ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

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The French theorist and activist Jean Genet, one of the most ardent supporters of the Black Panther Party, provided the preface to the pamphlet and texts prepared by the GIP. It was at his suggestion that the GIP devoted a communiqué on media coverage of George Jackson’s death in San Quentin.

The GIP prefaces its title page with the following statements:

The death of George Jackson is not a prison accident. It is a political assassination.

In the United States of America, assassination was, and still is, a form of political action.

This pamphlet does not propose to fully explain the events of August 21, 1971, which took place in the prison of San Quentin: for the time being, at least, these events are not fully understandable. Through this brochure, we wanted to answer two questions:

1. Who was this human being (vivant) whom they wanted to kill? What type of threat did he carry, despite the fact that he only carried his chains?
2. And why did they want to kill this death, to stifle it under lies? Why was it still perceived as a form of threat?

To answer the first question, we have chosen to present some of the most recent interviews in which George Jackson examines the revolutionary function of the movement in prisons.

To answer the second question, we have analyzed some pieces of information and some documents that were published directly after the death of Jackson.
The Masked Assassination

For a number of weeks, American newspapers have published articles about Jackson's death. Many divergences exist between all, or almost all, of these articles. Impossibilities and contradictions appear at every stage. One article claims that the events started at 15:10; another at 14:25. One article describes the revolver as a 9 mm; another as a .38 caliber. One article reports that Jackson wore a wig; another claims he did not. On Saturday, the whole event was described as a thirty-second blaze; on Monday, it became a long massacre of thirty minutes.

Most of this information comes directly from the administration of the penitentiary. A man whose account of his neighbor's death is half as incongruous as the story told by the director of San Quentin about Jackson's death would be immediately accused of the crime, but this will not happen to the director of San Quentin.

Jackson has already said it: What is happening in the prisons is war, a war having other fronts in the black ghettos, the army, and the courts. There was a time when an imprisoned militant was a soldier outside of combat. For the ruling power, prison represented, after murder, the most effective weapon against its adversaries. Today, the imprisoned revolutionaries and the common-law prisoners, who became revolutionaries specifically during their detention, paved the way for the war front to extend inside prisons. This struggle is terribly uneven since all of the weapons (as can be noted from the recent events in Attica) are in the hands of one party. Despite this fact, such a struggle worries the American administration, since it has become clear that court sentences will not be able to stop it. Scandalous verdicts have transformed the prisoners into militants, and, in turn, the struggle in prisons has rendered court sentences derisory, whatever they might be. At this stage, the ruling power is left with one resort: assassination.

Jackson's assassination will never be prosecuted by the American justice system. No court will actually try to find out what happened: It was an act of war. And what the ruling power, the administration of the penitentiary, and the reactionary newspapers have published must be considered as "war communiqués."

This means that they fulfill some tactical exigencies, they serve a specific purpose, and they stimulate the struggle on the internal front.

It is therefore pointless to try to find out what is more or less accurate in the communiqués of the administration. Rather, it is sufficient to know the purpose that this or that statement would serve and what the administration sought to achieve and gain through its use.

A few hours after Jackson's death, Jim Park, associate warden of the prison, gave the first version of the events:

—Everything took place in thirty seconds. It was 3:10 in the afternoon—that is, "a little more than an hour after the end of visiting time."
—The incident took place in the maximum-security cellblock of the prison, where the "worst of the incorrigibles" are locked up. Seventeen to twenty inmates were involved in it; among them were Jackson, the other two Soledad Brothers ([Fleeta] Drumbo and [John] Clutchette), and [Ruchell] Magee (implicated, along with Angela Davis, in the events of August 7, 1970). 4
—"What exactly was Jackson's role? Was he the leader?" Jim Park was asked. He was the first to leave his prison cell, and he had a revolver in his hand. I leave it up to you to draw your own conclusions.
—This revolver was a .38 caliber. We don't know if he used it or not. Anyway, the five victims (three guards, two white inmates) were stabbed with knives, which were either smuggled in or fabricated inside the prison. Two other guards were injured in the same way.
—Less than one minute after the beginning of the riot, Jackson fled the maximum security cellblock, running. [Johnny] Spain, another inmate, was with him. Jackson was directly shot down, Spain was slightly wounded.
—The guards only fired one or two effective shots. The remaining ones (some thirty or so) were intended to warn the inmates and force them to leave their cells and lay down in the yard.
What are the purposes that this first version serves?

To depict an abrupt, violent, and absurd riot, without a specific reason or objective, and emphasize the prompt and impeccable response of the police.

But this was merely a hasty first operation, designed to answer the most urgent needs. Other operations were necessary, and they were enacted over the subsequent days. Undoubtedly, the American administration needed Jackson's death. He was the main exponent of the revolutionary movement in the prisons; thus, it was necessary to eliminate him. But this administration feared that his assassination would provoke an explosion and lead to the reinforcement of the revolutionaries. Consequently, there was a series of operations, which took the form of communiqués, news, and disclosures. Their goal was the manipulation of public opinion—at least, that of the people who were yet “undecided”—and to prepare a certain number of repressive measures. This counteroffensive tactic aimed to achieve five goals:

1. Compromise those black and white lawyers who provide legal and political assistance to the inmates.
2. Plant the seeds of suspicion about the complicity of the entire black community.
3. Present the guards, whose reputation had been devalued, in a more positive light.
4. Destroy the unified front of resistance formed by black and white prisoners.
5. Detract from the prestige of the black figures who led the struggle in the prisons, along with the common-law and political prisoners.

First Operation: “The Suspect Lawyer”

The outline of the events imposes its “logic”: Jackson's death must be directly linked to a visit, a lawyer's visit—a lawyer who had ties with blacks and radicals and who, acting as an illegal courier, must have provided the instruments of the drama.

1. THE CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

According to the first version, the riot started at 3:10 P.M., an hour after the end of visiting time. This is also the chronology reported by The Oregonian of

But:

—The events “started immediately after the end of visiting time” (New York Times, August 23).

—The events took place at 3:10, “at the time when the visits were over” (San Francisco Chronicle, August 23).

—At 2:35 P.M., Jackson was led back to the maximum-security cellblock, and the events started at that specific moment (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

—At 2:27 P.M., Guard DeLeon signed the log confirming that Jackson had been led back to the maximum-security cellblock. Jackson pulled out his revolver a few seconds later (New York Times, September 3).

2. THE SMUGGLED REVOLVER

—Jim Park [the associate warden of San Quentin] claims, “Apparently a gun was smuggled in” (San Francisco Examiner, August 22).

—Louis S. Nelson, warden of San Quentin Prison, revealed that Jackson had received a visit on Saturday, August 21, at the beginning of the afternoon. Nelson did not want to reveal the identity or the profession of the visitor, but in a slip of the tongue, he spoke of the table that separated Jackson from the “attorney.” Nelson “supposed that” [the] visitor introduced the revolver. “But how was it possible,” Nelson was asked, “for the visitor carrying a gun to go through the metal detector?” He replied, “In life, anything is possible” (New York Times, August 23).

—The officials disclose the name of the lawyer: Stephen Bingham. He is young, white, and progressive: he participated in a number of sit-ins at Berkeley, collaborated with Martin Luther King Jr., and, in March 1970, defended three men accused of violence against an agent during a court session in the trial of the Soledad Brothers (San Francisco Chronicle, August 23, August 24).

—Bingham arrived at San Quentin at two in the afternoon, with a young woman who registered under the name Anderson. The young woman had a briefcase. Since she was denied access to the visiting area, she gave the briefcase to Bingham. When he entered the visiting area with the briefcase, the metal detector reacted. The briefcase was opened, and it contained an apparently functional tape recorder. Some working parts had
been taken out of the machine to conceal a gun (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

—Bingham and the young woman entered the visiting area together and spoke with Jackson. It is noted that the young woman is in communication with a female lawyer from the East Bay (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

—The address given by the young woman is that of the Black Panthers in Oakland (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

—The address of the young woman is 2230 10th Street, Berkeley (San Francisco Chronicle, August 25).

—The revolver had been acquired by the Black Panthers in Reno (San Francisco Chronicle, August 23).

—Bingham and his companion had arrived at San Quentin at 10:35 in the morning. Since Bingham was not Jackson's official defense attorney, he had to get a visit permit, but Miss Anderson was denied one. Bingham met with Jackson in the visiting area at 12:25 (New York Times, September 3).

—During this meeting, Bingham gave Jackson not only the revolver but also two ammunition clips and a wig (New York Times, September 3).

—Bingham completely disappeared; Bales, the prosecutor, has officially charged him with five murders, on the basis of a California state law that does not discriminate between perpetrators of crimes and their accomplices (New York Times, September 3).

Second Operation: “The Black Conspiracy”

In what will follow, the objective is to demonstrate that, in this war waged in prisons, the whole black community must be considered suspect; women and children are combatants masked as civilians.

—Officials disclosed information about an escape plan that they had “discovered.” A former prisoner [James E. Carr] who was Jackson's cellmate sent Jackson a letter through a lawyer. Jackson had written a response on the back of the letter. The former prisoner slipped the letter in his pocket. During the pressing, an employee found the letter and gave it to the officials, who, “to avoid raising his [Carr’s] suspicion,” made a copy of it and then put it back in the pocket (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

—In this letter, Jackson asked his sisters to “hide some pistols in the heels of their shoes”; he enclosed a “diagram to show them how to get past the metal detector.” Furthermore, the women must have hidden tubes of explosives in their vaginas. Jackson also indicated how one could interrupt the prison’s electrical current, and he requested that he be picked up in “a four-wheel drive vehicle.”

On August 1, Jackson received a visit from two sisters with three children, Jim Park, associate warden of San Quentin, thinks that the purpose of the visit was to “test” and “measure the effectiveness of the detector.” In fact, one of the children was discovered to have metal buckles on his shoes and his belt; the three of them carried concealed toy pistols.

Officials made no public disclosure of the escape plan and the suspicious visit of the family because, they claim, they did not want to “prejudice Jackson's position prior to his trial,” which was due to take place soon in San Francisco (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

—In fact, next to Jackson's body in the San Quentin yard, they found not only a gun and two ammunition clips but also a bottle containing [an] explosive substance (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

Third Operation: “The Nonviolent Guards”

The inmates were in possession of all of the weapons, resorted to all sorts of tricks, and were the source of all of the violence. Confronting them were the guards—unarmed, impotent, and distracted. The blacks are the ones waging permanent war while the whites always attempt to maintain a lenient order. If the guards don't want to be the first and only victims, they will have to resort, as Jim Park said, “to old corrective methods.” They, too, will one day have to be armed.

I. THE REVOLVER SMUGGLED DURING THE VISIT

—Usually, when taken to the visiting area, Jackson was handcuffed, and his arms were shackled to a chain around his waist. But “because of his cooperative behavior lately,” it was decided to remove his chains for the duration of the visit (New York Times, September 3).

—In the visiting room, there is frequently a barrier separating inmates and visitors. That day, between Jackson and the lawyer, there was only a table (New York Times, August 23).
According to prison regulations, a guard is to continuously surveil the small visiting room where Jackson met with Bingham. It is the visiting room usually reserved for those visiting prisoners condemned to death. On August 21, only one guard was assigned to surveil the main and the small visiting rooms. He wasn’t able to keep his eyes permanently fixed on Jackson (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

2. The Arsenal in the Hair

a) What Was Jackson’s Hair Like?

-Towering Afro-style hair (Oakland Tribune, August 24).
- An African hairstyle of average length (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).
- For some time, Jackson wore a watch cap on his head. It is under this watch cap, and not under his hair — or probably “a combination of both” — that Jackson concealed and transported the weapon (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).
- The guards have spoken of a wig that was later found jammed in a cell toilet. They maintained that it could be related to the events of August 21, but they did not indicate how (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).
- One of the guards had had the impression that Jackson was wearing a wig, but had never said anything. He did not disclose this piece of information until after the wig had been discovered (San Francisco Chronicle, August 25).

b) Of What Did the Arsenal Consist?

- A .38 caliber revolver (San Francisco Examiner, August 22).
- A 9 mm revolver of foreign origin (New York Times, August 23).
- A 9 mm Spanish-made Llama (San Francisco Chronicle, August 23).
- An Astra M600 (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).
- A short 9 mm Llama [Llama Corto], five inches long; not a standard Llama, which is eight inches long (San Francisco Examiner, August 29).
- A revolver which is eight inches long, five inches tall, and 1.5 inches wide. In addition, under his wig, Jackson carried two full ammunition clips (New York Times, September 3).

3. The Discovery of the Revolver

- After his return to the maximum-security cellblock, Jackson pulled out his revolver and shot the man who was frisking him (San Francisco Chronicle, August 23).
- The guard who was frisking Jackson noticed in his hair something that resembled the point of a pencil. The guard asked him what it was and, instead of responding, Jackson pulled out the revolver. According to some sources, the revolver was not loaded, so Jackson loaded it and then overpowered the “surprised” guards, who stood helpless (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).
- When the incident was taking place, there was, on the ground floor of the cellblock, a total of six guards, one of whom was noncommissioned. Three guards were in the corridor that leads to the cells (New York Times, August 23; San Francisco Chronicle, August 23).
- Jackson had just been returned to the maximum-security cellblock by Guard DeLeon. Rubiaco was in front of Jackson, frisking him. Behind Jackson, Officer McCray was supervising. Rubiaco noticed something in Jackson’s hair and tried to grab it, but Jackson jumped aside, whipped off his wig, grabbed the revolver and the two ammunition clips, swept one of the clips into the revolver, and turned toward the guards, whom he neutralized (New York Times, September 3).

Fourth Operation: The Black Massacre

The American administration has constantly used racism to fight the revolutionary movement in the prisons. However, at present, the front of the war no longer lies between the black inmates and the white inmates but, rather, between all the revolutionary inmates on the one side and the administration (and all those who serve it, be they guards or inmates) on the other. For the officials, it is crucial to break this new front at all costs and to reestablish as soon as possible in the prisons the virulent racism against black inmates. Therefore, they have to show that the events at San Quentin do not belong to a new stage in the political struggle but, rather, constitute a return to the old practice of savage massacre.
1. JACKSON'S PARTICIPATION

—Jackson fled from the cellblock thirty seconds after having brandished the revolver. (Five men had their throats slashed by “other inmates”) (San Francisco Examiner, August 22).

—Jackson pulled out his revolver and forced the guards to open all of the cells on the ground floor. Immediately after, he exited the building and was killed. Everything took place within thirty seconds, but the guards were not able to regain control of the cellblock until after a quarter of an hour. They found five bodies. When he was asked why these people were killed, the Associate Warden replied: “It could have been in retaliation for the shooting of Jackson” (New York Times, August 23).

—Using an automatic lever, Jackson opened all of the cells on the ground floor. It was shortly after 14:35. “In the ensuing half hour,” Jackson and a companion executed the massacre. It wasn’t until 15:30 that Jackson exited the building and attempted to escape (San Francisco Chronicle, August 23).

—in Jackson’s cell were found, piled on top of each other, four dead bodies and one wounded guard; the murderers had not noticed that he was alive.\footnote{5}

—to prevent them from recognizing their assassins, the victims had been blindfolded (San Francisco Chronicle, August 27).

2. THE SAVAGERY OF THE MASSACRE

—All the victims had their throats slashed within thirty seconds (San Francisco Examiner, August 22).

—the duration of the massacre was half an hour. Using half a razor blade, Jackson and the other inmates attempted to slit the throats of their hostages. However, since the blade was dull, they were forced to use it like a saw. A number of shots from a firearm forced them to retreat to the back of the building; they dragged their victims, continuing to slash their throats (San Francisco Chronicle, August 23).

—Since the razor blade was dull, a fingernail clipper was used to puncture the jugular artery of one of the guards.\footnote{6}

—Autopsies of the victims. Jere Graham: two stab wounds to the chest, another two to the abdomen, a bullet to the back of the head. Frank DeLeon: throat slashed on both sides, a bullet to the back of the head, a facial wound caused by a dull object, strangled with an electrical wire. Paul Krasnes: three razor blade slashes to the throat, another to the right side of the torso, strangled with an electrical wire. John Lynn: four wounds on the right side of the neck, two on the left side. Ronald Kane: severed artery on the right side of the throat (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

3. THE DEATH OF THE WHITE INMATES

—the revolting blacks killed, in addition to the three guards, two white inmates because “they [the revolting blacks] didn’t like them” (San Francisco Examiner, August 22).

—There were four white inmates on the ground floor of the maximum-security cellblock. When Jackson forced the guards to open the doors of the cells, two of the inmates, realizing that the blacks were going to kill them, re-closed the cell door; this act saved their lives (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

—the blacks killed two white inmates because they were tier tenders,\footnote{7} and the blacks could never become tenders (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

—the two tier tenders had just finished working in the kitchen. They remained in their cells. The mutineers asked: “We’re breaking out... Are you with us?” —“We won’t get in your way... but we don’t want in.” —“Then you’re against us.” And they were killed (San Francisco Chronicle, August 25).

—the two white tier tenders were killed while they were still working in the kitchen (New York Times, September 3).

Fifth Operation: “The Irresponsible Leader”

Jackson was perceived as the leader of the revolutionary movement in the prisons. For the administration, it was crucial to physically eliminate him. However, this administration also wanted to destroy the public image (so that Jackson would not survive) and the function (so that no one would take his place). Consequently, it needed to weave the “right” narrative to make the general public believe that Jackson had dragged the other inmates into an endeavor without
an exit strategy, and that this endeavor aimed to achieve his exclusive, personal goals. Thus, this administration also had to represent him as someone who abandoned his companions in the middle of the struggle and attempted to escape alone.

—A collective escape attempt, of which Jackson seems to have been the leader (San Francisco Examiner, August 22).

—Jackson intended to escape before his trial with the other two Soledad Brothers, which was to take place shortly thereafter. By discovering the revolver in his hair, the guards frustrated his plot. It is exactly at this point that Jackson stirred up the riot (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

—For the trial, Jackson and his accomplices had prepared a plan of action somehow similar to that of August 1970. He wanted to use a revolver in court. When he saw that his plan was discovered, he dragged his companions down with him (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

—From the outset of the riot, Jackson was trying to escape (New York Times, August 23).

—When the alarm was sounded, Jackson attempted to escape. He fled the maximum security cellblock and ran toward the seven-meter-high wall. He was killed by two bullets: one to the head, the other to the heel (San Francisco Chronicle, August 24).

After the Assassination

On August 23, the preliminary hearing for the events at Soledad took place. A bullet-proof sheet of glass separated the court from the public, including the journalists. The public was so outraged by the attitude of the judges that it pounded on the glass, yelling, “Pigs, pigs.” Two days later, Cluchette’s mother was expelled from the court after a crisis that the authorities described as hysterical; blacks and police clashed in the courtroom. On August 23, Cluchette handed over to lawyers a petition signed by twenty-six inmates of San Quentin who had witnessed the drama of Saturday. The petition was written on the back of a greeting card sent to one of them and bearing the inscription, “I live to love you.” At different stages, the petition was rejected by the judges, who considered it irrelevant. Lawyers read it to the public and the press outside the courtroom. The petition addressed the assassination of Jackson:

We, the undersigned, each being held incommunicado, because of suffering from both wounds and internal injuries inflicted upon our persons by known and unknown agents of Warden Louis S. Nelson. Through their agents, Warden Nelson and Associate Warden James L. Park killed a man called George Jackson and plotted the assassination of the undersigned who refused to be involved in the conspiracy of the functionaries of the State.

The text continues, recounting instances of physical maltreatment and torture; it also asks that investigations be conducted and forms of protection offered to the inmates. The lawyers who were able to see some of the inmates in the maximum-security cellblock confirmed the horrible conditions; it was also noted that Ruchell Magee was in extremely bad condition.

The prisoners also succeeded in leaking another longer text to the outside:

We, the twenty-seven united black, brown, and white prison-slaves of the maximum security cellblock of San Quentin penitentiary, are the victims of an assassination conspiracy, exactly like the one which ended the life of our comrade G. L. Jackson, assassinated on August 21.

The scene had been staged to suggest an escape attempt, but what really happened was a conspiracy to assassinate the Soledad Brothers, and with them Ruchell Magee and the rest of the fighters for freedom. . . . Since August 21, we twenty-seven have been directly experiencing fascism in its roughest form. We have been subjected to every form of brutality; we have been kicked and beaten with clubs, tortured with lit cigarettes and pins; we have been abused, spat on, dragged on the ground, etc. All of this while we are enchained like animals, spread naked on the grass. . . . Every day they threaten our lives; we will be poisoned, asphyxiated; we will never leave the maximum security cellblock alive; we will never receive a trial; and our lawyers will not be able to help us because they too will be killed, etc. In this prison, there are black, brown, and white comrades who don’t belong to any particular political organization. All that we are asking for is the support of the people in our daily struggle. Among us there are men who don’t read Marx, Lenin, Engels, or Mao; there are some who don’t know how to read even a sentence. What we are affirming now is this: we need everyone’s help, whether s/he is an outlaw, a pimp, a prostitute, a priest or a doctor of philosophy. . . . We are not grieving, we are not crying over the death of our beloved comrade George
Jackson. He brought courage to our hearts and spirits, and he taught us how to pursue his ideals. He made the ultimate sacrifice, and his black blood is the nourishment that gives us the resolution to fight against the crushing forces of oppression. We will vindicate him, because we are the ones who knew him best and loved him the most.

It is clear that there was no escape attempt but, rather, an assassination, a premeditated crime against Jackson. For some time, the director of the California Department of Corrections, R. K. Prochnik, had been spreading rumors that trouble might break out at San Quentin. The guards wanted to kill Jackson and other "dangerous" prisoners, to make people believe that there was a collective escape attempt. Jackson, who knew very well that the guards wanted his skin above all, succeeded in reaching the yard, where he was killed. By doing so, he rendered unsustainable the "pre-packaged" official version of the events and prevented the massacre of the other prisoners. This explains why the lawyers and the other inmates said that George Jackson had sacrificed his life. It is possible, then, that the guards and the two prisoners were killed in a brief battle following Jackson's assassination. Park, associate warden of the prison, stated that some of the murders probably happened "in retaliation for the shooting of Jackson."

Jackson had known for some time that he was constantly under the threat of death. On the one hand, it might come from an inmate conditioned by racism and lured by the promises or terrified by the threats of the guards. On the other hand, it might be directly engineered by the guards themselves. The graveness of this threat increased in tandem with the development of Jackson's political consciousness and prestige. The probability that the events of Soledad would be discussed in court while Jackson was still alive became increasingly scarce. There were numerous attempts to eliminate Jackson, and his letters from prison are a testament to this. On March 19, 1971, the former Soledad prisoner Allan Mancino wrote that one night in January 1970, Spoon, a guard, and Moody, a captain, had pulled him out of his cell and asked him to kill Jackson. Moody then asked me directly if I was willing to kill George Jackson. He said that he didn't need another Eldridge Cleaver.

In this atmosphere of death that permanently surrounded him, Jackson faced extremely hard challenges: "I may run, but all the time that I am, I'll be looking for a stick! A defensible position!"

And in such a climate heavy with death, he advanced the political education of his parents:

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

I was leading up to the obvious fact that black women in this country are far more aggressive than black males. But this is qualified by the fact that their aggression has, until very recently, been within the system—that "get a diploma boy" stuff, or "earn you some money." Where it should have been the gun. Development of the ability for serious fighting and organized violence was surely not encouraged in the black female, but neither was it discouraged, as it was in the case of the black male."

This political education resulted in a level of consciousness for Jackson's mother, which made her declare, after the assassination of her son, "Both of his legs looked like they'd been cut. He just looked so mangled, it's pitiful... He said they were trying to kill him. They wanted to kill George, they wanted to kill George years ago." Jackson said:

It's no coincidence that Malcolm X and M. L. King died when they did. Malcolm X had just put it together (two and three [sic]). I seriously believe, they knew all along but were holding out and presenting the truth in such a way that it would affect the most people situationally—without getting them damaged by gunfire. You remember what was on his lips when he died. Viet-
nam and economics. Political economy. The professional killers could have murdered him long before they did. They let Malcolm rage on muslim [sic] nationalism for a number of years because they knew it was an empty ideal, but the second he got his feet on the ground, they murdered him.31

The same thing can be said about Jackson: He was killed specifically when the time he had announced and worked for came, when a growing awareness among “the blacks, the browns, and the whites” allowed for the identification of the deceptive traps of organized racism. This process marked the beginning of the formation of a unified resistance front, specifically within the prisons. There is something inside us that often pushes us to believe that the interventions of the ruling power, when they aren’t just, are at least diabolical and well-calculated. This is not true; everything eludes this power and its control, including its own actions and its conspiracies. The assassination of Jackson is one of these phenomena, a defensible position, as Jackson would say, that revolutionaries can transform into a cause.

Jackson’s Place in the Prison Movement

In the black revolutionary movement, Jackson wanted to be perceived as a militant. However, the most crucial aspect of his reflections resides in the theorization of the relationship between military and political actions.

This is a fundamental issue that was at the origin of the split between [ Huey] Newton and [ Eldridge] Cleaver. Cleaver reproached Newton for what he called his “pacifism,” his “legalitarianism,” in short, his “revisionism.” By contrast, Cleaver advocated the immediate passage to armed struggle, which he considered as the supreme form of political struggle.

Jackson, the militant, condemned the military activism of the Weathermen and their actions, organized without strategic preparation and the political support of the masses. He gave his support to Newton and his popular action programs, such as the free distribution of snack meals to black children in the ghettos. These programs will be increasingly threatened by fascist repression specifically because they enable the black community to organize itself. Such a causal relation informed Jackson’s belief that these programs will soon become inconceivable without a military cadre.

For at least two years, Jackson was in charge of the preparation of this militant cadre, within the prisons where disarmed and heavily shackled men train for war. This is Jackson’s grand initiative. Two profoundly connected facts made it possible: On the one hand, the entire black avant-garde lives under the threat of prison, and many of its leaders are held there for long periods of time; on the other hand, under the influence of this presence, other prisoners, in turn, become politicized. One of these prisoners, for example, when asked about his plans for after his release, answered, “To help my people.” Hence, it is not only in the ghettos, in the factories, in the rebellions in the military, but also in the prisons that solid nuclei of resistance, elements of the armed cadre, are forming and being formed.

These previsions overturn many commonly accepted ideas in the history of the working-class movement about the population of the prisons.

From within the prisons, Jackson prepared the military protection necessary for political work; such a form of preparation was unstable, weakened by the threat of systematic murder practiced by the authorities. That’s the reason why, outside the walls of the prisons, political organizations launch military operations to rescue and liberate some inmates, specifically those whose lives are threatened by imminent death. In this context, Angela Davis became a symbol of heroism for black people, when she was accused (despite belonging to a pacifist, legalitarian communist party32) of contributing to the bold action of support, undertaken from the outside on August 7, 1970, to rescue Soledad prisoners. From both sides of the walls, the army of the prisoners and the army of the people are preparing themselves for the same war of liberation.

In this movement, Jackson occupies a fundamental position. He is one of the first revolutionary leaders to acquire his political education entirely in prison. As he states, “I have all the theory . . . and I’ve put my books aside now.” He is also the first whose political action was carried out exclusively in prison. He is the first to carry out a class-based analysis of the prisoners and define their specific role in the revolutionary process:

You would be very surprised to see how these particular lumpen in here accept class war and revolutionary scientific socialism, once they understand [that] our real historical contribution was not the African feudalism of U.S. and other government stooges, but the agricultural communal existence described by [W. E. B. DuBois], [ Earl] Ofari [Hutchinson], and others.33

All these cats in here are lumpen, that’s all I’ve ever been—it has not damaged my capacity to love . . . Then all these brothers are similar. Violent, yes,
but ninety percent tenderness. It can be seen in the intense longing for community. Even out there, the unconscious one looks for parties and gatherings with a passion, that’s a reaction, Pat, to the absence of community, no family or clan or national ties, so they search for parties, dances, etc., in their love for and longing for community, commune-ity.

That's what helps define us as a class.

I have spent eleven years—from the age of eighteen to twenty-nine—caged up like an animal for a crime that would have earned the average person six months or a suspended sentence.

Ten years in prison for seventy dollars is a political experience—an experience of hostage, of a concentration camp, of class warfare, an experience of the colonized.

In prison, Jackson implemented his theory of communism through his daily practices. He shared money and books; he taught his brothers how to read and write; he helped to develop their political consciousness; and he organized them so that they could fight, by all necessary means, fascist methods of repression and dehumanization.

Daily violence and the permanent threat of death constitute the most rigorous tools for learning class hatred and the vigilance and astuteness of war. It's an experience of warfare. The people's liberation army will find its Ho Long and its "revolutionary outlaws" not in the mountains but in the prisons. The revolutionary role that Jackson attributed to the prisoners was that of the protection of political work—a military cadre, a sacrificial role. Through their support of [George] Jackson, Drumgo, Clutchette, and the three Soledad Brothers, Jonathan Jackson and Angela Davis played an instrumental role in bringing the movement in favor of the prisoners to a critical stage of its development.

Traditionally, this type of support is one of the forms of democratic struggle, effectuated through marches, demonstrations, and meetings. Kidnapping a judge in a full courtroom, Jonathan Jackson denounced the justice system as the indubitable instrument of fascist repression practiced by the United States. This same justice system, with its white judges and its white juries, consigned hundreds of thousands of African Americans to the bloodthirsty guards of concentration camps. In this context, Jonathan Jackson demonstrated that the act of supporting prisoners constitutes a form of war.

Jackson's death is at the origin of the revolts that exploded in prisons, from Attica to Ashkelon. Prison struggle has now become a new front of the revolution.

Notes

Editor's note: Some also attribute authorship of this pamphlet to Gilles Deleuze, but research was unable to support this claim. “The Masked Assassination” was originally published in 1970, Intolérable 3. The translation is by Stéphane Hébert.

Translator's note: The version reprinted here differs from the original in that changes were made to correct the spelling of some proper names (for instance, Charlene was replaced with Charlene and Rane with Rane), and the use of “Chronicle” and “Examiner” in some references to the San Francisco Examiner and the San Francisco Chronicle (San Francisco Examiner is the title of the Sunday edition of the San Francisco Chronicle) and some inaccuracies (for example, Jim Park was referred to as a "warden" of San Quentin instead of "associate warden").

1. The Assassination of George Jackson (Intolérable 3: L'Assassinat de George Jackson) is the third in a collection of four GIP pamphlets. The first two were published by Champ Libre, and the other two were published by Gallimard. The back cover of the first pamphlet cites what the GIP finds intolerable: “courts, cops, hospitals, asylums, school, military service, the press, television, the State.” See GIP, Intolérable 4.

According to Artières et al., Le Groupe d'information sur les prisons, 105: “After the break with Champ Libre, the choice of Gallimard is probably due to the links [the publisher] had with Michel Foucault, Jean Genet, and Catherine von Bülow.”

2. Foucault announced the creation of the GIP in a statement presented on February 8, 1971, in Saint Bernard Chapel, in the Montparnasse train station. The statement was published in March 1971 in Esprit. It stresses the importance of denouncing the bleak conditions of life in prisons and the complex repercussions of the institutional gaze on individual lives. Because of the tone and spirit of the statement, Foucault was perceived as its main author and the GIP as “his new organization”; the statement listed Foucault’s home address, 285 Rue Vaugirard, as the GIP mailbox. See Eribon, Michel Foucault, 229; Milner, The Passion of Michel Foucault, 188.

3. GIP, Intolérable 4; idem, Intolérable 2.

4. Editor's Note: Ruchell Magee, who was serving a life sentence in San Quentin prison, was present at the August 7, 1970, trial of James McClain when Jonathan Jackson entered the Marin County Courthouse. Magee assisted Jonathan Jackson, along with the prisoners James McClain and William Christmas, in taking Judge Harold Haley, the district attorney, and members of the jury hostage. As the only prisoner who survived the guards' gunfire, Magee was indicted by a Marin County Grand Jury, along with Angela Davis, in a joint charge of first-degree murder (of Judge Harold Haley), kidnapping, and conspiracy. Magee and Davis filed to have their cases severed be-
cause Magee, acting as his own counsel, needed to seek judicial recognition that he had been falsely imprisoned in the state penitentiary for almost eight years. By establishing that his original conviction was illegal, Magee planned to demonstrate just cause for his participation in the August 7 events at the Marin County Courthouse. See Aptheker, *Morning Breaks; Davis, Angela Davis.*

5. *Translator's note:* The authors provided neither source nor citation for this statement in the original.

6. *Translator's note:* A newspaper account reports that the jugular vein was punctured.

7. *Translator's note:* Tier tenders are “inmates who serve food and pick up laundry in the adjustment center [maximum-security cellblock] and thus have some degree of freedom.” “The Quentin Violence—First Inside Account,” *San Francisco Chronicle,* August 24, 1971, 32.


9. Ibid., 33–34, 229.

10. *Translator’s note:* This quotation comes from an interview with Georgia Jackson, George Jackson’s mother, titled, “I Bought the Plot a Year Ago, I Knew They Would Kill Him” (*Sun Reporter* [San Francisco], August 28, 1971, 24).


12. *Translator’s note:* Angela Davis is a member of the Communist Party of the United States of America; her ideological affiliation is with its left wing, formerly led by the black militant Charlene Mitchell.

13. *Translator’s note:* The quote is from Pat Gallyot, “George Jackson, a Beautiful Black Warrior,” *Sun Reporter* [San Francisco], August 28, 1971, 2.


15. *Translator’s note:* One part of this quote is from Gallyot, “George Jackson, a Beautiful Black Warrior,” 2.

16. *Editor’s note:* In September 1971, responding to George Jackson’s killing by San Quentin prison guards, administrators, and dehumanizing and racist prison conditions, 1,500 African American, Puerto Rican, and white prisoners seized control of Attica, a maximum-security prison in New York. *Translator’s note:* Eight days after the events in the maximum-security prison of Attica, Palestinian inmates began revolting in the Israeli prison of Ashkelon.