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American ‘prison notebooks’

The following two quotations, from the Attica Manifesto of 1971 and from the priest and anti-war activist Daniel Berrigan while he was on the run, frame my discussion of the prison intellectual and his/her role:

Attica Manifesto

We, the inmates of Attica Prison, have grown to recognize beyond the shadow of a doubt, that because of our posture as prisoners and branded characters as alleged criminals, the administration and prison employees no longer consider or respect us as human beings, but rather as domesticated animals selected to do their bidding in slave labor and furnished as a personal whipping dog for their sadistic, psychopathic hate . . . We, the men of Attica Prison, have been committed to the NYS Department of Corrections by the people of society for the purpose of correcting what [have] been deemed social errors in behavior. Errors which have classified us as socially unacceptable until programmed with new values and more thorough understanding as to our value and responsibilities as members of the outside community . . . [Yet] under the façade

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of rehabilitation . . . we are treated for our hostilities by our program administrators with their hostility as a medication.

Attica Liberation Faction, 1971

Daniel Berrigan

I think a sensible, humane movement operates at several levels at once if it is to get anywhere. So, it says communication, yes; community, yes; sabotage, yes – as a tool. That is the conviction that took us where we went, to Cantonsville. And it took us beyond, to this night. We reasoned that the purpose of our act could not be simply to impede the war, or much less to stop the war in its tracks. God help us; if that had been our intention, we were fools before the fact and doubly fools after it, for in fact the war went on. Still, we undertook sabotage long before any of you. It might be worthwhile reflecting on our reasons why. We were trying to say something first of all about the pernicious effect of certain properties on the lives of those who guarded them or died in consequence of them. And we were determined to talk to as many people as possible and as long as possible afterward, to interpret, to write, and through our conduct, through our appeal, through questioning ourselves again and again to discuss where we were, where we were going, and where people might follow.

My hope is that compassion and affection and nonviolence are now common resources once more, and that we can proceed on one assumption, the assumption that the quality of life within our communities is exactly what we have to offer. I think a mistake in [the] past was to kick out any evidence of this community sense as weakening, reactionary, counter-productive. Against this it must be said that the mark of inhumane treatment of humans is a mark that also hovers over us. And it is the mark of a beast, whether its insignia is the military or the movement.

Letter to the Weathermen, 1972

Imprisoned intellectuals¹

Incarcerated for years in Mussolini's Italy for his socialist beliefs and activism, Antonio Gramsci wrote in the *Prison Notebooks* that, 'Every social group . . . creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.' For Gramsci, everyone thinks critically and philosophically, hence everyone is an intellectual; yet not everyone officially functions as such in society.² Some may superficially assume that only professional intellectuals – recognised writers and pundits in the public

realm, academics and policymakers – constitute an intellectual formation. However, every group has an ‘organic’ intellectual caste, one that functions as a vehicle to articulate, shape and further its aspirations. As my opening quotations attest, American activists caged in Attica prison or hiding from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) because of their anti-war actions wrote their own prison notebooks. And their acts, sacrifices and words significantly influenced the political outlook of the larger American public.

The ‘public intellectual’ encompasses the oft-forgotten ‘prison intellectual’. Like his or her visible counterparts, the imprisoned intellectual reflects upon social meaning, ethics and justice; only s/he does so in detention centres and prisons which function as intellectual and political sites unauthorised by the state. Consider a special grouping of imprisoned intellectuals, political prisoners. Incarcerated for their political beliefs and acts or politicised after being jailed for social crimes against people or property, progressive political rebels, surviving or succumbing to incarceration, wrote as outlaw intellectuals. Facing repression because of their political stances, they provided unique and controversial insights into social justice and humanity.

My opening quotations both offer a brief glimpse into the roles and writings of imprisoned intellectuals in the United States during the movement era of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first passage from ‘social prisoners’, politicised while housed at Attica in New York State, protests against racism and human rights abuses; the second from a letter by Daniel Berrigan calls for humane resistance to state violence. It is useful to recall the context of both ‘notebook’ fragments.

In September 1971, incarcerated men staged an uprising in New York’s Attica Prison, sparked by the August killing of prison leader, theorist and Black Panther Field Marshall George Jackson in California’s San Quentin. Writing that they sought ‘an end to the injustice suffered by all prisoners regardless of race, creed or color’, the men comprising the ‘Attica Liberation Faction’ endowed negotiating rights and powers upon Donald Noble, Peter Butler, Frank Lott, Carl Jones and Herbert Blyden. (Blyden, like most of the thirty-plus prisoners and hostages slain at Attica during the retaking of the prison, was killed by national guardsmen.) The Attica Liberation Faction, comprised mostly of African Americans, issued a memorable document known as the ‘Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Depression Platform’. It was, in many ways, influenced by the Black Panther Party’s ‘Ten-Point Platform and Program’ for liberation. Describing Attica as ‘one of the most classic institutions of authoritative inhumanity upon men’, the prisoners presented their manifesto under the heading ‘Man’s Right to Knowledge and Free Use Thereof’. The men note the violent absurdity of their captivity: ‘In our efforts to comprehend

on a feeling level an existence contrary to violence, we are confronted by our captors as to what is fair and just, we are victimised by exploitation and the denial of the celebrated due process of law.' Attempting to assemble peacefully, a right guaranteed under the US Constitution, the writers note that they are 'murdered, brutalized, and framed on various criminal charges'. Attempting to disseminate their views to media and the larger public, they point out how they are isolated and denied access to communication.

Access to communication is, of course, an essential requirement for imprisoned intellectuals who seek to function as public intellectuals. Those caged or hunted often surreptitiously channel their communiqués to the outside world. Increased restrictions on communication in the United States both for the incarcerated and the opponents of state violence, following September 11 and the passage of the Patriot Act, are resulting in greater censorship of the analyses and insights of imprisoned intellectuals. Yet voices from both the present and the past come through; they have done so historically in times of foreign or domestic warfare and they do so today. For example, the excerpt from Berrigan's 1972 *Letter to the Weathermen*,³ written while he was being sought by the FBI for having burned draft cards and damaged weapons of mass destruction, still provides inspiration and instruction. Some thirty years after Berrigan was captured and imprisoned, the US deployed a war strategy in Iraq of dropping thousands of (cluster) bombs, mostly on civilians, to bring about a quick 'victory'. US radicals, in mounting resistance rather than genuflecting before 'shock and awe', evoked memories of activists such as Berrigan who beat 'swords into ploughshares' by fighting against the imperial wars of an earlier era.

Examining intellectuals whose analyses are rarely referenced in conventional political speech or academic discourse leads one to fragments from 'American prison notebooks': political writings undertaken in opposition to state or corporate policies promoting racism, war, imperialism and corporate globalisation. In recent US history, the writings of imprisoned intellectuals were probably better known to society in general because social upheaval and mass movements created an urgency for greater literacy in critical thinking and transformative politics. Prison writings that detailed and explored resistance and repression were reinforced by rebellion and liberation praxes from the civil rights/black power, women's, gay/lesbian, American Indian, Puerto Rican independence, Chicano and anti-war movements. The imprisoned intellectual seemed to be more firmly secure in embracing a revolutionary struggle that encompassed significant segments of the general society.

Today, the general or mainstream American public constitutes a mostly hostile or indifferent readership and respondent, yet there are

multiple 'publics' and varied 'civil societies'. The intent of imprisoned intellectuals to influence 'the public' in its multiple formations is a complicated endeavour. No monolithic 'imprisoned intellectual' exists. Despite shared anti-racist and anti-imperialist politics, US political prisoners differ in identity, ideology and strategy. However, a general *disavowal* of their political and theoretical work exists. This is partly due to its radical content, which destabilises conventional political discourse including conventional radical discourse, and partly due to the insistence that true intellectual production occurs within socially recognised sites of 'respectability' – academia, publishing houses, conference settings.

Much of what is troubling in the writings of imprisoned activists centres on the issue of violence: violence by the state to squash dissent and destroy dissenters; violence deployed to 'disappear' the incarcerated or detained; violence carried out by dissidents and prisoners in self-defence or to wield power. Whether the work of pacifists or militarists responding to violence and militarism, prison writings remain suspect and heatedly debated by many in the public realm. Most Americans are more familiar with (inured to?) state violence, particularly when it is directed against disenfranchised or racially or politically suspect minorities. Often, for the general public, police or military violence against the 'racially suspect', against the poor and immigrants or against prisoners is not as unsettling as counter-violence against the police or military by the subaltern and incarcerated.

Paradoxically, those most passionately seeking collective liberation – from racial or economic or military dominance – are those most likely to lose their individual freedoms. Imprisoned intellectuals, ironically the most intensely monitored and repressed by the state's police apparatus, may in fact be those most free of state conditioning. Existing not merely as 'victims' of state responses to radical opposition, they produce analyses that deconstruct dominant ideologies and reconstruct new strategies for humanity in reactive and proactive readings of struggles for freedom.

But who reads the works of imprisoned intellectuals, and why? What are the shared desires and aspirations for democratic culture and civil society? Relationships between those incarcerated and those in the 'free world' suggest multiple civil societies; sometimes overlapping, sometimes segregated from each other; sometimes reinforcing, sometimes contradicting each other. One aspect of these overlapping contradictions entails the conflicting relationships between 'free' intellectuals and imprisoned intellectuals, for it is the former who usually act as 'mules' or couriers, relaying the messages or texts of the latter. Yet the courier – as editor, translator, publisher, critic – wields considerable power to influence or alter the text emanating from the incarcerated. It is likely that the incarcerated are routinely censored by their supporters

on the outside seeking to ‘mainstream’ their messages. Whether the imprisoned, as political ‘dependants’ relying upon those outside to garner support, might engage in self-censorship is less clear (and rarely mentioned in the movements around the ‘prison industrial complex’). Potential limitations among allies abound. Self-censorship and self-conditioning work both ways: the privileged academic might hesitate to criticise a progressive ‘folk hero’ sentenced to life or death in prison, although the repercussions of academic criticisms seem to be fairly limited. The lack of ‘parity’ between political prisoners and their political allies is based on the reality that, in theory and practice, the imprisoned intellectual can be ideologically ‘frozen’ in or physically ‘freed’ by the work of non-incarcerated academics and activists. The ‘free’ intellectual has no such dependence upon the imprisoned intellectual. It seems, then, that captivity mutates into many strange forms.

Captivity and American democracy

The United States has a long and terrible history of confinement and, as it were, enacting the disappearance of those it racially and politically targets.⁴ Include those who were captives in slavery and on reservations and it becomes an even longer narrative of torture and resistance. W. E. B. Du Bois notes in *Black Reconstruction in America* how, despite the protests of the Lincoln administration, over 200,000 African Americans served in combat during the Civil War.⁵ The ancestral line of these fighters included Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner and Harriet Tubman, and their political lineage encompassed John Brown. With the rise of lynching after the aborted Reconstruction era, the investigative journalist Ida B. Wells, armed with a pistol, vigorously organised against a racial terror in which as many as 10,000 whites attended ‘parties’ that roasted and dismembered black victims. But there has always been resistance.⁶ The colonised, subaltern and subjugated have continuously fought genocide and social death, and, in battle, called upon their progenitors for guidance, and, in failure, for forgiveness.⁷

Contemporary incarcerated writers and political theorists are no different. Housed in San Quentin, Vietnamese activist and author Mike Ngo writes of prisoners’ forced complicity with authorities and his own shame in participating in the disciplinary machinery, alleviated when he finds comfort in conversation with slain prison writer, revolutionary strategist-turned-icon, George Jackson. For Ngo, if it does not destroy, imprisonment teaches a power and political theorising that emanate from intimacy with death: social, physical, sexual, emotional.⁸

Intimacy with death, whether one’s own prefigured or those deaths prematurely engineered by the voracious appetite of expanding military-corporate power, is imprinted throughout the writings of incarcerated intellectuals. Death comes in resistance to the Klan; death through

assassination; death in battles with the police; death in opposition to US military incursions and interventions; death in execution chambers; death on street corners; and, indeed, death to the very concept of blind civic obedience and patriotic fervour. Yet such writings are replete, too, with life. They are replete, if not with the inevitability of political and military victory for the rebels – who, in the phrase of Black Panther Party cofounder Huey P. Newton, seemed to court ‘revolutionary suicide’ – with the possibility of liberation and freedom, and the certainty of striving for it.

The endemic flight from death in American culture (via its fetishism of youth, technology and immortality tied to materiality and science) indicates a marathon of censorship and avoidance politics. The disappearance of the incarcerated, together with the inhumane punishment meted out to rebels, suggest that recognition of and intimacy with the imprisoned, particularly political prisoners, are embraced by and known to a few only. For prisons constitute one of the most controversial and contested sites in a democratic society. Many Americans seem embarrassed by a loved one or family member’s past or present residency within a penal site. Yet given that some 2.5 million people are imprisoned or detained by the state – 70 per cent are African, Latino, Native or Asian American – many families could claim this intimacy. Like those families in denial, US government officials also fervently deny the existence of US political prisoners. State employees do practise denial by defining political militants as ‘criminals’. Yet who is the ‘criminal’ if an individual’s crime is physical opposition to state criminality (as determined by United Nations conventions, human rights law and non-apartheid-based morality) or opposition to crimes against humanity in warfare and profiteering; against the poor, against the racially ‘subordinate’; crimes against children, against women?⁹ To address the issue of incarcerated intellectuals, one would have to examine the reasons for their incarceration; examine not just the acts of which they were accused and convicted (at times with juridical malfeasance), but their personal and political commitments. African Americans constitute the greatest percentage not only of those incarcerated for crimes against private property, drug violations and social violence, but also of those incarcerated for political acts (including armed struggle) in opposition to repression. As the largest contingent of (social and) political prisoners, African Americans tend to draw down the longest sentences with fewer possibilities for clemency or parole. There is a specificity and temerity about black liberation struggles that relate to and infuse political prisoners in the United States. The racially marked prisoner tends to be the most forgotten and to serve the longest sentences, accompanied by the most violent punishments.

Historically, this has been exemplified by the US government's treatment of political prisoners associated with radical political movements, for example, African and Native Americans, respectively in the Black Panther Party or the American Indian Movement and their allies, and Puerto Rican *independentistas*. To rationalise and legitimise the sentences and punishments by pointing to the advocacy or use of armed struggle or armed self-defence by some of the incarcerated ignores the fact that a number of those slain or incarcerated for decades were innocent of the charges. Their innocence has been attested to – as in the cases of Black Panthers such as Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, who were slain, and Dhoruba Bin Wahad and Geronimo ji-Jaga (Pratt), who were finally released in the 1990s – by the multi-million dollar settlements ('compensation') paid out by the US government.

The captivity and policing of black bodies in America entail significant amounts of violence. To be policed and violated are racial-sexual phenomena that take place on both sides of prison walls. For example, the New York Police Department's brutality against people of African descent was viscerally recorded in the 1997 beating-rape of Haitian American Abner Louima and the 1999 firing of forty-one shots at African émigré Amadou Diallo. Reflecting on these and other incidents, and relating them to Fanon's analysis in *The Wretched of the Earth*, theorist Frank Wilderson, III writes:

[F]ollow Fanon's analysis, and the gestures toward this understanding in some of the work of imprisoned intellectuals, then . . . come to grips with the fact that, for Black people, civil society *itself* – rather than its abuses or shortcomings – is a state of emergency. . . . Whiteness then, and by extension civil society. . . must be first understood as a social formation of contemporaries who do not magnetize bullets . . .¹⁰

Whether social or state violence in domestic or foreign arenas, racialisation or racially driven policing are constant features of incarceration and the political analyses confronting it. Paradoxically, those most passionately seeking collective liberation – from racial, economic or military dominance – are those most likely to lose individual freedoms. Like racially constructed 'others', imprisoned intellectuals, who are most intensely monitored and repressed by the state's police apparatus, may in fact be those most free of state conditioning. Progressive imprisoned intellectuals both deconstruct racial and political containment and policing, and reconstruct new strategies for humanity.

Political prisoners

There is a continuum of debate over who constitutes a political prisoner. The debate is waged among prisoners themselves and among the non-

incarcerated. A political prisoner can be someone who was put in prison for non-political reasons but who became politicised in his or her thought and action while incarcerated. Incarceration is inherently political, but ideology plays a role. If everyone is a political prisoner, then no one is. I reserve the use of (a somewhat awkward term) 'political-econ' prisoners for those convicted of social crimes tied to property and drug-related crimes and whose disproportionate sentencing to prison, rather than rehabilitation or community service, is shaped by the political economy of racial and economic privilege and disenfranchisement. As a caste, political-econ prisoners can and do develop and refine their political critiques while incarcerated. Consider that Malcolm X and George Jackson were incarcerated for social crimes against property or people, and then politicised as radicals within the penal site. Also, paradoxically, youths who renounced their gang memberships and social crime in order to bring about social change through the Black Panther Party were subsequently targeted and imprisoned for their political affiliations.

Those whose thoughts of social justice lead to commitments and acts in political confrontation with oppression acquire the standing of political prisoners. For those who (continue to) prey on others, the status of 'political prisoners' is an oxymoron. Such prisoners do not appear as liberators but exist merely as one of many sources of danger and violence to be confronted and quelled.

Victimisation by a dominant culture and aggrandising state is not sufficient to qualify an individual as a 'political prisoner'. If agency and morality define the political being as *engagé*, then only a fragment of the incarcerated population (just as a fragment of the non-incarcerated population) registers as such; that is, in *active* resistance to repression and injustice. Some progressives assert that to recognise an entity called 'political prisoners' creates a dichotomy between a select group and the vast majority of prisoners, and thus promotes elitism by constructing the iconic prisoner. Yet these men and women are different. They were different before their incarceration, marked by their critical thinking and confrontations with authoritarian structures and policies and state violence. In addition, they were and are treated differently by the state. Often receiving the harshest of sentences, they are frequently relegated to solitary confinement or 'lockdown' in control units so that they cannot 'infect' – really infuse – other prisoners with their radical politics and aspirations for freedom.

In respect of US political prisoners, these political activists for human rights will encompass both those engaged in civil disobedience who identify as 'loyal opposition' – and by their very dissent affirm the institutions of American democracy – and those so alienated by state violence and government betrayals of democratic ideals that their disaffection leads to insurrection.¹¹ 'Law-abiding dissent', engaged in

by the former group, represents a political risk-taking that has broader social acceptance. This is largely due to its adherence to principles of non-violence, civil disobedience, widely shared moral values and, sometimes, proximity to the very ‘corridors of (institutional) power’ closed to the disenfranchised. Such adherence spares dissenters the harshest of sentences. Hence, it is not political incarceration *per se* which is stigmatised and which leads to an individual’s ‘disappearance’ from conventional society and politics, but incarceration based on a refusal to suffer violence without resorting to armed self-defence.

Even religious pacifists, once they prove themselves disloyal to the nation state, are widely disavowed. Despite his adherence to the Christian faith and Gandhian principles of non-violent civil disobedience, Martin Luther King, Jr – whose 1963 ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’ exists as a ‘classic’ text among contemporary letters by political prisoners – lost considerable support following his public criticisms of US capitalism, imperialism and the Vietnam War. What is largely condemned is not the risk-taking that leads to incarceration, but the radicalism that rejects the validity of the nation state itself and the legitimacy of its legal and moral standing. Through its denials that ‘political prisoners’ exist within its territories, the United States asserts a hegemonic narrative that discredits the observations about political incarceration made by both prisoners and their advocates.

Mondo we Langa (David Rice), incarcerated in Nebraska prisons for decades, is one who maintains a counter-narrative to that of the state. At the time of his imprisonment, he was Deputy Minister of Information for the Omaha Nebraska chapter of the National Committees to Combat Fascism, an organisation affiliated to the Black Panther Party. He is now serving a life sentence for the first-degree murder of a policeman, a crime he maintains that he did not commit and for which his lawyers claim that there is no evidence implicating him. But Mondo we Langa had been active in protesting police brutality against African American residents in Omaha and, according to the Center for Constitutional Rights, was targeted by COINTELPRO.¹² He writes in ‘Letter from the Inside’:

I know what I mean by ‘political prisoner’: someone who, in the context of US laws and court system, has been falsely tried and convicted of a criminal offense as a means of ending his or her political activities and making an example of the person for others who are espousing, or might espouse, ideas that those in power would find offensive. By this definition, I might be the only political prisoner in this joint. But in a broader sense, most people behind bars could be considered ‘political prisoners,’ inasmuch as the process of lawmaking, law-enforcing, and the criminal ‘justice’ system are all driven by a political apparatus that is anti-people of color and

anti-people of little economic means. At the same time though, many, if not most of the people who are locked up have acted in the interests of the very system that oppresses them and victimized people who, like themselves, are oppressed.¹³

In a 1990 article entitled 'Political prisoners in the United States: the hidden reality', attorneys Michael E. Deutsch and Jan Susler describe three types of political prisoners. For Deutsch and Susler, US political prisoners are comprised of:

1. Foreign nationals whose political status or political activities against allies of US imperialism (e.g., Israel, Great Britain, El Salvador) result in detention or imprisonment;
2. Members of US oppressed nationalities (African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos/Mexicanos, and Native Americans) who are prosecuted and imprisoned for political activities in furtherance of their [liberation] movements . . . Included in these groups are anticolonial combatants or prisoners of war (POWs) – members of national liberation movements who as part of clandestine organizations have employed armed struggle as a means to achieve self-determination and independence for their nation . . . and
3. White people who have acted in solidarity with the liberation movements of oppressed nationalities or against US foreign or domestic policies.¹⁴

Among all the works of imprisoned intellectuals, those most difficult to assimilate and disseminate remain the writings of political prisoners, activists facing repression because of their political beliefs and commitments.

Conclusion: back to the future

The imprisonment of those seeking social and political change in the United States is as old as its elite-based democracy rooted in slavery, anti-Indian genocidal wars and 'manifest destiny'. Historically in the US, racial fears and hostilities have been manipulated so that state and civil society seem to speak with one voice regarding policing, punishment and violence, even as the media, educational institutions and private citizens are organised or manipulated in the furtherance of state hegemony. Yet the past (as will the future) also bears witness to creative attempts to bring the voices of imprisoned intellectuals before the wider society and to petition for human rights and the release of captives. Such reinvention of strategic interventions, using the language and action of 'rehabilitation' commingled with the language and action of active resistance, posits new ways to rework the past and present for future democratic cultures.

Such work mandates that human rights advocates expand the categorisation(s) of imprisoned intellectuals and political prisoners to include immigrant detainees awaiting deportation. For instance, in the United States, the current sweeps of non-citizens legally organising for workers' rights in Florida (mostly young people of South Asian origin) are constructing a new category – that of the political detainee awaiting deportation. At various Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detention sites throughout the country, 'foreign' social and political prisoners await deportation, sometimes to hostile nations. Various penal sites within the country hold US citizens as social and political prisoners. Abolition politics aims to expand strategies focusing on release campaigns for those incarcerated for decades, so as to counter the increasing tendency of the government to 'disappear' prisoners into lockdown. Following September 11 2001, for example, US political prisoners were held incommunicado.

Imprisoned intellectuals assist the 'free' public in developing powerful responses to stem a growing wave of 'disappearances' – whether in maximum security, supermax prisons, death rows, INS detention camps or Guantanamo. Yet, those resistance strategies and political narratives are set in a series of prison notebooks still waiting to be written and read.¹⁵

References

- 1 For a detailed discussion of the term 'imprisoned intellectuals' and of the distinctions between 'social' and 'political' prisoners, see Joy James, preface and introduction to *Imprisoned Intellectuals: America's political prisoners write on life, liberation, and rebellion* (Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).
- 2 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York, International Publishers, 1985), p. 5. Gramsci writes: 'When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals . . . although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist' (p. 9).
- 3 Daniel Berrigan's letter is reprinted in *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, op. cit.
- 4 For example, the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution legalises slavery for those duly convicted of a crime. Following the Civil War, under the convict prison leasing system, African Americans criminalised for their 'blackness' were worked to death in mines, fields and forests in joint ventures between the state and private industries. See Matthew Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: convict leasing in the American South, 1866–1928* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1996).
- 5 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935).
- 6 Some accounts of the southern civil rights movement, for example, argue that pacifists were often provided with protection from Klan and police violence by armed and organised African men and women, such as those who formed the Deacons for Defense and Justice in North Carolina. See Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in*

- Mississippi* (New York, Dial Press, 1968); Robert Franklin Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (Detroit, MI, Wayne State University Press, 1998, reprint); and Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
- 7 See Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: the black struggle for freedom in America* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1981).
 - 8 See Mike Ngo, under pseudonym 'An Unknown Soldier', 'A day in the life', prisoners' 'zine, untitled (13 January 2000); see also Dylan Rodriguez's 'Interview with Mike Ngo', in Joy James (ed.), *The New Abolitionists: imprisoned writers on incarceration, enslavement and emancipation* (forthcoming).
 - 9 For details of US foreign and domestic policies that instigated warfare, destabilisation and countless deaths in the post-second world war era, see Noam Chomsky, *The Culture of Terrorism* (Boston, MA, South End Press, 1988); Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: the FBI's secret war against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston, MA, South End Press, revised edition 2002); Joy James, *Resisting State Violence: radicalism, gender, and race in US culture* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
 - 10 See Frank Wilderson, III, 'The prison slave as hegemony's (silent) scandal', in *Social Justice* (forthcoming).
 - 11 On this point, see, for example, Chomsky, *The Culture of Terrorism*, op. cit.; Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York, HarperCollins, 1999); David J. Brown and Robert Merrill (eds), *Violent Persuasions: the politics and imagery of terrorism* (Seattle, WA, Bay Press, 1993); Churchill and Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*, op. cit.; and Troy Johnson et al. (eds), *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the longest walk* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1997).
 - 12 His conviction 'was based on the testimony of a frightened teenager and on explosives allegedly found in [we Langa's] house'. A Federal Court of Appeals declared the search illegal, yet the Supreme Court 'sustained the conviction holding that the Federal courts should not have reviewed the state court decision'. See Center for Constitutional Rights, 'Political prisoners in the United States' (September 1988). COINTELPRO is, of course, the acronym for the FBI's domestic 'counter-intelligence programs'.
 - 13 See Mondo we Langa, 'Letter from the Inside', *Nebraska Report* (May/June 1999), p. 9. For information on Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa (David Rice), see *Can't Jail the Spirit* (Chicago, IL, Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, fifth edition, 2002).
 - 14 The article was first published in the *International Association of Democratic Lawyers Bulletin* (January 1990) and reprinted in *Social Justice* (Vol. 18, no. 3).
 - 15 See Anne-Marie Cusac, 'You're in the hole: a crackdown on dissident prisoners', *The Progressive* (December 2001). *The Progressive* reports that on 26 October 2001, John Ashcroft signed the 'National Security: Prevention of Acts of Violence and Terrorism' order, which was subsequently published in the Federal Register. Cusac writes: 'Under the new rules, the Department of Justice, "based on information from the head of a federal law enforcement or intelligence agency," will select certain prisoners for "special administrative measures" . . . [including isolation, denials of correspondence, telephone communication, visitations and media interviews].'