

## **Introduction: American Apocalypse\***

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### **AMERICAN APOCALYPSE**

While America is boasting of her freedom and making the world ring with her professions of equality, she holds millions of her inhabitants in bondage.

Henry Box Brown, Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown (1851)

where does it all lead to?  
i mean, like where are we going?  
and where did we come from?  
where did it all begin?  
and who started it?

raúlsalinas (Raúl Salinas), “Pregúntome” (1970)

### **INTRODUCTION: LIVING APOCALYPSE, RADICAL FREEDOM**

Amidst the current apocalypse of mass-based punishment and liquidation thrives a political lineage at war with its own disappearance, haunting and shadowing United States civil society with earthquake fantasies of liberation and freedom. Resonating the opening epigraph by Henry Box Brown, the one-time slave who escaped Virginia by sealing himself in a mail crate and emerging in Philadelphia twenty-seven hours later, these are visions of displacement and disarticulation, confronting the non-imprisoned “free world” with the sturdy deadly premises of its own definition and self-narration. Fatal unfreedom, historically articulated through imprisonment and varieties of (undeclared) warfare, and currently proliferating through epochal technologies of human immobilization and bodily disintegration, forms the grammar and materiality of American society. It is within a troubled relation to the terror and essential violence of this social coherence—as both a scholar-activist committed to radical transformation and a direct descendant of a population once targeted for genocidal extermination by

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the United States of America<sup>1</sup>—that I offer this book, a sustained theoretical engagement with the praxis of radical intellectuals imprisoned in the United States.

I am focusing my theoretical attention on the post-1970s formation of “radical prison praxis”, as an active current of political-intellectual work shaped by a condition of direct and unmediated confrontation with technologies of state and state-sanctioned (domestic) warfare. This political lineage refutes and displaces, confuses and short-circuits the coherent and durable sets of political assumptions that define the commonly enforced limits of public discourse and social intercourse in the United States. In part, the theoretical trajectories and political legacies of this praxis render essentially unstable and, at times, untenable the very foundations of such valorized and allegedly universal American entitlements as 1) formal protection under the fundamental (“inalienable”) rubrics of constitutional or civil “rights”, 2) mediated protection under the rule and dominion of the state’s juridical, policing, and (para)military structures, and 3) the everyday presumption of individual and collective bodily integrity, that is, a generalized freedom from anticipated or imminent physical suffering, violation, or obliteration. Departing from this condition of theoretical and material crisis, I am interested in a different philosophy of praxis, one inscribed by the very logic of violence, disappearance, and death that forms the regime from within which it is produced, returning an image (shadow? apparition? echo?) of a world in terror, at war, yet unsettlingly stable.

Imprisoned radical intellectuals critically envision (and sometimes strategize) the displacement or termination of the epochal American production of biological and cultural genocides, mass-based bodily violence, racialized domestic warfare, and targeted, coercive misery.

#### **LINEAGE AND “SOCIAL TRUTH”: DISTINGUISHING “IMPRISONED RADICAL INTELLECTUALS”**

I have chosen the conceptual designation “imprisoned radical intellectuals” for reasons that should be clarified. First, my choice of designation foregrounds the term “imprisoned” in order to bring attention to the conditions of possibility, that is, the changing regime of rituals, practices, and juridical procedures that structure this category of intellectual and cultural production. The terms “prison intellectual”, “prison writer”, and

“radical prisoner” (terms which I freely used until the last revisions) tend to re-inscribe and naturalize the regime of imprisonment, as if it were a natural feature of the social landscape and an irreducible facet of the “prisoner’s” identity and historical subjectivity.

Second, I am addressing while exceeding current juridical and progressive activist/human rights categorizations of “political prisoners” and “prisoners of war (POWs)”. Progressive and leftist definitions of these terms, despite their subtle (and hotly debated) variations, often address a specific telos of incarceration that privileges the existence of the liberationist/radical insurrectionist/revolutionary political subject prior to her/his encounter with formal juridical criminalization, police bodily apprehension, and state captivity.

According to these definitions, political prisoners and prisoners of war are imprisoned as a direct result of their political activities in civil society—community organizing, political education, public speech, armed self-defense, artistic production, guerilla warfare—that foster or manifest insurrection against socially embedded forms of domination and subjection. Activist attorney Jill Soffiyah Elijah, who has worked on behalf of U.S. political prisoners for over two decades, outlines the broadly accepted international standard of definition:

Political prisoners are men and women who have been incarcerated for their political views and actions. They have consciously fought against social injustice, colonialism, and/or imperialism and have been incarcerated as a result of their political commitments. Even while in prison, these men and women continue to adhere to their principles. This definition of the term “political prisoner” is accepted throughout the international community.<sup>2</sup>

Other less restrictive, though still politically centered conceptions focus on the criminalization of those already imprisoned who have taken action against systems of national, racial, gender, and/or class oppression during the time of their incarceration. Within these definitions, “common” or social prisoners may become “political prisoners” by virtue of their politically articulated actions on behalf of the oppressed, and their frequent subjection to enhanced penal consequences as a result. According to Can’t Jail the Spirit:

A Political Prisoner is a person, sanctioned by The Movement, evolved in character and deeds, who is held in confinement for support of, or identity with, a people struggling for freedom from an oppressive government or against its oppressive policies.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to personifying the (rather slippery) attribute of an “evolved” political identity, political prisoners/POWs are overwhelmingly understood as having been affiliated with particular organizations, discrete social movements, or specific counter- and anti-state uprisings that seek a liquidation of oppressive socio-political and economic structures, including (proto)slavery, (cultural and biological) genocide, military occupation, communal displacement, white supremacist apartheid, and neo-liberalism.

While my conceptualization of “imprisoned radical intellectuals” incorporates (and centers) the political prisoners and POWs encompassed by the aforementioned definitions, it also invites a broader political understanding of the abject categorization of “commonly” imprisoned people. Overwhelmingly poor, Black, and Brown, “common prisoners” remain broadly unrecognized by the activist public, rendered nameless and non-specified, while generally presumed to be outside staid and elitist conceptions of the “political”. Such politically unrecognized captives compose the vast majority of those who have become activists and political intellectuals while imprisoned, many of whom were and are engaged in unprogrammatic (or non-organizational) varieties of liberationist-directed anti-systemic activity prior to, during, and after their incarceration. Some are explicitly radical or revolutionary in their political commitments, and many more are proto-radical—that is, committed to insurrection and rebellion against structures of domination, though in the absence of a formal ideological system. Most often, rather than being a product of extant social movements or free world-based organizations, the unrecognized imprisoned activist is interpellated by the political influence and mentorship of her/his peers and predecessors (including political prisoners/POWs duly “recognized” by activists in civil society), as well as the pragmatic urgency of self-education for legal defense and political/spiritual self-defense.

I follow a dynamic, contextual definition of “the political” within my conception of the imprisoned radical intellectual, following activist and political theorist Marshall Eddie Conway’s thoughtful reflections on the socio-historical transformations he has witnessed over the time of his

incarceration (a Baltimore Black Panther imprisoned since 1970, Conway is among the longest held political prisoners in the United States).<sup>4</sup> During a 2004 lecture conducted via speakerphone for an advanced seminar in Ethnic Studies, Conway was pressed by one student to offer a re-definition of the “political prisoner” that accounts for the shape of the post-1970s political landscape.<sup>5</sup> His response proves instructive as a framework for conceptualizing the current condition.

The seminar [participants] had been discussing the juridical, cultural, and military proliferation of the state’s racialized domestic warfare techniques, hallmarked by the 1980s declaration of a “War on Drugs”, and accompanied by a drastic police militarization, punitive juridical shift, and emergence of the mass incarceration form now known as the prison industrial complex. We were also critically examining the breathtaking varieties of the state’s formal and ad hoc aggression against broad categories of (poor) Black, indigenous, and Third World populations in the current historical moment, a trajectory of domestic warfare that appears to target “civilian populations” (in addition to radical “activist” and insurgent groups) for social liquidation and/or political neutralization. Speaking to this shift in socio-historical context, Conway departs from static definitions of the “political prisoner” in exchange for a more multilayered understanding:

[A political prisoner] in my opinion would be an activist, a person that stands up to injustices, a person who for whatever reason takes the position that this or that is wrong, whether they do it based on ideology or they do it based on what they think is morally right... It’s where you’re at in [terms of] location on the one hand, and it’s where you’re at historically....

On the one hand, I think that there’s a universal classification for political prisoners and that’s movement related, activity related, ideologically related, in the sense that... these people were engaged in political activity.

But I also have learned over thirty-some years of being in jail that a lot of people become political prisoners, become conscious and become aware and act and behave based on that awareness after they have been incarcerated for criminal activity or other kinds of activities.

That's on one level, on another level I'm also aware [that] there are people forced into the position of [becoming] political prisoners because of some act of the government or some opposition they have presented to the government.<sup>6</sup>

Following Conway's political inventory, I emphasize the historical and cultural specificity of the "imprisoned radical intellectual" in order to foreground the counter- and anti-systemic, radical and revolutionary materiality of this political lineage. Imprisoned radical intellectuals, as I argue throughout the book, are politically constituted by the prison's regime of immobilization and bodily disintegration. The state's (and prison's) technologies of incarceration do not only repress or delimit the praxis of imprisoned activists—this programmatic violence inhabits, occupies, and interpellates political and historical subjects within a specific structure of political confrontation. It is precisely this unstable tension—at times an explosive or fatal confrontation—between the oppressive regime of the prison and the materialized political subjectivity of the captive radical intellectual that catalyzes and shapes a pathway of radicalism and insurgency.

Imprisoned radical intellectuals densely articulate, through multiple voices and vernaculars, the proliferation and extension of the prison's regimented technologies of domination into the everyday systems of social formation. The allegedly excessive, exceptional, or abnormal violence of the prison regime's violence is, within this political-intellectual lineage, reconceptualized as a fundamental organizing logic of the United States in its local, translocal, and global enactments: as such, this is a body of "radical" praxis in the etymological sense of the term, as a political labor that emanates from and is directed toward transforming or destroying the "roots" of a particular social formation, engaged in critical opposition to its constitutive logics of organization and historical possibility. Truly, this is a lineage that exposes the symbiosis of love and hate, revolution and creative destruction, in the process of envisioning the end of oppressive violence and programmatic human domination.

To appropriate Frantz Fanon's meditation in a different time and place, a war of social truths rages beneath the normalized violence of any such condition of domination. It is the Manichean relation between colonized and colonizer, "native" and "settler", or here, free and unfree that conditions the subaltern truths of both imminent and manifest insurgencies. Speaking to the anti-colonialist nationalism of the Algerian revolution, Fanon writes:

The problem of truth ought also to be considered. In every age, among the people truth is the property of the national cause. No absolute verity, no discourse on the purity of the soul, can shake this position. The native replies to the living lie of the colonial situation by an equal falsehood. His [sic] dealings with his fellow-nationals are open; they are strained and incomprehensible with regard to the settlers. Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation; it is all that protects the natives, and ruins the foreigners. In this colonialist context there is no truthful behavior: and the good is quite simply that which is evil for “them”.<sup>7</sup>

Truth, for Fanon, is precisely that which generates and multiplies the historical possibility of disruptive, subversive movement against colonial oppression. The evident rhetoric of oppositionality, of the subaltern “good” that necessarily materializes “evil” in the eyes of domination, offers a stunning departure from the language of negotiation, dialogue, progress, moderation, and peace that has become hegemonic in discourses of social change and social justice, in and outside the United States. The native’s “equal falsehood” is, in fact, a necessary and ethical response to a regime that renders a hegemonic truth through the regulated death and deterioration of the native’s body and society. Perhaps most importantly, the political language of opposition is premised on its open-endedness and contingency, a particular refusal to soothe the anxiety generated in the attempt to displace a condition of violent peace for the sake of something else, a world beyond agendas, platforms, and practical proposals. There are no guarantees, or arrogant expectations, of an ultimate state of liberation waiting on the other side of the politically immediate struggle against the settler colony.

A similar political vernacular and vision haunt the recent history of radical prison praxis. The reductive conception of the prison as simply a site of “resistance” to state violence vastly underestimates the complexity of political discourse generated by its resident, radical organic intellectuals. This body of knowledge and truth is premised on the utter impossibility of dialogue and communication with the force—discursive, embodied, institutionalized—of one’s own domination. Longtime U.S. political prisoner Marilyn Buck,<sup>8</sup> imprisoned for assisting in the liberation and eventual political refuge of Assata Shakur, offers powerful testimony from

the Dublin (CA) women's prison in her 2000 article, "Prisons, Social Control, and Political Prisoners". Arguing against the tendency of progressive and radical social movements to institutionalize politics through conservative organizational forms, Buck articulates a form of political commitment that foreshadows a new—though historically rooted—political language.

There is always room to debate politics, points of view, strategies, and tactics. To confront differences and questions is a good thing. Any struggle for liberation demands free and open debate of ideas and practices. At the same time, active struggles need to support those who act consciously and politically. To do so is a part of asserting the right to struggle, as well as defending activism and promoting stronger resistance to the military, financial, and political apparatus that denies our society and the whole world true equality and justice.<sup>9</sup> [emphasis added]

Buck's insistence on the necessity of conflict and exchange among and within such "active struggles" begs the question of how imprisoned activists might project themselves into the social movements of the free world as well as the ongoing, de-centered political skirmishes occurring in civil society. Her conception of a "free and open debate" among activists as the condition of possibility for viable liberation struggle foregrounds the current condition of mass (and political) imprisonment as perhaps the fundamental obstacle to an authentic political radicalism—where the categorical status of unfreedom is tolerated or otherwise compromised by activists in the free world, their putative visions of social transformation fall into complicity with the contemporary material symbiosis of punishment and human containment.

Most important in the above passage is Buck's audacious assertion of a moral, political, and historical right to struggle. In addition to offering an incipient, alternate political theory of resistance, opposition, and revolutionary movement that demystifies the state's naturalized monopoly on both legitimate violence and the moral/judicial right to determine the acceptable (non-criminalized) modes of political struggle within its formal domain, the notion of a right to struggle is akin to a transhistorical political mandate. Buck reminds activists and intellectuals in civil society that the genesis of radical, liberatory power hinges on the pronouncement



and actualization of this right, compelling the invention of new languages, strategies, and fantasies of struggle against domination and oppression.

**WHITE SUPREMACY AND THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX:  
“A SOCIETY STRUCTURED IN DOMINANCE”**

In addition to generating a unique vernacular of freedom, liberation, and political struggle, this radical intellectual lineage composes an extensive theorization of state and state-sanctioned bodily violence as the central and productive technology of a “society structured in dominance”. Stuart Hall’s oft-quoted elaboration of racism as a central socio-cultural production—and dynamic, politically structuring component—of modern social formations bespeaks the specificity of racist and racial ideologies as they are produced and “made operative” in different historical moments. His essay, “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance”, rigorously examines the “ideological articulation” between racism and class relations, popular culture, and other modes of social thought and “popular consciousness”. Hall is worth quoting at length for the purpose of situating his theorization within this discussion of the United States carceral formation:

In each case, in specific social formations, racism as an ideological configuration has been reconstituted by the dominant class relations, and thoroughly reworked. If it has performed the function of that cementing ideology which secures a whole social formation under a dominant class, its pertinent differences from other such hegemonic ideologies require it to be registered in detail. Here, racism is particularly powerful and its imprint on popular consciousness especially deep, because in such racial characteristics as colour, ethnic origin, geographical position, etc., racism discovers what other ideologies have to construct: an apparently ‘natural’ and universal basis in nature itself. Yet, despite this apparent grounding in biological givens, outside history racism, when it appears, has an effect on other ideological formations within the same society, and its development promotes a transformation of the whole ideological field in which it becomes operative.<sup>10</sup>

Imprisoned radical intellectuals put a finer point on Hall’s conception of racism’s multiple (and transformative) articulations within social

formation, conceptualizing imprisonment, punishment, and policing as the categorical practices through which hegemonic, overlapping conceptions of “freedom” and “peace”—themselves structured in dominance—cohere the United States “society”. A close examination of these regimes of social ordering—prisons, the law, (domestic/undeclared) warfare, and policing—contextualizes an historicized definition of white supremacy, which is essential to the theoretical framework of this book.

White supremacist regimes, organic (if not unique) to the United States—from racial chattel slavery and frontier genocide to recent and current modes of land displacement and (domestic/undeclared) warfare, are sociologically entangled with the state’s changing paradigms, strategies, and technologies of human incarceration and punishment. The historical nature of this entanglement is widely acknowledged, although explanations of the structuring relations of force vary widely and conflict deeply.<sup>11</sup> For our theoretical purposes, white supremacy may be understood as a logic of social organization that produces regimented, institutionalized, and militarized conceptions of hierarchies of “human” difference. There are three essential components to this theoretical framework.

First, as an historical discourse of power, white supremacy is premised on the conception and enforcement of the universalized white (European and euro-american) “human” vis-à-vis the rigorous production, penal discipline, and frequent social, political, and biological neutralization or extermination of the (non-white) sub- or non-human. While such hierarchies of differences are overwhelmingly constituted through discourses of “race”, they are also made through references to and productions of “ethnicity”, “nationality”, “religion”, “biology”, and other discursive regimes. It is, however, the fundamental and durable opposition between the white universal human, and the peculiar non-white sub/semi/non-human, that reproduces white supremacy as a force of social order.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, in order to understand white supremacy as a complex technology of human domination, one need look no further than radical political geographer and abolitionist activist Ruthie Gilmore’s conception of “racism” as the primary weaponry of white supremacy. Her conceptualization departs from hackneyed definitions of racism (as well as “racial discrimination”, “racial inequality”, and “race relations”) that obscure historical relations of power and domination, and instead magnifies the centrality of race to the programmatic and hierarchical organization of life and death:

Racism is the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies.<sup>13</sup>

As a logic of social organization, white supremacy is scaffolded by technologies of killing that sediment in Gilmore's definition of racism, recalling histories of militarized mass-based liquidation as well as normalized and institutionalized forms of racial population control and targeted decimation, including coerced inaccessibility to shelter, nutrition, and health care.

Thirdly, white supremacy must be understood as inextricably gendered; its modalities of articulation and violence are specific to constructions and expropriations of the male/female "biological" and projections of masculine/feminine sexuality and social existence.<sup>14</sup> Critical race theorist Dorothy Roberts, in her study of U.S. judicial aggression against Black women's reproductive freedoms, writes,

Black procreation helped to sustain slavery, giving slave masters an economic incentive to govern Black women's reproductive lives. Slave women's childbearing replenished the enslaved labor force: Black women bore children who belonged to the slaveowner from the moment of their conception. This feature of slavery made control of reproduction a central aspect of whites' subjugation of African people in America. It marked Black women from the beginning as objects whose decisions about reproduction should be subject to social regulation rather than their own will....

All of these violations were sanctioned by law. Racism created for white slaveowners the possibility of unrestrained reproductive control. The social order established by powerful white men was founded on two inseparable ingredients: the dehumanization of Africans on the basis of race, and the control of women's sexuality and reproduction.<sup>15</sup>

Native American scholar and radical antiviolenace activist Andrea Smith resonates Roberts in her contention that,

[C]ommunities of color become pollution from which the state must constantly purify itself. Women of color become particularly dangerous to the world order as they have the ability to reproduce the next generations of communities of color....

Colonizers such as Andrew Jackson recommended that troops systematically kill Indian women and children after massacres in order to complete extermination....

Consequently, Native women and women of color deserve no bodily integrity... [o]r, as Chicago-based reproductive rights activist Sharon Powell describes it, women of color are “better dead than pregnant”.<sup>16</sup> [emphasis added]

White supremacy, in this historical and theoretical context, may be conceptualized as a socially ordering logic rather than an “extremist” or otherwise marginal political ideology. By way of illustration, this is to consider the American social formation as the template for the Ku Klux Klan (a proudly “White Christian” organization), and to comprehend the complex role of “mainstream” American civil society (in conjunction with its precedent colonial, frontier, and plantation forms) as simultaneously the Klan’s periodic political antagonist and historical partner in violence.<sup>17</sup>

To consider white supremacy as American social formation facilitates a discussion of the modalities through which this material racial logic constitutes and over-determines the social, political, economic, and cultural structures that compose the contemporary hegemony and constitute the common sense that is organic to its ordering. For the purposes of this text, I conceptualize white supremacy through its fundamental contrapuntality: the inscription of a fundamental relation between freedom and unfreedom, life and death, historically derived from the socially constitutive American production of white life/mobility through Black, Brown, and indigenous death/immobilization. The contemporary prison regime is, in this context, simultaneously the materialization of U.S. civil society’s presumptive white corporate identity (inclusive of its post-civil rights “multicultural” articulations) and the production of a social logic essential to the current social order—a fabrication and criminalization of disorder for the sake of extracting and dramatizing order, compliance, authority.

Thus, while Hall references racism as the ideological glue of a given hegemony, I am arguing that in the current era of mass imprisonment, white

supremacist unfreedom—specifically, carceral technologies of human immobilization and bodily disintegration—provides the institutional form, cultural discourse, and ethical basis of social coherence, safety, and civic peace. It is, therefore, the normal functioning of the prison that bears interrogation, as opposed to its “brutal”, “unconstitutional”, “racist”, “homophobic”, or “sexist” excesses, corruptions, and institutional imperfections. The work of imprisoned radical intellectuals traces the contours and continuities of American civil society as a dynamic locality of white freedom, domesticating and proliferating the twinned constitutive logics of white bodily mobility and ascendant white historical/political subjectivity (“freedom”) across scales of varying magnitude—from the grandiose racial property and white existential claims of the United States’ political and juridical foundations, to the ongoing construction of the white American telos, and corresponding material narration of the white nationalist bildungsroman.

Sometimes forgotten in the wash of the current epoch of “globalized” and hyper-mobile technologies of power are the regimes of bodily immobilization that counterpose social formation and global civil society with the production of new mass-based carceral forms, (undeclared) war zones, and what might be called unfree worlds. Radical political geographer and abolitionist activist Ruthie Gilmore situates California’s rapid post-1980s prison expansion amidst the multiple political, cultural, and economic crises generated and compounded by the processes of “globalization”. Her analysis opens new lines of insight into the emergence of the prison regime as a fundamental and generative, rather than supplemental and static dimension of local and global American hegemonies. Moving through Gilmore’s theoretical lead, we can more easily comprehend the qualitative transformation of policing, jurisprudence, and imprisonment technologies into forms of power that extend significantly beyond their nominally limited juridical, administrative, or punitive functions.

Rejecting the two predominant critical explanations for the emergence of the prison industrial complex; namely, institutionalized racism and “carceral Keynesianism”, Gilmore argues that in the age of globalized capital:

[T]he expansion of prison constitutes a geographical solution to socio-economic problems, politically organized by the state which is itself in the process of radical restructuring. This view brings the complexities and contradictions of globalization home, by showing

how already existing social, political and economic relations constitute the conditions of possibility (but not inevitability) for ways to solve major problems.<sup>18</sup>

Gilmore argues that the Goldwater/Nixon electoral bloc's serial, reactionary "law and order" campaigns fueled an ascendant Right wing that recoded domestic political insurrection or dissidence—inscribed most centrally on the movements and collective bodies of radical and liberationist Black and Third World people during the late 1960s—as criminality and rogue racial (read "anti-white") vengeance.

Simultaneous with the genesis of this "moral panic" surrounding racially and politically over-determined "crime" was a mounting macro-economic crisis that reached its nadir in the 1973-1977 global recession. Widespread racialized "class" displacements followed, as corporations moved investment and structural focus away from industrial production and cast entire regions and populations of the United States into veritable economic obsolescence: in particular, the vital disappearance of domestic "heavy industries" (the factory-based production of auto, steel, rubber, etc.) and "rural extractive industries" (timber, fishing, mining) almost instantaneously obsolesced the labor of masses of people. Gilmore thus argues that the statecraft arising from this socio-economic crisis materialized in the formation of the "integument of the prison industrial complex", inaugurating a "modus operandi for solving crises [through] the relentless identification, coercive control, and violent elimination of foreign and domestic enemies".<sup>19</sup> In resonance with Gilmore's analysis, political prisoner Linda Evans (released in 2001) and activist Eve Goldberg write: "Like the military/industrial complex, the prison industrial complex is an interweaving of private business and government interests. Its twofold purpose is profit and social control. Its public rationale is the fight against crime."<sup>20</sup>

Gilmore's conception of "post-Keynesian militarism" elaborates this nexus of state-corporate alliance, social control, and state violence. As the Right wing asserted its hegemony within the legislative and juridical apparatuses in and beyond the 1980s, it was confronted with another basic political challenge.

[H]aving abandoned the Keynesian full employment/aggregate guarantee approach to downturns, the power bloc that emerged

from the 1980s onward faced the political problem of how to carry out its agenda—how, in other words, to go about its post-Keynesian state-building project in order to retain and reproduce victories. Capital might be the object of desire, but voters mattered. The new bloc, having achieved power under crisis conditions, consolidated around a popular anti-crime campaign that revived Richard Nixon’s successful law and order pitch. Thus the state rebuilt itself by building prisons fashioned from surpluses that the emergent post-golden-age political economy was not absorbing in other ways.<sup>21</sup>

Statecraft under these conditions required a qualitative transformation and expansion of the existing prison apparatus, over and above a mere refinement of its existing juridical or punitive technologies.

The relative (white) public consent to the breathtaking violence underlying this state project was enabled by the fact that the fodder of its production involved the massive social liquidation of human beings who, upon conviction, encountered civil death and de jure slave status vis-à-vis the provisions of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or anyplace subject to their jurisdiction.” [emphasis added] Further, the overwhelming criminalization of poor Black and Brown populations saturated this structural expansion with a white supremacist re-codification of the requirements for U.S. civil society’s intercourse and reproduction, as well as its very modality of self-articulation (now pitched in contrast or opposition to the social specter of Black/Brown criminality).

The budding structure of mass-based, white supremacist penalty—as both formalized state violence and state-sanctioned articulation of racist domination—spurred the genesis of a new wave of punitive juridical measures (not the other way around). Accompanying these formal juridical innovations was a brilliant wave of state-popular cultural production, encompassing and exceeding the searing and enveloping “War on Drugs” discourse of the 1980s renaissance of white civil society under the political and symbolic stewardship of Ronald Reagan. Providing a common sense explanation for the new state coercion, this legal and cultural labor generated an overwhelming popular acceptance of, and ideological investment in the

transformation of the prison into a primary apparatus for the maintenance and reproduction of social order.

As the U.S. prison, jail, INS/Homeland Security detainee, and incarcerated youth population approaches and surpasses the 2.5 million mark (as of this writing), the quantitative evidence only refracts the prison's qualitative transformation.<sup>22</sup> Activist-scholar and former political prisoner Angela Y. Davis has written and spoken extensively of the structures of "invisibility" accompanying the formation of state and corporate alliances through the development of a mass imprisonment regime. Echoing Davis, political prisoner Jalil Muntaqim argues that the elaboration and circulation of a racially coded punitive state discourse assumes a material life of its own, as the constant dramatization of criminality, personal endangerment, and vengeance interpellates civil society's subjects.<sup>23</sup>

By shaping the collective consciousness and attitudes, the politicians are then able to pass into law draconian sanctions. Sanctions that appease the will of the people demanding a safe society... ultimately serve the interest of restructuring the industrial-military complex, by forging an infrastructure for the proliferation of prison building.... [I]t anesthetizes the collective consciousness towards the desired end of permitting hundreds of thousands, if not millions more people to be incarcerated at no moral or psychic detriment to those who constitute the majority of Americans.<sup>24</sup> [emphasis added]

Muntaqim reminds us that the political and economic impetus behind this historical formation has generated a popular ethos of repression that renders criminalized populations and incarcerated people the collective objects of a normalized state violence. The most insidious aspect of this violence is that it is not simply a repressive response to social upheaval, collective disobedience, or criminal activity; that is, the (neo)liberal white supremacist state is not simply coercive, but is also productive of and symbiotic with the logic and culture of what Gilmore aptly names "industrialized punishment". Carceral state violence is thus the figurative and material nexus of multiple logics of domination and hegemony in the post-1960s era: it is a white supremacist formation that is simultaneously (although always unevenly) constituted by a vectoring of power trajectories that entwines "race",



“gender”, “class”, “sexuality”, “age”, and bodily/mental “(dis)ability”. To the extent that the state has come to rely on the pageantry of socio-political crisis for its various productions of social coherence, it has also reconstructed the political and cultural fabric of policing, punishment, and incarceration. The following section discusses the manner in which a new and necessary exterior to civil society, premised on the rehabilitation and security of civil society’s common white supremacist normativity, has transformed the prison into a constitutive center of the existing hegemony. This new constitutive center re-inscribes social formation by consolidating the emergent carceral formation as a new site of structured anti-sociality and civic death.

#### **RECONSTRUCTING THE HOMELAND: “LAW AND ORDER” AND THE WHITE ATLANTIC**

The historically unprecedented repression of the Black, Native American, Puerto Rican, Chicana/o and other US-based Third World liberation movements during and beyond the 1960s and 1970s forged a peculiar intersection between official and illicit forms of state and state-sanctioned violence. Policing, carceral, and punitive technologies were invented, developed, and refined at scales from the local to the national, encompassing a wide variety of organizing and deployment strategies. While the notorious Counter-intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) of J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI remains the most historically prominent incidence of the warfare waged by the state against domestic political movements, the multifarious spectacle of Hooverite repression at times obscures the broader—and far more sweeping—convergence of historical blocs and state formation that defined this era and its current legacies.

Spurring a rhetoric that would, within a decade, decisively shape the development of a bureaucratized, exponentially expanded, and widely militarized domestic police force, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater’s 1964 acceptance of the Republican Party/GOP nomination for the Presidential candidacy was a harbinger for white civil society at a moment of amplified political anxiety:

Now, my fellow Americans, the tide has been running against freedom. Our people have followed false prophets. We must, and we

shall, return to proven ways—not because they are old, but because they are true. We must, and we shall, set the tide running again in the cause of freedom... freedom—balanced so that liberty lacking order will not become the slavery of the prison cell; balanced so that liberty lacking order will not become the license of the mob and of the jungle.<sup>25</sup>

Echoing the racial juxtapositions of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Goldwater elaborated a white populist conception of liberty and security defined through the militarized containment—and ultimate liquidation—of the lurking urban/mob/jungle threat. Goldwater's strident conviction was to defend white civil society from its aggressors—an intimate, racial self-defense that generated a paradigm for law and order statecraft that remains a central facet of U.S. political life. Although his bid for the presidency failed, Goldwater's cultural thematic prevailed.

Security from domestic violence, no less than from foreign aggression, is the most elementary and fundamental purpose of any government, and a government that cannot fulfill that purpose is one that cannot long command the loyalty of its citizens. History shows us—demonstrates that nothing—nothing prepares the way for tyranny more than the failure of public officials to keep the streets from bullies and marauders.<sup>26</sup>

The exponential growth of the police industry in the United States closely followed the dictates of the Goldwater (and eventually Nixon) “law and order” bloc.<sup>27</sup> An allegory of bodily confrontation between innocent white vulnerability and Black/Brown criminal physicality instantiated a binding historical *telos* for the 1960s and 1970s White Reconstruction, a post-civil rights revival that required the simultaneous and decisive disruption of U.S.-based Black, Third World, and Indigenous liberation movements and their counterpart urban insurrections. Law and order was essentially an agenda for *white liberation*, instantiated through white civil society's awakening to the possibility of its own political disarticulation at the hands of Black and Third World insurrectionists and revolutionaries. U.S. civil society's invigorated institutionality—shaped by the burgeoning of foundation-funded non-profit organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and

mediated by the private sector, conservative and liberal faith communities, and corporate mass media—aligned with the law and order state as a virtual recruit and mass participant during the emergence of the Goldwater-Nixon bloc.<sup>28</sup> Elaborating the popular anxieties sprouting around the apparent and imminent displacement of the unique white supremacist hegemony of the United States, this historical bloc amounted to a broadly based political reconsolidation of a white civil society that had momentarily strolled with the specter of its own incoherence.

The militant reformism of the Civil Rights Movement had not only broken (and brokered) the legal structures of segregation and Jim Crow, but additionally foreshadowed a lapse and spasm within the white supremacist body politic's historical ascendancy. As it moved to reconfigure around the crisis yielded by this local and national struggle against official apartheid, white civil society was concurrently met with blossoming, radical struggles organized through and against historical structures of racial domination and “national” oppression. New forms of organized resistance to racist state violence were hallmarked during this period by the regional and national manifestations of the Black Panther Party and underground Black Liberation Army, and multiplied through the emergence of the Young Lords, Weather Underground, George Jackson Brigade, (U.S. Chinatown-based) Red Guards, Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino, and other radical self-defense, anti-imperialist, and domestic revolutionary organizations.<sup>29</sup> Along with the upsurge of urban insurrections against police brutality and other forms of state-sanctioned murder, these movements demystified and attacked the primary institutions of white supremacist hegemony and Black/Brown premature death: police, military, property, and law. Simultaneously, struggles for native american sovereignty openly declared and defended liberated territories while valorizing a politics of national treason, disrupting the presumptive juridical monopoly and sanctity of the U.S. Constitution (the legal heart of the white body politic).<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Puerto Rican independentistas waged an anti-colonial struggle on multiple fronts within the domestic spheres of American empire, culminating in the political trial of fourteen activists who refused to recognize the legitimacy of U.S. law and quickly became prisoners of war.<sup>31</sup>

The emergence of a definitive era of U.S. based (and frequently internationalist) liberation and revolutionary movements encompassed political and juridical claims that directly antagonized the constitutive logic

of the nation's historical formation as a white settler society. Such notions as "Black liberation", "Native American sovereignty", and Puerto Rican "self-determination" represented unanswerable demands on the United States of America, blaspheming the sanctity of American white localities. While examples of political violence committed by people of color against white bodies were few and far between, the culmination of the state's strategic (and self-legitimizing) use of unmediated physical force against Third World liberationists—at home and abroad—nonetheless articulated as self-defensive moral, cultural,<sup>32</sup> and material structures of white militarization. White civil society braced at the possibility of blowback for collective grievances that were gravely historical.

Thus, the politics of law and order entailed a pedagogical refining of a budding white supremacist desire for surveillance, policing, caging, and (pre-emptively) exterminating those who embodied the gathering storm of dissidence—organized and disarticulated, radical and proto-political. Articulated through and against the progressive and radical counter-communities who threatened the disruption and transformation of the American social formation's normative whiteness, this reinvigorated white civil society asserted its essential stewardship of the state through the versatile mechanism of racialized criminalization. In this sense, COINTELPRO's illegal and unconstitutional abuses of state power, unabashed use of strategic and deadly violence, and development of invasive, terrorizing surveillance technologies might be seen as the state's prototyping of the current era's broadly revived (and significantly extra-state) domestic low-intensity warfare techniques against racially pathologized "activist" and "civilian" populations alike.<sup>33</sup>

J. Edgar Hoover's formalization of a venerated racist state strategy—the criminalization of Black, Brown, and Red liberationists—simply reflected and foreshadowed the imperative of white civil society's impulse toward self-preservation in this moment.<sup>34</sup> The emergent technology of racialized criminalization was galvanized by Richard Nixon's rise to the executive office and the subsequent, massive federal and local investment in militarized police forces.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps most importantly, this domestic military technology both incorporated and exceeded COINTELPRO's narrower objectives of containing urban uprising and liquidating domestic radicals, (proto)revolutionaries, and sovereignty fighters. Outdoing the FBI's secret counter-intelligence campaign, "law and order" constituted a novel

discursive technology of domestic warfare that spoke through the reified body of the state executive.

Goldwater's ominous forecast of tyranny's onset shot through a civic consciousness that was absorbing the possibility of white freedom's rollback, and while white self-defense formed the template for an aggressive white supremacist state, the message remained intensely grandiose and global. His was the foreshadowing of white civil society's globalization, literally the reconstruction of domestic white hegemony and the unmitigated construction of a White Atlantic.

I believe that we must look beyond the defense of freedom today to its extension tomorrow.... I can see and I suggest that all thoughtful men must contemplate the flowering of an Atlantic civilization, the whole world of Europe unified and free, trading openly across its borders, communicating openly across the world. This is a goal far, far more meaningful than a moon shot.

...I can also see—and all free men must thrill to—the events of this Atlantic civilization joined by its great ocean highway to the United States. What a destiny, what a destiny can be ours to stand as a great central pillar linking Europe, the Americans and the venerable and vital peoples and cultures of the Pacific. I can see a day when all the Americas, North and South, will be linked in a mighty system, a system in which the errors and misunderstandings of the past will be submerged one by one in a rising tide of prosperity and interdependence.... But we pledge—we pledge that human sympathy—what our neighbors to the South call that attitude of “simpatico”—no less than enlightened self-interest will be our guide.<sup>36</sup>

Couched in the rhetoric of civic security and personal safety, this discourse offered white civil society political rescue and a new structure of collective sentimentality. The smooth symbiosis between “racial” and “criminal” discourse was the stuff of the new white civil society, in fact, the central premise of the post-1960s White Reconstruction. Goldwater rendered a white supremacist populist conception of liberty and security, defined through the militarized containment—and ultimate liquidation—of the lurking “urban threat”. His declaration of virtual domestic warfare in this speech, while

presumptuous, blueprinted the watershed Nixon victory of 1968 and the onset of the emergent police-prison hegemony in the United States. Policing and criminal justice emerged in this way as socially productive technologies during a crucial historical conjuncture, forging an indelible link between the site and scene of the prison and the corresponding world of a consolidated and coherent—though always endangered—normative white civil society.

**WHITENESS AS PROPERTY (INTEREST):  
A NOTE ON “MULTICULTURALISM” AND WHITE SUPREMACY**

To foreground US civil society as normatively white is not to posit a discrete “ethnic” or “racial” identity as the uncontested or non-contradictory determination of the social. This is to say, civil society is not “white” in the apartheid—that is official, totalizing, and closed—sense. Goldwater’s (and his heirs’) normative civil whiteness implies an ongoing and complex relation of hierarchy, discipline, power, and violence that has come to oversee the current and increasingly incorporative “multicultural” modalities of white supremacy, wherein “people of color” are selectively and incrementally solicited, rewarded, and absorbed into the operative functionings of white supremacist institutions (e.g., the military, police, and school) and discourses (e.g., patriotism). This multicultural turn is effectively the neo-liberal and neo-conservative assimilationism of a post-apartheid state and civil regime. The social formation of the current epoch is aggressively normatively white, to the extent that multiculturalism is based on an empirical production of “diversity” fostered and sustained by a white supremacist organizing logic, and, as evidenced in the formation of the prison regime, premised on an astronomically scaled institutionalization of Black and Indigenous peoples civil and social death (Black and Native American imprisonment significantly exceeds all other group-based incarceration rates).

American civil society (in both its local and global articulations) aggressively constructs normative whiteness as bio-political power, creatively transposing the technologies of racism and white supremacy into alternate (putatively “non-white”) racial identifications and embodiments. The contemporary hegemony of law and order, its materialization into a “way of life”,<sup>37</sup> is based on a discursive and material expansion of civil society’s normative whiteness, to the extent that “nonwhites” or “people of color” have increasingly invested in the protection of this sanctified property

interest: the sustenance of civil society and its reproduction on a scale of globalized magnitude as the United States of America. This identification marks the “multiculturalization” of white supremacy, a paradigm shift that offers promise for the global project of the “white civilian” ontology.

To blur the boundaries and limits of legitimate racist state violence is the act at the heart of the current American policing modality, and this rearticulation of the state—a political labor that disembodies the formal state while re-embodying it in the lives of its subjects—entails more than the institutionalization of police impunity: it calls for the deputation of white civil society itself. President George W. Bush’s October 2003 pronouncement of the Homeland Security Appropriations Act was enunciated as no less than the extension and elaboration of the Goldwaterist mandate:

On September the 11th, 2001, enemies of freedom made our country a battleground. Their method is the mass murder of the innocent, and their goal is to make all Americans live in fear... The danger to America gives all of you an essential role in the war on terror. You’ve done fine work under difficult and urgent circumstances, and on behalf of a grateful nation, I thank you all for what you do for the security and safety of our fellow citizens.<sup>38</sup>

While white citizens have always served as appendages of the U.S. state as its self-appointed (and juridically sanctioned) eyes and ears, the distinctiveness of the current moment lies in the technologies of interpellation which imbue a new conception of white locality—it is a “here” that is, in practice, entitled (even compelled) to be everywhere.<sup>39</sup>

In contradistinction to civil society’s normative whiteness, the carceral formation of the U.S. prison regime, itself generated and reproduced by the white supremacist logic of targeted, though rigorously mass-based policing, criminalization, and imprisonment technologies, is normatively embodied Black, Brown, and Indigenous. While many journalists and scholars belabor the point of Black/Native American/Latino “over-representation” in census counts of the imprisoned population, this rhetoric of empirical racial inequity or institutional bias—and conspicuous absence of a discourse of “white under-representation” among the imprisoned—elides the historical context and legacies of the White Reconstruction. Revising Marx’s classical discussion of the “usefulness of crime” to the regime of capital, radical

criminologist Nils Christie frames the emergence of this carceral formation as the lifeblood of nationalized, domestic warfare(s). Read in the context of Goldwater's White Atlantic and the Bush/Ashcroft Homeland Security imaginaries, Christie's meditation can be interpreted as an explication of the white supremacist logic of carceral organization, "law and order's" culminating act:

Crime does not exist. Crime is created. First there are acts. Then follows a long process of giving meaning to these acts.

...The social system has changed into one where there are fewer restraints against perceiving even minor transgressions of laws as crimes and their actors as criminals.... This new situation, with an unlimited reservoir of acts which can be defined as crimes, also creates unlimited possibilities for warfare against all sorts of unwanted acts.

With a living tradition from the period where natural crimes were the only ones, combined with an unlimited reservoir of what can be seen as crimes in modern times, the ground has been prepared. The crime control market is waiting for its entrepreneurs.<sup>40</sup>

Christie's historicization of the crime control market as a production premised on access to the limitless raw material of "unwanted acts" resonates both the circulation of capital and the materiality of ownership. This begs the question: What, under the terms of white civil society, forms the baseline of its putative protection from criminality and disorder, the countless unwanted acts of aggression that threaten to destabilize the "social system"? Critical race theorist Cheryl I. Harris' legal-historical theorization of "whiteness as property" responds to this crucial question. Her working answer illuminates the intersection of property and subjectivity, a convergence that articulates civil society's persistent propositions of universalizing values of collective white (and putatively multicultural) identity—a form of "corporate ownership"—which, simultaneously, invents and remakes material boundaries of racial unassimilability and otherness.

Correctly positing that "the origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination", Harris exposes the juridical means through which concepts of nationhood, ownership, and civil subjectivity have emanated from the fabricated materiality of whiteness. In the epoch



of chattel slavery, Harris writes: “Whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings.” Far from being eroded by the formal abolition of the slave plantation (and Constitutional relocation of enslavement to the site of the prison), law and property have continuously intertwined through the reproduction of civil society’s constitutive whiteness. In fact, Harris contends that the possession and protection of an ontologically propertied whiteness remains a pillar of contemporary jurisprudence.

In ways so embedded that it is rarely apparent, the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white have become a valuable asset... Whites have come to expect and rely on these benefits, and over time these expectations have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law. Even though the law is neither uniform nor explicit in all instances, in protecting the settled expectations based on white privilege, American law has recognized a property interest in whiteness that, although unacknowledged, now forms the background against which legal disputes are framed, argued, and adjudicated.<sup>41</sup>

Conceptualizing whiteness as a form of property, and white civic identity as a collective entitlement to ownership (of property, Others, and propertied Others), implies that when “non-whites” threaten, attack, or steal the common property of white civil society, they are actually violating the sanctified materiality, and the vicarious and deeply valued collective bodily integrity of whiteness. Multiculturalism is, in this sense, a keystone for the re-articulation of white supremacy as a simultaneously (and often contradictorily) incorporative and exclusionary regime of social ordering: it bears witness to both the spectacle of “diversity” as showcased through various state and civil institutions, and the proliferation of the post-1970s prison industrial complex as the normative white supremacist materialization of Goldwater’s White Atlantic.

#### **METHODOLOGY (OR ITS FAILURE): THE TERMS OF COLLABORATION**

The genealogical and theoretical work of this project draws widely from publicly circulated texts, as well as interviews, correspondence, and informal conversations that I conducted or participated in over the course of eight

years. Throughout this book are passages from the published communiqués, polemics, scholarly articles, essays, memoirs, testimonials, and legal documents composed by such widely recognized radical intellectuals and political prisoners as George Jackson, Angela Y. Davis, Leonard Peltier, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Assata Shakur, Laura Whitehorn, Marilyn Buck, and others. Equally significant, however, are the unpublished, undercirculated, or heretofore uncirculated texts produced by captive intellectuals who remain largely outside the non-imprisoned public's (and particularly the U.S. Left's) fields of political vision or concern. By way of example, the private correspondence, visiting room conversations, legal scholarship, theoretical meditations, creative writing, and scholarly essays of Viet Mike Ngo (as of this writing imprisoned in Soledad Prison, CA)<sup>42</sup> have been crucial to the development of this book from its earliest stages through the final revisions.<sup>43</sup> Ngo's status as a common or "social" prisoner, textually prolific yet virtually anonymous to the overlapping "literary", "academic", and "activist" publics, refracts in individualized form the massive and violent social extermination of human beings through current regimes of state captivity and carceral punishment.

The inherent repressiveness of methodology, conventionally conceived as a relatively stable and closed system (or "discipline") of scholarly inquiry, looms over this book. Moving from the text of a personal correspondence penned by Ngo in 2002, the remainder of this introduction mediates on the propositions, structured violence, and failures of "methodology" as it passes through (and aggresses) the embodied figure of one imprisoned radical intellectual, in this case a putatively "Asian" subject (Ngo identifies as Vietnamese).

Troubled relations of freedom and unfreedom, life and death constantly surface in the moments of political contact and possibility inscribed here, as well as in the absence of intimacies rendered difficult or impossible by gendered white supremacist hierarchies. Even this relation with Ngo, in other words, is a relatively "privileged" one, to the extent that Ngo's subjectivity—not to mention my own, as the "free" and variously identified Filipino, Asian, or "Hispanic" visitor—is not a primary object of the prison's racist hyper-violence ("Asian" prisoners often escape the normative racial classifications of many jails and prisons, and are not as massively or eagerly addressed and punished under "prison gang" penalties and institutional segregations). By way of example, Kijana Tashiri Askari (Harrison), another longtime correspondent, is imprisoned in 24 hour isolation in the California

Security Housing Unit (Pelican Bay State Prison) under the official rubric of (Black) “gang affiliation”. Hugo “Yogi” Pinell, a Black Nicaraguan, has been imprisoned for over three decades under similar circumstances, and is incarcerated in the same “unit” as Askari (they often shout communication to one another across closed cell doors). I have had the opportunity to meet “in person” with both Askari and Pinell, but our relations are manifest within the violence of a particular structure and racial geography of distance and alienation: we are not allowed “contact visits”, and our conversations are closely monitored by guards who are standing within earshot; furthermore, Pelican Bay State Prison is located in a part of California that is difficult to access, being six to eight hours away from the closest major airport and near the border of Oregon. Finally, neither Askari nor Pinell are allowed phone calls, and their mail correspondence is frequently denied or censored. This is, to invoke the terms of Orlando Patterson, the very picture of an ultramodern “social death”, the virtual liquidation of affective and (extended) familial ties through a historically specific articulation of penal slavery.

The history of my privileged relation to Ngo, in this sense, reinscribes and amplifies the failure of methodology in the nexus of a white supremacist continuum of freedom and unfreedom, one that is fundamentally structured by an institutional hierarchy of capture and punishment that reserves and ranks its technologies of violence for deployment on a landscape directly defined by the institutional genealogies of U.S. chattel slavery, an essentially anti-black technology. I am meditating, through the context of this privileged relation to Ngo, on the structured violence of attempts at political collaboration between the broadly structured categories of “free” and “unfree”, and am attempting to offer a conception of praxis that attempts to fracture the coherence and order of civil society’s banal notions of the “political” as well as conventional academic renditions of the “methodological”.

Ngo is part of a lineage of social prisoners whose organizing, teaching, and legal work have antagonized the California Department of Corrections (CDC). As of September 2004, he had nine pending cases or writs of habeas corpus against the CDC over matters such as racial segregation, institutional retaliation, religious freedom, and sexual harassment. He has said:

They really don’t know what to do with me and my comrades right now. I mean, one minute they want to transfer us, another minute they tell us “we changed our minds,” because they don’t know

what to do with us, because we're thinking outside the box. We're fighting. We're actually standing up saying, "you know what? I have the right to challenge your policy, challenge the way you run things. Just 'cause you're a pig and I'm an inmate doesn't mean that I have to listen to what you say. That your word is law."<sup>44</sup>

Since the winter of 2000, Ngo and I have developed an ongoing, critical dialogue about the structure of engagement between civil society's activists and those radical intellectuals and activists who live in state captivity.

Ngo has lucidly located his political work within a recent historical lineage of radical and revolutionary praxis. Various influenced by such thinkers as George Jackson, Assata Shakur, Ché Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Toni Morrison, Angela Davis, and Frantz Fanon, he speaks to an epochal condition illuminated and enriched by his living encounters with the current prison regime. Ngo's written work, which includes published pieces and unpublished notebooks of journal entries and political meditations, moves within a contemporary genealogy of "prison letters" produced by captive U.S. radicals, liberationists, and revolutionaries: consider the examples of Jackson's Soledad Brother,<sup>45</sup> public correspondence in Davis, et. al.'s If They Come in the Morning,<sup>46</sup> News and Letters Committees' Revolutionary Prisoners Speak,<sup>47</sup> or former political prisoner Ray Luc Levasseur's<sup>48</sup> online compilation "Letters from Exile".<sup>49</sup> By way of example, a personal note written by Ngo in January 2002 reflects on the history of our critical collaboration while offering a concise philosophy of praxis:

I wanted to meet you 'cuz I heard you were radical... I was hoping we could collaborate our work—specifically, I was hoping to liberate myself. When I realized this wasn't going to happen, I was comforted by the fact that my writing was being used by someone whose politics were like my own.<sup>50</sup>

For Ngo, the scene of the meeting with the non-imprisoned radical activist provokes a sudden revision of familiar political terms, conditioning the collaborative praxis of the "radical" free and "unfree" through the desire and political necessity of liberation, suggesting a living freedom that requires (at least) a material end to the condition of imprisonment. Ngo foregrounds the constitutive failure of this meeting by rendering the premises of its political structuring explicit. As he describes, the possibility of a "radicalism" with

integrity—that is, one that does not presume or reinscribe structures of civil and social death—hinges on the liquidation of the essential dichotomy on which the meeting itself is founded.

Failing the persistent test of a radical freedom, mutually obtained and embodied, the meeting becomes a reifying event: the charade of “collaboration” reproduces the violent condition of its genesis, for there would have been no (alleged) collaboration without the sturdy existence of the imprisonment regime, the contemporary formalization of what Fanon terms “systematized de-humanization”.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, the only “good” meeting, that is, the only liberatory meeting, is the one that foments the collapse of its condition, the disarticulation of what has been, in the American national formation, the necessary linkage between freedom and imprisonment. It is the methodology of liberation that remains the central and vexing question here, to the extent that it confronts the non-imprisoned activist/scholar with the physical (as well as political-intellectual) contingencies of insurgency, insurrection, and transformation in relation to their cohorts held captive.

The meeting that matters, then, is the one that displaces the condition of its reification, critically exposing and demystifying the structures and technologies through which “a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people”.<sup>52</sup> Reflecting Georg Lukács’ notion of reification is the common sense conception of the “free world’s” relation (or non-relation) to the imprisoned world as a “thing,” a natural feature of the social landscape, rather than an expansive and mind-boggling technology of domination and subjection. This common sense evinces “prisons” as somewhere outside of and away from civil society, when these modes of human capture in fact surround, enmesh, and articulate with the normative everyday of the social formation.

Ngo suggests that our attempt at “collaborative work” is radically insufficient, and that there can be no authentic relation of integrity or equity between those inhabiting the formal and opposed categories of free and unfree. He is, instead, momentarily solaced by the hope that my pedagogical appropriations of his intellectual work (although such appropriations must often go anonymous and unaccredited to minimize further endangerment of the imprisoned) are somehow relevant to his political desires, visions, and fantasies. Perhaps, then, the vernacular of “collaboration” (or coalition, solidarity, partnership, etc.) exaggerates the political and historical

possibilities of these meetings between free and unfree, to the extent that one of the “collaborators” is categorically immobilized—not at liberty to move, speak, and practise.

During a May 2002 phone interview that we recorded for a course I was teaching entitled “Imprisoned U.S. Radical Intellectuals and Social Movements,” Ngo elaborated on the political implications of his January note.

You have to find people who love you, and that’s the biggest problem in here in prison. If we had more access to people who think and feel like us... it helps us do the work. Because we’re so isolated in here and out there at least you guys have the opportunity to sit down and break bread with each other.... With people who love and feel the way you do.... That’s where you get your energy from.

We get our energy from our despair and our hate and a lot of things that have to do with love too, and love of wanting to live. But it’s overwhelming at times; so you have to use whatever advantages you have; and for a free person, that is your advantage. So definitely utilize it. That’s something me (sic) and my comrades dream of.<sup>53</sup>

While uneven, conflict-ridden relations of personal and structural power are inherent to any form of political collaboration, there is a qualitative difference to the engagement of which Ngo speaks here. Only in the meeting of the nominally free subject of civil society and the imprisoned subject of the carceral formation is there a bodily confrontation between people juridically and civically defined as alive (“citizen”) and dead (“inmate”).

More pointedly, as Sharon Patricia Holland contends, the “free” (non-imprisoned) activist/scholar/theorist’s movement into communities intimate with death—whatever form or force that death embodies—requires a principled entanglement with institutional, intellectual, and bodily marginality, if not more immediate varieties of clear and present endangerment.

Speaking about death and the dead necessitates that critics move beyond familiar country and into liminal spaces. These liminal spaces are present whenever a scholar moves between

the borders separating nations and communities, disciplines and departments.<sup>54</sup>

To situate Holland's critique within the dominion of the United States prison regime is to depart from the presumptive mobility of civic (and academic) freedom, the hallmark of the (white) Western professional intellectual subject, and to "move" instead into zones of conflict and (undeclared/ domestic) warfare.

Ngo writes and speaks constantly of being decisively de-linked from the political modalities of civil society. In the following passage from the same January 2002 communique, the illicit and subversive work of cultural production reconstitutes a Fanonian "literature of warfare", produced as both means and end, momentarily gratifying writer and recipient, although ultimately incomplete in the absence of the actualized dream of liberation. Self-consciously writing from the unprecedented condition of the contemporary U.S. prison regime, Ngo elaborates a philosophy of praxis that relocates to civil society's carceral underside:

Over the past year, I've come to terms with the fact that the conditions of my existence dictate my mode of warfare. At this point in time, my warfare must entail writing and teaching. I'm disheartened that this mode lacks urgency, but pleased that I may be alive to enjoy my work. And knowing that my work helps your teaching eases my mind. I'm doing what I can for now. Until other options show themselves to me to be worthy of a greater sacrifice, I'll live with what I'm doing now.<sup>55</sup>

Recasting praxis through an open-ended, though nonetheless material conception of liberation's urgency—he is not simply invoking a metaphoric liberation that elides (or purports to transcend) his bodily incarceration—Ngo speaks to a vision of radical freedom that is authentic to its context. Since the time of our initial meeting, he has communicated a theoretical corpus through a variety of strategic gestures, historical allegories, tactical silences, and vernacular codes (including poetry, correspondence, and memoir). Ngo's work refigures the time and context of a methodology that is premised on his imprisonment.

While a clear vision of freedom in struggle is the defining aspect of his political intellectual work, Ngo has always been clear that he expects to

die in captivity. He insists that even if he re-entered the “free world”, he would not experience freedom unless his imprisoned “comrades” were to accompany him.<sup>56</sup> Contradicting the individualizing political logic of many current and popular prisoner support organizations and campaigns—most conspicuously, the significant sector of liberal-to-progressive international support magnetized around the cases of Leonard Peltier and Mumia Abu-Jamal—Ngo’s conception of radical freedom illuminates the fatal categorical condition of imprisonment. There are no individuals within the regime of imprisonment, only sub-categories of punishment and classification that evaporate the individual into her/his condition of existence. Appropriately, Ngo’s principled refusal to individualize his condition (and thus, his “liberation”) invokes the radically de-individuating gestures of both Peltier and Abu-Jamal. Peltier writes in My Life is My Sun Dance:

This book is not a plea or a justification. Neither is it an explanation or an apology for the events that overtook my life and many other lives in 1975 and made me unwittingly—and, yes, even unwillingly—a symbol, a focus for the sufferings of my people. But all of my people are suffering, so I’m in no way special in that regard.

You must understand. . . I am ordinary. Painfully ordinary. This isn’t modesty. This is fact. If so, I honor your ordinariness, your humanness, your spirituality. I hope you will honor mine. That ordinariness is our bond, you and I. We are ordinary. We are human. The Creator made us this way. Imperfect. Inadequate. Ordinary.<sup>57</sup>

Radical intellectuals who are captives of the state, insofar as they are defined and categorized as civically dead, are formally de-individuated upon imprisonment. Imprisoned people are, in an official sense, non-people. Further, as mentioned above, they become a form of captive chattel in accordance with the provisions of the Thirteenth Amendment, through which they are made immediately available for “involuntary servitude”, or slavery. Their presumptive rights to formal recognition as “individuals” or legal subjects under the juridical and philosophical mores of American bourgeois liberalism disappear, replaced by a structure of unmediated subjection to state coercion.

Essentially, imprisoned people have no “right” to exist as political beings or social subjects. Often, the state punishes and pre-emptly the political work



and affective labor of its captives through physical violence, forced narcotic sedation, isolation, and relocation (often to prisons that are hundreds or thousands of miles away from family, loved ones, and political supporters). What, then, is the significance of political praxis for people whose right to exist has been eliminated? What is an appropriate “methodology” of engagement with this lineage of radical, revolutionary, and liberationist political subjects who are, by force of condition, putative “non-subjects”? Perhaps these are the very questions that underwrite the permanently troubled relation between the free and unfree (or the imprisoned and non-imprisoned) as the structure of political-intellectual “collaboration” begs the question of how “politics” happens at the carceral underside of social formation. Imprisoned radical intellectuals are practitioners of a qualitatively different “politics”, precisely because their field of engagement is defined through a relation of direct violence with the state. This condition of confrontation constitutes a discrete modality of praxis that is incommensurable with the myriad forms of political practice in civil society.

The condition of praxis over-determines its political significance, particularly when carried out by juridically dead people: that which is reasonably demanded by the free becomes grounds for punitive sanction against the unfree. Prisoners striking and rebelling for acknowledgement of non-existent human rights—as in the Attica Rebellion of 1971—thus amount to far more than “reformist” struggles against fascistic and localized regimes of domination. Assertions of political personhood by the imprisoned are a constrained attempt to decisively delegitimize the carceral formation’s official attempts to eliminate them from the realm of the “political”, as well as to generate new discursive-material terrain for political struggle against a state regime that consistently militates and militarizes against any such possibility. This is to say that the structuring of unfreedom extinguishes the possibility of legitimate political subjectivity a priori, while constructing a discrete border at which “politics” is presumed subversive in and of itself.

At the risk of stating the obvious, I am arguing that the study of and critical engagement with contemporary prison praxis represents a relation of appropriation and translation, structurally dominated by free world (professional and non-professional) intellectuals and activists whose necessarily exploitative use of these texts (for there is little material benefit and much potential punishment in store for their authors) is often endorsed and encouraged by their imprisoned counterparts. The living figure and political specter of the imprisoned political intellectual represents a crisis

of meaning for the “methodology” of the non-imprisoned scholar as well as a fundamental disruption of the free world activist’s operative assumptions (e.g., bodily mobility, political subjectivity, access to civil society). It is through the lens of this failure of methodology that this article must be read and (re)interpreted.

### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> During the oft-forgotten “Philippine-American War” at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, between 1 and 2 million Pilipinos—almost all civilians—were slaughtered by the U.S. military. Given that this military conquest occurred before the era of weapons of mass destruction, the killing was breathtaking in scope and intensity, and was in fact a direct continuation of the North American indigenous genocide. See Dylan Rodriguez, “‘A Million Deaths?’: Genocide and the Subject of Filipino American Studies,” *Positively No Pilipinos Allowed: Mapping “Filipino America” Formations* (Tiongson, et. al., eds.) (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).
- <sup>2</sup> J. Soffiyah Elijah, “The Reality of Political Prisoners in the United States: What September 11 Taught Us about Defending Them,” *Harvard BlackLetter Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 129 (Spring 2002), p. 129.

By way of further example, Amnesty International offers the following definitions of “conscientious objector” and “political prisoner”:

Amnesty International (AI) considers a conscientious objector to be all those who are imprisoned, detained or otherwise physically restricted by reason of their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs or by reason of their ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth or other status. Amnesty International works towards the unconditional and immediate release of prisoners of conscience.

...Amnesty International uses a broad interpretation of the term political prisoner so as to cover all cases with a significant political element, for example criminal offences committed with a political motive or within a clear political context. Amnesty International does not call for the release of all political prisoners within this definition, nor does it call on governments to give political prisoners special conditions. Amnesty International works to ensure that all political prisoners receive a fair trial in accordance with international standards, and Amnesty International opposes the use of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in all cases—both criminal and political—without reservation. (*Political prisoners in Azerbaijan and Armenia: Amnesty International’s concerns and recommendations*, AI Index: EUR 04/001/2002, 20 January 2002)

The Jericho Movement, on the other hand, suggests a more explicitly politicized definition of “political prisoner,” grounded in histories of Black and Third World liberation struggles: “[P]olitical prisoners are in prison today because they fought

for self-determination for the people and stood up against police brutality, racism, miseducation and the unjust incarceration. The fight to free them is part and parcel of the growing effort to dismantle the entire prison industrial complex.” (Jericho Movement website, <http://www.thejerichomovement.com/aboutus.html>)

Finally, the Out of Control Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners focuses its work on women political prisoners, who “are in prison for various reasons from opposing policies of the U.S. government through revolutionary activities, participating in the Puerto Rican Independence movement, Black Liberation, American Indian Movement, to anti-nuclear activities, etc.” (Out of Control Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners website, [www.prisonactivist.org/ooc/#about](http://www.prisonactivist.org/ooc/#about))

Owusu Yaki Yakubu, “Toward Collective Effort and Common Vision: The International and Domestic Contexts of the Struggles of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War Held by the U.S.” Can’t Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S. (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.) (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 2002), p. 13.

Marshall Eddie Conway was an active member and leader of the Black Panther Party (BPP) chapter in Baltimore, Maryland during the 1960s and 1970s. Conway helped to expose and expel a key FBI COINTELPRO infiltrator into the BPP, Warren Hart. According to Conway, Hart, under government and FBI direction and protection, had actually “founded” the Baltimore chapter. Hart subsequently used his purported leadership position to gain privileged access to the inner workings of the Panther Central Committee, and reported his findings to the National Security Agency (NSA). Conway’s disruption of Hart’s domestic espionage operation led to his being specifically targeted by COINTELPRO for neutralization. In 1970, Conway was arrested and charged with the murder of one police officer and the attempted murder of two others. Although no physical evidence linked him to the scene of the alleged crimes, and the government was later revealed to have used a paid informant during the trial (who testified that Conway “confessed” to him), Conway was nonetheless convicted and given a sentence of life plus 30 years. There is a campaign to win his release. Marshall Eddie Conway may be reached at #116469, P.O. Box 534, Jessup, MD, 20794.

Undergraduate Ethnic Studies major Sormeh Ayari, a prison and police abolitionist activist who has worked with the October 22<sup>nd</sup> Movement and other grass roots groups, posed a series of questions to Conway during this seminar/interview. Her concise and profound question, “What does it mean to be ‘political’?” formed a template for the conversation between Conway and the other seminar students.

Interview with Marshall Eddie Conway, Ethnic Studies seminar (Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and U.S. Liberation Movements, ETST 178), Riverside, CA, 6 July 2004. A revised version of this interview is forthcoming in the anthology Warfare: the American Homeland and Prison (Joy James, ed.).

Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (1963) (Farrington, trans.) (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1968), p. 50.

Buck is a white anti-imperialist and anti-racist political prisoner. After being imprisoned in 1973 for purchasing handgun ammunition, Buck served four years in a West Virginia federal prison. After receiving furlough, she refused to return to the prison and went underground for eight years. She was apprehended and tried in 1985

for assisting in Assata Shakur's escape from prison, and was additionally sentenced (with her co-defendants Dr. Mutulu Shakur and Sekou Odinga) for conspiracy to commit armed bank robbery in support of the Black liberation struggle. In 1988, Buck was sentenced to an additional decade in prison as part of the infamous "Resistance Conspiracy" case, in which she and others were convicted of "conspiracy to protest and alter government policies through use of violence" against government and military property. (See generally Prison Activist Resource Center website, [http://www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/marilyn\\_buck/](http://www.prisonactivist.org/pps+pows/marilyn_buck/)). Marilyn Buck may be reached via correspondence at: #00482-285, 5701 8th. St., Camp Parks, Unit B, Dublin, CA, 94568.

- <sup>9</sup> Marilyn Buck, "Prisons, Social Control, and Political Prisoners," *Social Justice*, Vol. 27, No. 3, p. 28.
- <sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall, "Race, articulation and societies structures in dominance," *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader* (Baker, et. al., eds.) (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996) p. 56.
- <sup>11</sup> See, for example, Angela Y. Davis's "From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison: Frederick Douglass and the Convict Lease System," in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* (James, ed.) (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor* (New York: Verso, 1996); Lawrence Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); and Paul Keve, *Prisons and the American Conscience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1991).
- <sup>12</sup> For an intellectual history of racism and racial ideology, see generally Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968); George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002); Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); and David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).
- <sup>13</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Race and Globalization" *Geographies of Global Change: Remapping the World* (Johnston, Taylor, and Watts, eds.) (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 261.
- <sup>14</sup> In addition to the following passages from Roberts and Smith, see generally Anannya Bhattacharjee, "Private Fists and Public Force," and Judith A.M. Scully, "Killing the Black Community," in *Policing the National Body: Race, Gender, and Criminalization* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002). For a sociological examination of the crucial role of white women in contemporary white supremacist movements and organizations, see Kathleen M. Blee, *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002).
- <sup>15</sup> Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (1997) (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), p. 22-23.
- <sup>16</sup> Andrea Smith, "Better Dead than Pregnant: The Colonization of Native Women's Reproductive Health," *Policing the National Body*, p. 123-124.
- <sup>17</sup> The Klan's primary website, at [www.kkk.bz](http://www.kkk.bz), conspicuously displays passages from the Bible alongside gratuitous images of the Capitol building, American eagle, and

U.S. flag. It is, quite literally, a classic American nationalist organization. Other white supremacist organizations, including Patriot groups, neo-Nazis, and white militias, evince a similar commitment to the flourishing of a particular vision of American exceptionalism that draws from its core political and cultural legacies, including republicanism, “white rights,” and “Christian values”.

<sup>18</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Globalisation and US prison growth: from military Keynesianism to post-Keynesian militarism,” *Race & Class*, vol. 40, no. 2/3, 1998/99, p. 174. See also Gilmore’s seminal book *Golden Gulag: Labor, Land, State, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p. 176-178.

<sup>20</sup> Linda Evans and Eve Goldberg, *The Prison Industrial Complex and the Global Economy* (San Francisco: AK Press Distribution, 1998), p.5.

<sup>21</sup> Gilmore, “Globalisation and US Prison Growth,” p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> The figure 2.5 million includes imprisoned populations that are almost always excluded from common carceral body counts. The most frequently quoted figures are from the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics. See, for example, Harrison and Karberg, “Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2003,” U.S. Department of Justice (NCJ 203947, May 2004). According to the BJS, as of June 2003 there were 2,078,570 prisoners held in Federal or State prisons and local jails. In addition, the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention writes in its 2002 annual report that there were 108,931 children incarcerated as of 1999 (*OJJDP Annual Report 2002*, NCJ 202038, p. 59). It is almost certain that the current population of imprisoned children exceeds this figure, especially since a growing number of youth under the age of 18 are being sent to adult jails and prisons (statistics on incarcerated populations typically have a 1 to 2 year lag, due to the time expended in collecting and calculating data). Finally, the Department of Homeland Security, which bureaucratically absorbed the older Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), reports that in 2002, there were 188,547 non-citizens held in INS prisons on an average day (memorandum from Acting Inspector General Clark Kent Ervin, “Major Management Challenges Facing the Department of Homeland Security,” March 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Jalil Muntaqim (a.k.a. Anthony Jalil Bottom) first affiliated with the Black Panther Party when he was 18 years old, after being recruited by elementary school friends who had since become Panthers. On August 28, 1971, he was captured along with Albert Nuh Washington in a midnight shoot-out with San Francisco police. It has been alleged that Muntaqim and Washington attempted to assassinate a police sergeant in retaliation for the August 21, 1971 assassination of George Jackson. Subsequently, Muntaqim, Washington, and Herman Bell—who came to be known as the “New York Three”—were charged with a host of revolutionary underground activities, including the assassination of NYC police officers for which they were given life sentences. Muntaqim has actively worked with a wide variety of activist and educational campaigns and organizations since his imprisonment, including his founding call for the Jericho Amnesty march in 1998 (which eventually catalyzed the formation of the Jericho Amnesty Movement) and the National Prisoners Campaign to Petition the United Nations in 1976. See *Can’t Jail the Spirit* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) (Chicago: Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, 2002), p. 136-140. Also see “The New

- York Three: History and Case Background”, an informational essay published by Solidarity in February 2002. The essay may be obtained through Solidarity by mailing 2035 Boul. St. Laurent, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H2X 2T3, or through the internet at <http://www.kersplebedeb.com/mystuff/profiles/ny3A.pdf>. Jalil Muntaqim may be contacted at: Anthony Jalil Bottom, # 77A4283, Auburn Correctional Facility, 135 State Street, Auburn, NY, 13024.
- <sup>24</sup> Jalil Muntaqim (a.k.a. Anthony Jalil Bottom), “The Cold War of the 90’s,” Prison News Service, Issue #52, September-October 1995.
- <sup>25</sup> Barry Goldwater, “Nomination Acceptance Speech at the 28<sup>th</sup> Republican National Convention,” 16 July 1964, reprinted by The Washington Post, 30 May 1998.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Some useful background texts include: Jael Silliman and Anannya Bhattacharjee (eds.), Policing the National Body: Race, Gender and Criminalization in the United States (Boston: South End Press, 2002); Christian Parenti, Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis (New York: Verso Press, 2000); Ted Gest, Crime & Politics: Big Government’s Erratic Campaign for Law and Order (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jill Nelson (ed.), Police Brutality: an Anthology (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000); Stuart Hall, et. al., Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978).
- <sup>28</sup> See generally Robert Allen, Black Awakening in Capitalist America (1969) (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), and Jennifer Wolch, The Shadow State: Government and Voluntary Sector in Transition (New York: The Foundation Center, 1990).
- <sup>29</sup> For an overview of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army, see Cleaver and Katsiaficas (eds.), Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party (New York: Routledge, 2001); Philip Foner (ed.), The Black Panthers Speak (1970) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (New York: DaCapo Press, 2002); and Charles Jones (ed.), The Black Panther Party (Reconsidered) (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998) among numerous other texts. The George Jackson Brigade’s public communiqués have recently been published in the pamphlet Creating a Movement with Teeth: Communiqués of the George Jackson Brigade (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press). Texts discussing the history and legacies of the Weather Underground include political prisoner David Gilbert’s recent book No Surrender: Writings From An Anti-Imperialist Political Prisoner (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press, 2004) and Jeremy Varon’s Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004). Mickey Melendez’ We Took the Streets: Fighting for Latino Rights with the Young Lords (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003) along with Torres and Velásquez’ (eds.) The Puerto Rican Movement (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1998) offer political analysis and testimonial histories of the Young Lords. Information on the Chinatown-based Red Guards, I Wor Kuen, anti-imperialist and anti-martial law Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino, and other organizations may be obtained from Fred Ho’s (ed.) Legacy to Liberation: the Politics and Culture of Revolutionary Asian Pacific America (Brooklyn, NY: Big Red Media, 2000), Louie and Omatsu’s (eds.) Asian Americans: the Movement and the Moment (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2001), and Tachiki, et. al.’s (eds.) Roots: an Asian American Reader (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1971).

- <sup>30</sup> Among other texts, see Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior's Like a Hurricane: the Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee (New York: New Press, 1996) and Josephy, Nagel, and Johnson's (eds.) Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1999).
- <sup>31</sup> In addition to the aforementioned texts by Melendez, Torres, and Velásquez, see the cluster of articles by and interviews with the independentistas in Churchill and Vander Wall's (eds.) Cages of Steel: the Politics of Imprisonment in the United States (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1992).
- <sup>32</sup> See Steve Martinot's discussion of white supremacy as a cultural and social structure in The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 2003).
- <sup>33</sup> See generally Churchill and Vander Wall, Agents of Repression: the FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement (Boston: South End Press, 1988); Nelson Blackstock, COINTELPRO: the FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1988); Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present (20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition) (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003); James Kirkpatrick Davis, Spying on America: The FBI's Domestic Counterintelligence Program (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992); and David Cunningham, There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004).
- <sup>32</sup> See Curt Gentry, J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992).
- <sup>35</sup> For recent data, see Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics, 2000, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (NCJ 203350, 2004). The LEMAS program began compiling statistics on state and local police agencies in 1987. Also see The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society: Looking Back Looking Forward (Symposium on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice), U.S. Department of Justice (NCJ 170029, 1997). Christian Parenti also offers a useful overview of U.S. police expansion in Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis (2000).
- <sup>36</sup> Goldwater, "Nomination Acceptance Speech at the 28<sup>th</sup> Republican National Convention".
- <sup>37</sup> See William A. Williams, Empire as a Way of Life (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985).
- <sup>38</sup> "President Signs Homeland Security Appropriations Bill", Office of the White House Press Secretary, press release, 1 October 2003.
- <sup>39</sup> Attorney General John Ashcroft, whose reactionary tendencies have at times offended even the conservative consensus that glues the Clinton-Bush axis, is among the most visible proponents of this important social project. Articulating a versatile discursive frame that ingeniously links the global policing of Empire to the highly personalized security of domestic white communities, Ashcroft's announcement of a reshaped, post-911 "National Neighborhood Watch" magically renders the "neighborhood" as the front line of anti-terrorist, anti-crime struggle. The populist glue of Ashcroft's appeal lies in its mobilization of white sentimentality, the shameless invoking of the time-honored melodrama of white bodily integrity under immediate, racial threat and



harm—here, it is the potentiality of violence done to white bodies that is dramatized as the essential national-cum-racial injustice and tragedy.

- <sup>40</sup> Nils Christie, Crime Control as Industry, (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 22-23.
- <sup>41</sup> Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, et. al., eds.) (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 277.
- <sup>42</sup> The official name of the California Department of Corrections prison in Soledad is “Correctional Training Facility at Soledad”. The place is more widely known as “Soledad Prison”. Viet Mike Ngo was incarcerated at age seventeen for the retaliation killing of a fourteen year old rival gang member. Ngo is a writer, activist, and political educator who has participated as a guest speaker and lecturer in a variety of educational and political venues. While housed in San Quentin, he petitioned the Marin County Superior Court for a writ of habeas corpus regarding the administration’s illegal racial segregation of inmates in housing and discipline. Ngo may be reached via mail at: E-21895, P.O. Box 689, Y-201 (L), Soledad, CA 93960.
- <sup>43</sup> See Viet Mike Ngo (with Dylan Rodríguez), “A Conversation with Mike Ngo (San Quentin State Prison, E21895): ‘You have to be intimate with your despair,’” (with Dylan Rodríguez) NeoSlave Narratives: Prison Writing and Abolitionism (James, ed.) (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005); “Grave Digger” and “Red, White and Blue,” Amerasia Journal, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2003), p. 179-180; “A Day in the Life,” Manoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2002), p. 22-29.
- <sup>44</sup> Ngo, “A conversation with Mike Ngo”, NeoSlave Narratives: Prison Writing and Abolitionism (2005) (James, ed.).
- <sup>45</sup> George Jackson, Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson (1970) (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994).
- <sup>46</sup> Angela Y. Davis, et. al., If They Come in the Morning (New York: Third Press, 1971). This collection contains “prison letters” from Huey Newton, Angela Y. Davis, Ericka Huggins, Bobby Seale, Fleeta Drumgo, John Clutchette, and Ruchell Magee.
- <sup>47</sup> News and Letters Committees, Revolutionary Prisoners Speak! Selected Prisoner Correspondence: 1998-1999 (pamphlet) (Chicago, News and Letters Committees, 1999).
- <sup>48</sup> Levasseur is a white anti-imperialist political prisoner and veteran of the Vietnam War. After his return from the war in 1967, he says that he “was deeply affected by the devastation of the war on the Vietnamese people and their country”. Levasseur subsequently worked with a number of organizations, including Southern Student Organizing Committee in Tennessee, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Red Star North bookstore, and a variety of underground groups. He was captured by federal agents in 1984, and was eventually tried and convicted for bombing U.S. military facilities, military contractors, and corporations connected to the apartheid regime in South Africa. He received a 45 year sentence. In 1986, he was indicted with seven others on charges of seditious conspiracy and additional charges under RICO laws. Levasseur was accused of membership in the underground Sam Melville-Jonathan Jackson Unit and the United Freedom Front. They were acquitted of the conspiracy charge, and the RICO charges were eventually dismissed. Ray Luc Levasseur was released from federal prison in August 2004.



- <sup>49</sup> This site is maintained by Levasseur's friends, family, and supporters, and contains links to letters and essays, as well as "updates" on other anti-imperialist political prisoners. See <http://home.earthlink.net/~neoludd/>.
- <sup>50</sup> Viet Mike Ngo, correspondence, January 2002 (undated).
- <sup>51</sup> Frantz Fanon, "Letter to the Resident Minister (1956)," Toward the African Revolution (1967) (New York: Grove Press, 1988), p. 53.
- <sup>52</sup> Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), p. 83.
- <sup>53</sup> Ngo, "A conversation with Mike Ngo", NeoSlave Narratives: Prison Writing and Abolitionism (James, ed.).
- <sup>54</sup> Sharon Patricia Holland, Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2000), p. 149.
- <sup>55</sup> Viet Mike Ngo, correspondence, January 2002 (undated).
- <sup>56</sup> Interview with Viet Mike Ngo, San Quentin State Prison, (date excluded).
- <sup>57</sup> Leonard Peltier, Prison Writings: My Life is My Sun Dance (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 9.

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In addition to his book, Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the US Prison Regime, his writing has appeared in a number of scholarly journals and been included in many anthologies.