more habitable prison are now better.

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<sup>11</sup> The author had been put in isolation after being charged by the prison authorities with assault with a deadly weapon.

I've had to secure permission to send out for the typewriter, of course. It took over a month to have it approved, so send it as soon as you are able.

They just turned the lights out. It's 12:15 (A.M., Tuesday). Take it easy.

George

SEPTEMBER, 1965 12

Dear Mama,

Robert tells me that you are not well. I'm sorry to hear this, but I guess we're all lucky to have lived as long as we have. The many years you spent without proper clothing for the cold wet weather back East, with improper food, not enough food, and lack of expert medical attention, is enough misfortune to leave the strongest person ill.

You need to see a specialist. If we were not blacks and consequently poor, you would be able to enjoy the benefits of science. But you are probably seeing some disinterested, half-trained parasite who knows no more about your ailment or the curing of it than I do. Robert doesn't make enough in two years to allow you to get the best attention (that is, here in our present surroundings). His scope doesn't extend any farther than the boundaries of the U.S. Those lies and the propaganda he reads in Life, Reader's Digest, and Look, have completely undressed his mind. I feel very sorry for all of you. I'm locked in a cell 24 hours a day, but I still know my potential, I still feel my strength, I still thumb my nose at the caveman. Because my mind is still my own, no one can lie to me anymore. I know where my interest lies.

For now though, I'm going to be a good boy, as Robert and most of the blacks we see around us are all good boys. I'm going to smile, and I'm going to pretend to accept the small compensations they hand out in return for our soul and our freedom. I'm going to be a good boy and eat what is put before me. I'm going to do this so that I'll stay alive long enough to take care of you. You deserve a lot better than you have had and more than you will have. You don't know it but there is a better life, regardless of what the Reader's Digest says. Believe me there is a better life.

Take care of yourself.

George

something better. It is vague, and is a possibility at best, but I know a place, a refuge where people love and live.

George

MARCH, 1965 16

Dear Father,

I've been going through final examinations at school. Had to use all of my available time in study and have not been able to write like I should, but forgive me. They are over now and I did well. I go before the board next week. I didn't know about L.'s husband. That is too bad. She seems to be extremely unlucky in that area. She told me that the last husband she had was worse. Since that is the case I can feel nothing against her, but as you said, she should have explained. People are odd indeed, about money that is. The best method of testing a person's character is through money. The shocks and strains of this money-mad society are enough to ruin the purest of minds. Men are so deeply engaged in making a living that their very existence is shaped and dominated by the system of production. I'm thoroughly tired already, Pop. When I obtain what I need to work with, nothing could stop me from going home. That is where I will invest my money, resources, and talents. My labor shall be expanded where it will be appreciated. My taxes will go to an order and system of government that will in turn protect me and my interests. I shall not, as long as I call myself a man, compromise with tyranny. There are a few things that mean more to me than life. Though I must think of and plan for tomorrow, I cannot, I must not surrender for tomorrow all that I possess today. I can repair this loss, this morbid depression that owns a little more of my mind each day that passes. The pale and almost indistinguishable glow of the future may yet materialize to disperse the gloomy stupor that has encompassed me completely. I have been purposely kept ignorant, I have been taught what to think, instead of how to think. I have been subjected to the ordeal of hunger, thirst, name-calling, and other uncountable indignities. Danger comes even from those of my own kind. Their lack of response and unyielding adherence to ineffectual thought and action is an obstacle to my plans. I may yet surmount it, but only if I follow my call. I must obey the dictates of my mind.

Give my regards to all.

Son

MARCH, 1965 30

Dear Father,

I haven't read anything or studied in a week now. I have been devoting all my time to thought. I trust you are all in health. I think of my personal past quite often. This is uncomfortable sometimes but necessary. I try not to let my past mistakes bother me too much, though some seem almost unpardonable. If it were not for the few intermixed little victories, my confidence in my ability would be irreparably shaken.

Though I know I am a victim of social injustice and economic pressure and though I understand the forces that work to drive so many of our kind to places like this and to mental institutions, I can't help but know that I proceeded wrong somewhere. I could have done a lot worse. You know our people react in different ways to this neoslavery, some just give in completely and join the other side. They join some christian cult and cry out for integration. These are the ones who doubt themselves most. They are the weakest and hardest to reach with the new doctrine. Some become inveterate drinkers and narcotic users in an attempt to gain some mental solace for the physical depravity they suffer. I've heard them say, "There's no hope without dope." Some hire on as a janitor, bellboy, redcap, cook, elevator boy, singer, boxer, baseball player, or maybe a freak at some sideshow and pretend that all is as well as is possible. They think since it's always been this way it must always remain this way; these are the fatalists, they serve and entertain and rationalize.

Then there are those who resist and rebel but do not know what, who, why, or how exactly they should go about this. They are aware but confused. They are the least fortunate, for they end where I have ended. By using half measures and failing dismally to effect any real improvement in their condition, they fall victim to the full fury and might of the system's repressive agencies. Believe me, every dirty trick of deception and brutality is employed without shame, without honor, without humanity, without reservation to either convert or destroy a rebellious arm. Believe me, when I say that I begin to weary of the sun. I am by nature a gentle man, I love the simple things of life, good food, good wine, an expressive book, music, pretty black women. I used to find enjoyment in a walk in the rain, summer evenings in a place like Harrisburg. Remember how I used to love Harrisburg. All of this is gone from me, all the gentle, shy characteristics of the black men have been wrung unceremoniously from my soul. The buffets and blows of

want to attack and destroy China in the next four or five years. China has become too strong and it is influencing the rest of the Afro-Asian world too heavily with anti-Western philosophy (self-determination and economic independence). All that stands in the way of the power elite is a few dissenting factions which are daily being won over, and having their opinions molded for them by the communications media, and, second, the domestic unrest and near-revolutionary atmosphere in the black slums of all the large U.S. cities. Do you add well? Can you see what may be in the making? They cannot attack China unless the blacks here in the U.S. support their war effort. What if some black voice denounced the war? Many blacks would go for this. What would happen if large numbers of blacks refused to fight or make weapons, or even say attempted to subvert the U.S. war effort? Remember the Jews of Germany! From what I observe in here, where they don't have to hide their contempt, we're moving toward this eventuality.

George

SEPTEMBER, 1965 6

Dear Father,

This is about six letters I've written in two weeks. Did you get my answer to your last one? In the future I will put the exact date on them and double-check with you on them. You say you got none of these recent letters? When they stop them, they usually send them back to me. I can't say exactly what happened, but I guess these things are to be expected.

I mentioned in one of those other letters that I went before one of these committees last month made up of the top officials here. They informed me that I "can forget about the board transfer or the main population facilities here in the prison." These were their words. So, my friend, I'll be in this little cell for a while yet. I hope you note that all this is done without any proof, and without allowing me to face my accuser. But I guess these things are to be expected.

I want you to send me a portable typewriter and of course the carrying case. We can have them here, and I can use one to build my spelling and vocabulary. It will give me something to do in here. Send a lesson book also. A used one will be all right. Although they sell ribbons here you will have to send a couple of rolls because I have no way of buying any.



AUGUST, 1965

Dear Father,

I've been on five hours sleep a day and one-and-one-half hours exercise. The rest of my time is divided proportionally between my work and what little pleasure I can make for myself in here. This isn't too much to speak of, a little light fiction, or the radio. The experiment seems to be bringing me some benefits; the tenseness that brings about emotional unrest has left.

I hope you are not too uncomfortable with your teeth being worked on. I will have to have mine worked on also when I leave here. The longer I wear these shoes you sent me the more comfortable they become. You should try some. Of course I haven't too far to walk in here, but I make the best of what I have. I do my best thinking on my feet, so I walk this little ten feet I have rather diligently sometimes.

I was just thinking yesterday how far I have fallen from glory, how very much of my "physical" freedom they have taken from me (I still have mental freedom). I realized how few of the pleasures of life I have tasted. Trouble, difficulties, and sorrow have pervaded these twenty-four years. Twenty-four years without one moment's mental gratification. For us it is always tomorrow; tomorrow we'll have enough money to eat better; tomorrow we'll be able to buy this necessary article of clothing, to pay that debt. Tomorrow, it never really gets here. "To every one who has will more be given . . . but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away." I like this life, I can never reconcile myself to it, or rationalize the fact that I have been basely used, hated, and repressed as if it were the natural order of things. Life is at best a nebulous shadow, a vague contingency, the merest of possibilities to begin with. But men in general (myself most emphatically included), being at best complete and abject fools, have rendered even what small possibilities there were to love and learn null and void! But I refuse to excite myself about my past, or our future. I have simply taken up a task and I am preparing myself for its execution. I absolutely refuse to give way to emotional involvement or any undisciplined or dogmatic beliefs. Life is too uncertain, and dogmas and beliefs are the product of this sick man who now transgresses against us and the world. If I can bend circumstances to my will I succeed. If not — I'm off the cycle.

You know that the U.S. power elite, the 7 percent who own and run this country and influence the policies of the rest of the European world,

this have and have-not society have engendered in me a flame that will live, will live to grow, until it either destroys my tormentor or myself. You don't understand this but I must say it. Maybe when you remember this ten or twenty years from now you'll comprehend. I don't think of life in the same sense that you or most black men of your generation think of it, it is not important to me how long I live, I think only of how I live, how well, how nobly. We think if we are to be men again we must stop working for nothing, competing against each other for the little they allow us to possess, stop selling our women or allowing them to be used and handled against their will, stop letting our children be educated by the barbarian, using their language, dress, and customs, and most assuredly stop turning our cheeks.

George

APRIL, 1965 18

Dear Father,

Did you get my letter of April 11, last Sunday? I fear you may not have gotten that letter since therein I set down some important matters in an almost too direct manner.<sup>9</sup> I did so thinking that if it was allowed to go through, you would have in your possession knowledge of the singular events that seem to rush upon me menacing and evil from all directions at once. You would have this information in as complete a form as the space of that single page allows, or if they had sent it back or destroyed it, nothing. This was logical in that I wanted you to know immediately. It is best to have such matters done, and related, and over with. Here in my position you know I'm not supposed to be critical, nor am I supposed to attempt to convey what goes on in here. So please acknowledge my letter. I have from you only the letters you wrote on April 1 and April 2. Have you sent others?

They are sending me to Folsom soon, so they told me. The assault charge was referred to the district attorney. He will in turn refer it to the grand jury, which will then bring what they call legal proceedings against me. Let me say here that all of this is a well-thought-out effort to frighten me and maybe even do me whatever harm they can without

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<sup>9</sup> All of Jackson's correspondence had to pass through the rigors of prison censorship. Much of it was completely destroyed or mutilated. Only his last letters to his lawyer passed through uncensored.

alarming or shocking those around me, you included, too much. I guess they want to show me and those around me here how powerless I am in their hands. But they must do this without giving rise to feelings of total insecurity on the part of the little people which could serve as stimulus to some act which would lead toward changing conditions or circumstances that threaten not just our well-being but our very existence. Thus if I or any of my kind should suffer the final hurt, it would be by accident, heart attack instead of poisoning, malnutrition instead of beating, suicide by hanging instead of being shot, or legal proceedings instead of foul play.

But I have much to say about any matter that concerns me in spite of their wishes. Fear, the emotion that stiffens and inhibits the minds of most men, causing them to be incapable of acting in their defense at the moment of trial, is totally lacking in me. I could look upon my total ruin with as detached an unconcern as I look upon theirs. The payment for life is death. I have written many a page in the book of life in spite of my limited years, and I intend to write many more. I'll come out of this as I have everything else. I'll see Ghana yet. Folsom is a better prison than this. There will be found many older inmates who are more stable and less inclined to mind others' business. I can also obtain a parole faster there or a transfer to some minimum security camp. On the assault charge I don't think they will convict me. Maybe won't even try me. The D.A. has to accept the case, and then the grand jury must be convinced to accept what evidence they may concoct against me. Give Mother my regards.

Fare you well.  
Son

MAY, 1965 2

Dear Mother and Father,  
I am still in isolation. Nothing has changed since I wrote you last, Robert.<sup>10</sup> You have a remarkable method for relieving yourself of unpleasant or weighty problems that can almost be admired, were it just a little less chancy and not so slow. You seem to just ignore the matter or pretend it doesn't exist, hoping maybe others with more time or brains

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<sup>10</sup> The author's father's name is Robert Lester Jackson. The author addresses him either as Robert or Lester depending on mood or circumstance.

I mean absolute patterns for thinking and living. But I cannot help feeling there is a judicious mean somewhere. I have been forced to seek the judicious mean, due to the circumstances that history has thrown me into here — now. You see it isn't as simple as you implied. "Thinking and reading" won't fill a twenty-four-hour day. I have something real deep running through me, a burning thing of the mind. I have observed myself pass into a state of anger over something that happened as far away as Rhodesia or the Union of South Africa. And I didn't sleep for two days when those children and women were being murdered down there in your part of the world last week. I've told myself uncountable times that anger is an emotion, a degenerative emotion, unnecessary and controllable, but I couldn't control it until a few days ago when I observed myself being consumed by the force of my own weight. So, my friend, I started conducting these experiments with myself.

Why can't I rid myself of the sorrow and emotion that awareness has brought me? I get rid of the self-destructive force of error and ignorance only to be torn and miserable by what I discover. It happened that I knew all along that some imbalance did exist, or I'll say a few imbalances existed, that disallowed me from progressing further in my development. I put my head in my hands and wondered why do I make myself sick, why can't I overcome this, maybe I'm just human after all? I believe that is what got it! I am what I am, and that's all I am. I knew this morbid depression must have some human explainable cause, an imbalance somewhere. The mind and body cannot be separated, a physical imbalance can precipitate effects that could eventually lead to some mental imbalance. Too much sleep, too little, the wrong kind of food, too much, too little, too much reading in the wrong position, too much study, or too long an application to one subject, results in imbalances, conflicts, struggles. I was looking for a solution from one direction only, when no event, no effect in nature, has a single cause. It's a collection of causes! So I look at myself and I discover new ways of knowing myself, seeing and placing myself in the vast scheme. The struggle is almost over, my friend, complete and harmonious development can be mine, everyone's. Only one-fourth of the sorrow in each man's life is caused by outside uncontrollable elements, the rest is self-imposed by failing to analyze and act with calmness.

George

manner, with only polite please for justice and moderation, all to no avail. We have shown a noble indisposition to react with the passion that each new oppression engenders. But any fool should be able to see that this cannot be allowed to continue. Any fool should be able to see that nature allows no such imbalances as this to exist for long. We have petitioned for judicial redress. We have remonstrated, supplicated, demonstrated, and prostrated ourselves before the feet of our self-appointed administrators. We have done all that we can do to circumvent the eruption that now comes on apace. The point of no return in our relationship has long been passed. I know what must and will take place so I follow my ends through to their most glorious conclusion. Don't make me waste my time and energy winning you to a position that you should already support with all your sympathies. The same forces that have made your life miserable, the same forces that have made your life senseless and unrewarding, threaten me and all our posterity. I know the way out. If you cannot help, sit back and listen, watch. You are charged with the responsibility of acknowledging the truth, my friend, and supporting it with whatever means, no matter how humble, are in your power. I am charged to right the wrong, lift the burden from the backs of future generations. I will not shrink from my duties. I will never falter or waver before the task, but we will go forward — to resolve this conflict once and forever. Of all the twenty thousand known years of advanced civilization, the years that are now coming on will be the most momentous.

George

AUGUST, 1965

Dear Father,

Although I'm still between the life-death cycle, I feel a lot better. How is the teeth situation with you?

I know you stay pretty busy and have a very bad memory, but try to remember to answer this question in your next letter. You told me once when I was at home there never to sleep more than six hours a day. You said that four was really enough. Why did you say this? On what authority? Experience or just something you read? What would be the effects of getting too much sleep?

I've been carrying out some very interesting experiments with myself in here. I quite definitely do not believe in a strict regimen. By strict

or perhaps more to lose will work something out. I have tried several times over the last few years to adopt this means of rationalization for my own relief. I tried it at the start of this last attack upon my well-being. Like you, I go to bed each night hoping that the morrow will bring about the needed change. I simply force all my awareness, all my many and monumental problems, from my remembrance. Without plans or forethought, without a hint of uneasiness, I go to bed each night, hoping, trying to avert the storm that is now coming on. I find each morning, as I found this one, freighted with possibilities of my own disaster. I still see the poverty among plenty, feel the curse of total insecurity. I still feel cramped within this cloud of ignorance which has been placed about me purposely to make me act against my interests. My bed is just as hard as it was when I went to sleep, my clothing just as coarse and inadequate. Here in the isolation cell the pitifully light breakfasts are just the same. I went supperless to bed the night before. Each morning if I can find or beg a piece of soap I wash myself. This is indeed counted as good fortune. But I mustn't complain. It is un-American to do so. Like the rest of you I should be completely lacking in feeling for myself. I should smile and sing. Perhaps I should thank the lord in spite of the fact that I have had not one moment's mental gratification in all my twenty-three years. I find no relief in baseball and basketball games on the TV. The charges they bring against me now could cost me my life, the last of my possessions, the only thing they have heretofore left me with. But now that I think of it, I have always been forced to fear for my life, so this is nothing new. It merely more direct.

One of you send me twenty-five dollars as soon as you can after reading this. I will get out of isolation next week and be locked up in segregation (slightly better than this because we can draw money or articles from the prison store). I want to buy some envelopes, and books that I will be needing. Important because I have nothing. Have lost everything. If you can get it here soon enough I will be allowed to draw it this month.

Well, I've heard it said that the darkest hour falls just before dawn, so I brace myself to my tasks, never doubting in my ability to struggle on. I feel no defeat could overcome me, and fear no evil but fear itself perhaps. I have removed this emotion from my mind completely, and I languish in misery, waiting. This is a big part of the battle: waiting for the correct moment and then having the courage and wit to move when the time is right. The living condition, though bad, have no effect upon

me physically. But how much longer will this last for me in and out of prison, for you in and out of debt, for the others of our kind who suffer jail, mental institutions, and the like. How long will we be forced to live this life, where every meal is an accomplishment, where every movie or pair of shoes is a fulfillment, where circumstance never allows our children to develop past a mental age of sixteen. I've been patient, but where I'm concerned patience has its limits. Take it too far, and it's cowardice.

George

JUNE, 1965 9

Dear Father,

We can spend twenty-five dollars a month here at the canteen for toilet articles, a few dry goods, and food. But we can spend any amount through the mail on such things as books, typewriters, correspondence courses in all the liberal arts. I spend what you have sent me on books. Many that are of interest and value to me cannot be obtained here in the library.

Anything that you send me in the way of finances is a good investment, the returns will be forthcoming after the successful conclusion of the wars.

Mao Tse-tung, leader of the Chinese Communist party, has written many works on politics and war. Please ascertain the exact titles of his works and who they are published by and how much each costs. Also the price of the Encyclopedia Africana by William Du Bois. How many volumes are there in the set? Who publishes them? It is very important that I have the publisher's name and address, because if I come by the money to purchase these books I need the exact titles and publishers. To read and study the major works of these two authors would be the climax of my education, and education in itself. Du Bois was a mere fool in his earlier days; but right at the close of his eventful life he gave up this life of toil, deprivation, and tears to join his own kind. He left the United States, went to Ghana, and wrote the Encyclopedia Africana.

It is difficult, very difficult to get any facts concerning our history and our way of life. The lies, half-truths, and propaganda have won total sway over the facts. We have no knowledge of our heritage. Our

remembered by me. I remember the garbage right under the side and back of our place on Racine. Mama having to wash and wring clothes by hand, carrying Penny and Jon while some fat redheaded mama sat on her behind. I remember how strange people looked to me when I finally had to be sent to Skinner School. You never knew why I was almost killed the first day I went, but I do. I remember how the rent and clothes for us children kept you broke and ragged. All of us hungry, if not for food — the other things that make life bearable. After you and Mama settled down you had no recreational outlets whatever. And everyone on Warren Blvd. knows how you would beat me all the way home from our baseball games in the alley. Robert, can you see how absurd you sound to me when you speak on "the good life," or something about being a free adult? I know you have never been free. I know that few blacks over here have ever been free. The forms of slavery merely changed at the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation from chattel slavery to economic slavery. If you could see and talk to some of the blacks I meet in here you would immediately understand what I mean, and see that I'm right. They are all average, all with the same backgrounds, and in for the same thing, some form of food getting. About 70 to 80 percent of all crime in the U.S. is perpetrated by blacks, "the sole reason for this is that 98 percent of our number live below the poverty level in bitter and abject misery"! You must take off your rose-colored glasses and stop pretending. We have suffered an unmitigated wrong! How do you think I felt when I saw you come home each day a little more depressed than the day before? How do you think I felt when I looked in your face and saw the clouds forming, when I saw you look around and see your best efforts go for nothing — nothing. I can count the times on my hands that you managed to work up a smile.

George

JULY, 1965

Dear Father,

Well I guess you know that I'm aware that this is not the best of all possible lives. You also know that I thank you for trying to cushion the shocks and strains that history has made it our lot to have to endure. But the make-believe game has ended now. I don't think it necessary for me to burden myself with listing strains we've endured. You are intelligent enough to know. At each phase of this long train of tyrannies, we have conducted ourselves in a very meek and civilized

for the vote of confidence you displayed in that letter to the warden. I'll never forget it! All my younger life you betrayed me. Like I said, I could forgive. At first you may not have known any better, but over the last two years I've informed you of many things. I've given you my best and you have rejected me for my enemies. With this last act, you have betrayed my bosom interest, even though I warned you not to say anything at all. I will never forgive you this. Should we live forever I'll never trust you again. Your mind has failed you completely. To take sides against your son! You did it in '58 and now again. There will not be a third time. The cost to me is too great. Father against son, and brother against brother. This is truly detestable. You are a sick man.

George

JULY, 1965

Dear Father,

I am perplexed and hard pressed in finding a solution or reason that will adequately explain why we are so eager to follow Charlie. Why we are so impressed with his apparent know-how. A glance at his history shows that it has been one long continuous war. At no time in European history has there been a period of peace and harmony. Every moment of his past has been spent in the breakdown of civilization by causing war, disruption, disease, and artificial famine. You send me a date from the moment he emerged from his cave-dwelling days and I'll tell you which of his tribes were at war, either on us or on themselves. The whole of the Western European's existence here in the U.S. has been the same one long war with different peoples. This is the only thing they understand, the only thing they respect — the only thing they can do with any dexterity. Do you accept this miscreant as the architect of the patterns that must guide your future life! If so, we must part company, and it is best we do so now, before the trouble begins. But please stop and think so that you can turn yourself around in time, so that the developments to come won't shock you so badly. I have not wasted my time these last three or four years. I speak with some authority and people are listening. People like me are going to be shaping your tomorrows. So just sit back, open your mind, and watch, since you can't marshal the fundamentals to help me.

Yes, my friend, I remember everything, the reason that Delora and I had to spend that summer and winter in Harrisburg is known and

economic status has reduced our minds to a state of complete oblivion. The young black who comes out of college or the university is as ignorant and unlearned as the white laborer. For all practical purposes he is worse off than when he went in, for he has learned only the attitudes and ways of the snake, and a few well-worded lies. The ruling culture refuses to let us know how much we did to advance civilization in our lands long ago. It refuses to recognize and appreciate our craft and strength and allow us some of the fruits of our labor. All this has left an emptiness in our lives, a void, a vacuum that must soon be filled by hostilities. I am most certainly committed, until the day I'm sent to the warrior's rest. By the ruling culture's acts of greed and barbarism the uncommitted will soon learn that compromise with such an enemy is impossible. Our two fortunes move along a collision course. I'm prepared in every aspect, I have nothing, I can lose nothing!

George

JUNE, 1965

Dear Mother,

Even though I have plenty of time now, I don't write more regularly because of my studies. I get involved in some aspect of the subjects that interest me and before I can extract myself the lights are going off and it is twelve o'clock. You know the last thing we discussed just before you people left me when you were up here last, well I've decided to go into it-now.

My life here is slowly becoming one of complete alienation. I talk to fewer convicts every day. Just one lieutenant here has tried to do anything for me. He got me out of segregation twice last year. The die is cast now though, I guess, thumbs down on me. My future is about as sound as a three-dollar bill. I thank whatever forces there are working for me that I'm still able to write you. I'm joking of course, it isn't that serious.

Nothing will help me now though but patience and I have developed plenty. There is nothing left to me now but to await whatever may come. I go back to the board October or is it December. Nine months from March would be December. Yes! Perhaps the fog will lift and I will see some ray of hope by then. You know the thing which they have locked me up for now could mean spending my next few years in



confinement here. It would be merely a flight from reality to think that I could get a date this year. I would be happy though to just know how long I will be held, even if it was 10 years. I'd feel better knowing.

Take care of yourself.  
Son

JUNE, 1965

Dear Father,  
One of those tall ultra-bright electrical fixtures used to illuminate the walls and surrounding area at night casts a direct beam of light in my cell at night. (I moved to a different cell last week). Consequently I have enough light, even after the usual twelve o'clock lights-out, to read or study by. I don't really have to sleep now if I choose not to. The early hours of morning are the only time of the day that one can find any respite from the pandemonium caused by these the most uncultured of San Quentin inmates. I don't let the noise bother me even in the evenings when it rises to maddening intensity, because I try to understand my surroundings. I've asked myself, as I do about all the other aspects of life, why — why do white cons act and react as if they were animals of a lower order than we black men (some blacks get foolish also but we don't refer to them as "men")? Why just because they look like shaved monkeys must they also act like them? It's frayed nerves, caused by the harsh terms that defeat brought when they went against the system, the same system that runs this place. I must ask myself why did they go against the system and why are the terms so harsh? Could it be that a man will most always pursue his interests, system or no? But why should so many people's interests lie outside the system? Why doesn't the system encompass the needs and requirements of all or, to be realistic, the majority. We now come to the part of the question around which the whole contention pivots: Why are the terms so harsh, the price of defeat so high? What is it that causes a man to become power-mad, to deify exploitation and mendacity and vilify the compatible, harmonious things of nature, how many times have you heard that "everyone should help fight the evils of communism," etc.?

George

JULY, 1965

Lester,

I write this letter to inform you that the people who hold me here read that letter sent them. They read it and smiled with satisfaction and triumph. You are under a grave illusion, I must now admit. You didn't think they would inform me of it, did you? But you are in serious error. They let me read it. Apparently every petty official in the prison has read it, all to my embarrassment. For it sounded like something out of Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin.

It didn't just cause me embarrassment. It also has caused me to be put in a cell that has the lock welded closed. Can it possibly be? Is it within the scope of feasibility that you did not know that to tell these people I was "bent on self-destruction" (to use your reference) would cause me harm? Are you so feeble of mind as to "report," after a visit with me, that I am bent on violent self-destruction and think it would cause me no harm!

I have always respected and loved you people, and hated myself, cried bitter tears of remorse, when, because of circumstances and conditions, which I didn't understand, I let you down. Even after I discovered the true cause of my ills, when I found that this social order had created, through its inadequacies and its abandonment of our interest, the basis for my frustrations, I forgave you for not preparing me; for not warning me, for pretending that this was the best of all possible worlds. I forgave you for misleading me. I forgave that catholic school thing. I tried to understand your defeat complex and your loyalty to institutions contrary to the blacks' interest.

I've traveled widely over this country and some in Mexico. I've met and have had exchanges with hundreds of thousands of people. I've read extensively in the fields of social-economic and political theory and development, all of this done against serious resistance from all sides. But because I knew one day that I would find what I'm after, and answer some of the questions that beset my mind with confusion and unrest and fear, I pushed ahead in spite of the foolish conformity that I saw in you people. Now I have arrived at a state of awareness that (because of the education system) few Negroes reach in the U.S. In my concern for you, I try to share the benefits of my experience and my observations, but am rewarded by being called madman. Thank you