

In Pursuit of Revolutionary Love

Precarity, Power, Communities

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Oshun's fan.

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Preface

Oshun's Flight

I do not seek to represent or dishonor any spiritual or religious traditions. If I err, please forgive. I merely note that thirst compels this writing.

I heard one story about the African orisha Oshun. I do not recall all the details so I embroider here to make my own political-ethical points. According to the griot, as the ambitious lofty conspired to overthrow the creator, they mocked Oshun who had refused to join in a coup or genuflect as a political demimonde. Angered by upstarts' challenges to authority, and the disorder of things, Spirit—Olodumare— withdrew protections. Waters in skies and on lands dried up.

Oshun sided with the lower castes, dispossessed masses, animals-humans dying from malnourishment, parched and perched amid poisoned and absent waters. Oshun so loved the world. Only the embodiment of the beauty of rivers and streams dared to fly to the heavens to petition Spirit for redress and aid to those suffering cracked earth under dry, burning skies. As Oshun flew closer to Spirit, the radiated sun took its toll. Their beautiful peacock-like feathers began to smolder, then burn, and fall. Despite the agony, Oshun focused on the desperation of those left behind and so reached their destination.

Shorn of beautiful feathers, scorched and scarred with the ashen appearance of a gray vulture, Oshun stumbled from the torturous flight to approach Spirit. Oshun bowed. Spirit observed, then agreed to listen to Oshun petition on behalf of those betrayed by life, abandoned by gods, bereft with broken defenses to ward off “leadership” alien to the needs of the mass.

Was it compassion or grace that led to respite from desertification? Or, was the catalyst the beautiful boldness wielded by a defiant orisha compelled to care? Whatever the motivation,

Spirit heard risk, love and courage in the pleadings; and ceased to punish the mass for the crimes of arrogant challengers who sought to dethrone, and imperialize misery. Thwarted but unpunished, destructive wannabe gods continued to transgress for accumulations. Unforgiven, they were forgotten by many except the dishonored and desperate who recalled and recoiled from their violence. Ignoring the imbalance on the scales of justice, the heavens' granted relief from pain by releasing rain to all as Spirit met our desperate needs for flowing waters.

The path of a worthy returnee is a painful sojourn. Oshun flew into scorching skies seeking to sabotage authoritarianism and to serve the people. Taking flight as warrior, Oshun navigated sacrificial labor. Carried by the echo of protective spirits, Oshun's heart beat became a radar for struggle. With(out) feathered beauty, their persistence fueled revolutionary love. Thus, the orisha returns wearing the radiance of agape. Reverence seeps through the labors of saints, ancestors, healers, doulas to fall upon captive communities and kin.

Survivors battle catastrophes unleashed by would-be gods— rapists, capitalists, overseers, imperialists, traffickers, abortion bounty hunters, prison guards, environmental desecrators, military-mercenaries, and death squads. Willing to hear the echoes of griot-speaking love, survivors coordinate flights and fights to ensure that—even when muddled—we remain within sacred waters.

Is Oshun's flight as tortured messenger a form of the Captive Maternal? Or is their labor to give birth to community care a "gift" from a transcendent deity? Are deities captives to agape? Do they (un)willingly suffer or are they emotionally/spiritually compelled to sacrifice? Can all forms of communities—deified, humanized, dehumanized, cyborg—generate or produce Captive Maternals? Oshun is a sovereign. Sovereigns suffer. Yet, are they captives?

“Killmonger’s Captive Maternal is M.I.A.”^[1] juxtaposes *Black Panther*’s mythical Wakanda royalty—described as “*sovereign* captive maternals”—with the Oakland sister/brother on the block. In the Hollywood blockbuster, it is the latter—the prole/rebel/lumpen—not the former—the salvific elite—that becomes the catalyst for transformation. Fictional characters in film or narratives are incapable of “saving.” Yet, Spirit exceeds the talents of celluloid narratives. Spirit is not a synonym for “Deity” or “Orisha” or “God.” The issue of “hope” is not an exegesis, or vice versa, i.e., the issue of an exegesis is not “hope” as a promissory note. If agape is absent, life struggles falter.

A Dread Doula’s Intervention

What gives birth spans the expanse between life and death. A dread doula, () tracks within struggling communities the emotions found in Oshun’s flight. In Mar’s May 2, 2022 essay “Dear Mariame Kaba, Hope Is Not a Discipline,”^[2] they open with a quote by Mariame Kaba, who has made significant contributions to abolitionism:

Hope doesn’t preclude feeling sadness or frustration or anger or any other emotion that makes total sense. Hope isn’t an emotion, you know? Hope is not optimism. Hope is a discipline... we have to practice it every single day.^[3]

s poetic prose underneath Kaba’s quote expands consciousness on “Hope”:

Hope requires complete trust and confidence; it requires faith.

Faith grounds.

Faith is the foundation upon which both our desires and expectations reside.

Faith is at the root of our ability to hope.^[4]

Reflecting on Kaba's contributions, () concedes that hope is not an emotion and then proceeds to describe it as "phenomena of [*coexisting*] emotions." () asserts that we must recognize the impossibility of any project to render hope a "discipline." Hope as "(cap)ability" accrues through "power, privilege," yet systemic abuse without transformative accountability or strategic efficacy to address anti-blackness, capitalism, neocolonialism leads people to lose faith in institutions and prominent leaders, hence those lacking "*power, privilege, and/or capacity to hope*. . . become incapable of hope":

Hope should not be contingent upon me (or those of us on the very margins) being able to (self)regulate/discipline in the face of institutional and systemic violence; there is no honor, healing, and spaciousness in that. Hope as a discipline becomes restrictive, monotonous, exhausting. We must be able to occupy a multifaceted consciousness and way of reasoning with what could be that makes room for both the pragmatic and the impossible. We must practice a regenerative and expansive hope, or else hope becomes contained only by what we assume and/or are told is not possible.^[5]

() asserts that the capacity to "imagine beyond the carceral status quo" depends not on "liberatory imaginings" but "faith" that what we can materialize what we imagine. Asserting that learning "hope as a discipline" mandates that we "lower our expectations of liberation," () quotes Nicholas Brady: "[P]aradoxically, the most hopeful people are those who have no hope in the system." () sets forth coda:

We should not and will not discipline ourselves into hope. We will not build more tolerance for disappointment in violent institutions and systems built upon our erasure and pain. We will not police our doubt.^[6]

To move forward rather than become stuck in despondency or defeat, () advocates that we “embrace despair not as an end or an arrival point” but as a “bridge” constructed without binaries.

This suggests to me that confidence shaped by skills and strategies is developed in communal *struggles* and as well develops organizing that can frame and sustain movements. Such struggles are energized and amplified by engineering revolutionary love not as “scientific” but as sentient. The spiritual nature of that love is embodied in agape disciplined by political will; that sustains this form of love even when one wishes its dissipation or for it to dissolve and so dismember the entanglements and suffering of liberation struggles. There is also the possibility that *despair*, rather than leading to nihilism or passivity and indifference, could be a key catalyst to confrontational change. How else could Mamie Till Mobley disturb psyches across the globe when she held an open-casket funeral—and allowed photographers to capture the horror-as-catalyst—for her fourteen-year-old Emmett who was sexually-assaulted, tortured, and mutilated before being murdered by white supremacists? Mamie Till Mobley *despaired*. Later in 1955, in August, Rosa Parks shared that despair, and rage, as while thinking of Emmett when she refused to give up her seat on a segregated Montgomery, Alabama bus. Catalysts in struggle are not always sparked by hope.

As do Marxists, () asserts that “one cannot ‘discipline’ themselves into the phenomena of hope without concrete material change.” Hence, absent “concrete material change,” influencers, celebrities as well as religious and community leaders cannot discipline communities into hope

when there are no material conditions to sustain it. Building on contributions, I would argue though that it is *struggle* rather than “change” that serves as the catalyst for “disciplining” strategies. Struggles on the later stages of the Captive Maternal’s evolution lead to maroon camps or autonomous zones, sanctuaries and enclosures that make “hope” a possibility and a stable accelerant for liberation struggles. “Hope” can be used to extinguish revolutionary struggle, according to (), when leadership and platforms with the capacity to “discipline hope” often “depend on teaching self-regulatory violence to their ‘followers’”:

This self-regulatory violence is usually dependent on a violent dismissiveness of “dark” or heavy emotions and phenomena such as destruction, despair, depression, and also deeply dependent on a constant lack of critical critique. This does not imply that those who possess and/or practice hope are less critical and don’t experience despair. However, hope as a “discipline” in the face of ongoing systemic and institutional abuse (and modest material change) requires the weight of the psychological and/or emotional consequences of our conditions and the task of nurturing feelings of “productive” expectation (in the midst of our ongoing suffering) dependent upon self-discipline. Hope should not be contingent upon me (or those of us on the very margins) being able to self-regulate/discipline in the face of violence; there is no honor and/or healing in that. The ability to hope “requires psychological & emotional acts of diligence along with differing levels of dismissiveness” and the ability to “occupy a multifaceted consciousness that makes room for both the practical and the impossible in order to practice a regenerative hope.”

Reading (), I hear the generative and see the void as shaped by communal dialogue and interrogation, as well as negotiations structuring theory, politics and strategies to further liberation movements through community connectors. Democracy is said to be based in discursive communication for the common good, according to European political theorists Jurgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt. Yet, deities precede the demos. The recognition of their political will—if it has validity—is based not on their super powers but on their capacity to receive and return love. Oshun took flight not because she loved in the abstract and from on high. Oshun took flight because she reciprocated the love she received, not from other deities but from the mass.

Even when offering assistance, the largesse of overlords can be both overbearing and disciplinarian. Yet, neither pity nor emotional grandeur fueled Oshun's flight. Gratitude did. Oshun returned the love given to them by the mass. The mass taught Oshun how to love. The origin story of Spirit within revolutionary struggle is the agency of mass catalyzed by the gravitas of loss—healthy childhoods, clean air, fresh water, freedom, dignified life and death. Whatever Oshun's capacity, the political will of the people to endure and love shaped their flight plan. Oshun was the messenger. The message delivered: "Pursue revolutionary love."

[1] "Killmonger's Captive Maternal is MIA: Black Panther's Family Drama, Imperial Masters, and Portraits of Freedom," Southern California Library. 2019.

[2] (), "Dear Mariame Kaba, Hope Is Not a Discipline," *Medium/Patreon*, May 2, 2022.

https://www.patreon.com/posts/dear-mariame-is-65935224?utm_medium=clipboard_copy&utm_source=copy_to_clipboard&utm_campaign=postshare

[3] Source note.

[4] (), "Dear Mariame Kaba, Hope Is Not a Discipline," May 2, 2022.

[5] (), “Dear Mariame Kaba, Hope Is Not a Discipline,” May 2, 2022.

[6] (), “Dear Mariame Kaba, Hope Is Not a Discipline,” May 2, 2022.

[7] This article first appeared in Joy James, “Black Revolutionary Love Reimagines Democracy,” *Truthout*, February 18, 2021. <https://truthout.org/authors/joy-james/>

Introduction

Black Revolutionary Love Reimagines Democracy^[7]

Given the long history of U.S. volatility and racist violence, those attentive to white supremacist and fascistic ideologies were dismayed but not surprised at the January 6 breach of the Capitol. A militarized mob endeavored to block the certification of the Biden/Harris election and harm, if not kill, elected officials seeking to uphold constitutional norms. The following month, the Senate acquitted Donald Trump for inciting sedition that inflicted trauma, injuries and the loss of life.

I never considered U.S. democracy to be trustworthy. Though preferable to a dictatorship, it often seems to function as a racist-classist-misogynist-transphobic Ponzi scheme for elite accumulations and unregulated warfare and war profiteering. After centuries of genocide and racial enslavement, the U.S. denies those most in need and deserving of reparations, restitution, respect and sovereign autonomy. Insulted with exhortations to “try harder” to prove our worth, chastised for going “too left” for social justice, we are called upon to “save” democracy from old-school authoritarianism and repression.

In January, white supremacist politicians, citing the betrayal of Reconstruction and Black equality as a template, coupled with violent Trump loyalists to derail a peaceful transfer of power. Viewers watched in real time the preceding rally coordinated by Trump, its anti-Black and Nazi-themes, as evangelical reactionary-conservatism and Confederate flags were working their ways into history books. The president is determined not by the popular vote but by the

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In January, white supremacist politicians, citing the betrayal of Reconstruction and Black equality as a template, coupled with violent Trump loyalists to derail a peaceful transfer of power. Viewers watched in real time the preceding rally coordinated by Trump, its **anti-Black and Nazi-themes**, as evangelical reactionary-conservatism and Confederate flags were working their ways into history books. The president is determined not by the popular vote but by the Electoral College — the three-fifths clause of the U.S. Constitution, through mass rape/reproduction, created a representative democracy in which the 13th Amendment to ban enslavement codified it to incarceration and thereby fueled voter suppression of poor, working-class and racially stigmatized peoples. Eliminating the Electoral College as well as the penal exception to the 13th Amendment, and overturning *Citizens United*, where the Supreme Court transposed “political personhood” granted in the 14th Amendment from the emancipated to corporations, would be the tools required for fundamental change. However, we need to go much further in order to truly confront repression: We must pursue Revolutionary Love.

Revolutionary Love is difficult to define. Distinct from personal or familial love, it originates from a desire for the greater good that entails radical risk-taking for justice. Revolutionary Love is not romantic or charming. It neither romanticizes nor projects celebrities or politicians as surrogates for radical activism. Worship within a “cult of personality” is not an expression of Revolutionary Love. Seeking equity and securing basic needs (housing, food, education, healthy environments) despite constant frustrations and betrayals is a sign of faithfulness despite the hostilities of well-funded, anti-revolutionary and counterrevolutionary organizing to maintain predatory hierarchies and **police forces** invested in protecting

reactionaries and destroying revolutionaries such as Illinois Black Panther leader Fred Hampton,¹ a revolutionary lover who maintained that *the greatest weapon is political education*.

Revolutionary Love is the portal for life-long education.

Revolutionary Love for justice and equity has a self-acknowledged vulnerability: No amount of compassion and love has historically demystified the majority's reactionary and predatory fetishes for racial and class domination, and its suspicions and hostilities toward the "other." Revolutionary Lovers are a distinct minority. Millions appalled by Trump and the Capitol breach (quite possibly **aided by police**) prefer civic duty, conformity or consensus-building as more acceptable than Revolutionary Love for equity and liberation. Conventional Democratic politics and policies have historically proven insufficient to stop white supremacist **violence against Black elected officials** or **Black environmental naturalists**.

During enslavement, ungendered **Captive Maternals** found their generative powers — intellectual, emotional and physical capacities — stolen and repurposed to build a social order and governance that deny Black humanity. Thus, a racially fashioned democracy stabilized and accumulated through predatory extraction, and its residue of Black depletion and death. The transformative powers of Revolutionary Love — rooted in suprarational politics, not quid pro quo politics that fail vulnerable masses — develop on training grounds within an imperial racial order. Patrice Lumumba understood Revolutionary Love as he led a freedom movement in the Congo; another Revolutionary Lover who deeply mourned Lumumba's assassination, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, castigated the UN for failing to protect Lumumba from assassination (reportedly with the assistance of the CIA). Guevara asserted, "At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say

¹Marshall Eddie Conway, *The Real News Network*, "The Murder of Fred Hampton."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQvNcrcYa3A>

that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality.”

US democracy often seems to function as a racist-classist-misogynist-transphobic Ponzi scheme for elite accumulations and unregulated warfare and war profiteering.

Risk-taking veteran activists note that if “BLM” meant “Black Liberation Movement” there would be more focus on revolutionary concepts than corporate donors. Those guided by love rather than hate are confronted with not the human rights violations in U.S. domestic policy, but also its betrayals in foreign policy. For instance, Black Alliance for Peace has drawn our attention to the Biden/Harris administration’s [position on the recent coup in Haiti](#). Meanwhile, U.S. Africa Command, [known as AFRICOM](#), and imperialist foreign policies are part of the bipartisan war machine. Reactionaries and centrists attack radicalism that challenges U.S. policies for such violations. If through Revolutionary Love we develop communal structures, political will and emotional intelligence to sustain longevity in struggle, then we build capacity to embrace and learn from the survivors of genocide, enslavement, political imprisonment and mass incarceration. We all need self-respect and self-defense; this democracy is not engineered to meet our needs — hence, the organic development of Revolutionary Love.

White supremacist violence followed the election of Barack Obama. Logically, it will stalk the Biden/Harris administration and Georgia’s Democratic Black and Jewish senators, respectively Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff. Elected officials have security details and designated police for protections. Non-wealthy communities, particularly activists guided by Revolutionary Love, do not — and thus, are preyed upon not just by civilians but also by police forces. Voter suppression against Black people (from gerrymandering to “Stop the Steal” myths) will continue along with ideologically and racially driven police and vigilante violence.

Captive Maternals move from conflicted caretakers into protesters who build movements, only to later transition into **maroons** who build freedom schools and community aid; or inevitably, war resisters who risk everything for freedom. Consider that 2021 is the 50th anniversary of the September 1971 Attica uprising. Treated as subhuman, Attica's incarcerated rebels, as Captive Maternals, transitioned from caretakers whose labor allowed the prison to function into movement activists for human rights. For a brief time, with a feeling of "freedom," they formed a maroon camp (with medical care and political education) within a prison. Inevitably, they became war resisters who perished or survived to be tortured (and later killed) when the state retook the prison through warfare. That is a legacy that we can study as stages in Revolutionary Love — conflicted caretakers; movement activists; maroon communities; war resisters. 2021 is also the 70th anniversary of the Civil Rights Congress UN document *We Charge Genocide*, currently studied by activists to petition for U.S. human rights. We have an amazing legacy to study and to stitch together.²

The Legacy of Cultural Rebellion

Our culture of resistance is a mainstay for resilience in the face of formidable opposition. We all need self-respect and self-defense; this democracy is not engineered to meet our needs — hence, the organic development of Revolutionary Love.

The most incandescent forms of Revolutionary Love often circulate through spirituality within popular culture. In 1962, during a "civil war" against Southern Jim Crow, Nina Simone sang "**Sinnerman**,"³ in which she begs the Lord to hide her (presumably from lynching) only to

² <https://abolitionjournal.org/?s=we+charge+genocide>

³ **Sinnerman** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QH3Fx41Jpl4>

be told to “go to the Devil.” Facing the Devil in abandonment, she cries to the Lord for power (presumably Black Power). In 1969, Sly and the Family Stone’s “Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)” chronicles racist policing while embracing self-love in resistance: “Lookin’ at the devil, grinnin’ at his gun / Fingers start shakin’, I begin to run / Bullets start chasin’, I begin to stop / We begin to wrestle, I was on the top ... / Dying young is hard to take, but selling out is harder.”⁴ In 1971, the Family Stone’s “*It’s a Family Affair*” chronicled the microcosm of polarized society and state: “One child grows up to be / Somebody that just loves to learn / And another child grows up to be / Somebody you’d just love to burn.”⁵

Political hymns sooth and inspire. During New York City’s pandemic and state abandonment, I heard War’s “*Slippin Into Darkness*” playing on the phone of a young Black essential (yet deemed “expendable”) frontline worker standing at a subway entrance. The counsel of lyrics crafted decades before he was born spoke of intergenerational love and struggle.

Practice increases skill. Combined with Revolutionary Love, we grow power through mutual aid, political education, release of the incarcerated, and community control over police. Love, vulnerability and agency mitigate apathy, depression and aggression. Promote viaducts into structures that fuel transformative power— the powers protecting the masses, nature, and animal life forms. Resisting violent inequities, liberationists and anti-racist allies, inspired by Revolutionary Love, construct small drawbridges and maroon sanctuaries to enable survival with vitality, strategies and security.

⁴ Sly and the Family Stone’s “Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)

⁵ Sly and the Family Stone, “*It’s a Family Affair*” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbT_asklCco

*Movements from the Damned*⁶

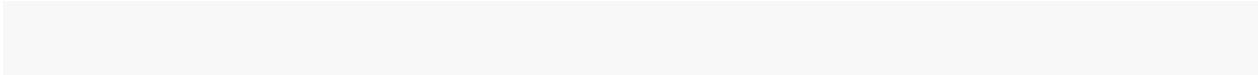
Civil rights activists sacrifice for social justice because freedom struggles rarely encounter their opposition in a fair fight. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated while organizing for poor people's rights and US withdrawal from Vietnam, through restrictions on capitalism and imperialism. This abolitionism led to the dissipation of his financial and political support from corporations, foundations, and "respectable" civil rights leaders. Thrust out to wander and march with the dispossessed and the Damned, King found a spiritual path towards justice. ["Lessons from the Damned, 2018,"](#) reveals vulnerabilities about living without a private security detail and assaults that our communities can confront, redress and heal. [captive maternal Mamie Till-Mobley](#)⁷ recovered her 14-year-old son (with a lisp or stutter?) from Mississippi waters in 1955 transformed a coffin into a catalyst for a civil rights movement—Rosa Parks stated that she was thinking about Emmitt Till when she refused to relinquish her seat on a segregated bus to a white man. Mrs. Till Mobley did not debate rabid racists. She defied them. Ida B. Wells created a home in Chicago fleeing from the south which had a contract on her life because of her antilynching activism. Organizing to get universities and colleges to promote ethics-based environments within their campuses, cities and towns means leveraging justice into an unfair fight in all regions. Rev. [King found Chicago racism](#) to be more frightening than the Jim Crow South due to the city's violence, homicidal policing, poverty, and substandard schooling. As a student [Bernie Sanders opposed school segregation](#) that the University of Chicago imposed through segregated housing.⁸ The FBI-Chicago PD assassinated Black Panther

⁶ Parts of this segment appear in Joy James, "The Unjust Fight for a Fair Democracy," Feminist Wire.

⁷ http://www.thecarceral.org/cn12/14_Womb_of_Western_Theory.pdf

⁸ <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/bernie-sanders-1963-arrest-full-story-school-segregation/Content?oid=21247370>

Party leaders Mark Clark and Fred Hampton in 1969 to send a political message to liberation movements; yet over decades Chicago activists dragged the city's name to the UN to denounce the [CPD-Burge torture ring](#). The leadership and battles of students and community activists have expanded democratic rights within the city. Activists labor on campuses, in cities, factories and fields. Bridges are being built between US battles for democracy and global struggles.



I

Precarity and Power

Chapter 1

“Sorrow, Tears, and Blood”: Black Activism Fractionating the Talented Tenth⁹

Everybody run run run
Everybody scatter scatter
Some people lost some bread
Someone nearly die
Someone just die
Police dey come, army dey come
Confusion everywhere
Hey yeah!
Seven minutes later
All don cool down, brother
Police don go away
Army don disappear
Them leave Sorrow, Tears, and Blood
—Fela Kuti, “Sorrow, Tears and Blood”

⁹ This chapter first appeared in: Joy James, “Sorrow, Tears and Blood: Black Activism, Fractionation, and the Talented Tenth,” *Viewpoint*, January 26, 2015. <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/01/26/sorrow-tears-and-blood-black-activism-fractionation-and-the-talented-tenth/>

In the first decades of the 21st century, the men, women, and children detained, imprisoned or slain by U.S. police in excessive and grotesque uses of force remain disproportionately black. This reflection focuses on males; but I recognize the Captive Maternal and black matrix as the basis for change.¹⁰ Rarely viewed as activists, they have formed a space between conventional progressive leadership and radical confrontations with police and state-sanctioned violence. This fractionating, or dividing into factions, of leadership from below has opened a void favoring new forms of political agency and community engagement.

Those killed by police are remembered as innocent civilians made hapless by the racist fear and arrogance of whites authorized to kill with impunity. These martyrs have no public histories of known organizing or family connections to social justice movements. Yet with their deaths, they have contributed to mobilizations, protests, lobbying and legislation for reform. The homicides of black Americans by deputized whites' or white police include the slayings of: Sean Bell, Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Akai Gurley, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Yvette Smith, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Tamir Rice, John Crawford, and Tarika Wilson who died holding her 14-month-old son, Sincere, who was also shot but survived. Police have been held unaccountable for these homicides by their departments, unions, district attorneys, grand juries and sizable segments of the public. It is that lack of accountability before the law (federal investigations still pending) for criminal acts by police that incites outrage. That rage was recently expressed in youth, female and queer black leadership followed by tens of thousands of multi-racial, diverse protestors and organizers chanting "Black Lives Matter!"

¹⁰ See Joy James, "The Womb of Western Theory: Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal," *Carceral Notebooks*, Vol. 12. http://www.thecarceral.org/cn12/14_Womb_of_Western_Theory.pdf; *FULCRUM: The Captive Maternal Leverages Democracy*, 2023.

The protestors and families of those slain have emerged as national spokespersons against torture and police violence; they thus seem to have deflected attention from formal civil rights leadership privy to state-corporate power. Diverse actors for rights are found in one movement. Yet, the professionalization of civil rights through philanthropy only began in the 19th century. It increased during the southern civil rights movement in the mid-twentieth century, and today shapes leadership for the reform of mass incarceration in alignment with liberal perspectives on social change. That leadership is now being contested not only by those who deny the existence of white supremacy as a structured evil and so oppose rights (from voting rights to prisoners' rights), but also those who find deficient "deliverables" of professional liberal and neoradical leadership, embedded in corporate-state structures, resistant to change "from below."

Consumer advocate Ralph Nader observed that being raised in American culture often means "growing up corporate." For those raised 'black,' growing up corporate in America means training for the talented tenth with expectations of "Black excellence." One need not be affluent to grow up corporate; one need only adopt a managerial style. When merged with radicalism, the managerial ethos produces a neoradicalism that, as a form of commercial 'left' politics, emulates corporate structures and behavior. As corporate funders finance 'radical' conferences and 'lecture movements,' democratic power-sharing diminishes. Radical rhetoricians supplant grassroots organizers and political managers replace vanguard activists."¹¹

This elite could either join or expand upon the street protests and prayer vigils. But it would not be allowed to *lead* the grassroots movement that exploded in Ferguson, Missouri. For that movement had a proximity to sorrow, tears, and blood, and the conditions of subjugation

¹¹ See "Radicalizing Black Feminism" in *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics and/or Seeking the Beloved Community*, 59.

tied to non-celebrity queerness, blackness, maternal femaleness familiar with trauma and poverty. Uprisings are not the same as movements; they often refuse gestures of welcome to those considered “outsiders.” The civility of muted applause can be easily replaced with jeers towards elites and police. It is insufficient to be in favor of civil rights; one must be in favor of *following*, rather than attempting to lead or control protests in the streets and speech on screens that emanate from the most disenfranchised groups.

There is always push back against unauthorized activism. Police spectacles of racist denial challenged demonstrations against police violence: white NYPD officers take selfies wearing “I Can Breathe” t-shirts, mocking the shirts donned by protestors of Eric Garner’s death by chest compression and chokehold; police wives protest with placards “*Blue Lives Matter*” (“*White Lives Matter*” might have been seen as too provocative) mimicking the “Black Lives Matter” coda. While others translate the coda into “All Lives Matter,” deflecting from black vulnerability and agency.

For spectacles to usurp the public stage and deflect from serious debates, there must be spectators and performers. For debates to dominate the public arena and foster strategies and the implementation of useful plans, there must be leadership based on democratic power that moves beyond the elites. Such leadership would not be self-serving or pragmatically opportunistic, with a vision limited by liberalism or neoradicalism, such leadership would be inspired by an agitated mass that may or may not see eye-to-eye with parvenu (ivy-trained) or pariah (lesser educated) professional leaders.

Leadership has to deliver in order to command loyalty. The rise and fall of funding for social welfare programs seems to follow at times the rise and fall of riots, as Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward argue in *Regulating the Poor*. Funding in the absence of incisive analyses

and agency is not sufficient to distract from traumatizing spectacles replayed constantly through memories and on screens. Narratives and visuals radicalized segments of the public (some prepared by academic texts on mass incarceration). Michael Brown's body lies in the streets for hours without comfort from and to family. Tamir Rice stomps on snowballs; points a toy gun at the sky and several pedestrians; sits under a gazebo by himself; stands up as a police car races onto the pavilion and is shot in seconds by police who offer no assistance to the twelve year old, yet tackle his teen sister who runs to his aid and handcuff her in the back of the police car. A federal detective passing by gives the CPR that police are not legally obligated to administer. The boy dies. Eric Garner pants "I can't breathe" nearly a dozen times while white men pin him to the concrete; later only Ramsey Orta, the Latino friend of Garner, who filmed, denounced and shared the killing with the public is indicted on an alleged gun possession charge. John Crawford, toy gun in hand, does pre-Christmas shopping in Walmart, in an aisle where families stand unalarmed at their carts, and is shot moments later by Ohio police in a state that legalizes unconcealed weapons (elsewhere in the store running, frantically escaping gunfire, a white shopper, Angela Williams, suffers a fatal heart attack later ruled a homicide).

Graphic illustrations of ghosting black life and collateral damage to nonblack life coexist with data on incarceration and policing that is less visibly embodied but equally disturbing. With 2.3 million people incarcerated, the United States has 5% of the global population and 25% of its prisoners; blacks are nearly 50% of the incarcerated. Racial disparities abound: whites are five times more likely to use drugs yet blacks are ten times more likely to be imprisoned for drugs; blacks' state prison sentences for drug offenses are only slightly less than the sentences whites serve for violent offenses (five years plus). Penal captivity stabilizes the middle class and upper class with jobs that factory work and industry no longer can provide. For example, The African

American president of the largely black/brown correction officers' union for NYC Rikers Island jail, Norman Seabrook, has built a comfortable lifestyle through overseeing a large complex known for its brutality, particularly against youth of color. Governor Andrew Cuomo has authorized legislation to ban housing teenagers in adult prisons and people under 21 in solitary confinement. New York is one of the few states to treat teens as adults and has consequently seen the rise of teen suicides in captivity as youth too poor to post bail wait for trials under horrendous conditions.

Policing and incarceration also provide economic growth for investors and professional critics. Interracially and intraracially, violence and economic exploitation are unevenly distributed. Strategies to redress these inequities often seem superficial and underfunded, yet progressives are told to work harder for change. Of course, this state of affairs, a crisis in transformative leadership, did not happen by accident.

Robber Barons and Talented Tenth

During Reconstruction, the convict prison lease system emerged in which blacks were essentially worked to death, with a life expectancy shorter than that of the plantation—they died for mining, lumber, and the industrialization of the South. White philanthropists fractionated black leadership, and filled a void the federal government created by reneging on its protection of black life under Reconstruction. The key promise here was safety from racial terrorists, and the ability to work freely. As Du Bois notes in *Black Reconstruction* (1935), with chapters on the “black proletariat” and the reinstitution of slavery and historical propaganda, misery followed emancipation; federal intervention in the South was in favor of capital, not the worker or laborer or neoslave.

Robber barons expanded their great wealth (J.P. Morgan had been a war profiteer during the civil war). Wealthy philanthropists, understanding themselves to be without peers, offered themselves as role models and tutors. They ruled empires securitized by a state that would not police them, but would deploy violence against those who resisted racial capital. That historical trajectory continues protected by a buffer zone funded by corporate wealth.

They took a fraction of that wealth accrued from the postbellum black slavery of penal servitude (legalized through the 13th amendment) and endowed educational industries to train the talented tenth. The black talented tenth has its prototype in every ethnic/racial grouping. Philanthropy fractionated black leadership, but not just black leadership. Corporate leaders Rockefeller, Carnegie, Cornell and others funded colleges and universities (most carry their names) that are predominately white and work to maintain a social order controlled by corporate elites who redirect law, government and police-military power in their favor. Their training of the educated class would influence the multiple fractions of leadership that constituted a complex opposition to racism and poverty.

The American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS), funded by corporate magnates, coined the term “talented tenth” in 1896. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s alma mater, Morehouse College, is named in honor of ABHMS secretary Henry Morehouse. The equally prestigious Atlanta Spelman College is named after the wife of John D. Rockefeller, Laura Spelman. In theory, the worst effects of racist oppression and poverty are mitigated by the philanthropic intervention of capitalists. In practice, their wealth, derived from exploitation and degradation of workers and neoslaves, uses police-military violence and law for maintenance and expansion. The 14th amendment, designed for emancipated blacks, granted political personhood

to corporations; thus the U.S. Supreme Court, and also local, state and federal courts, protected corporate interests and the exploitation of labor.

With the 1903 publication of “The Talented Tenth” in *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) became temporarily a promoter of a talented tenth of “race” men and women modeling the path for a democracy against the “color line.” This formally educated black leadership cadre based in elitism and race management, funded by blacks as well as state largesse and private benefactors, was trained to remain with southern, historically black colleges, in order to serve as both a model for minorities and a buffer zone between emancipated blacks and the white elite and middle class. Outmigration, desegregation, and affirmative action liberated it and likely diluted its historical mandate as recognized “race leadership.” Filtered increasingly through mainstream colleges and universities, the mandate of service trumped activism, particularly radical activism, which seemed unscholarly and “biased.”

Many conveniently forget that Du Bois later dismissed the talented tenth as opportunistic and self-serving, and why he recanted. With Fisk degrees and a Harvard Ph.D., Du Bois had an inside track on the talented tenth. Lesser-educated blacks might idealize this formation as a set of important celebrities (albeit minor ones in relation to artists, entertainers, and sports heroes). Liberal whites and the tenth themselves might view them, as Du Bois once did, as a “credit to their race,” working in the interests of progress. But elites are human; they work within political economies. They have desires and needs; and they want to be paid.

In some ways, Du Bois committed caste suicide as an academic, and mainstream progressive intellectual. Notwithstanding his judgmental study on impoverished blacks in Philadelphia, as he stood closer in solidarity to mass black suffering, he developed a critical

understanding of the (self-)conceit of fractionated leadership, seeing the tenth as a byproduct of racial capitalism and consumerism. His memoirs note that when the U.S. government targeted him for his communism and internationalism, the black middle class strayed while black trade unionists stayed with him. He reflects upon his ouster from the NAACP, due to his advocacy for economic justice, lamenting the absence of radical peers. This is sadly ironic, given his marginalization years earlier of anti-lynching crusader and investigative journalist Ida B. Wells from the founding of the NAACP. Wells's affinity for, and proximity to, black suffering was embedded in an incendiary pen and voice. She once disguised herself as a laborer to enter prisons to take the testimonies of black males awaiting legal lynching. Wells had fractionated the talented tenth by being an immensely talented, largely self-taught intellectual, traumatized by family loss into a confrontational radicalism at odds with more affluent and assimilated blacks. She was neither corrupted nor coopted by formal power. Her fraction of the talented tenth was outside of officialdom. Unauthorized, it was marginalized for an affinity to the needs of the most vulnerable, poorer blacks for whom Wells had great demands, but also much respect, too much to try to manage them. Ida B. Wells's resistance became an art form, an impressive shield against state-sanctioned violence impeding grassroots struggles.

On Anniversaries

In 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Lyndon Johnson represented an interdependent relation between the government and the civil rights movement that led to the signing of the 1965 voter rights act, recently weakened by the 2013 Supreme Court *Shelby County vs. Holder*. Over the course of his remaining years, King became more closely aligned with grassroots activists and publicly rejected capitalism and the imperialist US

war in Vietnam (55 thousand Americans and 2-3 million Vietnamese died as the war drained public coffers of funding for the “Great Society” programs). Consequently, King’s political and economic support from government, corporate funders, and the middle class (black and nonblack) dissipated. Like Ida B. Wells, King had fractionated the talented tenth with the desires of poor and colonized people. They became his inspiration of a materialized spirituality. Radicalized factions within the talented tenth organized and executed political confrontations that made progress possible. Breaking Jim Crow, civil disobedience determined the success of the civil rights movements. Activists understood that the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling to desegregate required a movement led by black children and their families, the 1957 Little Rock, Arkansas, integration of schools.

Diversity and integration became the official prize for those struggles. Diversity offers stability for a social order riddled by racism; it does not necessarily offer solidarity with the poor. Part of the mandate of talented tenths (in their multi-racial, cross-class and -sexuality pluralities) is that they epitomize responsible change: nothing to the “left,” or independent of their extension of officialdom, should accrue political value. King began to condemn capitalism and imperialism, and as had DuBois, saw civil rights bridges to the mainstream being burned by liberals. (They would be rebuilt after his death, and his voice of reason and passion extending civil rights into human rights and domestic into foreign policies was largely silenced.) In 1963, Malcolm X publicly criticized an assassinated president who was cautiously moving towards civil rights. Malcolm outraged whites and alienated blacks in mourning when he referred to John F. Kennedy’s death as “chickens coming home to roost.” That utterance alluded to alleged CIA involvement in the coup assassination of African independence leader Patrice Lumumba, who briefly served as the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo. Reserving

his grief for the black lives that mattered most to him, Malcolm's leadership was splintered off from the Nation of Islam. That painful event allowed Malcolm X to grow into Malik El-Shabazz. Malcolm was the master of traumatic reinvention. Before assassination, he had survived parental loss, dismemberment of family, foster care, criminality and pimping, incarceration, demagoguery, sexism, chauvinism. Even as a child, Malcolm seems to have been an old spirit, familiar with sorrow, tears, and blood. Like the other male leaders who fractionated the talented tenth, he was not a saint, but his risk-taking love for people transformed and inspired lives. Decades ago, as a seminarian on a class trip to Puerto Rico, I met a senator, blond, blue-eyed, seemingly "white," a Puerto Rican who spoke about how proud he, as a student, felt as a black man when Malcolm X debated at Harvard University, militantly denouncing white supremacy.

The mystique of the Kennedy administration began after the 1963 assassination, and continued as Kennedy was culturally enshrined as a hero of civil rights. President Lyndon Johnson had Martin Luther King, Jr. as teacher and co-architect of passage of the 1965 voting rights act. King was a *public critic* of Johnson's domestic and foreign policies. Their relationship went beyond theatre. Mass movements kept it honest; suffering and morality demanded more. King's assassination in 1968 horrified a nation in which most elites had faded as he marched with sanitation workers and poor people. No counterparts to Martin and Malcolm exist today. That was then; this is now. Yet, domestic and international human rights continue to demand opposition to police violence, drone killings of civilians, torture, the funding of genocidal occupations while opposing Palestine's entry into the UN International Criminal Court.

The space between Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, whose initially divergent politics converged to inspire freedom movements half a century after their assassinations, cannot

be measured. There is a wealth of possibility in their distance from each other and the bridges that can be built between these two icons. To a significant degree, these heroic insiders who became larger than life outsiders are in constant conversation. Which is a relief: it removes the burdensome fixation on the space between President Barack Obama and Reverend Al Sharpton, whose convergent politics privilege the movements they can manage. Such movements do not possess the capacity for an expansive concept for change.

Infinity in Between the Fractions

With the chorus “Them regular trademark!,” musician-activist Fela Kuti’s 1977 *Sorrow, Tears, and Blood* chronicles police-army violence against citizen artists and government opposition. Fela was politicized by his mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1900-1978). An “aristocrat” by birth, Ransome-Kuti led reform movements in education, anti-poverty initiatives, women’s rights, before her son became internationally known. Embracing Yoruba marginalized her from the politically assimilated culture, yet inspired Fela’s music or art as the weapon of the future. Arrested and beaten scores of times, Fela Kuti (1938-1997) lost his mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, months after army troops beat and threw her out of a window during a raid on his compound. The Nigerian government violently repressed Fela, his family, and loved ones, along with other political victims. Still Fela’s cultural and political movements against (neo)colonialism and state corruption were influential. He qualified as an international member of the “talented tenth” with prestigious family, and a London education at Trinity College, but left himself vulnerable through radical advocacy.

Fela was also politicized by his African-American lover Sandra Isadore. As an artist-activist, Isadore introduced him to the writings of Malcolm X. With lyrics that describe how

oppressed people focus on personal achievements—babies, parties, new homes, wealth—Fela argues that this focus diverts from or masks fears of fighting for justice and freedom-as-happiness; these fears are rooted in the potential loss of access, affluence, and safety stemming from resistance. Fela's video montage, *Sorrow, Tears, and Blood*, opens with a golden portrait of the saxophone player standing under the banner "Black President," an unofficial executive presiding over an embattled people. It ends with his assertion: "Music is the weapon of the future."¹¹

A talented musician, Fela achieved celebrity status independent of political leadership roles, he merged art with politics. When Fela fractionates the African and Nigerian talented tenths, as a radical member, he replaces missionary origins with Orisha, Afrobeat, and guerrilla theatre. With no public image or ratings to maintain, he and his collaborators pursue convictions outside of conventional society, creating "The Movement of the People." Their failings, imperfections, contradictions, like those of W.E.B. DuBois, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, have been and will be subjected to critiques. It is important to note that given that they did not seek governmental powers, none of these leaders had to develop a plan for liberalism in an apartheid state—as did Nelson Mandela, whose last prison, a spacious home with a swimming pool and white servants (and guards), held regular meetings with Afrikaner leaders and capitalists that shaped the trajectory of poverty for black South Africa. Fela, as an unofficial president, belonged to the aberrational talented tenth, that fraction of elites that accepted political tutelage from "below," and was transformed into creativity.

Leadership is fractionated by proximity to suffering. Departing from the chorus in harmony with liberal corporate-state sponsors, hearing the critiques of radical counterparts, refusing the disciplinary function of role models, allows a mass leadership of people struggling

in crossfires (misogyny, homophobia, colorism, and classism) to resist conflating respectability politics with freedom, and resist appending the title of “best and the brightest” to those most disciplined and incentivized to conform to institutional instruction. Collectivism celebrates the brilliance of the wild card. The gifts of the “rabble” can fractionate elitism and flood the market with talents that cannot be easily sold.

Whatever factions or fractions we belong to, we can develop a keener understanding that, despite individual personal character, as a group, elite leadership by itself lacks political will to self-divest of its economic and existential interests cultivated by the barons. The talented tenths are not designed to change, and so by themselves are incapable of altering, the trajectory of a national economy based in concentrated capital, a proclivity for war for capital, and a rewriting of historical struggles of democracy that make elites the “natural” leaders of progress. Talented tenths need to be fractionated by collectivities that understand that the call for “jobs,” if severed from radical economic justice, will mean more jobs guarding prisoners and borders, militarizing police, deploying troops. Without radical agency, employment remains linked to captivity and violence. Street rebellions cause us to pause and reflect; but in the absence of experiential knowledge about organizing they may become texts for leadership studies that reify or obscure radicalism.

In academia, politics may be overly textual. One can assign *Assata: An Autobiography*, by the former Black Panther leader Assata Shakur, a fugitive in Cuba who escaped from a U.S. prison in the late 1970s and maintains that she was falsely accused of killing a trooper, and a target of the FBI’s murderous COINTELPRO policing. At the same time, one might hesitate as faculty to organize a teach-in about the significance of the FBI placing Shakur on its terror list alongside members of Al-Qaeda. That list presents as a drone kill list. Tragically, thousands of

civilians have been killed by U.S. drones in the Middle East, more than died from terrorism on 9/11.¹²

There are endless possibilities within and between the talents of leaders who emerge, one after another, in our collective treks towards freedom. Some say that there are two types of infinity, a lesser and a greater one. The lesser is the sequential march of leaders. The greater infinity exists within the expanse between leaders. Those infinite spaces for freedom exist within the gaps between leaders, beyond the control of funders or the corporate state. That is where radicals work, fractionating the talented tenths, exploring the void, and fabricating armor for the future.

Afterword: A Response to Viewpoint

Thank you for your insightful queries; hopefully, the following addresses some concerns.

Yes, the proximity of Wells, DuBois, MLK, and Malcolm to black poverty and suffering enabled them to “fractionate” the Talented Tenth in different ways. (There is a version of the “talented tenth” in every ethnic/economic group.) Of the leaders cited here, only the middle-class ones with Ph.D.’s—DuBois and King—had to reeducate themselves in order to increase their analysis and agency. For Wells and Malcolm, their personal and familial struggles with dispossession—both were impoverished, self-raised orphaned children—gave them experiential knowledge that expanded their perspective, flexibility, and passion. Unfiltered by family structure, money or caste, the experiences of black life are more traumatic.

Yes, in a consumer society, multi-ethnic elites are alienated from traumatic suffering tied to poverty and racism. Reform seems reasonable to some due to their distance from daily denigration and violence. Practical politics and freedom reduced to personal achievement or

idealism become attainable goals. “Inequality” thus becomes a euphemism for oppression. Profits from policing, captivity, warfare and military technology go without critique in party-driven politics. Civilian deaths by drones and/or genocides ignored by the United States seem distracting from domestic issues. Yet, when centuries-old phenomena crowd the present moment, suffering can fractionate any organized entity, even those that are “leaderless.”

Fractionation happens because black people are taxed in their desires to love, their children and their selves. Reform policies do not bring back dead babies, at home or abroad. So the void between loss and justice is not spanned. Legislative regulations, or judicial interpretation, police enforcement, and managerial alleviation of some forms of stress while instituting forms of dependency and dishonor mean that black families suffer for their children’s futures and battle as they bury them. History is always instructive.

Ida B. Wells pioneered an anti-lynching movement in 1892 only after the father of her two-year old goddaughter was lynched. Professional, funded civil-rights leadership found Wells too difficult to deal with in combatting lynching, although they needed her militancy in order to be effective. Mamie Till defied law and respectability by having an open casket funeral for a mutilated teen murdered by self-deputized whites. Mass attendance at Emmett’s Chicago funeral in 1955 is now credited, coming months before Rosa Parks’s refusal to give up her segregated seat, as a catalyst for the modern civil rights movement. The NAACP failed to manage Mamie Till’s grief and rage and channel it into legislative reforms. Suffering rebels resist: they write, sleep, watch screens, self-medicate, go to the streets. Resistance is spontaneous or organized, or alternates between the two. It is never bureaucratic. Bureaucracies do not grieve; they offer protocol and grief management. Tensions between autonomous activism and bureaucratic reforms are inevitable. Spaces between old and new advocates shrink or expand. Activism still

cannot raise the dead. Humbled, it displays the discipline and autonomy to transcend multicultural “talented tenths.”

Chapter 2

7 Lessons in 1 Abolitionist Notebook¹²

When you kill a living being, you kill yourself and everyone else as well.

—*Thich Nhat Hahn*

I was introduced to prison abolitionism when asked to organize a 1998 prototype for Critical Resistance at CU-Boulder.¹³ Alongside several thousand attendees at the “Unfinished Liberation” conference, I learned about the prison industrial complex. Below are 7 lessons studied then and in the years that followed.

#1. The parental ethos of academic bodies filters professionalism and conformity into activism; and veils inherent contradictions. When few pro-radical public platforms critique progressivism, little value is recognized left of the “left.” Radical analyses are then dismissed as anti-progressive distractions aiding the repressive right. With public transparency, historical abolitionists debated strategies across the ideological spectrum; this likely enhanced their effectiveness.

#2. Black political prisoners received the anthology from the 1998 prison conference with “thank you” notes remarking the disappearance of their agency. They thus inspired future anthologies, shaped by students, of the writings of captive revolutionaries. Unlike the mass of the incarcerated, imprisoned radical activists cannot be easily portrayed (or led) as a purely victim

¹² This chapter first appeared in: Joy James, “7 Lessons in 1 Abolitionist Notebook,” *Abolition Collective Blog*, June 25, 2015. <https://abolitionjournal.org/joy-james-7-lessons-in-1-abolitionist-notebook/>

¹³ See <http://criticalresistance.org/>

caste. Influenced by decades of captivity and violent trauma, their intellectualism offers analyses assimilated into (and altered by) progressivism's multi-cultural reforms.

#3. On the political continuum, US conservative-centrist-progressive “advocacy democracy” works for reforms with an anti-black racism that structured democracy's evolution through: an *anti-abolitionist* revolutionary war that blocked the expansion of the 1772 Somerset ruling (emancipating a black slave brought to Britain from colonial America); an *anti-abolitionist* 13th amendment that codifies slavery to prison; an *anti-abolitionist* 14th amendment that transfers black political personhood (and social standing) to corporations.

#4. On continuum, extreme political positions *appear* as essential differences. On-continuum reforms (such as decarceration) diversify elites in government, corporate, nonprofit, academic and policing sectors; they do not decentralize power or custodial care. Leaning into privileged structures, that historically create, manage, tabulate, or ameliorate crises, requires leaning back from the control and radicalism of those most vulnerable to police and prison violence.

#5. Popularizing prison/police abuses through books and reports, television series and podcasts appear to deflect from off-continuum resistance and theories of “revolution,” “rebellion,” and “violence in both resistance and repression.

#6. Off-continuum grief and suprarational demands to state authorities—“Resurrect the children you kill”—exceed the capacities of on-continuum politics.

#7. Expanding capacities for change, off-continuum “leaderless” maroons—policed or captive youth, black-identified, queer, maternals calling out “Black Love”—save their own lives and enable those of others.

Chapter 3

Airbrushing Revolution for the Sake of Abolition¹⁴

In their July 2020, post “**Was Angela Davis a Panther?**” the Black Revolutionary Guard (BRG) asks and answers a query raised as a pretext for dismissing harsh critiques of an important progressive ally. They note that Davis was not a member of the Black Panther Party (BPP), but the Panthers considered her “a comrade and fellow traveler.” BRG rightly notes that **Davis** is not “an enemy of the people.” No progressive Black intellectuals/pundits seek to function as such. Yet contradictions exist. Van Jones’s funding from the Koch Brothers and later stealth editing of police reform policy for Jared Kushner reflect a “Sammy Davis, Jr. Conundrum” —where a performer can do benefits for radical causes—Angela Davis’s legal defense—and reactionary causes—Richard Nixon’s re-election—while seeking progress. Dual relationships in abolition politics have existed for centuries as “pragmatic compromises.” **Complex critiques** of current pragmatic compromises exist but they are rare.

BRG errs in referencing Elaine Brown’s *A Taste of Power* to explain why Davis did not join the **BPP**. Davis states that male chauvinism is the reason why as a graduate student she did not join Karenga’s US; and the Black Panther *Political* Party (*BPPP*), a SNCC study group. She worked closely with and advocated for California Panthers. She also toured US universities as the translator for Jean Genet to fundraise for bail and legal fees for Panthers targeted by Cointelpro. The public thought of her as a Panther, partly because **she alluded to herself** as such.

¹⁴ This article first appeared in: Joy James, “Airbrushing Revolution for the Sake of Abolition,” *AAIHS Blog*, July 20, 2020. <https://www.aaihs.org/airbrushing-revolution-for-the-sake-of-abolition/>

Teaching women's studies in the 1990s, I raved over Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power* as a model of Black feminist leadership to academic Kit Kim Holder, a Harlem Panther trained by Assata Shakur. When asked what I thought of Brown having Black women bullwhipped for disobeying orders, I stopped raving. I had *missed* detail in *A Taste of Power* and airbrushed it out of my teaching. *A Taste of Power* identifies Jay Richard Kennedy, a FBI/CIA agent who spied on the civil rights movement until Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, as Brown's lover. Yet, Davis's favorable *New York Times* review of Brown's memoir depicts Kennedy as merely an older white male mentor who supported her during a lengthy affair, and introduced her to Black radicalism. Cointelpro is disappeared.

BRG's concerns are partly addressed in the June 2020 **Panther letter**. BRG castigates (comrades'?) assertions that academics/pundits would "turn against" or "provide information to the State regarding its activists." Elite academics are *not* a revolutionary cadre; they rarely personally know revolutionaries (unless [former] political prisoners). On-the-ground activists work with considerable risk and no wealth. Elites offer more peer-recognition to progressive (or conservative) associates than to working class militants. The political economy of social justice produces employment, honoraria, royalties, and stellar salaries, generating personal wealth or portfolio management with low risk of surveillance and repression. Progressive academics performed for Obama the labor that Van Jones provided to Trump: Airbrush to transform revolutionary demands for power and community-defense into "non-reformist reforms" or "revolutionary reforms" (oxymorons). Before abolitionism, there was revolutionary struggle. Alliances exist between the two: Panther free breakfast programs—mutual aid— created a model that now serves public schools.

Academic Abolitionism

Elaine Brown attempted to sue me in March 1998 when I organized an abolitionist conference at CU-Boulder, at the request of Angela Davis, as a prototype for Critical Resistance (CritResist) held at UC-Berkeley that September. “Unfinished Liberation”— named after one of Davis’s UCLA lectures— was CU’s largest, most expensive conference at the time. Its leadership collective accompanied Davis to Boulder. I invited Black Panthers and former political prisoners: Holder, Safiya Bukhari, Gabriel Torres and Panther Lee Lew-Lee a Panther who screened his documentary *All Power to the People!: The Black Panther Party and Beyond*.

With a small coalition of Black and white undergrads who dedicated unpaid labor, I too was exhausted by tasks and a demanding funder (faculty senate) commanding meetings to justify the budget, with the lack of discussion about incarceration and the sidelining of local activists (as an assistant professor I did not fight vigorously enough to include them). The Ethnic Studies chair’s skittish rejection of Elmer “Geronimo” Pratt, who I proposed as an additional keynote, was disappointing. His wealth of knowledge about incarceration, after twenty-seven years of imprisonment, and legal experiences with his attorneys Johnnie Cochrane, Kathleen Cleaver, and Stuart Hanlon was not desirable. As a working-class militant Panther and Vietnam veteran, Pratt lacked academic credentials and celebrity status.

Days before the conference, Davis warned me in a late-night call that Elaine Brown would sue me if I did not withdraw Lew-Lee’s documentary from the conference and essentially oust him from the forum. The nearly two-hour film, dominated by male voices but also featuring Safiya Bukhari, Kathleen Cleaver, Yuri Kochiyama, and Sarah McClendon, included a brief clip of a former male Panther political prisoner disparaging Elaine Brown’s relationship with Jay Richard Kennedy. The threat to airbrush from “Unfinished Liberation” knowledge of the CIA’s

impressive reach into Black radical politics was rudely rebuffed (but later accepted for *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* when I agreed to delete any reference to Gloria Steinem's work with the CIA as she was raising funds for CritResist). The all Black CPUSA club Davis joined, Che-Lumumba Club, was named after Che Guevara and Patrice Lumumba—revolutionary leaders assassinated with the assistance of the CIA. When FedEx delivered the legal cease-and-desist papers, I delivered and explained them to the vice provost's office exiting as white male administrators received them with laughter.

Some 2000 participated in Unfinished Liberation. The documentary was well received. On the final day of the conference, Davis's keynote publicly chastised Lee Lew-Lee, without naming him. She denounced the "old trope" of blaming enslaved Black women for sleeping with white slave masters and betraying slave rebellions. The keynote was instructive. Davis inverted her 1971 *The Black Scholar* article "The Role of the Black Woman in a Community of Slaves," which is dedicated to George Jackson (whom she considered her husband) following his *assassination* (Michel Foucault's terminology). Repurposed, the article was no longer an analysis of how Black women fought alongside Black men in family/community for freedom. It became a Black feminist manifesto, castigating the Moynihan report on "black matriarchy" and highlighting the centrality and indispensability of Black feminist leadership. (Both could have been simultaneously possible.) Davis would state that the article was always about Black feminism but she did not realize this when she wrote it in her jail cell. Insurrection faded. (Jackson maintained from the site of prison that the US was proto-fascist; from the site of the university, Davis asserted it was not.) Struggle became conflict not War. The defense of Brown foreshadowed the future of disciplinarian acts against public critiques of Black feminist leadership.

Defended by Powerful Allies

The BRG asserts that Davis's legal defense could be replicated if there were more unity on the "left":

We should also note the worldwide solidarity campaigns led on Davis' behalf — much can be learned from this today. Campaigns like this require tabling non-antagonistic ideological differences and realizing that quarreling is in the interests of the ruling class particularly when a high-profile activist is under attack from that class.

The National United Committee to Free Angela Davis (NUCFAD) was stabilized by the bourgeoisie, white liberal hegemony, and global communist parties during a Cold War with competing "empires." The USSR professed itself to be an alternative to the racist capitalist empire of the US. The CPUSA had first debated whether to defend Davis (some considered her an "adventuress" for allowing seventeen-year-old Jonathan Jackson access to her guns—*although a prison guard and DA hostage inside the van fired the shots that killed and injured on August 7, 1970*). The CPUSA helped to structure and fund Davis's six-member legal team. Alongside Black communities, white university students and (law) faculty fought to protect one of their own. Gloria Steinem was asked to head fundraising for Davis's defense—three years after the 1967 *Ramparts* exposé forced Steinem to acknowledge that she worked with "liberal" elements of the CIA. Steinem, whose personal friends included war hawks in the Nixon Administration, was effective in raising funds and *de*-demonizing Davis to non-radical whites. Davis's global solidarity campaigns also included "interest convergence" noted by Derrick Bell as a catalyst for change when the interests of the dispossessed and elites align. President Nixon shifted from publicly declaring Davis's "guilt" to offering prominent Soviet scientists seats at her

trial so that they could verify US justice. Davis was acquitted by an all-white jury. Few working class/imprisoned Black revolutionaries received such levels of support. The 1972 exoneration was a “Win-Win.” Conservatives bragged the US was not a gulag. The left declared a rare “people’s victory.” Nixon was re-elected.

Davis and Pratt were on trial at the same time. Her trial was an international media spectacle; the press largely ignored Pratt’s and abandoned investigative reporting into the FBI and LAPD framing him for murder. Cointelpro targeted *revolutionary* capacity. The year before Davis and Pratt were arrested, in a predawn Chicago raid, the FBI/CPD assassinated Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. Hampton gifted us with revolution as the Rainbow Coalition: white power to white people, brown power to brown people, yellow power to yellow people, red power to red people, Black power to Black people: *All* power to the people, none to police, or (petit) bourgeois politicians aligned with the state.

BRG writes “as a Maoist,” that Davis’s “politics have been rightist for decades.” Davis’s politics are *not* rightist. They reflect civil/human rights mandates that are well funded and increasingly popular in the network built within academia. Those politics include pragmatic compromises. In a 2014 interview, Davis asserted that President Barack Obama was part of the “Black radical tradition”—a tradition shaped by Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Malcolm X, Ella Baker, Robert Williams, Rosa Parks and Assata Shakur (Obama’s DOJ placed Shakur on an international terrorist list with Al Qaeda). The radical tradition opposed capitalism and imperialism. For POTUS 44, “Black success” under capitalism equals “Black power” (akin to Nixon’s “Black capitalism equals Black power”). In a 1997 [interview](#), Kathleen Cleaver described affluent Blacks’ paternalistic relationships towards impoverished/working class Blacks, and ideological animus against dissidents among their own class. The romantic search

for “Black unity,” Cleaver argues, required ignoring class divisions and public posturing of a Black united front, despite anti-communism and elites’ disproportionate gains from mass struggles.

“War” Is Not a Metaphor

BRG raises the imperative to save global political prisoners (e.g., in India and the Philippines). Popularized abolitionism tends to minimize the *agency* of US political prisoners — those imprisoned/disappeared in recent rebellions **who largely remain anonymous** and in historical ones (noted in the Panther letter). Airbrushing erases Cointelpro’s role in creating conditions for political repression and imprisonment, and state violence. Concerns about alienating police/parole boards, funders, and a sympathetic public promote airbrushing as a “responsible” task as activists note the urgency of freeing *all* people given that the pandemic functions as a death sentence in prison.

In his 19th century treatise *On War*, General Carl von Clausewitz describes War as “an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will.” Black/African and indigenous peoples were terrorized as slaves, colonized, and *opponents*. Conquest was war. Slavery was War. Convict prison leasing was War. **Sharecropping** was War. Cointelpro was War. The “War on Drugs” criminalized anti-war protestors as “pothead hippies” and Black radicals as “junkies” in a counter-insurrectionist War. Mass incarceration—where deaths classified as “suicide” or “natural” include police murders and medical neglect and life spans shortened and disfigured—is War. At a NYC library lecture, Black survivors of Attica described their bullet wounds and scars from torture after the government waged War against a human rights rebellion from captives. **Their anguished narrative** claimed that they took hostages, weeks after George

Jackson's 1971 death in San Quentin, igniting a rebellion seen around the world, yet academics airbrushed them out of history. Although alliances between abolitionists and rebels are essential, airbrushing of revolutionary struggles continues to undermine coalitions and political convergence.

Chapter 4

The Algorithm of Anti-Racism¹⁵

Meets Alchemy Abolition

Slaveholders cited black militancy as a justification for their brutality. In response, late-eighteenth-century abolitionists would rally around the image of a kneeling supplicant begging to be recognized as a man and a brother; as if the condemnation of evil required the meek innocence of its victims. That icon of abjection has shaped the prevailing understanding of bondage and race to this day.¹⁶ — Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*

Hegemonic Algorithms

An algorithm can be as simple as a brownie or kombucha recipe. As a list of instructions it permits the completion of a task. Yet, what if the task—social justice—requires rewriting the algorithms we have inherited in our struggles against US racism? In its June 19, 2020, “CALLING ON FACEBOOK CORPORATE ADVERTISERS TO PAUSE ADS FOR JULY 2020,”¹⁷ Color of Change argues for the multi-billionaire corporation: “to do the right thing and make their platform safer for the millions of Black people that use it.” Color of Change argues

¹⁵ Parts of this chapter first appeared in: Joy James, “The Algorithm of AntiRacism,” *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society & Culture*, Summer 2021. <http://logosjournal.com/2021/the-algorithm-of-antiracism/>; and, “The Alchemy of Abolitionism.”

¹⁶ Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

¹⁷ [HTTPS://COLOROFCHANGE.ORG/STOP-HATE-FOR-PROFIT/](https://colorofchange.org/stop-hate-for-profit/)

that from their “monetization of hate speech to discrimination in their algorithms to the proliferation of voter suppression to the silencing of Black voices, Facebook has refused to take responsibility for hate, bias, and discrimination growing on their platforms.” Corporate investment allowed the platform to accumulate “\$70B of revenue from corporations every year,” according to Color of Change which argues that given that these investors could have “their businesses featured on Facebook’s platforms side-by-side with racist attacks on Black people” — an incendiary association following the public’s growing awareness of police/vigilante murders of George Floyd, Ahmad Arbury, and Breonna Taylor — a boycott to demand Facebook to monitor and remove hate speech was reasonable. The demand to dismantle Facebook as a monopoly that violated public interest and (antiquated) anti-trust legislation was not made. (In July 2020, Congress held hearings on the tech titans Facebook, Google, Apple, and Amazon with conservatives decrying “censorship” and liberals seeking to reinvigorate anti-trust laws.)

The important call to hold Facebook accountable—as a platform that boosts revenues by promoting social/political violence—threatens to “shame” Facebook into progressive neutrality by diminishing its stock value. Just as Facebook has an algorithm of racism, an algorithm of anti-racism is deployed to correct it. However, the progressive algorithm of *antiracism* aligns with rather than disrupts the reactionary algorithm of Facebook’s racism. Both are structured to the same metric or metaparadigm. Both monetize their endeavors, amplify influential platforms to please funders, and reassure the general public of a stable (democratic) structure that can accommodate the “common good” without the need for revolutionary struggle. It is not just the corporate ethos or deference to capitalism that structures the two antagonists. It is the selective memory of the history of antiracism that joins the two to define the parameters of popularized anti-racist struggle.

The dominant algorithm for antiracism and contemporary abolitionism are traceable to 18th-century abolitionism. The insurgence of liberation is traced to the abolitionism encircling the civil war. Some 200,000 Black Americans fought in the civil war. The dominant algorithm rejects analyses of slavery-as- actual War (not a metaphor for War.) Analyses of white supremacy and captivity as War extend to postbellum lynching, convict prison lease system, sharecropping, Cointelpro, and mass incarceration. Terror is a technique of warfare and functions within asymmetrical War (e.g., US-funded contras).¹⁸ The dominant algorithm of antiracism airbrushes war; thus rebellions become “protests” that can be resolved in the dominate algorithm rather than revolutionary struggles that require the rewriting of the Algorithm of AntiRacism.

The popularized algorithm elevates passive black suffering over black militancy and resistance and thus has stymied the development of an algorithm of community-defense from violence of civilians or police. Prominent abolitionists lived among and fought with the black working class and laboring poor—those most vulnerable to poverty, captivity and violent death. Today, the wealth of black elites and concept of black success under capitalism as “Black Power” skew solidarity struggles as liberal hegemony and investment portfolios shape anti-racist politics and policies. Archie Mafeje’s “White Liberals and Black Nationalists: Strange Bedfellows”¹⁹ argues that general hegemony is “opposed to any real change in *power relations*” because in Southern Africa powerful progressives are “prepared to be ruled by” others yet “reserve the right to *reign*.” Derrick Bell’s “interest convergence” theory likewise argues that US civil rights gains progressed when compatible to the needs of elites. The ban on the ANC was

¹⁸ <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2019/05/who-was-naive-about-bernie-sanders-meeting-the-sandinistas/>).

¹⁹ Archie Mafeje, “White Liberals and Black Nationalists: Strange Bedfellows,” *AFRICA Review*, December 1998, Vol. 11. No. 13, 45.

lifted in 1990, the year that Nelson Mandela was formally released from prison. In 1993, General Secretary of the South African Communist Party Chris Hani, chief of staff of ANC uMkhonto we Sizwe (founded by Nelson Mandela), was assassinated in his driveway. Hani's popularity equaled that of Mandela's among the black electorate. Six months after Hani's death, Nelson Mandela and Frederik Willem De Klerk shared the Nobel Peace Prize (President Obama received his Nobel Peace Prize in 2009). Most Americans remember 1993 as the year that Toni Morrison received the Nobel Prize in Literature, the symbolism of black success as a victory over antiracism overshadows Hani's murder and the lack of redistribution of land/resources to South African masses.

The dominant algorithm minimizes wars against dissidents and their disappearances.

Cointelpro's historical deployment under FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and its current deployment under AG William Barr is under-emphasized in the algorithm of anti-Racism. The proliferation of conservative/reactionary prosecutors and Attorneys General and judges (POTUS 45 has appointed over 200 to the bench) that protect police violence, tools designated for horizontal or communal/family violence—education and therapeutic intervention—do not seem effective. Pro Publica use of declassified NYPD substantiated abuses reveal predatory behavior rewarded with promotions and pay increases. The rise in gun violence and civilian homicides in NYC is accompanied by the NYPD's 68% decrease in arrests in black/brown neighborhoods, those most afflicted by civilian and cop violence. The FBI's "IRON FIST" (a titular reference to the Iron Cross?) program conducts surveillance and persecution of dissidents, focusing on its fabricated "black identity extremists."²⁰

²⁰ <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/leaked-fbi-documents-raise-concerns-about-targeting-black-people-under-black-identi-1>.

*The Alchemy of Abolitionisms*²¹

Spiritual, metaphysical and material components of abolitionism suggest the merger of art, science and political will in “alchemy” that originated in ancient Egypt.¹ Trying to better understand the roles of political prisoners in global abolitionist struggles, I reflect here on the spiritual and political drive of activists; their labors suggest a force of nature that calls upon the ancestral in order to design a future beyond captivity.

A fluid, multilayered abolitionism, one aligned with dedicated activists experimenting as “alchemists,” shares leadership with imprisoned intellectuals. Radical alliances forge a golden norm for addressing crises. Susceptible to glossy reforms endorsed by the privileged, police and policy wonks, abolitionism without alchemy cannot meet the demands from captives, particularly the differently abled, impoverished, women, children, LGBTQ *radicals* for dignity, autonomy and care.

During the 2020 “Black August” Black Is Black virtual conference on US political prisoners (such as the recently released MOVE 9),² activist intellectuals referenced the Hadith’s adage to thrive in transforming predatory violence: first, one must feel in their heart the injustice; next, one must politically act; finally, one raises their fist against injustice. This sequence or process to challenge repression through abolitionism deploys emotional intelligence, political analytics and physical engagement for justice.

²¹ Segments of this chapter first appeared in: Joy James, *The Alchemy of Abolitionism*, *The Routledge International Handbook on Penal Abolition*, edited by Michael J. Coyle and David Scott. NY: Routledge, 2021.

“Abolitionism” always existed for those with wealth and power: existential whiteness,³ money or capital, and connections with governing elites. Elite “offenders,” *if* prosecuted and convicted, are largely redirected to therapy, counseling, drug treatment and expensive residential treatment centers. Internationally (and nationally), they can also engage in crimes against humanity or human rights violations yet still accumulate wealth and prestige and remain in governance. The quest for alchemists is how to obtain *abolitionism for all* and instill justice as universal norm when “caught between a rock and a hard place” – with predatory opportunistic civilian violence on one side, predatory police violence on the other side” and prisons run as organized zones of trauma and terror (the US leads the world in mass incarceration [with over 2 million captives] and pandemic deaths). The quest to control organized violence is highly politicized on all sides. Hence, abolitionists seek strategies in radical traditions.

The “Black Imprisoned Radical Intellectual Tradition”

Academic abolitionists often speak of the “Black Radical Tradition” (BRT), tracing it to anti-slavery abolitionism, the civil rights and Black liberation movements, and analyses of “racial capitalism” in texts by black academics. I first read the term “Black *Imprisoned* Radical Intellectual Tradition” (IBRT) while working with abolitionist academics⁴ responding to queries posed by imprisoned black queer educator and abolitionist Steve Wilson. Wilson raised the “Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition” (IBRT) as related to the “Black Radical Tradition” (BRT) of the civil rights and Black Power movements. One query Wilson posed was how has this tradition “influenced and been influenced by African American Intellectuals without incarceration experience.” For SW, IBRT – with differently valued tendencies that “converse with one another” is currently “undergoing a hard time.”

18th-century abolitionisms depended upon an anti-racism algorithm that depicted enslaved blacks/Africans as primarily sufferers imploring the assistance of white elites and ethicists. The black/African captives also included intellectuals, theorists, activists, rebels and warriors – but the optics for autonomous black agency proved disturbing to many conventional abolitionists. An 18th-century algorithm favored by elites might be operational in the 21st century; yet should it be the norm? Is the “practical” effective for transformational change? Given that civilians, judges, attorneys, police and prison guards dehumanize the incarcerated, the legacy of political prisoners or rebels is key for understanding the longevity of US policing and imprisonment as reiterations of the atrocities of chattel slavery, convict prison leasing, Jim Crow, Cointelpro,⁵ the fabricated “war on drugs,”⁶ mass incarceration, medical (pandemic) neglect and experimentation in prisons.

IBRT’s legacy spans centuries from the first kidnapping/purchase and cargo shipment and rebellion to the present moment of mass protests. Its leaders, captives, combatants and casualties are historically known and anonymous. The better-known 19th-century abolitionists include David Walker, Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass. IBRT history also includes insurrectionists imprisoned and killed for their abolitionism. For example, Osborne Perry Anderson, Shields Green, Lewis Sheridan Leary, John Anthony Copeland and Dangerfield Newby are black men – accompanied and fought with John Brown during the 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry that some argued precipitated the civil war. Some were killed during the raid, others imprisoned and hung. Brown’s body was given a ceremonial burial in New York. Yet, the bodies of the named black men, who fought to free their families and communities, were dissected in the streets or “donated” to a local medical college for experimentation.⁷

During the 20th-century civil rights movements (Rev. Martin Luther King called the movements the “second Reconstruction,” while SNCC⁸ activist youths referred to it as the “second civil war”), IBRT intellectuals and activists – such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Stokely Carmichael – were caged and beaten to destroy their political commitments. Contemporary abolitionists lead collectives such as NYC’s RAPP (Release Aging People in Prison); Chicago’s CFIST (Campaign to Free Incarcerated Survivors of Police Torture); and the Jericho Movement for release of political prisoners Jalil Muntaqim, Russell Maroon Shoats, Mumia Abu-Jamal and Joy Powell. Jericho and other abolitionist organizations are mobilizing for 2021 tribunals on the 70th anniversary of the 1951 “We Charge Genocide” petition presented to the UN and the globe by the Civil Rights Congress, as it called attention to state violence against black Americans. Internationalist organizing was always central to abolitionists, from antilynching crusader Ida B. Wells through the Black Panther Party to the Black is Black Coalition. Black abolitionists as internationalists were jailed/imprisoned yet still informed and inspired the world. As ancestors and “psychopomps,” alongside Patrice Lumumba, Tom Mboya, Walter Rodney, and Dulcie September,⁹ they influence international struggles.

Abolitionist Educators

When academics dominate abolitionist print culture, it is easier to forget the alchemical lineage of radical street and prison movements. Books on incarceration and abolitionism written by academics are at times more popular and celebrated than the memoirs and analyses of incarcerated radicals. The underacknowledged schism between the worldviews of abolitionist academics and radical imprisoned abolitionists creates a blind spot that obscures radical agency from within prisons and jails.

The administrators of prisons and jails remain the greatest obstacles to studies deemed “too” political. Intellectual and personal property of imprisoned IBRT educators are routinely confiscated. Abolitionist advocacy helps to recover and prevent prison admin theft and wreckage. Yet, for decades, solitary confinement disrupted movements inside and outside as educators were/ are removed from their communities. (In addition to expensive books, Wilson notes that Pennsylvania imprisoned workers earn 19 cents per hour while prisons promote distractions from the study and development of IBRT with “televisions, tablets, MP3 players, PlayStation . . . and games galore.”¹⁰) JPay email can be costly to users and families. Digital culture creates isolation between abolitions. Speaking for incarcerated intellectuals, Wilson reflects: “We are not part of the conversations. We are afterthoughts.” Noting that (sometimes inaccessible) abolitionist texts often lack writings by the incarcerated, Wilson poses challenges to academic/pundit abolitionists: “those of us who are trudging along in the trenches and producing work often find no place to publish”, and distortions emerge from a “totalizing definition of prisoner. . . . All of us are not cis-het, able-bodied males.”

Imprisoned journalists covering the pandemic face more life-threatening violence than that endured by journalists attacked by federal and local police during the recent unrests for racial justice. (The 13th amendment legalizes slavery in US prisons and thus essentially nullifies most constitutional rights, including first amendment rights.) Incarcerated educators who labor to inform the public of the pandemic devastating US prisons are punished for their courageous exposés in health and safety reporting.¹¹ Many US prisons have been woefully incompetent or indifferent in providing adequate safety protocols and sanitation for those forced to live under COVID-19 as a potential death sentence. US prisons “contain” the virus with lockdowns and solitary confinement; they also limit health programs and services. The Pennsylvania Department

of Corrections retaliated against Wilson; using “vague, shifting, and contradictory accusations of misconduct,” it silenced him by putting him in “the hole,” or solitary confinement.¹² Wilson began a hunger strike on April 7, 2020; he has asserted: “Now I am truly a political prisoner.”¹³

Radical solidarity amid Political Repression

In August 2020, US media reported that some 21 million people had participated in marches or protests since the May 2020 police lynching of George Floyd. Hundreds if not thousands of those protestors have been or will be arrested. This suggests that social justice protests will extend the IBRT legacy with new political prisoners.¹⁴ Within prisons, forming bonds and study groups among intergenerational radicals is often undermined by prison administrations seeking to destabilize networks among politicized intellectuals.

Among political prisoners, Steve Wilson asserts, even if abolitionists lack “ideological agreement given the different levels of threat, fear, depression and repression,” they continue to build “zones for study, engagement, critique, and constructive work” to leverage civil and human rights through a multi-realm compressor: from the mechanisms of policing and imprisonment within an imperial democracy through the realm of social justice movements to the maroon sites of study collectives built from repurposed time and labor to more engagement with changing the quality and duration of life for our community members.¹⁵

Maroons escaped enslavement and fought for their freedom to not be returned and tortured as captives. What is then is the nature of the relationship(s) between white-collar abolitionists and enslaved rebel abolitionists? What structures our encounters with each other? The open heart, vocal advocacy, raised fist? When do the imaginaries of incarcerated maroons meld with those of the professionalized educators? Do we even share the same “freedom

dreams” from our disparate sites – from pen pals or visitors of captives to being entombed by governmental/ corporate capture? Given the global struggles – pandemic deaths and health precarity; recessions and increased poverty; climate devastations and forced migration; regional wars and execution; police and paramilitary repression of dissenters and authoritarian rule – logically, the abolitionist is alchemist. In the rational world of unabated loss and terror, it is only natural that the liberator would be a magical thinker and radical doer. Fighting for and with those battling within the bowels of prisons and jails – the “disposables” from the waste generated by prison regimes, profiteers, and politicians – we continue with ancient experimentations in transmutation. Thus, we will imperfectly measure but determinedly perform how radical traditions enlighten and transpose trauma into freedom.

Addendum: Stevie Wilson’s Roundtable on the Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition (2020)

It is difficult to define the “Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition” (IBRT) if it is enveloped by the “Black Radical Tradition” (BRT). The latter is often tethered to academic texts. Also, differences in ideologies and strategies can be ill-defined if both phenomena—IBRT and BRT—are referenced in the singular, not in the plural (e.g., “black feminism” as opposed to “black feminisms”). It is easier for a hegemonic (black) left—if such an entity exists <https://scinapse.io/papers/1844913171>—to shape definitional norms if IBRT is presented as a unitary formation. Using the standard nonplural, I see IBRT as fluid, multi-layered, and aligned with BRT. The two have always co-existed and overlapped. They produced extraordinary leadership against the atrocities of chattel slavery, convict prison leasing, Jim Crow, Cointelpro, mass incarceration, medical neglect and experimentation. Despite the constant wars we face—

including President Nixon’s attempt to crush dissent by fabricating a “war on drugs” through unions we are able to build capacity out of our traditions.²²

Antebellum enslavement was a prison. Postbellum prisons are enslavement sites. IBRT’s literary and theoretical legacy spans centuries of testimonials, speeches, and writings by abolitionists from the antebellum to the contemporary era: David Walker; Nat Turner; Harriet Tubman; Frederick Douglass; and the leadership collectives of NYC’s RAPP (Release Aging People in Prison); Chicago’s CFIST (Campaign to Free Incarcerated Survivors of Police Torture); the Jericho Movement; and (former) political prisoners and *Real News Network* journalist Marshall Eddie Conway, and author Mumia Abu-Jamal, incarcerated for nearly four decades.

Prisons mirror and magnify state and social ills. IBRT intellectuals and activists caged in jails or prisons were/are beaten and tortured with “surplus” punishment to discourage or destroy political commitments. Fannie Lou Hamer, Stokely Carmichael, M.L. Nolen (who mentored George Jackson) are names that come to mind. IBRT history includes the forgotten or less well known, e.g., the five black men—Osborne Perry Anderson, Shields Green, Lewis Sheridan Leary, John Anthony Copeland, Dangerfield Newby—who accompanied John Brown during the 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry. Several were killed during the raid, others imprisoned and hung. Brown’s body was given a ceremonial burial in NY; yet, the bodies of the black men who fought to free their families and communities were dissected in the streets or “donated” to a local medical college for experiments.²³

²² <https://harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/> —

²³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/10/13/five-black-men-raided-harpers-ferry-with-john-brown-theyve-been-forgotten/>

The intellectual, political, emotional-psychological contributions of IBRT are stabilized by “coming of age stories” that brilliantly reveal doubt, desire, determination and sacrifice. The narratives, dominated by male authors, are not pretty or always reassuring. They are powerful, disturbing and quieting. Neither pessimistic nor optimistic, their realism dominates. IBRT authors and actors are Captive Maternalists: nongendered entities who function as caretakers and nurturers, protectors of communities, raising future generations. They have labored in confinement through centuries: from the first Africans in the cargo hold to activists protesting state-abandonment during a pandemic. Chronicling victimization and violence does not lead to their de-emphasizing or diminishing radical leadership and agency.

IBRT’s breadcrumb trail and navigation include: David Walker’s 1829 *Appeal*²⁴ Haywood Patterson’s 1950 *Scottsboro Boy*; Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s 1963 “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”;²⁵ Malcolm X’s 1965 *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (shaped by Alex Haley); Anne Moody’s 1968 *Coming of Age in Mississippi*; George Jackson’s 1970 *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*;²⁶ 1971 *The Attica Manifesto*²⁷ Assata Shakur’s 1987 *Assata: An Autobiography*; Safiya Bukhari’s 2010 *The War Before: The True Life Story of Becoming a Black Panther, Keeping the Faith in Prison, and Fighting for Those Left Behind*.²⁸

Without the inclusion of the Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition, African American intellectualism becomes less clear and more likely to be polished with a glossy preservative that appeals to the privileged and reassures with palliative rather than “curative” politics. We’ve

²⁴ See <https://www.sites.google.com/site/davidwalkermemorial/david-walker/death-of-david-walker>

²⁵ <oom.us/postattendee>

²⁶ <https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/soledadbro.html>

²⁷ <https://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?view_collection=144&format=Manifesto>;

²⁸ <https://safiyaibukhari.com/>

learned not to erase women, children, LGBTQ leaders, and revolutionaries from our political memories and analyses. Therefore, we know how to hold onto our radicals as imprisoned radical teachers, and to support them during their trials. The contributions of Rev. Joy Powell²⁹ show us how important it is to stay vigilant and protect each other. The legacy of international political prisoners who took risks in political action to build communities and nations—Patrice Lumumba, Tom Mboya, Nelson Mandela, and Dulcie September (incarcerated for six years, she later worked for the ANC in Paris, where she was assassinated in 1988 are also instructive.³⁰

The IBRT past manifests in the present. Victories exist but not as “successes.” We the people have not transcended captivity, social violence, exploitation, poverty, trafficking, femicide and infanticide, transphobia and devastation of the natural world. Yet, we have a legacy. Not all of it is written down. Not all existing IBRT writings are evenly distributed and read. Still, we continue to learn from IBRT oral and written contributions. Led by the formerly and currently incarcerated, the Jericho Movement encourages us to contemplate the upcoming 70th anniversary of the 1951 *We Charge Genocide* document, which utilizes the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide.

We are all indebted to Imprisoned Black Radical Traditions. As we organize, mourn losses and celebrate victories, the inheritance grows.

²⁹ <https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/05/03/black-women-political-prisoners-of-the-police-state/>

³⁰ <https://africasacountry.com/2019/08/the-erasure-of-dulcie-september>)

Chapter 5

Panther Afterlife Plan A: Build Community³¹

Reconciling Liberation with Repressive Education

Liberation pedagogies tied to Black Studies stem from well-known political thinkers and activists who created a popularized form of political education originally rooted in community struggles for civil and human rights. Those struggles and studies emerged from an era of battles against repression in which traumatized and grieving students, educators and communities sought to build and fortify a more equitable and just world.

Over decades, grass-roots and community-based education became the foundation for texts and diversity canons for the academy; sometimes the militant histories were accurately depicted. At other times, those narratives were dissipated or succumbed to revisionism.

Activist were central to political education that would eventually return to the classroom after tracing the contributions to communities made by students such as Howard University's Stokely Carmichael or Barnard's Kathleen Cleaver, both worked with SNCC (Cleaver later transitioned to Oakland to join the Black Panther Party). Social justice activists developed community-based methods of learning and teaching political theory, civic engagement and community protection. From the mid-to late 20th-century, luminary teachers were both listeners and orators who created oral and literary texts. Bayard Rustin and Ella Baker, with attorney

³¹ This chapter first appeared in: Joy James and K. Kim Holder, "Building Critical Radical Communities: Liberation Pedagogies and the Origins of Black Studies," *History as an Ongoing Human Struggle*, Rodolfo Rosales, ed., NY: Routledge Press, 2022.

Stanley Levine, were members of the NYC-based organization In Friendship. In 1955, following Rosa Parks's refusal to relinquish her seat on a segregated bus—she instructed that it was the lynching of fourteen-year old Emmett Till that August that sparked her resistance and the Montgomery Bus Boycott—Rustin and Baker travelled south to assist the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) and support the educational-communal mission of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Miss Baker left SCLC, the male ministers were not ready for radical female leadership, particularly from a socialist. In 1960, Miss Baker alongside historian Howard Zinn became a mentor to the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) which was formed by college and university students who wanted what King would later describe as the “beloved community” in which equity and dignity—and the cessation of terror and captivity—became the norm and not the exception.

Miss Baker, who originally attended a black college in the south, and moved from southern communities to meet other community learners and teachers in Harlem. Years before the southern civil rights movement, she organized with domestic workers and unemployed black women during the depression. Eventually she and Miss Parks met, heard of and learned from black Muslim revolutionary and (inter)nationalist educator Malcolm X (El Malik El Shabazz). The 1960s informed and inspired an oral tradition of speeches that reflected the precarity and power of communal based experience, suffering, resistance in a matrix of education. In this moment in which we are emotionally and politically reeling in the aftermath of the spring 2020 police/vigilante killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Avery, and George Eliot, one can find instruction, emotional intelligence, if not always comfort in the bracing and abrasive lectures of Malcolm X. His 1962 speech in Los Angeles on police brutality and killings of unarmed blacks given nearly sixty years ago reflects this present moment and calls upon us to deeper investigate

the repetitions of violence and disposability that we face and the difficulty in teaching about it to others who do not share the same levels of vulnerability or desire an intensity of resistance. Now the Smithsonian channel can post speeches by Malcolm X but years ago he was considered a “bigot” and hate-filled. It is odd how things change but stay the same as we struggle to build community-based liberatory education and contain mass-produced factory-corporate based instruction that denies the possibility and transformational wisdom based not just in suffering but in resistance to suffering and degradation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_uYWDyYNUg According to Malcolm X, “Truth is on the side of the oppressed.” Yet, in the classrooms where community-focused teaching and grappling with the specificity of the violence enacted through white supremacy and predatory capitalism, the “truth” seems to be taught based on what is conventional and agreeable to the institution and the publisher.

This struggle of building community out of activist (not professionalized) culture is an international struggle. Here, we can draw upon Brazilian academic Paulo Freire. According to Freire, “Washing one’s hands of the conflicts between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful.” Author of the *Pedagogia do Oprimido/Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968/1969) he emphasized the non-hierarchical ways in which communities teach each other and with each other without professionalizing the sharing of knowledge and ethical action. Countless unnamed activists and students functioned as pedagogues as well, boldly creating theories of social justice in tandem with their communities often marginalized from elite or from the academy. Baker organized with the Student NonViolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to counter racism and economic exploitation and war. Malcom spoke to the people about freedom, and lectured on university campuses (often elite institutions). Freire demonstrated how to speak in systematic ways about the poor and oppressed and varied forms

of education that would work in their interests. Baker's strategic brilliance, Malcom's cultural eloquence, and Freire's educational academic-communal frameworks are expressed in various ways by student activists who engineered Black Studies in the academy to reflect liberation movements.

Anniversaries celebrating Black Studies recall on-campus activism that created academic programs decades ago. Yet, the repression that went beyond rhetorical slights and racial slurs that sought to kill black intellectual and political autonomy is not often referred to in these celebrations of ethnic studies and black studies programs developed on specific anniversaries that grew out of militant movements. That activism is sometimes distanced from radicalism traceable to the Black Panther Party (BPP) and student organizers. Liberation pedagogy is traceable to the theologies of Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Vernon Johns, Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, James Baldwin, Malcolm X. Their pedagogies reflect theories emanating not from academic research or textual studies but from within mass mobilizations to change oppressive material conditions and political disenfranchisement. Violence and intimidation against those movements have been a constant threat to critical pedagogies and theories that seek to deepen public understanding of liberation movements and the academy. There are key things to remember as we go forward to building or setting a legacy for future communities. In the era of resistance for a better world, the academy, pundits, and texts were not the center of leadership, analysis or ethics. *In student mobilizations and transformative theory, students' relationships to their communities not their relationships to faculty or administrators were the driving forces behind the development of Black Studies.* What inspired the students to learn and teach were the political responsibilities that they shouldered with their communities and leaders that risked their lives for freedom and justice.

Those educated included those who were imprisoned and who wrote from their cells or wrote after their release/escape from those cells. Intellectual foundations of Black Studies remain founded in the writings of former prisoners such as Malcolm X, George Jackson, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur and Safiyah Bukhari. Prison resistance shaped the consciousness of campus radicals and liberation pedagogies. Inhuman conditions which existed beyond the view of the public were exposed in print and oratory as the “dregs of society” expressed themselves in university culture after having spoken to their communities of origins. During the movement era in the mid-1960s, the imprisoned demanded human rights as Black students organized alongside Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans for social justice and an end to US wars in Southeast Asia, and repressive policies administered through national, state and local governments.

In the 1960s militant groups challenged the legitimacy and authority of US institutions. In Los Angeles, Newark, and Detroit, Black youths and other youths vented frustration and rage by confronting and at times attacking (through protests, boycotts, street battles) the most visible symbols of oppressive conditions: white businesses and police. While young Blacks took to the streets in in hundreds of rebellions³² (that included the rage of destruction and the opportunism of looting), colleges increased enrollment of black and Third World students.³³ “Third World” students brought to campuses the ideological, philosophical and ethical rebellions and desires of their communities. They also sought campus cultural centers as an extension of demands for community control for working class people. At San Francisco State University (SFSU), Cornell University, Harvard University, and Jackson State University, student organizing aligned with

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the political demands of their home communities. Unfortunately, repression, at times violent, was the general response. When these protests or rebellions subsided, “community building” inevitably became more structured and managed by the educational institutions which not only hired personnel to manage “community engagement” but also steered students to focus militancy into policy negotiations and platforms for advocacy. The purpose of the university as educational site was not to necessarily empower working-class militancy or autonomous educational zones from the “oppressed.” The purpose of state universities or private universities, respectively government and corporation, was to create a (lower) middle class that could stabilize structure and government through administration.

These managerial duties would over the years obscure the origins of black studies and the sacrifices and trauma that gave birth to a communal form of education and study dedicated to freedom of one’s exploited and repressed communities. That often obscured history is codified not just on May 4, 1970, at Kent State when trust in community, university and state were shattered as the university president requested the Ohio National Guard to suppress student protests against police violence and the war in Vietnam, specifically the US invasion of Cambodia. Four middle class white students lost their lives during protests, shot by the National Guard (white students who had no weapons would be imprisoned for “inciting” those deaths). Two years prior, in February 1968, Orangeburg police shot South Carolina State University student protestors, killing Samuel Hamilton, Jr., Henry Smith, and high school student Delano Middleton, and injuring at least thirty students who were largely shot in their backs, sides or soles of their feet as they fled police and National Guard. All police were exonerated at trial. The trajectory of outrage and injustice that has driven so many to protest and struggle for community-based education and political demands in 2020 is a reflection of our past. Just as protestors, often

young people, were targeted for their protests for a just society today at the time of the Orangeburg massacre, only SNCC field organizer Cleveland Sellers was convicted —of inciting a riot. Sellers, who would later become the Director of the African American Studies Program at the Univ. of South Carolina, maintained that he was attempting to shield and save students by moving them to safety and away from a bonfire they had lit.³⁴

Black/Africana Studies is not merely the study of Black Americans through the traditional disciplines or the cultural productions and acquisitions and contributions of Africa and the diaspora. Black Studies began in 1968 at SFSU. In Ethnic Studies, George Mason Murray, a graduate student in English and the first Minister of Education of the BPP, was hired to teach special admittance students from low-income neighborhoods. He taught the first course on black studies at San Francisco State in September 1968. Professor of sociology Nathan Hale was charged with creating a Black Studies department. When the Board of Trustees fired Murray for controversial political statements concerning antiracism, the Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation front protested. Hale was targeted allegedly for his role in the protests. When SFSU President Robert Smith resigned based on his refusal to fire Murray, S. I. Hiyakawa was named president and called in police to repress students; police did so with considerable violence.

Panther Clashes on Campuses...Panther Clashes on Ideology

Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale were enrolled in Merritt College when they co-founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in 1966 in part as a response to police violence in black urban neighborhoods. The upheaval of the era included the vertical violence of local and

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federal police and the National Guard as well as the violence of community members who engaged in horizontal violence. University campuses were not spared tragedies. Panthers John Huggins and Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter were killed on the UCLA campus allegedly by members of the US organization (and Cointelpro). <https://dailybruin.com/2019/01/17/throwback-thursday-fifty-year-anniversary-of-bunchy-carter-john-huggins-shooting/> (James Baldwin and Kathleen Cleaver attended Bunchy Carter’s funeral.) Contesting a rival group’s control of the Black Cultural Center as indifferent to the needs of poor people, Huggins and Carter were shot. Revolutionary not cultural nationalists, Panthers asserted class struggle as key to liberation pedagogy and Black Studies. Huggins and Carter, along with Geronimo Pratt and Elaine Brown, were party members enrolled at UCLA. These nontraditional students were acquaintances of UCLA’s first Black female instructor in philosophy, Angela Davis, a more “traditional” student and member of the Communist Party USA who faced death threats due to her party affiliation and anti-racism. Panthers provided Davis off-campus security.

Whereas in the south, student activists had to contend with racist vigilantes and police, in California (where prisons and police departments recruited whites from the deep south because they “knew how to handle” Blacks), southern vigilantes merged into the ranks of state and city employees. Still, students demanded educational programs relevant and beneficial to their communities, despite vulnerability to police violence. (The historical role of campus police as enforcers of old mandates to contain black and anti-racist student organizing is understudied.)

Campuses were familiar with SNCC and the fiery rhetoric of Hubert “Rap” Brown and Stokely Carmichael, patterned on Malcolm’s eloquence saw the civil rights movement decline as the movement for Black Studies surged. Before his Organization of African American Unity could develop a Black liberation pedagogy that mobilized Blacks for self-determination and

human rights rather than civil rights and integration, Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965. Malcolm had politicized unemployed urban youth. Martin King's assassination three years later forced a spotlight on a democratic dystopia that students brought to campus. The BPP attracted these students as universities and colleges (cautiously) recruited them. Using Malcolm's preaching, SNCC tactics, Nation of Islam's 10-pt Platform, the BPP, born on Oakland streets in October 1966 in response to police killing a black teen, sought educational and pedagogical channels to militancy among youth who could create concrete programs beneficial to communities. Organizing to meet medical, food, housing, and safety needs, the BPP developed survival programs serving hundreds of thousands within a form of liberation pedagogy. Its motto "Serve the People" was emblematic of philosophy and pedagogy: demonstrate analyses and commitments through action to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Sovereign black communities and socialism would be difficult to attain without an intellectual base on campuses.

While blacks were protesting in the streets, Mexican American agricultural workers were protesting in the fields, students and people of faith marched against the Vietnam war. Liberation pedagogies were developed on many fronts to force administrations to respond to social justice as articulated by Baker, Malcolm, and Freire.

Unlike the fading of SNCC, SCLC, CORE, NAACP—whose leadership largely sought integration—the BPP's demise directly impacted radical campus culture. The civil rights movement sought access to elite institutions; hence student recruitment. The BPP or Black Power sought to transform society. *Ideological* transformation that met the needs of the poor, not inclusivity or intersectionality, was the goal of liberation pedagogy that was confrontational and justice-focused. Liberation pedagogy developed in children's breakfast programs, junior high walk and high school walkouts, and college and university mobilizations.

Focusing on historical figures as superheroes/heroines or super villains obscures the theory that historical Black Studies nurtured as a reflection of mass or collective engagement. Former New York Panther and black studies scholar Kwando Kinshasa notes the dilemmas in documenting historical struggles by centering on heroes: “While historical ‘characters’ do act, their actions occur not in a vacuum, but as a response to perceptions of reality.” Reality as a social phenomenon is created by community within social orders that are contested or obeyed. Theory as a verb³⁵ does not emerge in isolation from community or as an individual attribute. Learners personally involved with the subject matter augment, build upon and stabilizing analyses that seek to build communities of equity not of disposability.

Teachers who became professors who had actually worked in movements for radical change are our best informants for critical thinking. There are many as pundits or public intellectuals who seek to lead but they rarely were on the front lines of struggle in the generations of the past. Celebrity intellectuals can unintentionally distort both the past and the present moment. That is, they can reference their adjacency or scholarship to revolutionary groups such as the Black Panther Party (or American Indian Movement) but not quote from those who actually built and formed those militant communities of struggle. That is, without a pedagogy of the oppressed or the discipline of a nonelite community to structure one’s analyses, generalities might overtake specificities, and hegemonic progressivism but displace truly critical thinking. After weeks of witnessing the weeks of protests, in late June 2020 an open letter of Panther veterans was released to the public. It was not published in the venues dominated by

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more popularized educators who had networks, platforms and staff to amplify their voices. Still, some were able to locate the letter on a Morgan State University media studies professor's platform. There among the signatures, one could read the names of academic professors Kathleen Cleaver (Emory Univ. law), Jamal Joseph (Columbia University) and Kit Kim Holder (Rowan University). In the letter, these educators and members of the Black Panther Party encouraged "the next generation of freedom fighters, cultural workers and activists" to learn from rather than mystify or intellectualize past revolutionary struggles: "[A]n oppressed people can resist domination from one generation to the next without reinventing failures, pitfalls, or the mistakes of the previous generation . . . it is our enemy's job to . . . isolate one generation from the other. . . [and] denigrate the history of militant and radical traditions and burnish the history of integrationist[s] who think we can simply vote our way out of this problem." The Panther veterans write that they "have stepped forward at this neo-fascist moment in history driven by the current crisis of capitalist culture, an ongoing pandemic and the now renewed attention and massive demonstrations brought on by ongoing police murders in our community." Writing of armed combatants in the revolutionary Black underground which followed the murderous Cointelpro war waged by the FBI, CIA, and local police against activists, they assert that the Black Liberation Army (BLA) is part of the "history in our people's struggle [that] has been kept away from you and seemingly [is] unavailable to your generation as you reinvent what was done in the past." Although "circumstances and conditions" change, the educators assert that the "enemies" of black communities seeking to free themselves from poverty and police violence "remain the same." ³⁶

³⁶<https://imixwhatilike.org/2020/06/10/bppopenlettertohiphop/?fbclid=IwAR0GMsTGCU97iBJCdDgG3p9L7Hk9CzCgugIEiLHMxilQ214-Buf3Cer9h0Q>

Recalibrating Black Studies

Passively receptive “students” for whom knowledge is textual and acquisition have little resemblance to students who created Black/Ethnic/Women/LGTQ+ studies decades ago. Those activists as learner-participants encountered and created theoretical content through their collective powers to implement programs to counter violence and injustice. Students, community members, rank-and-file Panthers, imprisoned activists, grassroots organizers—constructed the basic structures and tools for theory that later (re)articulated in scholarship. During Black Studies militancy, theory was active not passive. Its content and goals were directed by the material and emotional needs of communities deprived of security and dignity who continuously rebuilt themselves only to be continuously attacked.

Black Studies emerged from conditions of violent repression as well as the material and spiritual needs of oppressed peoples. Half a century ago, tied to activism, strikes, boycotts, battling police violence and mass-produced theory as pedagogy for organizing, Black Studies sought an intellectual base inside the academy as a strategic site to grapple with the political and cultural realities of communities. Black Studies then did not claim objectivity devoid of political goals. Catalyzed by liberation pedagogy, it rejected the notion of a political or neutral education. Political objectives guided the emergence of Black Studies; just as political objectives to stabilize or expand or rationalize capitalism guides other disciplines, ditto for imperialism. All education is political and cultural when aligned with state or corporate power it becomes mystified by claims of “academic objectivity.” Harold Cruse described Black Studies as “a school of interdisciplinary approaches to the understanding of a living experience.”³⁷ Black lived

³⁷ See Harold Cruse

experiences against racist violence, poverty, and dishonor created Black Studies as a radical innovation. Valued as theory (or what Barbara Christian would describe as “theorizing”), it was crafted by largely anonymous intellectuals whose names would not be recorded on syllabi. Such theory is reflected in the liberation pedagogy promoted by Ella Baker: “You didn’t see me on television, you didn’t see news stories about me. The kind of role that I tried to play was to pick up pieces or put together pieces out of which I hoped organization might come. My theory is, strong people don’t need strong leaders.” Miss Baker praxis is reflected in local and global protests by those demanding sufficient food, shelter, education, natural environments, health care, and art for communities to thrive without police repression, prisons and war.

Chapter 6

Panther Afterlife Plan B: Organize Communal Socialism³⁸

You have to go back and reach out to your neighbors who don't speak to you!
And you have to reach out to your friends . . . get them to understand that they, as well as you and I, cannot be free in America, or anywhere else, where there is capitalism. . . .”—Ella Baker, *Ella Baker Speaks!* (1974)¹⁰⁴

We live in strange times. We have a black president using race-neutral framing for social justice, alongside a Black Lives Matter movement using structural racism framing for participatory democracy. Killer Mike, a Southern rapper best known for his work with the Grammy Award-winning superduo Outkast, has endorsed a sitting U.S. senator and self-described socialist, Bernie Sanders. Some black preachers, apparently, are tripping over themselves to cozy up to Donald Trump or reposition themselves within the arc of Hillary Clinton's historic candidacy. Strange times indeed. —Rev. Andrew J. Wilkes, January 14, 2016¹⁰⁵

The state targeted the panthers because we were socialists, not because we were armed. —Marshall Eddie Conway

³⁸ This chapter first appeared in: Joy James and K. Kim Holder, “Black (Communal) Socialism,” in eds., Gregory Smulewicz-Zucker et al., *An Inheritance for Our Times*, OR Books, 2020.

Introduction

In the US, progressives rarely agree on the meaning of “democratic socialism” (DS). It is a concept for politics used by progressives, workers, academics, anti-racists, feminists, LGBTQT activists and elected officials, increasingly so following Bernie Sanders 2016 primarying Hillary Clinton and the emergence of Covid which revealed the lack of medical care, housing, and food for working class and poor communities. In 2016, using the language of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, presidential candidate Sanders, an Independent Senator from Vermont, asserted that democratic socialism “is not tied to any Marxist belief or the abolition of capitalism” or the belief that “government should own the means of production.” Rather, Sanders argued, democratic socialism is based in the belief that “the middle class and the working families who produce the wealth of America deserve a fair deal.”¹⁰⁶ Here, unsurprisingly in the US, Marxism is disavowed with progressive concern that the benefits of capitalism be directed to the laboring, working and middle classes. Sanders campaigned on the dignity and well-being of the (US) worker not the abolition of capitalism.

Democratic congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), who evolved into a political celebrity for the left, advocated for the Green New Deal built upon FDR’s New Deal. ACOC stated that the “ideology of capital” and the “concentration of capital” require “that we seek and prioritize profit and the accumulation of money above all else, and we seek it at any human and environmental cost. . . . democratic socialism . . . means putting democracy and society first. . . .”¹⁰⁷ Here, capitalism exists as subordinate to democracy and society. (Ocasio-Cortez’s family comes from Puerto Rico, one of the last remaining US colonial possessions.)

A key campaigner for Sanders's 2015–16 presidential bid, and supporter of AOC, activist scholar Cornel West views DS as pursuing a transformative goal:

the fundamental commitment is to the dignity of ordinary people and to make sure they can live lives of decency. . . . It's about the accountability of the powerful vis-a-vis those who have less power at the workplace, women dealing with a household, gays, lesbians, trans, black people, indigenous peoples, immigrants. How do we ensure that they are treated decently and that the powerful don't in any way manipulate, subjugate and exploit them.¹⁰⁸

Subtle differences exist between Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez, and West who acknowledges multiple forms of DS. The most popularized versions of DS, as articulated by left political celebrities, shows that its progressive potential was realized in the past and is entwined with the 1966 origins of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. The radical, if not always revolutionary, anti-racist international party seeking the end of colonial rule across the globe and anti-black repression (internal colonies) at home, the Black Panther Party (BPP) made significant contributions to socialism. Its contributions remain relevant to contemporary democratic socialism pursued in the US. The BPP analyzed responses to communal socialism in black communities in which conflicts or antagonisms were shaped by class and/or social economic status.

Only one party in the revolutionary era (1967–1972, from the Detroit uprising to the acquittal of Angela Davis)¹⁰⁹ became the primary target for unsanctioned lethal police violence due to its socialist, anti-racist politics and international appeal. Given the amount of state violence arrayed to destroy the BPP, its logical to scrutinize its ideological threat to racial capital. This very small, young, bold organization inspired national and international communities to rebel against imperialism, racism, and classism. Organized in 1966 as the Black

Panther Party for Self-Defense, the BPP monitored and deterred urban police aggression, and sought to meet communal material needs—food, clothing, shelter, medicine and education. Criminalizing radical politics and militant blackness, local, state, and federal police decimated an organization whose membership, several hundred max, was mostly under twenty-five years of age. (Members of the organization believed in self-defense/armed struggle, contesting state militarism and COINTELPRO; party internal failings concerning self-defense and violence are well documented.) The BPP wielded both pragmatic and visionary politics.

BPP programs functioned as the realization of a black communal society, one embedded within captivity shaped by anti-black imperial democracy. US segregation, labor exploitation, sexual violence, police forces and prisons required engagement with a key theorists within the Panther Party. Those theorists included women. Posed in militarist garb with a gun for a photo shoot, but often working behind the scenes as a key intellectual, and later a defense attorney for panther political prisoner Geronimo Pratt, former Barnard College (Columbia University) student, Kathleen Cleaver, became a key strategist and formidable theorist in a freedom struggle.

Pragmatic Analyses

The first woman to sit on the BPP Central Committee, Kathleen Cleaver was an internationalist. Her father had worked in the foreign services so she had traveled extensively as a child. When the panther party split following Huey P. Newton's denouncing armed self-defense and paranoia that led to Oakland "death squads" seeking to disappear "rogue" panthers on the east coast, the Cleavers, Kathleen Cleaver and her insurrectionist husband Eldridge Cleaver, author of *Soul on Ice*, fled the US, first to Cuba and then were transported to Algiers. Co-founders of an Algerian internationalist wing, fleeing from Huey, a cadre of Black Panthers

separated from Oakland's hierarchy and criminality that began redefining black power as black capitalism and electoral politics. However the international wing was unstable or destabilized by Newton. Cleaver became a mother while in Algiers. Being a product of the Black petit bourgeoisie, and an analyst of international socialism and underground militarism.¹¹⁰ Cleaver's critiques of anti-revolutionary animus among black Americans remain essential.

In a 1997 PBS interview with Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates, Cleaver describes nuanced ways in which a revolutionary movement rose, faltered, and fell. Class and ideological divisions among black Americans shaped black middle class or black bourgeoisie disparagements of radical or revolutionary struggle, according to Cleaver, as a caste of affluent blacks held "complicated" paternalistic relationships with black poor and working- class communities and ideological animus toward black radicals and revolutionaries. For Cleaver, the romantic search for "black unity" required ignoring class divisions and led to superficial agreements that publicly presented a black united front despite the fact that confrontations with state and capital would disproportionately benefit those best positioned for personal gains: "many of the goals of the Civil Rights Movement were essentially goals for easier assimilation for middle class people . . . working class people and poor people weren't going to get too much out of [the civil rights movement]." The BPP were different from other civil rights organizations that "succumbed to red-baiting": they studied revolutionaries Malcolm X, [Ghanaian Kwame] Nkrumah, and [Martinique psychiatrist Frantz] Fanon to forge a (neo-) Marxist party.¹¹¹

Revolutionaries believed that if "Third World" international movements challenged global capital and empire they could prevail, observed Cleaver, as an "international revolutionary vanguard that would have restructured the economy, restructured the educational system, taken the United States out of the role of world policeman, and made it the American people's

revolutionary United States.” For the majority of the world’s “liberation” movements to be successful would require more than that they “seize power,” asserts Cleaver, given that conventional “independence” left the IMF, World Bank. and global colonizing corporate capital with control of national resources in Africa and in South America.¹¹²

In the 1960s, pragmatic revolutionaries presciently organized against extreme concentrations of wealth and poverty. In the 1990s, Cleaver reminded public television audiences “government-by-corporation would be dominated by those who controlled resources” and “15- and 20-year plans.”¹¹³ Waging a rebellion against the emergence of a governing corporate-state partnership with “billions and billions of dollars to get rid of us,” Cleaver’s Panthers were imperfect visionaries in struggle who did not anticipate material wins in their life time but wished to leave a model: “[W]e had ideals, and we had commitment, and we had this glorious belief that the spirit of the people was greater than man’s technology.”¹¹⁴

Today, politicians and reformers work for white nationalist and anti-racist struggles to be denuded of class analysis. In the absence of a critique of capitalism, the workings of national economies within inter- national predatory capital remain obscured. Cleaver notes:

. . . the colonial power creates a middle class, usually to control the colony for itself. . . . the creation in black American communities of a class of physicians and managers and lawyers and judges [means that] their education takes them away from the communities that created these people. These are not like my parents’ generation, people who are trained in the black schools and whose talents are confined to the black community through a regime of segregation. These are people who are trained in the major institutions and are able to use their talents in the

corporate and business structures of the larger society. Therefore, they're not available to the poorer black communities.³⁹

BPP Survival Programs

During the revolutionary era, the BPP created survival programs to build socialist institutions within local communities; in their intent they channeled the theories of love espoused by Ernesto Che Guevara: “At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality.” Guevara was killed in 1967 by CIA-aided Bolivian military forces. Following the southern civil rights movement of the 1950s to mid-1960s, the BPP grew out of the radical and militant atmosphere of the 1960s. Many, particularly students and young radicals—radicalized by racism or the war in Vietnam—studied Third World liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as well as alternative economic systems. Blacks questioned the economic realities and promises of capitalism under which they were the last hired and first fired often with the lowest wages. Although with poverty, police violence and white vigilantism were the most heinous or offensive of crimes against black humanity. Black solidarity with Puerto Ricans (including Afro-Puerto Ricans), Native Americans (including Afro-Indigenous), as well as Chicanos and Asians, was based on a need to collectively address racism, poverty and economic exploitation. The political climate of the 1960s was conducive to an embrace of socialism viewed as closely aligned to liberalism (similar to what Sanders et al advocated for during the 2016 presidential election). Unlike the Communist Party USA (CPUSA)’s Du Bois Clubs, and other socialist-oriented organizations of the ’40s and ’50s, which were integrated, or

³⁹ Interview Cleaver.

even its all-Black Che-Lumumba Club which Angela Davis joined in 1968, the BPP was rooted in Black communities and Panthers lived and worked in Black communities.

The BPP's socialist stance appeared to be more practical than intellectual. Rather than theorize, it focused on the practical aspects of distributing wealth. The Panther motto "All Power to the People!" was concretized in socialist economics. Through socialist politics the Party advocated its goal for community control—over policing, housing, education, health care, and food distribution. The Party introduced socialism to the community in practical ways. For example, the Lt. of Health of Corona (Queens, NYC), Dianne Jenkins, echoes civil rights leader Ella Baker, breaking down and sharing the knowledge that mutual aid is communalism:

Sisters, you practice socialism. If you needed a cup of sugar, all you had to do was go next door socialism, or the idea of socialism, is no big phenomenon . . . the BPP will continue to develop these programs to serve the people and constantly raise the political level of the masses.⁴⁰

Seattle Breakfast coordinator Elmer Dixon discussed the party's socialist goals: "Serving the basic needs of the people is the primary task of the BPP. Implementing socialism within the community is one way of serving the people."⁴¹ The survival programs were designed to serve and educate the black community. To serve the people was a central theme of the Ten-Point Program and Platform (based on the Nation of Islam's Muslim program). Attempting to be responsive to the needs of the people, staffed by nonelite rank-and-file members, survival programs developed institutions that met the material and emotional needs of disenfranchised people who were also dispossessed by capitalism: "The conditions of living in a nation that can

⁴⁰ *The Black Panther*, November 1, 1969:19.

⁴¹ *The Black Panther*, November 15, 1969.

send a man to the moon. . . . and burn excess' wheat at harvest time while small children suffer year round from malnutrition. . . . is too depressing to be allowed to continue without taking some positive action. . . ."⁴²

Developing programs that would lay the foundation for a new alternative, Richard Dhoruba bin Wahad of the Panther NY 21 trial notes:

it is definitely in the laboring masses best interest to institute through survival programs . . . an alternative to inferior high priced foods . . . where people of the community collectively own, support and run cooperative stores. . . . In order to reach this level we must . . . [work] in a manner that necessarily involves the community because it relates to their survival.⁴³

The BPP understood that survival programs were neither revolutionary nor capable of solving the material conditions of black impoverishment. The programs sought to educate about the relevancy of socialism to daily life. Abstract theory is not always relevant to communities's needs; hence survival programs became a form of theory-in-practice. Key also in survival programs was material needs for security or safety from police aggression, imprisonment, mass incarceration, and police homicide. Often, security is left out in conventional narratives on the BPP.

Community Control

Black Lives Matter and diverse forms of activism have popularized if not shaped concepts of community, racial-profiling, militarized policing within democracy. That advocacy

⁴² *The Black Panther*, Feb 28, 1970:18

⁴³ *The Black Panther*, November 28, 1970, 9.

shapes debates about the relevancy of democratic socialism. The BPP's first police-watch program, in 1967 (following the 1966 name "Black Panther Party *for Self-Defense*") sought to monitor and diminish police misconduct. It did so in ways distinct from but similar to cell phone footage today (although there is no consensus outside of high-profile police murders that there have been substantial gains in control over predatory policing through cell phones). As Panthers became the focus of police harassment and conflict, effective monitoring of police misconduct diminished. By 1968, programs became more broadly political. For example, the Party assisted tenants with landlord and tenant disputes. BPP were asked by residents to provide protection from gangs given their distrust of or alienation from police departments that targeted low-income communities of color. In 1969, in New York's Lower Eastside, the motorcycle-organized crime syndicate the Hells Angels lived in a building as tenants; they terrorized black tenants in an attempt to evict them from the apartment building, making it an all-white residence or all "motorcycle club" building. They might have been able to segregate the building except that a black tenant called the BPP for assistance. NYC Panthers accompanied National Field Marshal Don Cox to investigate the situation. The Panthers spoke to tenants, both white gang members, and black tenants. The Panthers then guarded the building until harassment from the Hells Angels ceased.

Everyday party members participated in community programs, and often lived in a collective manner, as members took turns cooking, cleaning, and providing for household needs. The basic need of all households was for food and health. Hence the most popular program of the BPP was the Free Breakfast Program (FBP), which developed because of the numerous hungry children who attended school without proper meals. Each BPP chapter had at least one FBP that highlighted the importance of nutritional assistance within communities. Feeding children before

they went to school also exposed the economic inequities within racial-capital. Exposing that government and corporations had the resources but not the will to provide the basic human right of a nutritional meal, especially for children, highlighted the needed for an alternative to the capitalist economy: “[It] is not enough to publish 2,000 page reports containing facts and statistics on hunger in Babylon because we cannot feed a report to a hungry child: ‘Instead, the Party has put its theory of serving the people into practice and has instituted free breakfast for children all across this country’.”⁴⁴ The theory was that showing by example that communities had the power to control hunger among their children by organizing and building alternative models, increased the possibilities for creating a more just social order.

New York FBP’s Malika Adams expresses the feeling of working with the program; “I was doing something concrete and I could understand it . . . I could clearly see that if I get up at 4:00 in the morning and feed children . . . I know these children were hungry because I’d have to go get them and I could see they were hungry.”¹¹⁶

The educational part of the breakfast programs was taken from the SNCC Freedom School models. All children were welcomed. According to Philadelphia FBP coordinator Sam Coley: “We feed any and all children who come to us hungry.” Programs included white, Latinx, and black children. In New York, Berkeley, Seattle, Washington, and Chicago multicultural children and staff populated the building.

Many centers lacked formal interaction between staff and children due to the shortage of staff and the volume of meals served. At other centers, staff members conducted informal discussions or classes on black and Latinx history and political education discussions about the need for the FBP. Des Moines Clive DePatten saw that the FBP wove socialist thinking into care

⁴⁴ *The Black Panther*, Feb 28, 1970

and food: “We would say like there are five kids here, and one of these individuals has five pieces of candy. If you give each one of the others a piece of candy that would be socialism. Socialism was simply sharing, an equal distribution of whatever somebody had. This is the way we broke it down.”⁴⁵

The FBP was a tremendous source of support for communities served by and contributing cash or food donations to the FBP. Organizations such as the Puerto Rican Young Lords, Chicano Brown Berets, and Asian I Wor Kuen, white Young Patriots began their own independent FBPs and also jointly ran breakfast programs with other groups. The food was obtained either by cash donations from individuals and/or food and material donations from businesses and organizations. This model of communal socialism was autonomous: until 1971, the BPP did not accept government funding. Governmental agencies attempted to demonize and vilify an organization for attending to human needs neglected by corporate-capitalist government. The BPP’s position was oppositional to capitalism but party rules prohibited intimidation or theft to provide for the FBP. The BPP initiated boycotts of specific stores that would not support FBP.

By 1970, the program had become a model for other survival pro- grams such as free health clinics, food distribution, and clothing pro- grams. The focus on socialism was a constant. At Corona, New York, Carlton Yearwood noted about a free clothing rally:

Solidarity among the masses is becoming an objective reality through bringing the masses together so that they can see the contradiction of this capitalist society and weigh these findings with the ideology of Socialism “Serving the People.” The

⁴⁵ House Committee on IS., 1970:4812

reality of socialism overthrowing capitalism is because through their practice this will be the will of the people.⁴⁶

All programs, including FBP, were models for the community to initiate and run:

People in the communities where our programs are in operation have come forth to cook and donate their money and time as they see that the program is for their benefit. Also they see it as a bright example of them using their resources and energies, without the burden of a bureaucratic program We honor the people who care about our youth.⁴⁷

On a given day at many FBP sites, there were more non-Panthers working than Panthers. This was consistent with the Panthers' view of serving the people. The BPP was not interested in controlling the programs but rather initiating them. The Party did not limit nonparty involvement in their programs to individuals.

During 1970, the federal government provided 51, 380 "free or reduced" breakfasts daily to school children. The average cost per meal was \$.25. A 1972 Department of Agriculture report stated that this amount covered the cost of one piece of white bread and a half a glass of milk.⁴⁸ In contrast, the BPP initiated programs fed well over 3,200 children daily: thirty-two branches serving one hundred children each. The Black Panther Party's free breakfast program and similar endeavors were perhaps the most comprehensive free food program within a communal socialist context of its time. Constant opposition to communal socialism included San Diego FBI agents lobbying Catholic hierarchy to transfer a priest hosting a FBP in his New Mexico church.¹¹⁷

⁴⁶ *The Black Panther*, November 1, 1969, 19.

⁴⁷ *The Black Panther*, March 28, 1970, 8.

⁴⁸ Nutrition and Human Needs. 1972, Part 1

The BPP liberation schools were modeled after SNCC Freedom Schools. Attached to Free Breakfast Programs, they were accused of being sites for ideological indoctrination of youths. Despite the opposition, community and communal care continued. Children and families require not only food or material sustenance, but also critical education to evaluate the politics and ethics and economics shaping their lives. Workers' families with small children, the un(der)employed, and elders desperately needed quality care. In 1970, the BPP began to establish day care centers, originally organized to care for infants of Panther members (in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Algiers). Centers began to expand to include community people. One mother of five, whose children made satisfactory grades in school, was impressed by the instruction at the liberation school coupled with the FBP. When she noted her children choosing and writing reports on articles and giving oral reports on global news, she observed that: "Their work shows that they can relate to what is happening to them and other poor people in the world." Students encouraged to work in community devoted more time to learning to read and write so that they could offer effective support and assistance to their communities.⁴⁹

Medical Programs

There is much discussion and organizing today about single payer health care. It is interesting to note for perspective that the BPP sought free and universal health care for all communities. One successful grassroots program that also expanded and developed was the free medical clinics. The BPP initiated a medical and health-care program, in the early part of 1969. Various chapters of the party began working with health professionals and medical students conducting medical checkups in the local communities.

⁴⁹ Foner, 1970:172.

Conditions and problems such as high blood pressure, sickle cell anemia, lead poisoning, and drug abuse were some of the major concerns of the initial medical programs. Blood and blood-pressure testing, nutritional counseling, general checkups, and drug counseling were some of the services provided by the first Black Panther medical teams. Most of the Panthers who worked in these medical teams were trained by medical volunteers who were either medical students or professional nurses and physicians. At first BPP members concentrated on acquiring first aid skills. Branches conducted first aid classes as medical cadres met the medical needs of members and medical cadres were responsible for Panther medical and dental appointments, teaching basic first aid so that they could help the people in emergencies. Street corner tables provided free TB tests and information on sickle cell anemia. Black medical students and doctors assisted in Harlem's free clinic. Weekly meetings between the medical cadres of the Bronx, Brooklyn, Harlem, Jamaica, and Corona branches met. Harlem branch never did establish a free health clinic; the Panthers worked with progressive white and Puerto Rican medical corps in a Lower Eastside clinic in Manhattan. In Brooklyn, the New York 21 Community Health Clinic emerged. Aside from physical examinations, various tests and basic medical treatment, the clinic focused on health education and preventive medicine.⁵⁰

In March the Rockford, Illinois Branch opened a clinic. In Chicago, the Surgeon Jake Winter's Peoples Medical Care Center served over two thousand people within the first two months of its existence. The center was staffed by gynecologist, obstetricians, dentists, pediatricians, optometrists, general practitioners, and registered nurses, lab technicians, and public advocates. The BPP held weekly informational meetings for the public and organized community volunteers, and medical students to canvass the community, testing for lead

⁵⁰ *The Black Panther*, February 28, 1969, 17.

poisoning sickle cell anemia, and diabetes.⁵¹ Although staffed by qualified medical staff and had adequate equipment, the city health authorities repeatedly attempted to close the clinic. Working with progressive students and medical professionals the Party was able to utilize their advanced skills on a grassroots community level. The Party facilitated the process of medical skills and services coming into the black and other poor communities. The health clinic also involved community people as participants in the maintenance of the program.

By encouraging the community to participate in medical cadres, the Party was not only providing medical care to the community but was also training community people in public health. Opened in May 1970, the clinic was housed in a trailer on land seized by the Boston Black United Front in an attempt to stop the city from building a highway through the African American community. In addition to holding public health classes, the Boston center also trained lab technicians, nursing assistants, and medical secretaries. Boston Peoples Health Centers was the shooting death of an African American patient by police at Boston General Hospital. The BPP used this incident to mobilize support for community control of medical care. At the opening ceremony, the mother of the slain man, Ms. Julia Mack, donated a portrait of her son to the clinic. At the clinic's first anniversary, over one hundred community people attended a dinner honoring Ms. Mack's support.⁵²

The Boston Peoples Health Center successfully provided experienced medical care to communities while involving the community in decision-making. During 1971 the BPP launched a national campaign to raise the public consciousness of sickle cell anemia. In addition to their

⁵¹ *The Black Panther*, January 29, 1970; April 3, 1971, 3.

⁵² *The Black Panther*, June 12, 1971, 15.

1970 national testing campaign, the BPP was a leading participant in the establishment of a research foundation dedicated to address sickle cell anemia.

Conclusion

Journalist, and former BPP political prisoner, Marshall Eddie Conway asserts that it was the party's rejection of capitalism that made it a target of police repression. However, a combination of factors—including its own missteps and violence—led to its demonization and rejection: the right to self-defense, anti-racist analyses, internationalist frameworks, and demands for community and police control.

Based on their belief that the liberation of Blacks and all oppressed communities required freedom from capitalism, the BPP was anti-capitalist. While racism and (hetero)patriarchy are major forms of oppression, they cannot be eradicated until the capitalist system begins to disintegrate. During the revolutionary era, it was assumed by progressives that socialism was something that most sectors of the black community could relate to based on the general depressed economic status and low-wealth of Blacks in the US. However, the petit bourgeoisie and blacks who found careers in government, military, and corporate institutions did not share the same class status or deprivation of the unemployed and working poor, nor did they share the same vulnerability to police violence.

By demonstrating socialism as an ideology through their material support via breakfast, housing, and medical programs, panthers believed that they could harness a perceived historical tendency and mandate among black communities: address individual financial oppression through collective means. After the violence of Cointelpro which targeted the Panthers for elimination or “neutralization” through intimidation, false imprisonment, and assassinations, half

a century passed. Post-revolutionary era saw or sees rampant individualism, consumerism, digitized addictive entertainment, movement millionaires, celebrities as influencers and political leaders, “black faces in high places” serving the state and capital; Covid, rising unemployment and diminishing affordable housing, insufficient quality health care and education—all key factors in the rise of social alienation and mental and emotional distress. Social and personal ailments, along with the destabilization of democratic norms (e.g., the January 6, 2021 siege of the US capitol) have built considerable roadblocks against mass mobilizing for a transformative vision of a new society without predatory capitalism or capitalism at all. The rise of academics and mainstream journalists as the authorities on (radical) politics, has meant revisionism from sectors that rarely fought in the streets or within working/laboring communities, but largely perched within the academy, nonprofit think tanks, or publishing houses to view mass struggle and then disseminate and distribute interpretations that become dominant ideological frameworks that resist substantive change from below.

With the endless campaign cycles of electoral politics that promise redress that is not sufficiently delivered, it is unlikely that society will achieve robust analyses of socialism. This is not just because of big money flooding the electoral process due to the 2010 Citizens United decision, or voter suppression, gerrymandering, or felon disenfranchisement. All of these are critical issues that have to be dealt with—along with the electoral college and “insider trading” within the democratic and republican parties that skew power toward billionaires and away from grassroots activists. Those based in community organizing know it is possible to discuss socialism on a grassroots level where working class people can view their lives in theory because they are the architects of not only political movements but also the political theories that attend

those mobilizations. These communities and the more affluent radicals who work with them have little to no investment in corporate structures.

The strictures of electoral politics do not allow robust debates on socialism, so it is difficult to have incisive debates on other vital issues fueled by violence: white supremacy, heteropatriarchy and trans/homophobia; the destruction of other animal species and the natural environment. If the need to win a campaign dictates a drag toward centrist politics then we have less space to develop analyses that counter the ideological mythmaking of capitalism as ordained by deity, and socialism as heathenism and essentially “un-American.” (There needs to be more discussion and debate concerning communism for our communities.)

Grassroots and international environmental activist, and anti-racist intellectuals offer insights. Kali Akuno, a member of Black Socialists of America (BSA), offers an assessment of black socialism’s role in overcoming repression and class division. His critique, built upon the legacy of community-based radical workers, highlights future possibilities:

Building communities and societies that are healthy is stymied by sufficient organization and class consciousness within the working class and the managerial elitism of the (petit) bourgeois and employees of state, and capital, and the lures of underground economies that are detrimental to community stability. Despite organizing across the globe for generations, the working class remains a divided subject, fractured by language, nationality, culture, religion, race, sex, and gender. The proletariat is also under constant assault by the (petit) bourgeoisie, and reactionary state institutions and social forces. Despite fragmentation and never-ending assaults, workers and laborers are growing in size and perhaps strength

under ever-intensifying processes of dispossession and enculturation by the capitalist-imperialist system.

The refrain of half a century past still echoes: All power to the people.” As communities seek life and healing, while risking comfort and security, they buy us time and space to imagine and materialize a better world.

II

Communal Communiques (Interviews/Podcasts as Pedagogy)

Chapter 7⁵³

Black Lives Between Grief and Action

George Yancy (GY): There are times when I’ve asked myself if philosophy can console in times of pain and suffering. Among my friends and colleagues of all races, the killings of Michael Brown, Akai Gurley, Tamir Rice and Eric Garner and so many others like them have caused emotional pain —feelings of being sick and hurt, feelings of depression, angst, hopelessness. It’s crazy.

Joy James (JJ): That’s grief. And yes, it is crazy. Welcome to black life under white supremacy.

Grief as a painful historical trajectory is one thing; to grieve intensely in the misery of the present moment is another. Ferguson, Staten Island, Brooklyn and Cleveland (we can add Detroit for 7-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones, and Bastrop, Texas for Yvette Smith) — these disparate sites have forced diverse people around the country and internationally to huddle closer together as we scrutinize laws and policies that reward police violence with immunity.

Being denigrated and victimized by your designated protectors is shocking to the core, because their job is to protect and serve. We’re stunned because our trust in law is violated; police departments tolerate hyper-aggressive officers by underreporting and underdisciplining them. These officers are not “going rogue” in wealthy, white communities because those communities have the economic and political resources to discipline them.

⁵³ This interview with George Yancy, “Black Lives: Between Grief and Action,” first appeared in *The Opinionator*, *NYT*, December 23, 2014; unpublished segments of the interview appear in this chapter.
<https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/author/joy-james/>

Police are our employees whom we have to obey ostensibly for our own safety and that of the general good; but also, because they will hurt us often, with impunity, if we don't — and sometimes even when we do — obey.

Of course, police crime and the duplicity of law are not new to America. During the convict prison lease system and Jim Crow, a black person could easily be arrested for not stepping off the sidewalk to let a white person pass. In Ferguson, it appears that not stepping on the sidewalk to let a white person pass — one whose salary was paid in part by blacks — sparked the encounter that ended Michael Brown's life.

Nonetheless, despite how disturbing these structural and episodic assaults are, they also work as catalysts for substantive change. Police incompetence, malfeasance and murder inspire outrage.

GY: What are your thoughts on the killings of the New York City police officers Wenjian Liu and Raphael Ramos? Does it complicate these issues?

JJ: The murders of these officers highlight the dangers that both police and public face. When Ismaaiyl Brinsley first shot his former female partner in a domestic violence dispute in Baltimore then traveled to Brooklyn to randomly kill police officers, he invoked the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner as motivation. This invocation has been denounced by the Brown and Garner families, civil rights activists, the president and attorney general, and city leaders. What any mentally ill or criminal person does is not representative of a movement for human rights.

GY: What are the implications of this sort of suffering amid police violence?

JJ: In a democracy, the implications for an ill-informed citizenry are grim. The recent tragedies remind us that this violence is sadly familiar to those who have a complex memory. We've grappled with racial animus and hatred from overseers, Klansmen and -women, police, segregationists, integrationists and various sectors of society from academia to athletics.

The implications of public servants and deputized vigilantes violating black life with impunity are profound, especially for young black people. We need to publicly debate whether it is just, moral, and appropriate, or even safe and sane, to believe in modern policing, given the fallibility, corruption and danger present in the institution. Police agencies have a history of racial bias and violence that has been investigated and condemned by governments as well as civil and human rights organizations. Citizens are supposed to flee or fight criminals, not the police. But reality teaches you that in black life you need to be ever vigilant for both.

GY: What do we do with despair at the moment regarding these killings? What do we do to avoid feelings of implosion?

JJ: We mix sorrow with something else. We've historically done that as a people. Ida B. Wells as an anti-lynching activist, who was marginalized by respectable blacks, always said she would sell her life "dearly" to a lyncher. She didn't have to (apparently, she died from exhaustion and lack of support for her radical opposition to racism). Ida B. Wells loved, deeply and immensely; traumatized and transformed by the Memphis lynching of Thomas Moss, the father of her goddaughter, she became an activist. Moss was "targeted" for economic competition with whites; and lynched in 1892 with other black men following the exchange of gunfire with white, unidentified policemen who approached the black grocer's store at night, through a dark alley,

with their guns drawn. Realizing the men injured were police, Moss and his associates went to the police to explain the mistake. Their murders sparked an anti-lynching movement.

Decades later, Mamie Till Mobley defied law and held an open casket for her mutilated 14-year-old son, Emmett, who broke “law” and custom by allegedly whistling at a white woman. He was subsequently tortured and murdered; his white killers acquitted. These women activists loved life, family and community, and inspired the courageous reinvention of America through social and political movements.

People sometimes miss that outrage and resistance are guided by love, and the desire to bring honor to life brutally taken. We continue to remember atrocities through demonstrations and protests in humor, sports, black women who though traumatized by domestic violence still organize forums against gun violence.

GY: Why has racism persisted so long within the North American context?

JJ: As the late great civil rights leader, historian Vincent Harding noted, this crisis is structural and endemic. There is anti-black prejudicial bias not only in policing but also in education, employment, health and housing. “The law” has been an impediment to black lives’ mattering since the “three-fifths clause” to the U.S. Constitution legalized bodily theft to build a democracy favoring white property holders.

The 13th Amendment legalized slavery to prisons, establishing the foundation for the convict prison lease system, where blacks died faster in freedom than they had on plantations because they were worked to death to benefit capital and state economies. Jim Crow, foster care disproportionality, racially fashioned policing and incarceration and — as Marvin Gaye notes in

“Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)” — “trigger-happy policing” are all part of the fabric of American life.

Racism is also economically and existentially profitable. Proximity to “whiteness” helps, as studies have shown, in obtaining jobs, housing, promotions; just as gender and sexism lead to differential pay for women, race and racism create differentials in the acquisition of resources.

Racism is also sexualized. It is so embedded with (sexual) slander, and micro and macro aggressions against blacks (males and females), that it is normative as entertainment. This is part of the American “libidinal” economy; for some, black suffering is enjoyable as spectacle.

GY: How does your understanding of that persistence relate to the current situation?

JJ: If Michael Brown had survived his police encounter, he might have had to endure a Rodney King-type beating, physical and emotional trauma; trial; incarceration; disenfranchisement through being a felon.

Here is the “crazy” of our social order. Former Chicago Police Commissioner Jon Burge was released in October after running a torture ring that imprisoned over 100 black men. For over 20 years, Burge, who is white, led an anti-black torture ring to obtain false confessions. Torture included cattle prods to their genitals, and near suffocation through plastic bags over their heads (some of the tactics evoke the report on the C.I.A.’s interrogation techniques). Due to the statute of limitations, Burge was convicted of perjury in 2010 and sentenced to four and a half years in prison. The officer-torturers now reportedly collect millions in pensions; and Chicago has settled more in compensation to their victims. The nation compensates racial predators; without accountability, restorative justice remains elusive.

Restorative justice is complex. It is also unnecessarily complicated by police structures that present and posture as omnipotent. In the absence of a clear line between criminal and police behavior, fear is the enforcer. Ironically, black Americans are regularly taxed to pay salaries, pensions, and benefits to police forces that disproportionately target black life through penalties and fines, brutality and disrespect. The Senate Intelligence Committee's report on C.I.A. interrogation documents that the C.I.A. lied about its use of torture to the public and government, and that its actions did not make the United States safer, only more barbaric. Why would the local police force expect a different outcome as it treats black communities as "enemies" and deploys excessive force without accountability?

⁵⁴**GY:** How does your approach to the dynamics of race bear upon the fact that there was no indictment of Officer Darren Wilson over the killing of unarmed Michael Brown?

JJ: Officer Wilson's testimony before the grand jury is striking in its depiction of only one victim: himself. That the 18-year-old, who was "large" was demonic and like Hulk Hogan like reminds me of the novelist Octavia Butler's recollection of a panel of science fiction writers among whom she was the only black woman; when asked why there were no black protagonists in the books of the other novelists, one author replied that because the books already had aliens (to contrast to humans) blacks were not needed.

Wilson lives in a sci-fi world with the rest of us. He is representative, not an isolate. He constitutes a norm or algorithm. That narrative was the same one used when the infamous 1992 of Rodney King occurred in Los Angeles, when Wilson was a toddler. Ferguson police met the

⁵⁴ From this query until the next, the content was submitted to but not published in the *NYT*.

nonhuman and they dispatched him; the details are important; the story line remains true to form. It doesn't matter if you prefer Chris Roc's version of how to talk to the police or David Chappelle's much more sophisticated and complex rendition through the voice of his privileged white male drug-using companion "Chip": white police forces have never had a historical or contemporary role of protecting or serving black communities; and since the convict prison lease system seem to have figured out ways to fund themselves through disproportionate taxing, profiling, arrest and detention and killing of blacks. The "dynamics of race" are set in part by the "dynamics of killing."

We see racially-fashioned violence played out in "reel time" on screen. That is our reality as viewers. We see, experience, feel, remember different things. The anti-racists see an outrage and sorrow; the racists a vindication of excessive use of force. And we all fall somewhere on the distancing line between those two poles.

We are all warped. Unless you are actually in Ferguson at the time of the killing and the rebellion that follows you are not in the actual time of sorrow. Grieving people have lost their minds or had them partially stolen by those who create or endorse their grief. Proxy grief exists for every survivor who did not magnetize the bullets that struck Michael Brown in Ferguson or Akai Gurley in NYC's public housing Pink House or is shot and killed in a stairwell; or on Staten Island when we don't have cable TV in our homes and I am not that savvy with the internet so I replay news clips after the event has taken place. This in fact may be the most honest form of viewer witnessing in that time as conventionally (mis)understood does not flow in a linear and evolutionary fashion. So, it does not matter if the event is history or the projected future, whenever I pay attention to it, it appears in the immediate now, with all of the urgency, trauma and rage that accompany it.

As the Black Women's Blueprint and Crunk Feminism aptly point out, resistance is a criminal offense. President Obama [would] use only once the trope and reality statement: "If I had a son..." in relation to the slaying of Trayvon Martin; that line would not be repeated for Graham Marley. There is little likelihood that Obama's daughters would live lives similar to Marissa Alexander or . . . Resheema Brightly or Breyonna Taylor.

So, race is about class and sex and class and sex are about race. That 90% of blacks die at the hands of other blacks; or that 80% of whites die at the hands of other whites or that 90% of blacks die at the hands of other blacks (only the later statistic seems to be used as reflex armor by conservatives) misses the picture that everyone —through income, sales, home owners' taxes— is tithing to the killing of black people. We are the employers of the employees with a license to kill. We, including blacks, pay the salaries and the pensions and benefits portfolios of white police — documented as civil rights violators by human rights organizations and the FBI —as using excessive violence and force disproportionately against black life.

Do some people need to be policed. Absolutely, or at least until they can self-regulate sufficiently without monitoring and guidance. Some of them are found on police forces throughout the nation. Should an entire race be policed because of its color? For centuries that has been the norm. So, if we cannot stop the violence, then we should ask for a rebate: for the school-to-prison pipeline; the high school dropout factories; the mandate to inferior education, housing, health care, employment and funding of the police apparatus through fees that made parts of black Ferguson a debtor nation to the violence of fearful or rabid or mechanized police whose emotions and paychecks are embedded in economies shaped by racist bias and economic exploitation and humiliation.

Did Michael Brown need to be a race saint in order to be a legitimate “victim”? Did Trayvon Martin? A NPR reporter asked a Ferguson activist if Ferguson rebellions would spark the new civil rights movement, with a suppressed smirk (if one can smirk on public radio), adding that President Obama had contradicted Congressman John Lewis given the non-pacifist aspects of the rebellion.

I can’t speak for the president or the congressman. But I can observe time and context fluctuating within fields of racial dynamics. Lewis lived real time against racist violence; and still managed to gain a seat in national government despite his nonviolent resistance. Yet having lived "black time, " like serving black time in prison or public (or even private elite) schools, is to serve hard time. And the most difficult time is meted out to rebellions. Akai Gurley's death-by-cop was likely accidental although not surprising given the predisposition for police fear and excessive force in poor, black and brown communities facing trauma and violence independently of that which will be inflicted upon them by police, disproportionality in child removal and dysfunctional schools. Real time is to be beaten or tortured or humiliated to have one's life at

Like the character Dana self-reflects in Octavia Butlers novel *Kindred*, the child weeping at the violent disciplining of a slave through a brutal whipping was likely better emotionally equipped than she, the late 20th c. Bay Area bourgeoisie black transported through time to the early 19th c. to protect kin.

Our dilemma is if the youth are better equipped to grieve and rage at anti-black violence and the complicity of structures in perpetuating it under the "rule of law," then the children are leading the elders.

Half a century ago, during the rebellion of SNCC activists such as John Lewis, the United States did not have a black president, a black attorney general, a black NSA chair—key

branches/cabinet positions dealing with domestic and international policing. Interestingly, these positions held by elite blacks have not made a discernible dent in abating racist violence expressed through rogue police and mass incarceration and bias in capital punishment. as one theorist has observed that civil society is reserved for those bodies that “do not magnetize bullets.” Then the citizen (of whatever ethnicity) without that magnetic appeal does not exist in real time with the noir in the ghetto or in Gaza.

We've seen Fergusons before. The only way we will ever be able to stop seeing them again is to change the dynamics of race. The only way to change the dynamics of race is to change the dynamics of violence. The only way to alter the dynamics of violence is to recognize and come to terms with in something other than reel time the agency of activists who are dedicating their lives to abolishing, not managing or spinning, trauma in its myriad forms expressed in violence from the police-military, intimate-domestic, social-political and educational violations.

GY: So, where do to we go from here?

JJ: Congressman John Lewis, a former S.N.C.C. activist, has said that Ferguson may have sparked another civil rights movement. During the civil rights rebellion, Ella Baker emphasized that the movement was about “more than a hamburger” — more than the right to consumer society. Today, as all lives experience so much violence and sorrow, we can see how certain historical leadership, that of Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Audre Lorde, prepared us for the present moment. If the current tragedies have sparked movement, then it is not only

about the martyrs, it is about the mothers and families and communities that organize in the face of all forms of illegitimate violence, including that by police who are rarely brought to justice.

We've seen "Fergusons" and police violence before. We'll see them again until there is substantive change. Activists are challenging the dynamics of violence and intimidation: racial-denigration and contempt; rape and domestic violence; schools as dropout factories or pipelines to prison; banning of speech for the (politically) imprisoned; incompetent medical care on both sides of razor wire.

The good news is that the young are resilient. Student activists educate black women's leadership in Ferguson addressing racism, sexism and homophobia in order to forge dynamic, political responses to violence. They have also pointed out how the underreporting of activist black female leadership, and the scant attention to police sexual and physical assaults against black women and girls, limit our views of political agency and women's contributions towards healing, accountability, and building protected communities.

Movements also appear on listservs where mothers cite Canadian politicians who call for "zero death" in the wake of police shootings of unarmed people. We can raise the bar and demand "zero trauma" — that is, peaceful, not terrorized, communities as the bedrock for a functional society, and the public standard for police set by their ability to diminish rather than create trauma. Black lives matter only if we make them matter.

Chapter 8

Reaching Beyond “Black Faces in High Places”⁵⁵

George Yancy (GY): Black suffering is pervasive; its arc long. As a scholar-activist who takes seriously such themes as radical politics and abolitionism, when will Black suffering “bend”? Or is it the case that Blackness is always already a site of “permanent” suffering or oppression? To put this metaphorically, are we still in the holds of slave ships? When I ask this question, COVID-19, and Black vulnerability to it, feels almost normative vis-à-vis the death of Black people.

Joy James (JJ): It is always good to be in dialogue with you, George. Your first question relates to an existential theme that we discussed years ago about “misery” following the publicly displayed police executions of Eric Garner in Staten Island and Michael Brown in Ferguson. I do not think that Blackness as a permanent site of suffering/oppression is the defining marker of who we are. I would say that white supremacy and its violent iterations are clearly historically documented. Think here of enslavement, the convict prison lease system, black codes, Jim Crow, voter disenfranchisement, redlining, and the spectacular war and violence as reflected in Tulsa, Oklahoma’s, Black Wall Street 1921 bombing, and burning and mass murders of Black residents, in which white police looted and lynched, re-enacted decades later by Philadelphia police in the 1985 bombing of the MOVE house and city employees deciding to burn down an entire Black neighborhood. White supremacist culture is a permanent site of predatory

⁵⁵ This article/interview first appeared in *Truthout*, February 1 2021

consumption, extraction and violation. Its aggressions seek to distract from the dystopia depicted in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (also marked by Eliot's reported affinity to antisemitism).

Oppression and devastation preceded and engineered the creation of the "Black"; we are just in a long dirge in which resistance and rebellion follows repression and adds shouts, prayers, and expletives. How do we resist? We do so in innumerable ways through arts and activism, betrayal and code switching as "shape shifting" (as noted by a brilliant webinar, "[Octavia Butler: Slow Read-A-Long](#)" led by young Black feminist intellectuals/artists).

We are in the "hold": slave ships, dungeons, prisons, jails, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) family centers (in Texas, [Haitian families form 40 percent of the population](#)) and "womb collector" hysterectomies that seem to "favor" Black women/mothers. Yet the rebellion of whistle blowing was done by a sister, [Dawn Wooten](#), who reported both medical violations and medical neglect concerning COVID-19. From the hold of a slave ship to solitary confinement in prison or psych wards, our people fight for life in the presence of death by caring for ourselves and others.

GY: When I think about the theme of Black leadership and hope, I think that there were many who may have conceptualized Barack Obama's presidency as the panacea for anti-Black racism, that he might help the arc of the moral universe to bend. I think that such an expectation was unreasonable for many reasons, one being that he was commander-in-chief, head of the American empire. My question has to do with radical political change and its possible realization from within the space of state power. I'm thinking here of Kamala Harris but trying to do so beyond her symbolic significance as the first Black and South Asian American woman to hold such political power. What can she do that might be identified as politically radical? After all, as you have argued elsewhere, hegemonic structures exist alongside a diversity of Black faces. As

with Obama, her allegiance is to the American empire first. What would it take for “insiders” to bring about radical change, counter-hegemonic change or is the instigation for genuine radical change only possible as “outsiders”?

JJ: We both work for private corporations defined as nonprofit educational institutions. We have no romantic illusions about the nature of our jobs. We were hired to affirm and stabilize the elite university/college. We can demand accountability for white supremacist/(hetero)sexist eruptions and ask for security (which can be denied or curtailed), but we do not pretend that these institutions exist to bring justice to the world or function in the interests of the oppressed (particularly if such institutions are gentrifying neighborhoods and taking donor money from right-wing oil/gas mogul Charles Koch). If you don’t have illusions about your day job and its functions to stabilize (while admonishing excessive violence from) racial capitalism, why would you have illusions about the government/state investment in racial capital?

No one forced Barack Obama to be the first Black *imperial* president for a nation whose democracy was built on racial conquest and rape. He wanted the gig. Black people, working class or laboring poor or dispossessed of paid labor, did not draw up petitions to draft Obama to primary Hillary Clinton (whose policies were more neoliberal progressive than Obama’s in the 2007/2008 primary). White wealthy donors seemed to be his early backers along with a slice of the Black elite that had not yet peeled off from the Clintons. Anti-Black racism was furthered by Clinton policies and never seriously challenged by Obama policies. If the big ask now is to “see Black faces in high places,” then enjoy the Biden-Harris administration. It is definitely better to not be taxed to pay for violent white nationalists and the salaries and pardons of white-collar and war criminals. However, no longer being taxed to pay for predatory rogues, rot, and

incompetence is not the definition of transformative justice. Empires thrive on violence and racial capitalism.

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Harris campaigned on “Joe.” Not just for the president-elect’s policies (which are not based in transformative justice) but for his persona as the caring white leader who can bargain with those who empowered white nationalism and the devastation of the health and well-being of the laboring poor and working class. Biden’s revolving door of the Obama administration attempts to re-center D.C. into a romanticized past. There should be more money for jobs and social welfare programs — as much money as corporations and bureaucrats deem “prudent” from those exploited and abandoned by the corporate state and its racial/sexual/religious anima. With the (neo)liberals back, expect less autonomy for independent thinking as everybody will be charged to “get on board” with the elite-driven programs that never adequately addressed white supremacy, poverty, and violence against women, children, LGBTQ and are not designed by those most negatively impacted by racial/colonial capitalism.

Black masses are consistently told by the Black elite pundits, academics, nonprofit leaders or movement specialists to stay in line and follow. But follow whom? What is the possibility that Obama and Harris have been sold to Black people by corporate/state elites as responsive to the needs of the Black mass and the impoverished and denigrated? Biden’s only strong competitor was Bernie Sanders who campaigned on Medicare for All — until Black civil rights icons merged in the political machine with the Obama/Clinton DNC to warn folks not to go “too left” and to stop asking for “free stuff.” How much misery from 20 million COVID-19

cases and over 400,000 deaths in the U.S. could have been mitigated or prevented if universal health care existed? Where Black politicians and advocacy Democrats share the same donor base and think tanks, and propaganda networks with the Democratic National Committee (DNC), it is illogical to expect transformative justice. There are possibilities with the incoming representatives such as Cori Bush and Jamaal Bowman, and the sort of rogue Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), if their roles as productive disruptors and creators for the (Black) masses are not cannibalized by the party machine.

GY: Given the previous question, how do we engage in “free discourse,” that is, a discourse that challenges how liberals have defined freedom and liberty? What does a political vision of freedom look like outside of logics that maintain the status quo, that imprison not just our discourse but our political imaginative capacities?

JJ: Free discourse is the ability to be radical in service to the disenfranchised and imprisoned without being attacked. Obama instituted the most repressive laws against whistleblowers/investigative journalists. To stop the white (Black?)-washing of the Obama legacy and acquiescence to heirs apparent, radicals would have to negotiate the terms of struggle, and sacrifice and insults for attempting to illuminate contradictions, hegemonic betrayals, and ideology masking performative politics within celebrity activism/education and accumulation from the monetization of Black suffering. There is razor-like irony at play in performative politics inching towards the Achilles’ heels of radicals. Black radicals are lectured to stop being so “lefty” by Joe and Barack (and others who castigate as “purity politics” analyses which decades ago would have been described as principled rather than opportunistic). Despite the millions protesting against the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, police and

white supremacist killings and dishonoring of our people ([Anjanette Young in Chicago](#)) or deaths due to medical neglect such as MD Susan Moore for whose death no one will be accountable; her last testimony to us warned: “[Being Black up in here, this is what happens.](#)”

There is razor-like irony at play in performative politics inching towards the Achilles’ heels of radicals. Black radicals are lectured to stop being so “lefty” by Joe and Barack. Historically, anti-Black violence was used to enslave and accumulate wealth for non-Blacks, including Indigenous tribes granted “civilized nations” status if they trafficked/enslaved Black people. Some doubt New Mexico Congresswoman Debra Haaland, named the first Indigenous secretary of the interior by Biden, will positively respond to the [Choctaw-Chickasaw Freedmen/Black Indian petition](#) to seek tribal recognition and monetary/land support. Anti-Black violence was also embedded in Biden’s choice for new Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack; the former Ag guy in the Obama administration who expedited Black farmers’ loss of their lands and livelihoods due to denial of civil rights protections. Violence from 18th century slave ships to 21st century Obama administrators enabled accumulation through Black loss. One can monetize Black suffering and raise revenue through private prisons, repressive charter schools, [Wells Fargo fraud](#) targeting Black homeowners. Those opposed to anti-Black violence and dispossession can also monetize Black suffering by refashioning the narratives, stories, and trauma into marketable writing and lecturing, visuals in fashion wear, public relations, voter registration/mobilization, nonprofit sector jobs, punditry on news shows/podcasts. Black misery is profitable for racists and anti-racists.

Making money is a precondition of surviving under capitalism (rent, food, competent health care, clothing, education, etc.). Yet, Black street activists or imprisoned activists — whose heads are cracked open by violent cops/guards and white supremacists — take the greatest risks

for transformative justice and reap the smallest percentage of monetary gains from advocacy democracy. Explaining Black people or anti-Black terror to non-Blacks, reassuring Blacks that there is a way to evolve out of predatory anti-Blackness without revolutionary struggle is lucrative. Those funds garnered from the narratives whose radical love leads to radical risk rarely go back into Black institutions, community centers, houses of worship, food banks, freedom schools and most importantly, *transformative political education*, what Fred Hampton defined as the only real weapon against oppression.

GY: The Black Lives Matter movement is crucial as a dynamic process of bringing attention to various forms of anti-Blackness. Meanwhile, Indigenous struggles are often erased even in the middle of racial justice movements. Speak to the theme of solidarity here. I'm thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr., where he says that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." It seems to me that marginalized people can't claim liberation until Native Americans are also liberated. In fact, Native American suffering, or so I would argue, is often elided.

JJ: There were debates before an abolitionist platform changed its motto statement from a quote by a Black academic to a declaration for sovereign rights by an Indigenous Dakota leader seeking to secure the roads into the reservation despite a Trump-leaning governor. The attempts of a collective of radical Black women abolitionists to highlight Article 16 of the Ft. Laramie Treaty as "abolitionism" was permitted as a *momentary* intervention. Radical Black women and allies could only temporarily refocus the abolitionist motto. We later circulated a statement asserting that Indigenous nations/elders — not Black, white, or people of color (POC) academics—determine the status of those who claim to belong to Indigenous communities (and build careers as representatives of said communities). Still later, we brought attention to the

Choctaw-Chickasaw Freedmen's [petition challenging anti-Black racism](#) to New Mexico Congresswoman Deb Haaland, the first Indigenous nominee for secretary of the interior.

In the U.S., we grapple with white supremacy, “POC” ethnic chauvinism toward Indigenous people, and anti-Black racism among Indigenous people. We lack consensus on how progressive multiracial “coalitions” should respect the desires of Black working/laboring class people and Indigenous reservation communities to define their needs and assert autonomy. Revolutionary acts respect global Indigenous autonomy and culture, including Indigenous peoples in Africa, Australia, the Americas and beyond.

Derrick Bell analyzed “interest convergence” in which the strongest party steers the coalition and so betrays the needs of the less empowered by the racial state and capital. Alliances with hegemonic wealthy white liberals tilt the balance of the scales. If Indigenous elites are white wealth-identified, they will not align with Black people unless they are also white wealth-identified. Either way, Black masses are marginalized.

I am curious about why Afropessimism is so vilified for its contributions not just its limitations. Its contributions are to cut through the smoke and mirrors of banal coalitions that castigate Black people for being “too Black,” that is, for addressing the need to be free from anti-Blackness/white supremacy through a political project that forecloses compromise (the “virtue” of coalitions that are not dominated by radical Black masses). Perhaps we could focus on what we have in common as Indigenous, Black Indigenous and Blacks: rebellion, hence the need to free our political prisoners such as: Leonard Peltier, Mutulu Shakur, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Joy Powell, Russell Maroon Shoatz, Sundiata Acoli, Veronza Bowers, [Ruchell Cinque Magee](#) and others who rebelled against conquest and genocide.

We need each other as allies in struggle, but as Black people our struggles remain distinct; it is not a hierarchy in oppression, it is a *specificity* in combating it that we as radicals demand. Let's see if we can form an alliance around the recognition of the rights of Black Indigenous people alongside the recognition of non-Black Indigenous rights to land and autonomy. Also, let's see if we can discuss reparations with specificity, not generalizations; that this is imperial democracy built on stolen Indigenous land and with stolen Black labor. Let's see if we can collectively mourn the mass rapes of Black women baked in the three-fifths clause of the U.S. Constitution so that former slavery-bond states (southern "red states") deployed terror for reproduction to accumulate political power and pro-plantation presidencies. Let's see if we can fight the murders and disappearances of Black women/girls/trans interlocking with the battles to stop the murders and disappearance of Indigenous women/girls/two-spirit people. We need each other as allies in struggle, but as Black people our struggles remain distinct; it is not a hierarchy in oppression, it is a *specificity* in combating it that we as radicals demand.

GY: Joy, you have written about spirituality and Black feminist thought. As an approach to healing so much human suffering, speak to the importance of a specifically *spiritual* awakening that is necessary for this country. Also, in what ways does your understanding of spirituality overlap with Black feminist thought in terms of rethinking relationality, community, and humanity?

JJ: Spirituality and trauma forced me to recognize the limited capacity of bourgeois Black feminist thought and reflect on how the ideological markers of Black feminism were blended into hegemonic discourse and "progressive" marketing.

2021 was the 50th anniversary of the Attica rebellion. Think about how those in Attica maintained the structures of their captivity under pain of torture or death, until they chose to risk life to defeat a living death. Trustees and imprisoned nurtured and nursed each other and performed the labor under penal slavery (the 13th amendment to the U.S. constitution codifies enslavement to incarceration) that allowed the massive prison to exist. Rejecting the first or early stage of contradiction and caretaking and collaboration, the captives decided to organize a prison strike for human rights and dignity. They allowed spirit to lead them into mass movement and rebellion (some were inspired by the assassination of [George Jackson](#)).

After taking over the massive prison, they had to rebuild community as a maroon camp within a prison, setting up a food delivery system, waste removal, political education, a medic site, security, spokespersons to address the press and public about their [Liberation Manifesto](#). Spirit formed community out of chaos, amid precarity and extreme vulnerability they were able to forge unity and purpose for transformative justice.

From that third stage, captives were moved to the fourth and final stage, that of war resister when the racial state born with a lust for slavery treated the rebellion for human and civil rights as an act of war and responded with Vietnam military surplus (imperial wars amplify domestic supremacist violence); the National Guard called in by president and governor killed Black and Brown resisters, maroons, community builders and defenders; later guards would torture and murder rebels once the prison was retaken. Spirit-filled stages — conflicted caretaker, movement activist, maroon, war resister — where those who risk their lives to achieve life outside of the fetid hold see “losses” transformed into victories. Rebellion creates origin stories and birth making. Any moment of freedom meant that the world was reborn sweeter, exhilarating with hope laced with fear and despair.

Chapter 9

Coming to Political Theory in the Academy⁵⁶

People for Womxn in Philosophy

People for Womxn In Philosophy (PWIP, Charlotta Harmann): Dr. James, could you tell me a little more about how you came to political theory and to your particular interests?

Joy James (JJ): I can try, though I don't really know [how] one comes to political theory. It's to do with engaging or thinking about the world as a political place, as the contestation of power. This starts in childhood: you know, you want to do something, your parents say “No.” Or school, the teachers have authority, and you do not. Your agency gets limited or is mitigated by the demands of others. That's great when you're in line with them in terms of ethics and desires, it's not great when they express power in authoritarian ways and you become the subject-object of their decrees or their rules and their policies.

I grew up in a military family, always confronted with the issue of power [and] control, the role of the state as an employer, the backdrop of warfare. My father was in Vietnam and in the 101st Airborne, so he was probably deployed to quell the uprising - some people would call them riots - in Detroit. He was probably in a number of invasions. Even though you don't actually talk about power over the dinner table, or ask “Where's dad? What's he doing right now?”, there's an understanding of policing as ingrained in the fabric of social life. Social life then becomes personal life, which is by extension, political life and militarised.

⁵⁶ This interview was conducted by Charlotta Hartmann for PWIP: People for Womxn in Philosophy, published in *Oxford Public Policy* newsletter.

By the time I was a [preteen], I was interested in rebellion. I was 11 when I started to read my father's books, like E. Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie*.⁵⁷ I believe he [Frazier] wrote this when he was working for UNESCO in the 1950s, as an African American intellectual who understands the contradictions around power and hegemonic political theory coming from the right schools. He taught at the University of Chicago, and then went to teach at Howard University, the alma mater of [Vice President] Kamala Harris. In his books he questions how the Black bourgeoisie, or the Black middle class, is an imitation of the white bourgeoisie. We don't have their money, but we have the same aspirations. He points to the contradictions: You come from a people who were enslaved for centuries, and then after that subject to the convict leasing system where you died at faster rates than you had on the plantations, jointly owned by corporations and the state. Then you faced Jim Crow legislation, prohibition to voting, voting at the cost of your life, at times sharecropping. You just go on up the stages to George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. The contradictions of being in the black middle class are all about politics, compliance or occasionally rebellion. At 11, I'm reading this book, which shapes my feminism in the future and my suspicion of the black bourgeoisie or the black middle class of academic elites. That turned me into the political thinker that I am. I start with the family because it's the site of contradictions. If you work for the state, either private corporation or corporate state, . . . you work literally for the government or the military.

I've always been a reader, trying to understand the world through books, and not usually the books that people my age were reading. So, you're reading about power that you do not have because you're not allowed to possess it. As a dark-skinned Black girl in the South, you're being groomed to be an intellectual outsider. Do you want in or do you want to break out? It seems like

⁵⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Black Bourgeoisie*.

a contradiction; you're technically not in, but you're governed by those who set the programme, the teachers, the parents, the principals, the university professors, the dissertation director, et cetera. How much do you want in, to the extent that your thinking is just conformity, and how much do you want [out], to the extent that your thinking becomes a rebellion against conformity? These are the questions I was struggling with in my early years, along with the general sexism, racism, patriarchy, colourism and anti-Black aggression.

PWIP: You've just mentioned all sorts of obstacles. How did you deal with those obstacles?

JJ: I'm not quite sure I can tell you. You know I hold this Ebenezer Fitch Professor of the Humanities chair. I'm sure [Fitch] was not an anti-racist feminist. For me it's a bit ironic and conflicted, all these titles that say, "You're a real intellectual", "you're a real professor" and "you teach at a real school". Who gets to define what is "real," and why does it always look like another manifestation of elitism? My whole intellectual development was a constant struggle. Even now that I'm looking at retirement, I don't think it's been resolved. To what extent do you just give in and go with the programme, even if you believe it to be unethical? It feels like a Ponzi scheme, the smartest people are not in academia, they're [academics are] just smart people who got the job. There are smart people in all economic classes and stations. The ones that are allowed to have the leisure time to write then have access to the most prestigious presses to publish and disseminate their thought, which usually seems to align itself with prevailing norms. This comes back to E. Franklin Frazier, and W.E.B. DuBois before him: the notion of the talented tenth, that elite amongst African Americans who are going to lead the other 90 percent. That whole notion came from the American Baptist Home Missionary Society, which were white philanthropists, during the era of the Civil War. After the war was won, after 200,000 formerly

enslaved people fought in that war and helped the North to win, we have the resurgence of white supremacy as a norm in the United States. After the war is won, what do you do with an “emancipated” people? As white philanthropies, what they wanted was an educated cadre that would steer a Black mass that's impoverished, terrorised by the Klan, that gains rights that are then stripped away by these new Jim Crow laws. They wanted a kind of obedience and adherence to the rule of law, even if the law was corrupt and anti-Black.

To be educated, to attain these degrees for me was problematic. If you can't have a rebellion for your rights, if the point of having educated elites is to school them in a certain kind of civility and decorum . . . compatible with existing democracy, I don't see how you get the other 90 percent free. In a way, it's almost like if you don't criminalise political rebellion, then you see it as a lack of civility and a lack of sophisticated politics. This was manifest in the promotion of the Democratic Party in the recent election, too. Of course, Joe Biden is preferable to Donald Trump. But if you look at the specific policies that the Democrats have enacted, they have not, in large part, been beneficial and definitely not liberatory to impoverished or working-class African Americans, Native Americans... The Democratic Party shares the same kind of obedience mandate to corporate power that the Republican Party does. This comes back to the issue of political theory: Do you just accept that democracy is the Holy Grail for the liberation of LGBTQ folk, or of treating the natural environment as if it had real value other than that based on the extraction of coal, oil and gas and oil? Or do you want to use political theory to unthink the norms? I don't think it's enough, in an environment in which conformity in thinking is rarely challenged without being punished, to be a feminist theorist, or a critical race theorist or a democratic socialist theorist, unless you're willing to understand the value of resistance and rebellion.

. . . On the Limits of Academia, and Hope in the Future

PWIP: You've mentioned now, and elsewhere, how academia can be very limiting. How have you dealt with the limits of how far your theorising within the academy can go, and how you would like to go beyond that?

JJ: I don't know if I've achieved anything, only that I've tried. There's a form of loneliness in the academy. If the intent of our labour is to question authority, to call out what we think is racist, sexist, or homophobic - that's not welcomed, that wasn't in the job description. I've met so many students, mostly women, who wanted to articulate what they saw in terms of power, but who simply stayed mute. I've heard things like, "I need a letter to get a job" or "I need to get published". People are disciplined to be disciplined. I'm not faulting them for that, I see all of this as the zone of compromise. The question becomes, how compromised you want to be in order to attain economic security, or see yourself as a white-collar worker, so that the next time there's a pandemic, you can stay home.

There's a lot of abuse in the academy. It's gendered and it's shaped by race and ethnicity. What's often not talked about is that if you conform to a sort of corporate state norm, then your ethnicity and gender can be used to discipline those who refuse. The academy is the intellectual wing of the state. If you have a state that is progressive and doesn't believe in empires and has a critique of monopoly capitalism, then I don't think that's a bad thing to be the intellectual wing of that kind of state. My position is that the United States is not that kind of state.

PWIP: So far in academia, have there been any positive surprises about how far your studies and your theorising can go that you didn't expect when you started out?

JJ: Let me use not me, but some colleagues of mine. When I went to Brown University as a full professor, I brought former political prisoners to campus. On a panel discussion, I had invited graduate students who became the architects of Afropessimism, Jared Sexton and Frank Wilderson. Years later I was surprised by what they were able to do in the academy, in codifying a school of thought that rejected the norms. I don't have the same politics as Afropessimism, but I have the same appreciation for rebellion against what I see to be predatory cultures, and the same sensitivity to deception, to people telling you they're not harming you while they are harming you, and getting you to believe that. The surprise there is that we're still employed, because we teach not to be popular, but teach to be relevant in a country full of crises and that because of its military and its budget can create crises in other countries.

The beautiful thing that I see in the academy is when students ask you questions that sound like they're struggling. Not with grasping material so that they can "master" it and move up the ranks and get their gig or additional degrees, but struggling because they really want to comprehend how nothing fits the way they were told it would fit. We can think about the university as a replacement for the parental authority; while you're there, they're supposed to be raising and polishing you. But when you realise that a lot of what you were told wasn't necessarily an accurate description of how much violence and corruption there is, and how hard we would have to work to care about the world which we weren't always the centre of. The beauty, to come back to this, is when people realise they don't have super powers, but they do have an intellectual capacity that can express not just compassion, but a certain kind of concern tied to a steely determination to do something. I think once you see people become more awake to the fact that they have the capacity to be political actors, but that in order to do so, they have to have political philosophy and political theory, the conversations shift from being the zone of

consumption or mastery to being intimate. To come back to Afropessimism, they created a vocabulary to talk about this.

PWIP: You've mentioned the sort of the compromises that students and also academics have to face constantly. Do you have any advice to undergraduate students or any student of political theory, in dealing with those compromises?

JJ: I'll be honest, don't take advice from me. I wrote my dissertation on Hannah Arendt, a feminist critique of her analysis of communication. When I was trying to talk about the apartheid in South Africa, I was so offended by the questions that came to me and the way I was challenged, not just for my "intellectual performance," but also about my ethics. I found these challenges unethical and racist. I was like, "Okay, when this is done, I'm done." I passed, because I knew what I was talking about, but I was so offended that I walked with the degree and never asked for a letter. I don't even have the words for it; I'm surprised I'm still really upset by this. But that's why you don't take advice from me. Eventually I did get a job, working for the U.N. Women's Centre in Manhattan. I taught in seminars part time and then went to seminary after a trip to Nairobi, and reflection on international politics. After seminary I tried again, and got my first academic job in women's studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I'm not the only one who did something like that, there are a number of people who just quit the academy who were disgusted. That's the word I was looking for: disgust. I've read everything Arendt ever wrote, and then the dissertation where I'm just in a sideline, just trying to say apartheid's bad, becomes problematic. And I was like "I don't want your letter". Other people said "I don't even want this job". The academy has probably lost some brilliant and passionate thinkers just because they couldn't stomach the environment.

PWIP: Is there anything that you deliberately do as a professor, to break out of this environment?

JJ: I've always done it in different ways. When I was teaching women's studies at UMass Amherst, the predominantly white students complained about reading all this literature by women of colour as if they were not women. I was teaching a lot of memoirs, Native American women, Latinas, Asian women, African-American women, particularly political ones such as Angela Davis and Assata Shakur, but also white women. The complaints kept coming, so I told them I'd give everyone an A, and they could show up, or leave. Not everyone returned, but the students who did were amazing because they weren't there for the grade.

I remember one white woman who was near tears saying that she was learning so much, she dreaded going home for the holidays because if she actually said what she believed in terms of how white supremacy and misogyny operated, she would no longer have a family. [At the time, I honestly did not] know how to comfort people who evolved into more conscious and ethical beings . . . I don't believe you can evolve into a more ethical-political being without having losses.

Interacting outside of the classroom with some of the Black women who were at the university was amazing, too, because I was also learning from them. At the University of Colorado Boulder, I wrote about doing a prototype for critical resistance at the request of Angela Davis. I organised this with the undergraduate students there, Black students who found the mostly elite campus quite problematic because of its racism. We were determined that this conference was going to go off well. It was the largest one that CU Boulder had done at the time. A cadre of white, affluent students who were organising and donating their labour, came to me and said they were going to miss class. And I was like, "What's the problem?" thinking that

white affluent people don't have problems. They explained that the FBI wanted to interview them, because they had known people who were doing environmental liberation activism. I believe the United States put the Environmental Liberation [Front] on some kind of terrorist list, the way they've been trying to do with Black Lives Matter. I get blinded this way sometimes; I don't see as clearly that white, affluent students are engaged in struggle as well. These were all educational moments for me.

Coming out of that conference I did an anthology, *States of Confinement*, with works by a number of those who attended, and I got 50 copies to mail to incarcerated people. I got a letter back from a Black Panther, Black Liberation Army [political prisoner], who actually got out last October after serving forty-nine years in prison, saying that the academic work I thought I was being very helpful in producing was not that relevant. When I left CU-Boulder to go to Brown University, I was determined to write about and anthologise the most vulnerable of the radicals. Those people who were disappeared into prisons, who were being tortured and who presumably were going to die there. I don't agree with all their choices, but I understood they saw themselves in war. So, at Brown I took the greatest risk: I decided to invite people who had been in the Black Panther Party, people who had been in the Republic of New Africa, people aligned with the American-Indian Movement, people who had been in the Puerto Rican independence movement. I used my personal research funds to do this, and my students helped organise that event. The two to three anthologies that came out of the years that I stayed at Brown were driven in part by student intellect and student agency. That would be the height of teaching in which students taught me. I think that students are aware of the contradictions and the betrayals, from climate devastation and ongoing wars, to differential death rates around COVID-19 and new forms of authoritarianism. They actually know what's going on. The question becomes whether

or not they feel somebody needs to give them permission or advice to act on the knowledge they already have. I don't give advice because I only know smart people, including people who never went to college. The best I can do is listen and maybe echo back to them some of the things that they've expressed, which are of concern to them or some of the things that they're willing to challenge. I don't think advice is useful, I think *solidarity* is.

PWIP: One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, what are your hopes for the future?

JJ: I know that when I'm talking it's all really grim. In an interesting way, I am hopeful now. I am confident that we will respond to the crises, whether or not it's as many people as we would hope in solidarity. The certainty list is that we, in different sectors, understand the threats. Affluent students are working on environmental issues because they understand the existential threat of that. Other students are working on police killings of civilians because they understand the existential threat of that. We're all labouring on both the intellectual and the physical level, to stabilise the world that we have to live in and to allow it to be a more beautiful one. I see that happening all around.

As much as I have a critique of the academy, it has allowed me the leisure time, the extra time. I do have a roof over my head, I can buy my groceries and have a stable economic cushion, which has allowed me to use my time for social justice. That is the most beautiful thing about the academy, that whatever skills you acquire, you can redirect some to help people in ways that do not reproduce the cage. Having this job for decades has allowed me to practise my beliefs without being consumed by a machine. I've met beautiful people inside the Black Internationalists Unions, mostly black women, academics. We're on the abolition collective

site.⁵⁸ Since the pandemic started, we've been organising and writing and trying to amplify the voices of the most vulnerable. Those sisters are fierce and they're much younger than I am. I can't help smiling because it's a good time to recede [when] the young people and the young women, the young Black women who are stepping up are very principled. They don't compromise just because they've been intimidated, they compromise because it's a necessity as a political strategy in the moment.

⁵⁸ <https://abolitionjournal.org/bius/>

Chapter 10

The Academy, Captive Maternal, Central Park Five, Abolition, Simulacra⁵⁹

Time Talks

Chris Steele (CS): I was wondering if you could speak about teaching counter narratives, how you approach combating propaganda? As you mentioned before, the liberals don't like talking about violence and so often the academy will speak about how groups were repressed instead of also speaking about agency such as the legacy of slave revolts leading to actually abolition you know, supposed abolition until you get the 13th amendment or academia not holding up Africana history but holding Greek philosophy as a pillar of knowledge.

Joy James (JJ): [T]he university's an interesting sight, right? For those who of us who are employed within it, and who are also progressive, our progressivism tends towards radical, with suggestions of revolutionary struggle, which we largely do not wage and cannot wage within a university. For those [who have] cadre [and] are collective, we find the endeavor sometimes depressing, always challenging, and there are also minor victories.

For the question of violence, you can study the issue of violence as a concept and, in my perspective, you're permitted to do so if it's quite abstract, right? If you concretize it to

⁵⁹ This chapter is transcribed from: Chris Time Steele interview: “Joy James on the Academy, Captive Maternal, Central Park Five, Prison Abolition, and Simulacra,” *Time Talks*, July 2019.

contemporary violence, or the ways in which deprivation and disenfranchisement [are] tied to a long legacy of violence, it's perceived as controversial. [F]or example, when I was at Brown [University], and I was hired as a full prof, and provided with \$10,000 for research. . . most do individual research [to] produce the publications or whatever they choose to do with that kind of research funding. I decided to do a conference on political imprisonment. This was also at the time in which George W. Bush was preparing for his so called "Shock and Awe" invasion of Iraq under false pretenses of weapons of mass destruction being created there by Saddam Hussein. So, in doing this endeavor, I found all kinds of obstacles in opposition, some subtle, some not so subtle, the fact that the political prisoners themselves and this was not just people who have been incarcerated, because they have fought for the Black liberation movement or the emancipation, second or third emancipation, I don't know how many we need here in a white supremacist democracy of, people of African descent.

There are also people who had struggled for Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico *independentistas*, white anti-racists who have been in the anti-apartheid movements, people who can represent AIM (American Indian Movement). The fact that the state had used repressive violence against organizations that originally did not seek militaristic means to remedy or to protect themselves against state violence. That was a discourse that appeared to be not just novel to the university, but also controversial and a discourse that needed to be reprimanded and censored, if not completely shut down. So, in doing this conference that led to the anthologies, *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, *The New Abolitionists* and later *Warfare in the American Homeland*, I found that if you treated the history of liberation movements, not as an abstraction, but as a living testimony, to will and desire of people to be freed from repression, but also to not succumb to state terror. And that would include, to quote Malcolm, "By any means necessary," that, in fact, was a taboo.

So, when I'm called into the president's office, I'm told that I can teach anything but advocate, nothing, meaning don't advocate anything. Obviously, I'm not advocating any particular kind of day-to-day struggle, because people in their communities figure out their day to day struggles organically on the ground. But as a theorist and an academic, I am pointing to the tangible material conditions under which a racist capitalist democracy reproduces itself, through caging or terrorizing populations that it feels it needs to corral or disappear. That pointing to that not just as something we mourn, but to that as actually realities that have been consistently fought through various means. That was the prohibition, and for me, it was not a prohibition against advocacy, even though it was couched in those terms. It was a prohibition against critical thinking.

CS: The theory that you produce, I had always found it very easy to grasp and it also has a historical context and the seeds that that produces is something you never know where that can go or how that will influence people, as well as one of the most important things about theory.

JJ: [T]he scariest thing about theory is that if people start thinking critically you have no idea what they will produce. . . amazing art, amazing culture, amazing resistance movement. . . . I'm not talking merely about textual theory, that you find in one of the architects of Western theory or European theory, or it can move around the globe, that you find one of the architects and then you become a specialist or scholar and their way of thinking and so you reproduce the norm tied to a particular kind of genealogy of thought. I'm not opposed to that. I mean, that's scholarship. I'm talking about the kind of scholarship [critical theory] that you can't put in the box because what it starts to reproduce is something that you've never seen before, and this seems like an

anomaly or contradiction in the university. The university is supposed to seek the most innovative, transformative means of thought, and creation of critical thinking in order to create new knowledge or epistemologies. That's more like the marketing for it. The university, under capitalism, under racial capital, reproduces the norm, but expands its base in order to accumulate. You end up probably at times with the accumulation of other people's cultures, other people's thinking, as artifacts, in some kind of museum and that actually becomes one of the vulnerabilities of our movement. It's what some scholars have called the "museum effect." You know, what happened years ago [in struggle becomes] artifacts of the past. [Radicals are portrayed in the "museum effect" as] infantile in some ways, because they didn't have a pragmatic base. This completely misses the reality that they were grounded into the needs of the communities within which they were embedded. The university is not grounded into the needs of any community and struggle. If it's a state university, it is, technically and legally a government entity. If it is a private university, it is a corporation. So, whether it's state capital, or private capital, which [have] been married in various ways: . . . private corporations have dictated policies for the state, the state has policed and protected private capital. . . . new thinking for freedom does not come from this site [of the university]. It comes from communities in struggle. The new theories about genes and about black holes. . . using the wealth of the state in the corporation, creates these [new] moments. But those are moments of technology, of medicine, of engineering, which are impressive, but they don't necessarily deliver freedom or equity to people. People have to deliver that to themselves and that is not the university's role— to democratize and amplify cultures through political struggle

CTS: That should be up to the self determination of those of whatever communities that decide to do whatever forms of liberation they're seeking.

JJ: Some people believe that you can reform the state, so that it actually will quell the levels of violence against disenfranchised peoples and communities, Indigenous people, Black people, Puertoriquenos/as, people coming across the border, actually into territories that the US technically stole from the nation south of the current US border through the Treaty of Guadalupe. Those people include a twenty-year-old Guatemalan woman found shot in the head; a twenty-year-old woman with two infants and a toddler found dead in a desert. People live terror. Not because they inflicted it on themselves. All communities have violence they are dealing with. But they [we] understand terror [is] delivered and organized through the state. Those communities are the ones who face that reality and those communities are likely the ones who have the experiential knowledge to address that. If you're looking for purely legalistic reform, or reform through electoral politics, as important as those endeavors are, If they do not directly confront violence from the state apparatus, and its ability to inflict harm on all people, all ages, all genders, ungended, then we haven't addressed the full capacity of our thoughts. We haven't addressed the full capacity of our will to be free of terror [which] technically we pay for as taxpayers.

CTS: I think [this] ties into your powerful essay, "The Womb of Western Theory, Trauma, Time Theft, and the Captive Maternal." You write that "the captive maternals are those most vulnerable to violence, war, poverty, police in captivity, those whose very existence enables the possessive empire that claims and dispossesses them." You speak about how Western democracy, that's based in American exceptionalism, merged enlightenment ideologies, to create

this white supremacist background that you say quote "fed on black frames." Can you call it an anti-soulmate of Freedom?" And, can you talk about how you write the absent dialectic between master and Captive Maternal as a missed opportunity for the evolution of revolutionary theory?

JJ: Yeah. [laughs] You just said a lot. I don't always remember everything I say sometimes. Also, when I'm writing, I'm in that zone. Others are talking to me . . . I totally abide by this notion . . . the fact of collective theory or as Barbara Christian would say, "theorizing as a verb." So, the collective wisdom of the material world and the immaterial world, of the spiritual and of the people. . . the spirituality of our ancestors. You have conversations all the time, not always with fully physically embodied people.

The captive maternal as a concept came about after I started dealing with the state's treatment of children in its systems. It wasn't purely research, [I was also] meeting mothers. I always met mothers from organizing . . . mostly I just organized with women [but] not on these high-profile levels of platforms. The academic profile is higher than the activist profile, but the activist profile is what I adore. It's not a profile, per se, it's a practice of humility, and also—to the best I can muster—courage.

When I was organizing with Black women at Medgar Evers College [in Brooklyn, NY] . . . I was in another political formation a multiracial woman's group that had ties with the Communist Party [Women for Racial and Economic Equality [WREE]]. I saw the way in which [Black radical women] critique the world and their critique was dismissed because they were read as working-class Black mothers from a non-elite institution of higher ed. So they [were not credited with] critical savvy. Yet, they're the ones who predicted the fall of the [Berlin] wall in 1989 and the rapprochement between—you could joke about Putin and Trump right now—

Eastern Europe and Western Europe. [That rapprochement would cement capital so that] people of color would still be left out in the cold and still be treated as detritus or raw resources, not just their minerals per se, but the people themselves and their labor and cultures.

The [Black women internationalists from Brooklyn] offered that first critique that led me to develop a critique of Foucault, which I first wrote about, published in 1996 [in *Resisting State Violence*]. I took a postdoc with Angela Davis at UC Santa Cruz. We were reading Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* in Davis graduate seminar at HistCon. I gave a closing talk at the end of my Ford Foundation postdoctoral fellowship. My critique of Foucault would later be used by Davis in her own [less critical] critique of Foucault. A couple of years later, other critiques on Foucault's erasure of antiblackness followed. My views came from the framework of Black maternal activism, because they [Medgar Evers Black women activists] cared for their children, they cared for the communities. They cared for the elder, and yes, electoral politics were important, but so is the day-to-day reality of making sure your kids had enough food to have necessary and quality, or the best you could get quality medical care, got to school, when they're supposed to be at school, had safe school environment, didn't get harassed in prison or shot by the cops.

It was that way that I saw that their captivity was not just from an oppression or the repression of the state. It was also this entanglement and love for their families and their communities. And not just their biological children, or their particular grandmothers or grandfathers or grand aunts, grand uncles, great aunts, great uncles, it was really broadly sketched, I mean, it was this huge embrace, and so what kept you disciplined was not just the state's animus against you, which you were happy to return, or whatever your discipline was in a loveless state, your capacity to love the most vulnerable. That meant that the way you were

positioned in struggle, it radiated beyond any kind of linear, or unitary animus, this is also where I felt like intersecting those aggressions didn't work, you know, in itself, because you can add more like, oh, it's because I'm Black, or because I'm female, because I'm queer, because I'm undocumented, you could do an additive approach, but that still could not deal with a multi-dimensional reality of people who literally kept communities alive, and keeping them alive wasn't just about physical issues, medical issues, or not being brutalized in the street or in the home, keeping them alive was also about intellectual and spiritual issues. When I start to really watch closely, and I was saying, 96, right, before I got very much involved with, trying to figure out what is our relationship with children, and our relationships are always flawed because, you know, we didn't grow up in pristine environments, and we're complicated with contradictions, and we fail all the time. Or we keep trying, within that, idea that captive maternal started to gel.

First, I was writing a piece about six years ago, called Afro Realism and the Black Maternal or the Captive Maternal, and it was like an acknowledgement of how much Afro pessimism as a school of thought had contributed to critical thinking, particularly in its willingness to deal with violence not as an abstraction, or some kind of museum effect, or artifact. I was also trying to find out where the feminized persona who was nurturing and reproducing the social world with the knowledge that it was going to be used as raw resource to be exploited, keeping everybody alive so then they could become edible Negros or Negresses, or they can be consumed by the state or tossed away by the state. I was trying to figure out what are the dynamics at play here, and can we track our struggles, not just by recovering heroic women, and by the way, you know, the captive maternal I say is an ungended phenomenon, or persona. I say Assata Shakur is kept alive when she was run away, you know, as a young teen, because she was taken under wing by another kind of maternal, it wasn't her biological mother, right,

because she left home and it wasn't necessarily her aunt Evelyn Williams, who defended her admirably at trial later, after she'd been captured and tortured by, you know, the FBI COINTELPRO and the state. It was, you know, it was a trans woman, who took her in and kind of rescued her and nurtured her and mentored her, just recall, so that she could actually grow up past the age of 21. And just try to figure out these moving dynamics.

So, we're back to history to Elizabeth Key and the 1600s, you know, fast forward to Assata, how the captive maternal is not purely, a subjugated female in the household or the workplace, but is actually a nurturer who can have varied ideological expressions, I mean range from conservative to liberal to radical and revolutionary. But it's central to the reproduction of the world, that without this form of caretaking, without this form of sacrifice, without this kind of glue, to the social order, which is tied to the economic order and the political order, and you know, just the very notion of what is familial and familiar in the world that seems to not function. Obviously, my version of a captive maternal that I find the most intriguing would be the one to embrace revolutionary politics. What I hope as I continue to explore this, since I've written about the captive maternal in these various aspects is trying to figure out what is this concept as reality that is haunting me, right?

In the essay "Killmonger's Captive Maternal is MIA," I explore the Hollywood blockbuster *Black Panther* movie.⁶⁰ I explore how the one persona, a villain, who seems most likely to manifest as a US black revolutionary, embodies the contradictions of a dispossessed person, the antithesis of imagined black royalty presiding over pristine environments, because they lost the essence of their mother. The film's narrative there is a huge hole, a vacuum. There

⁶⁰ See Joy James, "Killmonger's Captive Maternal is MIA," *Reading Wakanda*, Southern California Library, May 1, 2019. <https://sites.williams.edu/jjames/files/2019/05/WakandaCaptiveMaternal2019.pdf>

is no mother. The absence becomes significant in real ways. I think of the Captive Maternal not as an intersectionality persona, because with a captive maternal comes ideology, and intersectionality, you have this intersection, but you don't ask once you hit the corner, or at the intersection, are we talking about liberal intersectionality, radical intersectionality, neo radical intersectionality? I'm pretty much interested in the function, not the identity marker with a captive maternal, I think it sets function as a form of activism as a form of labor, sometimes forcing cores often given voluntarily, to the point of exhaustion and despair, at some, juncture, that is an under analyzed reality, in our struggles with that may be like actually a key foundation or platform to take your struggles to another level.

CTS: You've written before, saying the majority of social change agents continue to be women working in triple shifts for depress wages, on pay child rearing, and housework and volunteer community building, Black women's pivotal role struggles that go undocumented and unnoticed, which I thought that tied right into this essay and what you're speaking on now. I feel that this really connects to the Central Park Five trial

JJ: In 1989, I had gone to the Central Park trial, because I belonged to a woman's dojo, it was this interesting dojo in Parks Logan, Brooklyn, where the white woman who headed it and it was a women-only dojo. To the best of my memory had been trained by someone who had been in a Black Panther Party in Harlem. After we practiced one day, the sensei tells us about this trail, which we already know about it because it's haunting the city. It comes after the deaths around the time a little bit after the death of Yusef Hawkins. It's in the moment of the antiapartheid movement in the fights against police brutality. It becomes a lightning rod not just because of the

rape and the attack against Trisha Meili, it becomes the lightning rod because in a way, the city needs a white victim in order to exonerate it for its white supremacist violence against Blacks, and brown and Latino, Puertorriqueano, Dominican people.

So, after we've finished one of our trainings in the dojo, we're asked to consider going to the trial and only one person testified at trial and you can't really get the sense from the very interesting film that Ava DuVernay did, it's just really emotionally rich. Before that there was Ken Burns' film *The Central Park Five*. So Ava Duvernay follows a number of years later with *When They See Us*, it really brings a resonance of Black culture perspective that isn't present in a documentary maybe because it's a documentary or maybe because of the stories of Black communities, and Black families are not gone into that deeply. But when we go to the trial, and Yusef again, is the only one to testify, he's the only one who did not do a confession, you know, a tape confession. Sharon Salaam his mother, in the film, she interrupts this and she represents this incredible powerful persona of a captive material. So you're right. So before we even started organizing around in Texas, and other than in New York City around what happens to our children in the system, I saw what happens to our children in the system.

[Our sensei, a white woman trained by a Harlem BPP] asked six or seven of us, Black or Latinax, white, to investigate the Central Park Case. We went to the trial where Yusef Salaam testified to this innocence.] we stand for over an hour to get inside. I remember that because there are very few seats for the public. Most of the seats are for the press, *The New York Times* and the major papers had already shaped the narrative and that was one of guilt and a little bit of that comes out in *When They See Us*, but not not really how this vicious, the liberal media was. I watched as he defended himself and then I watched the jury basically ignore him like yawn, some people read the newspapers. I don't know if you can do that if you're in the jury box but he

was sort of like, we already know you guys are guilty, we're just here because we answered the call, we got called up for this and when is this going to be over? That was my sense. When I walked out, I followed up by going to other organizing events. One Suzanne Ross, a white radical woman, who actually used Angela Davis's article, Myth of a Black Rapist, there was a foreman 1199 which is the labor union, which was very supportive of Martin Luther King, Jr. predominately Black, and they had held a forum. I had gone with a friend of mine who is white, we were in seminary, we'd been in seminary together at Union. I watched again how the press this time a writer from The Village Voice, completely mischaracterized that gathering, there was one or two negative voices about the survivor of the attack, Trisha Meili. But most of it was this sort of critical analysis. What is this rush to judgment? What does a legal lynching look like? What is the history of accusations of rape against black men that's focused only on white women as victims, because at that time, I remember to this day, but we don't remember the names, women and girls and yes, men and boys too but it wasn't registering that much as such not in the numbers, but also not in the public narrative for being sexually assaulted in New York City.

There, was a woman of color who was thrown off a roof after she was raped and she died, there were all these horrific sex crimes, however you want to characterize them, violence against women. The violence against trans women, even though that we didn't have a public discourse for that then, violence against children, but this is what made the news, this was newsworthy, not just because she was white, but she also worked for Wall Street for Salomon Brothers, a high levels, brokerage firms, so it was whiteness and capital, it was bloneness. It was everything within the category that Ida B Wells wrote about as being this iconic formation of white chivalry and white victimization that was facing an existential predator codified in Blacks. It was the mothers who I watched, organize against that, like in the movie they show you Nomsa and

Elombe Brath, and I went up to meet Nomsa and Elombe and until I can meet them and get cleared by them I couldn't Sharon. But once they gave me a green light, then I met Sharon at the Schomburg. So I had been gathering knowledge so when I went to this event at 1199, and saw the journalists from *The Village Voice*, mischaracterized that as really another kind of crime against white females, which it was not, it was a serious endeavor to understand what was going on in that moment in which the city had a lynch mob mentality, and you see some of that in this film. When the youth when the young, they're not even men, they're boys, when they say everybody hates us. When you see the placards, you see the support for them, you don't see in that film, the hatred. For the rest of us who are living in the city at the time, we not only saw it, it became a form of collective trauma.

When I read the piece in *The Village Voice*, which was written by a prominent white feminist, I decided to write a response, like a letter to the editor. I wrote it, I saw it with, you know, my white friend who had been there with me at the event, but she was in a partnership with a Black man, he was fearful, in partnership with a Jamaican man, he was fearful, so anyway, I ended up putting my name on it solo. I had to be on the phone, this is before cell phones, so I didn't have one. I was basically using payphones on the street to talk with the editors at *The Village Voice*. They made me verify it's just a short little edit letter to the editor, double check verified, jumped through multiple hoops. That all the facts were correct, and then to the best of my understanding, they later let the woman who wrote the slanderous piece against the gathering, I mean, she stopped writing for them. But it was it was this need to prove not only that we were innocent until proven guilty, which was unprovable, actually. But it was this need to prove that we weren't malicious liars, that we could actually tell the truth about reality. And I was like, like, Why? This is what two paragraphs? Why is this taking days to be vetted, because

they couldn't understand and this wasn't about the rape itself, mind you. This was just about a gathering at 1199. They could not understand that a multi-racial group of men and women could come together and have a critique of racism, and rape, and denounce both simultaneously and from there, my first job was in women's studies. So, I wrote another piece that was longer. I was told that, that could jeopardize my job because I was in women's studies, but it was still around the facts and the facts were, the case made no sense, which is when you see do renice fees, it's so clear that the case made no sense. But we still had prominent Black feminists and prominent Black feminist men who were largely academics, by the way, and this this goes back to my earlier critique of the Academy. It's not exactly tied to the knowledge or the experience of communities that are most policed and under resourced. We still have them appear in print and castigate the collective but also the community as protectors of rapists and I'm trained as a political scientist, which probably means nothing.

Politics, have any material base and if there's any such thing as, quote, "science", and you would say like, well, if they got the location wrong if they had to bring one of the youths to the actual scene of the crime to, quote, put himself in it so you can get the details, right. If there's no DNA, if there's no, how could you have this rush to judgment? There was a segment of the Black community that didn't want to be associated with these views, because they represented all the stereotypes of Black depravity, then that meant they didn't want to be associated with the sex either. Because the facts would have told you that this was not exactly this Scottsboro case, because there had been a horrific assault, because it was done by Mathias Reyes, individually. Not the Scottsboro case per se, but this was another miscarriage of justice that could be seen as a collective legal lynching that was just being enforced by, juvenile prison and adult prison. I watched the four parts, I had to keep stopping at the last part in terms of the torture, the serial

torture, of Korey Wise. As they point out, there's no way you can monetarily compensate for torture. Psychological physical factors, there's no how big the check you want it to be. It's never, it's never going to reconstitute the whole person. So it's not real compensation, per se, right. It's just some kind of fee: sorry, to disembody you. It's no real compensation.

These wonderful Captive Maternal, largely, you know, the mothers in a nongendered phenomenon, and the fathers who are supportive and the pastors who are supportive and the community activists, but also realizing that our ire or anger or rage, which is righteous, and just, doesn't seem to be focused on this state. Yes, it's somebody who's going to pay for this so it'll be Lederer, who still has a job, Fairstein who doesn't have a publisher, but they had, you know, 30 years of being like, you know, these great white women protectors, through abusing, you know, black and Latino youth. But still, it feels like our demands are low and our memory is curtailed. Like we don't have a critique of how our own communities participated by not rebelling in a legal lynching, I mean, it may sound really cut and dry but if you don't rebel against the lynching, and with something in that rebellion, then just tell me where the line, where's the line between being neutral and complicitous, because I can't clearly see that line. So that's my experience. That's my analysis of the captive maternal relationship to that case, I brought Sharon Salaam to Hamilton College when I was a visiting scholar up there years ago, and she spoke on the case I never could have created what Duvernay did and I'm grateful for her gift. I would add to that, that our political critique is going to have to become much sharper, more focused and more embodied if we want to diminish these types of atrocities from reoccurring on a regular basis.

CTS: This kind of goes into something else we were talking about, which was if you're going to speak about prison abolition, it needs to be coupled with discussions of anti-capitalism, and how you can't have one without the other.

JJ: I've been thinking about our movements lately, the last couple years about simulacra, which is kind of an imitation or would be like, the fake version, like you have the real, painting, the original from the artist from Haiti or Senegal and then you have the knockoff version, the faux version, the fake, which passes for the real. Then you're supposed to appreciate the beauty of the substitute as being a concrete expression, the real when it's just a knock off. In some ways, I believe that celebrityhood has allowed imitation supplant the real because our culture is a celebrity culture. I can't think of and I'm sure there might be I'm just not aware of it any other culture right now, that is so driven by celebrity, maybe because we don't have loyalty, thank goodness for that. But then their celebrity become our royalty. Whether it's, I don't want to name any names. We already know who our celebrities are right? When there's no safeguard, because there may not be a clear message about organizing in communities that are under resourced, with the leadership of those communities that are dominant, not the leadership's of authors or the leadership of academics, or the leadership's of prize winning fill in the blank. But the leadership of the people who live the day-to-day experiences, and have the epistemologies to unpack this and understand the intricacies of the complexities of engineering an alternative to it, in a confrontation with violence.

However, that confrontation can be, it can be pacifist, and can be non-pacifist and the essence of that. Then the most celebrated people or celebrities. . . become a leadership cadre. They don't live the conditions, but they become the advocates for the freedoms of those people

who endure those conditions. This range of abolitionism now includes [Kim] Kardashian West. I'm not bashing I'm just noticing that the notion of an abolitionist is so open, that it includes POTUS 45 and includes his son in law, Jared Kushner, and includes the Koch brothers. [According to] Jane Mayer's work [*Dark Money*; *New Yorker*], work, the Kochs wanted to reform penal codes, because they wanted to [lessen] the prosecutions of white-collar crimes.

CTS: That's similar to the Cato Institute?

JJ: Conservatives have never seemed to care about racial justice, [and seem to dismiss] Black liberation or Indigenous people controlling their own land and resources in order to stop pipelines, from destroying what's left of their land. Somehow [in bi-partisan agreement], we have consensus on mass incarceration. I've not been incarcerated. I am not going to criticize anything that gets people out. . . . Whatever it is that would free people from captivity should seriously be considered. [But] what is abolitionism if it's not also a critique, or a confrontation with racial capitalism? what's the plan for confronting racial capitalism. I don't see how you can sever the two.

CTS: They're knotted together.

JJ: They're knotted together. But one of them may be the driving engine. I don't believe mass incarceration is the driving engine to this phenomenon of poverty, dispossession, over policing, violent policing, incarceration detention centers. The driving engine would be racial capitalism. . . the accumulation of people's culture, their labor, their disposability through gratuitous violence.

Being able to terrorize people because psychologically you have a badge and a gun or belong to ICE and have letters on your jacket. You have a battering ram, you can knock in somebody's door. You can grab their two-year old and throw them in a cage. The animus that permits this type of systematic violence exceeds the container of mass incarceration and exceeds the definitional norm of abolitionism.

If you have an imaginary vision of the future, it will likely not be concretized, unless you actually have a program that challenges . . . the very notion that a state built on racial capitalism will ever deliver concrete gains that benefit the masses of people. Racial capitalism is not sustainable.

CTS: It kind of holds those margins.

JJ: I'm not against being pragmatic. I mean, that's how we manage to pay your bills, those of us who can, and that's not just because you're practical, or pragmatic or better than anybody else, but all of us function in a pragmatic world, to the extent that we can, I'm talking more about who actually is calling the shots here? And I don't think polling a community where the very questions are not shaped by the community or the agenda. It's almost like polling for the Democratic Party. To the extent, in a two-party system, like most of our politics are shaped around one of the two parties, obviously, the Democratic Party, it would be the Progressive Party of choice, and those struggles to make it progressive, then, figure out reform movements, electoral and this is terrific. Tiffany Cabán won in Queens [during recount Caban as a DSA candidate lost the Bronx DA position to a democratic party candidate but by 2022 was a member of the NYC City Council]. Caban is probably one of the most progressive DAs in the city of New

York, with some 2.2 million people in that jurisdiction. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, I still question about [Caban, AOC, DSA in terms of where their analysis of race is beyond inclusion and diversity language.

People who are held captive have needs that exceed the political process. To meet those needs, logically, one will end up in a confrontation with racial capital. A confrontation is not the same as a critique. So again, in a celebrity culture, people can advocate for people to get out and that is important. The way Kim Kardashian West [KKW] did it, as she talks about it, was that she called Ivanka, and said” I need to talk to your dad in the White House.” KKW made a joke with POTUS 4.” Why did you throw Chloe off *The Apprentice*?” He laughed. She points to Alice Johnson, who she heard about, I believe on Twitter, stating Johnson should not be in jail. Yes, she committed a crime but she's trying to take care of her family by working in the drug trade. It was Kardashian West who called the prison and to speak with Alice Johnson and tell her “You’re going home.” It was not the warden. It was not a state official. It was an incredibly influential and wealthy celebrity as an abolitionist. I'm glad that Johnson is out and back with her family. I listened with interest when both she and Kardashian stated publicly that 45 is not racist. [Johnson campaigned for Trump in the 2020 presidential election.] So obviously, the rest of us just “misunderstood” everything he said [that was white supremacist]. What a mass movement in struggle was penalized for attempting to do for our own communities, protect them against incarceration, or try to get people out [celebrities who embraced conservatives were celebrated for doing].

DuBois disavowed the concept of the “talented tenth” a concept which he did not originate; the American Home Baptist Missionary Society did in the late 1800s, but DuBois popularized it in his work *The Souls of Black Folks*. Charlene Mitchell, who recruited Angela

Davis to the Che-Lumumba section of the Communist Party in California, told me to go to the Schomburg and look at what DuBois was saying. When he was being persecuted by the state for his progressivism, only the working class, trade unionists who came out for him; it was not the Black bourgeoisie. *Transcending the Talented Tenth* (1997) [which came out of the research Mitchell asked me to do] didn't progress that far, because part of that book was all this celebratory "let's think about Black women in history we're not talking about." Then saying those names and putting them in print fit the framework of conventional Black feminism. Progressive. More than 20 years later, I don't think that we've progressed. In some ways, we've become more imitative of the norm. I mean, culturally, as performance . . . in terms of political movements, we've become more embedded.

Fighting is painful, and there are always losses. [If you win] it doesn't mean there won't be repercussions for you. Being in opposition you see tangibly where the line is between complicity and opposition. Those lines are so blurred now. Everybody has the same rhetoric. The white supremacists coming up from underground don't have that rhetoric of multiculturalism. But for those people who see themselves as within the middle bandwidth and on the progressive edge, the language seems to under analyze violence, assume that you can actually control the state's ability to inflict violence on rebels, through the state's mechanisms without having engineering your own kind of mechanisms.

CTS: You really said it well yourself, and you put down a lot of things to think about. When you're talking about drawing that line, when people have fought back, such as in Ferguson, Black identity extremists came up as this term to continue COINTELPRO, there's been the death of Ferguson protesters and these fusion centers and the surveillance keeps growing and then you're

showing the juxtaposition with well, it's okay for celebrities to do this, but when you organize or communities organize, it turns into extreme state repression?

JJ. I don't think people consider celebrities to be much of a threat, particularly if what they're saying is a reiteration of the norm. The only thing that is threatening is deviation. I talk to my students about the “wild card.” People always struggle in different ways, elites don't live in those communities of struggle.

You go to these churches that have memorials for murdered Black trans women, with alabaster angels [cradling a large cross created by Black teens of photos of murdered women]. There are ways in which we remember the reality that we live within.

There is no rescue team coming for us. With that knowledge [we need a] different operational base to recreate the world. It is not going to be a celebrity savior. Never was, never will be celebrity saviors. If you're in a particular religious tradition that is millennia-old you know how the last one went out. It was always going to be bloody. It was always going to be hard. It was always going to be traumatic. But facing the reality of our lives has a beauty to it. Not our lives as they're broken apart, and then written about and then sold back to us in academic discourse. But our lives that we understand them because we continually fight for ourselves and communities and get up the next day, to still be in community. The most important thing is showing up and not on the platform, stage, or screen. Showing up and learning, how to live by [with] the other people who are learning how to live, and to reinvent ourselves in this increasing wasteland.

That's the good life. Being present to the struggle without trying to reduce the struggle into some kind of containable object, in print or on screen or in a speech. It's to understand all this is wild. Most of this is going to be violent.

Even if we're pacifist, this state is not a pacifist state. Any opposition or threat to it will be disciplined in some way. Celebrities might lose gigs. Other people can lose their life. Remembering political prisoners [incarcerated for] decades, needs to honor the fact that there were revolutionary struggles where people died or were disappeared into cages for decades. Because they fought. . . the state had to adapt. Because it had to adapt, you got some modicum of resources or accommodations that never would have happened without a fight.

I keep going back to the political prisoners . . . incorporate ourselves within a community that incorporates them. Because that's where the fuller story in the narrative is. And so the [meaning of the] Central Park Five [Exonerated Five] is not in the documentary [*Central Park Five*]; it is not in this emotionally rich film [*When They See Us*]. The real narratives are always in the communities of struggle. The captives are the ones who know the stories. The non-celebrity captives know the stories as they're written in the grittiest form, and it's that grit that is actually going to enlighten us.

CTS: Thank you, so much for speaking to me.

Chapter 11

The Plurality of Abolitionism⁶¹

Groundings Podcast

Felicia Denaud (FD): We just want to start with abolition, as you know, it's growing as a means through which people are seeking and conceiving liberation, which also means on the flip side, that it's just more vulnerable to "Neoradical handling" such as: infiltration, containment, funding, contestation over method and strategy. You address [this] in "Airbrushing Revolution." Talk to us about abolitionism. How do you define it? How has it informed your own political analysis and your commitments. What are some fundamental questions you're still working through or starting to formulate as we enter this new period of struggle?

Joy James (JJ): I'm puzzled by abolitionism and how it's come to be the buzzword, the term for political mobilization when it was not the term used decades prior. Abolitionism does not exist in singular formAbolitionism comes with an SFrederick Douglas had a different form of abolitionism than the white liberal abolitionists who were, some of whom were still struggling with their own sense of racial superiority in regards to black captives, um, and Douglas among others who were more radical or in the community of black activists, his abolitionism would be distinct in some ways from the abolitionism of Harriet Tubman or the abolitionism of John Brown. . . . when we make it a singular concept, it's easier for. . . elite sectors [to determine its meanings]. . . the mainstream can take a unitary concept and say, this is what abolitionism is. . .

⁶¹ "The Plurality of Abolitionism," *The Groundings Podcast*, January 2021, Devyn Springer and Felicia Denaud

<https://groundings.simplecast.com/episodes/joy-james>

. the notion of this unitary black, that you can talk about black people without, you know, differentiating say class differences among us, right. Or ideological differences. And that sort of simplistic approach to us in general has bled over into abolitionism. So that in fact, we become a stereotype of a caricature of one unified formation, which you were so diverse, right? And so abolitionism, I would argue has become like, I wouldn't call it a caricature per se, but maybe a stereotype of ideals about struggle. And so when it's conflated, the whole notion is in a nice package.

Then whoever's written the last book that becomes the most popular or the best-selling or gave the talk that, you know, got reviewed the most on TedTalk or their book like hit the New York times review or got this prize, like in terms of literary achievement and contents that are et cetera. They're setting up what Archie Mafege would say in his article and “Strange Bedfellows, “meaning white liberals and black radicals, within the African contexts. They're setting up a hegemonic norm. . . . to define the terms, the language. And if you're using their terms and their language, then the strategy logically would also be derived from those terms and language. I think one of the first things we need to do is look at the diversity of abolitionism and then decide which ones are worthy of our attention.

. . . for critical thinkers and radical activists that might not be most popular [ones]. So I stick adjectives in front “academic abolitionism” “Celebrity abolition” . . . I'm just trying to differentiate, because even though I work in the sector of the academy, it's not an industry that I believe is going to lead people towards freedom. That's not its mission. It's not its goal, right? It's a state or corporate apparatus. It reproduces itself and it reproduces elites hopefully with some skills. If I say I'm an academic doing abolitionism [that] doesn't always mean I'm doing academic abolitionism. [For example,] when I went to Brown university and invited former political

prisoners, and these were rebels who came to campus, I wasn't doing “academic abolitionism” even though I was doing it on campus.

I took my research funds —usually people do private research —and I just funded diverse people coming because there's no way I could have raised money outside for that to happen. So the university administration had a problem with my endeavors, not so much because formerly incarcerated people were on campus because you can bring them on campus under certain kinds of academic abolitionism, where they admit that they did harm, they did wrong. And now they understand that they're a better person. And this is how reading and study helped them. And this is how Progressive's or the clergy helped them. And now they're ready to return to the civic life or the, you know, um, civic virtue as a citizen, right. Hopefully to get the vote back as well. There's not a problem with those who are formerly incarcerated, or even if you can zoom or Skype in or write to people who are incarcerated.

The problem, at least in this instance was that I brought rebels to campus. So they weren't apologetic. . . . their position was, this democracy is predatory. It has no civic virtue. There's nothing of quality to integrate myself into except for a liberation with Smith, right. Which would go against the state apparatus, but also the liberal hegemony that supports and intellectualized as it, or at least its right to exist only with minor reforms. So when I did this piece “7 Lessons in One Abolitionists Notebook” in 2015, it's online for the Abolitionists Journal at their request. I listed seven things. Angela Davis introduced me to abolitionism in the 1990s. I did a prototype as I've written elsewhere for critical resistance in 1998 and in the process of organizing [I] produced an anthology. . . . with my undergrads *States of Confinement*. I negotiated with a major press to send 50 copies into the incarcerated and incarcerated intellectuals. Also a former Panther member of the Black Liberation Army [BLA] wrote back that the book had nothing really

relevant. He said it in a nicer way. Nothing relevant to save people who've been incarcerated for decades. That led me to do the kind of work I did at Brown, but the pushback was quite noticeable. And it seems to me that there is one hegemonic abolitionism that should exist in the minds of the people who were funding it. And it should be compatible with the academy. It should not embrace rebels or calls to radically confront the state and that, you know, and the state apparatus.

FD: I wonder, should we concede that ground? I like this idea of a plurality. Um, and especially as you root it in an analysis of slavery, there were different lines, different streams of abolitionism, but should we cede the ground? Should we not say that's not abolitionism? Or do we add the adjective? Do we give them that ground, that this is academic, this is revolutionary. Or do we, do we hold the line and say, that's not what abolition?

JJ: A really great question. I think it depends on you as a strategist. . . . I'm not going to argue with you about words. Like, except for like, if you claim to be indigenous or black and you're not, then I'll just cross the street. Right? Because you shouldn't be on the same sidewalk. Cause we'll bump into each other or something, you know? I guess you could say let's slap an adjective on it . . . the coward's way out. I think once you decide on your goals, they will come to you. If your goals are radical, they will come to you and tell you that *you're not* the abolitionists.

I don't even think you have to make the first move. once you become visible, I mean, mostly my experience people ignore you as long as you can. And then they just do the bochiche [gossip] network. "No, that's not right. Don't meet that person. Don't invite them. Don't talk to them." But then once people start paying attention, then it's "See if we can counter this." [When

they cannot contain the message] then it's like, oh my God, . . . the horse has got out of the barn and they don't ask you why the horse has gotten out. The horses got out of the barn because the barn was burning and the horses kicked down the stall. They needed to survive. So that's why they ran for it. If your barn was a safe place to be in . . . If your barn was safe, they would've stayed. Like there's some hay, it's kind of warm. It's a little crowded. I can't move around, but I'm alive. People move to other intellectual political concepts because they need to, it's not like we have a ton of leeway. I do have leisure time as an academic. I'm not hustling three jobs to put a roof over their head and feed folks. I'm trying to acknowledge my own privilege. But based on the leisure time that I do have, I'm not trying to create concepts just to [sell] a brand.

I'm trying to theorize what is going on in a world on fire. And then people telling me to stay in the barn and then the language they give will only take me maybe to the edge of my stall, to the left or the right. But it doesn't allow me to kick down a locked door to get out, not kicked down a door to say, oh, I want to manage the bar. And I don't want to manage the bar we want out. And I think part of the, this is the worst thing you know about the abolitionism that I look at and I'll just call it academic abolitionism. It has this abstract goal and it's tethered to freedom dreams. And so it's pretty, open-ended meaning that you could put anything in there, but I'm like, what's the plan? Like what's this strategy. I mean, is this dreaming?

How long has the dreaming going to last? Okay. For the rest of our lives, I get it. It's aspirational. But then what's the strategy or the plan to confront the predator. I don't trust dreams that don't allow the possibility of nightmares. That's not even how the brain works. . . . you're going to like have these wonderful dreams of these like pastel colors or whatever, right? No, like there's always the flip side of that. . . . you wake up in a cold sweat, you know, you have the scissors under your pillow. . . .

But fear does not seem to be a staple. . . . you can't say this freedom dream will mobilize me into a higher level of animals. Um, because I understand that the mobilization is a logical, rational, biological, emotional response to threat and asking me to dream more aspirational dreams does not neutralize the thing threat confronting the threat, confronting the nightmares that are not just in my emotional intellectual landscape.

. . . .Black people don't live in a dreamscape unless you've got enough money to live in alternative world, which is essentially to live with rich white people. Like in the absence of having a gated community that doesn't even need to put a gate on it because you know, other people so called other people are never going to roll up. give me a strategy to deal with both and talk to me then about the emotional landscape, the aspirational landscape and how dreaming strengthens my defense not becomes a form of narcotic. . . that turns me away from how much democracy was built on incredibly deep violence.

Devyn Springer ([DS]): One thing that comes to mind hearing you speak about quote unquote, academic abolitionism is Walter Rodney's concept of the gorilla intellectual or intellectual gorilla. Right? And I I've in my past wrote about that concept. And now years later, seeing academia in its full most transparent self, right as this, I mean, academics, academic work, the academy university are commodities. They are cash cows. They're commodities, they're arms of the state. But thinking about that term and what Walter Rodney was saying was that the role of the academic should be, if they're aspiring to be this intellectual gorilla is to redistribute, whatever they can get their hands on from the university to redistribute the tools of knowledge, production, to redistribute resources, money, whatever it may be, that's their role because they ultimately want to subvert it and build something better. I'm curious if you think that there's a

place for such a concept in the year 2020, the year of hell on earth, it feels like at this point, if that concept, especially when it comes to this idea of academic abolitionism, if there's room for that concept anymore, I mean, that's, that's, that's a big question, but I think you see what I'm getting

JJ. It's an important question . . . I'm glad you asked it. Those academics do exist, the guerilla academics, but they tend not to be the elites like at firstly say there's some of the folks that you loan money to because they need to hire an attorney because university is trying to fire them, right. Or the ones that move around because the university makes it so hostile for them. Right. They're like, let me get out of here and go to another gig. And then it out, the new gig is just like the old gig, right? It's the same hostility, the gorilla academics. It's a beautiful concept, right? I would say is principled and understands that sacrifice is necessary in order to use our intellect in a way that is ethical.

There's no way to be ethical intellectuals without sacrifice under these systems and regimes. But then you have the possibility to accumulate wealth, seriously, real money. Like I make money, but like for some reason, like younger people know what everybody makes. And sometimes they tell you like, oh my God, people make that much as an academic. So based salary book, sales talks, you know, some people can charge 40,000 for a keynote. The standard is \$500. Um, but if you can like get 40 K and the flight and everything else, like, so it's just sort of like, wait, this is a money-making site. Like in the, in the old days when it was elderly white males, you know, who probably came from wealth also. And it was just sort of this abstract intellectual realism, um, that also seemed to reinforce white supremacy, capitalism, right? And, um, patriarchy misogyny, as well as genocide.

It was less seen as part of the marketplace. I would say today, the academy is definitely just an extension of the marketplace in part, because academics have become pundits. This is the rise of technology and the way in which “news” is coupled with punditry; “specialists” appear on their programs that promote the latest book we are told to read. The book wins awards [sometimes because of quality of content, sometimes because of promotion, or perhaps both]. The news promotes the award-winning book. The award-winning book becomes a documentary or film. The award-winning author is hired as a consultant on a Hollywood movie. The film is marketed and distributed through corporations. Entertainment, commerce trade become part of the swirl of the academy. The academic appears in the world through press releases that increases their value to the institutions that can market them to raise more money.

Do you see the loop? It's just like, it's, money-making every day. You'll get your cut as an academic, but the university will get theirs in terms of prestige and standing and the rankings in *US News and World Report*.

What do you do when black suffering has become monetized? It was monetized in the antebellum era when we as Blacks were literally chattel slaves. One key question then was “how much are you worth on the auction block?” It's monetized after the enslavement era through the 13th amendment to the U S constitution which legalizes slavery in prison. The convict prison lease system follows emancipation so Blacks are worked to death on “plantations” that are work farms belonging to the state and northern capital as it industrializes the south. Our death rates went up significantly after the civil war and because blacks, when arrested, became sold as prisoners and so became the joint property of the state and corporation invested in mining, lumber, manufacturing, etc. Those most likely to be incarcerated would be poor laborers and

workers. Decades later in civil rights movement, it is the petit bourgeoisie that commands leadership because government and capital leverage or help pick black leadership.

When Martin Luther King, who is chosen to be the public face of leadership for the Montgomery Bus Boycott that starts in 1955, it is partly because he is middle class, has a Ph.D. in Theology from Boston University, and is the pastor of a respectable church. When he becomes a guerilla intellectual, after marching, organizing and suffering with blacks of all classes, he is radicalized and understands that the war in Vietnam is immoral and illegal and that means US citizens must oppose imperialism and capitalism. That is when King's funders largely disappear. There was nothing to capitalize off of in terms of black suffering; for King there was only solidarity. If you're going to fight, you're not just the victim. Now you have agency and then your agency is tied to rebellion against capitalism and imperialism. Two to three million Vietnamese died in the Vietnam war. The US lost 55,000 personnel. For the Vietnamese, it was a genocide. For the US state losing that many people was an investment in "foreign interests" and empire.

Blacks were some of the soldiers "fragging" officers in the Vietnam war. Black troops appeared to be sent to their deaths at a higher rate. As Blacks, we were/are monetized because we were reduced as monetary objects and that's tracked us through and into rebellions. Yet, our rebellions also became monetized. We start off with street protests and then there is an incredible flood of money coming from large liberal, but not really humane or justice-minded corporations. Jeff Bezos made his donation to some form of Black Lives Matter off shoot with other corporate leaders who are exploiting their workers, devastating the climate and supporting the police to terrorize and/or control us. When do we know the abolitionism is real? When do we know that the academic is really a guerilla academic? I can't answer that question, but I think those are

brilliant questions to put on the table because at least you're asking and not buying the whole package.

If I got a button with a black power fist on it, some might think “Oh, that must be like radical. That must be abolition. That must be something that can deliver.” That is just symbolism. People have become “experts” on and “profiteers” off black suffering and, weirdly, black rebellion. My position is “How would you know anything about a rebellion unless you actually fought in one.?” I’m not an Afropessimist; maybe they adopted me somewhere down the line. I think the antipathy towards Afropessimism, the way it’s construed, is because AP are often guerilla intellectuals engaged in an intellectual rebellion on defining an anti-black world.

Afropessimists are not asking you to do anything tactical. . . leave that up for your cadre. But they are saying that you can't reform this, the US democracy as a racial-imperial project. I've written [in “Airbrushing Revolution for the Sake of Abolition”] that “revolutionary reforms” are an oxymoron. I'm really tired of people making up political language. I understand if it's culture and it's coming from the streets, or from artists such as No Name. But for academics to think that we're creating [black radical/revolutionary] culture from the academy . . . that's just a straight up hustle. We as academics don't create culture. We create artifacts that are compatible with the industry.

It’s the people as a mass who decide political paths. I’m not romanticizing the masses. People tell me that I don't know what I’m talking about on a regular basis. I'm like, “Okay, let me see.” If you're right on that one or I don't agree with you, I am still going to do what I think is right. The shift of power right should be towards the mass. If the mass is being disciplined to follow state/corporation, then power shifts towards the elites who speak on behalf of the mass and interpret their suffering. People were counting the numbers of people who came out after

George Floyd's slow murder by police officer Derek Chauvin. Showing up is important, but that doesn't mean that everyone who marched/protested changes their commitment to capitalism or racism.

BLM does not mean "black liberation movement," it means black lives matter. If you have to explain that to an imperial nation, with grown-ass people, I mean, come on. Like they didn't know? They know and they don't care. Some are poised to tell you that black lives do not matter because some, they, can accumulate from your suffering. Obama, Trump, Biden . . . all rejected the term 'defund the police.' If they could not truly support "black lives matter" by reigning in police violence, then what do you think their position is on "black liberation movement?" They would criminalize a black liberation movement; they did that decades ago with Cointelpro. I think it's not hard to figure out the government's positions. It's emotionally hard to accept what you figure out.

FD: [T]here's a passage in wretched of the earth where for nonblacks, decolonization equals the flight of capital. Lodged in my head [this is] just as a metric. Where is money pooling? Where is it drying up as just a baseline? But that flight of capital is a sign that you're onto something, it is what phenomena basically says. I think we forget that. We forget that as a metric.

JJ: You're right. It's money and violence, right. By the Capitol. And then you being put on a surveillance list and there's so much violence right now, yet it's horrific that the white supremacists have their own, you know, capture or kill list. You know, I don't know how they describe it, but obviously the state does too. And it doesn't matter whether it's a democratic administration or Republican, like any rebel is a cause for concern one because they encourage

the flight of capital, which, you know, makes sense because they're trying to undo a predatory economic system, you know, also known as capitalism, predatory, capitalism, you need adjectives, a monopoly capitalism, but you know, capital is protected by violence. Try a strike, try a demonstration. Logically, you know, who's going to show up to suppress the strike and suppress the demonstration. One question would be what's the role of the academics in this? Are we the buffer zone between the cops and the mass? Decades ago, I would say, yes. [In *Resisting State Violence*, I talk about clashes with police] in New York, on the Brooklyn bridge, in front of the UN. There's something about the academic industry, its aloofness or engagement exists within the modality of the classroom. Now, prisons become our classrooms and also our laboratories. . . . it's where you go to study people or study their writings. There are admirable things that we've done as abolitionists, but we could not call ourselves *revolutionary* abolitionists unless we actually opened the gates of the prisons. It's kind of biblical. I mean, Jericho, which is now doing a 2021 tribunal on 1951 We Charge Genocide document, trying to free political prisoners [and have the walls come tumbling down].

Sundiata Acoli, Mumia Abu Jamal, Leonard Peltier. I know there are others that I'm forgetting. Forgive me. It's an important endeavor. The methodology or method is going to be aligned with the liberals that fund "radicals" who get their money from liberal funders. We're not going into churches, mosque, or synagogues passing the plate for our endeavors. Instead, we ask if folks can you write a grant proposal, or have their university sponsor a conference? And those ones in tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars, those kinds of. Look at the money. Charles Koch, um, you know, the two brothers David and Charles Koch (one recently passed) contributed to the hires of arch-conservative/reactionary faculty by funding universities. Obama had his chief of staff Valerie Jarrett meet with Koch personnel to discuss prison reform.

Even though Frank Wilderson actually has a background of struggle, most of academics have not been in a war. The gorilla academic is a unicorn, the black unicorn. The academy, if you can find one that is reasonably tolerant, gives them some space, support. But the environment seeks to either saw off the horn of the unicorn, or cage it as another prize possession, or lock it up somewhere. I mentioned Margarita [the UC doctoral student who suicided while writing her dissertation on the CM]. I suspect the academy was hard too. I worry that our youth are suiciding in increasing numbers, if they're more vulnerable and more alienated. Technology has a part in this, but so also do political portrayals and deceptions.

The language doesn't even work anymore if you can't distinguish a radical from a liberal. They're all using the same discourse. Rebellion is prohibited because it's bad manners. But reinventing the world is beautifully frightening because it's full blown. A 360 wrap. You can't do 90 degrees, 180, because everything is unstable, including the very meaning of what it means to be free. And I know that sounds like overwhelming, but like, you know, on a good day, it can be thrilling.

DS: And at one point, this is just one last point on this because I'm not in academia. This is very rich conversation for me. I'm like academia adjacent, but you know, it's really me getting the gleam in on the insights of YouTube, I think any good Marxists and any smart economists will say that as you just said, I mean, you said capital is guarded, and maintained by violence, but it's also created and generated by violence. This is something Dr. Jared Ball recently helped me really understand. If I'm thinking about capital being generated and created from violence from colonialism and slavery till today, and we think of these economies of representation and representation, the representation industry being linked with the academic industry—those two

are almost one in the same at this point—the capital that's being generated by these academic abolitionists, and academics in general, must also be generated through some form of violence or exploitation, hyper-exploitation.

JJ: If somebody signs up for your class and they don't drop out by a certain point, they have to keep on with the class in order to get the grade to cumulate grades that are passing in order to get the degree, to be able to launch themselves as like, I'm not going to be laboring poor or working class. Right. And look, I got the paper, so hire me as white collar. When the next round of COVID comes, I get to stay home and I'm not going to like die prematurely, you know, as a expendable essential worker. If the captives are the raw material of our factory work, then yeah, we should pay them. But more important than paying them, we should free them.

We're part of this machine that is consuming the lives of the captives. But we tell ourselves that we're contributing to the well-being by putting their stories on page or on in film, but right. Enlist, they have a percentage right of the royalties. Then there lies became the property of others. And that's what we were talking about earlier, right? Like who gets to own other people and to own their story is in fact you own them to some degree to own their politics, dictate to them what political responsibility is. That is the parental voice. Like this is why, you know, we were talking about the captain maternal or Loco parentis in place of the parent, the social worker or the state or the parent's Patria, the state itself, which is the parental authority.

You are benefiting in the zone of terror and trauma, the only way to stop the pennies or whatever they're giving to you because it's less than the publisher is making right. And less than the university or colleges making their fundraising, using your book as like, look, we have smart people and they care about the world. The only way to shift the violence away from the subjects

that we say we care about is to better understand the violence of the state and neutralize that violence, deflect that violence, or allow that violence to go somewhere else, but not into your communities and hopefully not into the communities you care about. I agree with the abolitionists and the aspiration that prison should not exist. I also know that predators exist. I don't care what you call it; they're going to have to go somewhere until we work this out.

However, the police are predatory formation for the democracy. Unless you can come up with the way in which you control the violence, and this is different. What I think is key. It's not defunding the police per se because it's a budget thing and people keep moving money around. And then two years they're going to slice the money back from the basketball program, the arts grow. Cause they always do that. Like throw you like money, follows rebellion once a rebellion style, they're going to take the money back because you didn't control the bank, right? We have to control the violence. Violence is going to exist. The question is "Who's going to control it?" If you can control the violence, people are better equipped to demonstrate for their needs, protest for their needs, without that violence being turned against them.

If we can come up with these therapeutic modalities to deal with violence inside our communities, that is terrific. Definitely will support that. Have always support that. But a therapeutic modality will not deal with the police, with ice, with the CIA, with the FBI, with the national guard, right. They don't deal in therapeutic modalities with you, right. They deal with control capture elimination, right? I would say that academic abolitionists, if we want to take a risk, we would focus on violence money and we would be transparent. We would tell people how much we make for our gigs, how much we got in our book royalties. We were like, this is public knowledge. Don't believe in predatory capitalism. We don't want to be predatory capitalists. We

want to be transparent about our revenue stream. And then if you want to tithe, I don't know what your percentage is.

Put something in a common fund . . . you can't dance with the devil and come back with two feet. They need to explain candidly what their freedom dreams are about working with the Democrats, because those dreams don't seem to be streaming on the same line as people who were held captive [by police/prison] policies of the democratic party . . . To the best of my ability, I've tried not to dance with the devil, but I have done a Do-si-do here or there.

The last thing I would say echoes Kathleen Cleaver. I paraphrase her from an interview she did with Henry Louis Gates in the 1990s. I think her analysis was brilliantly stated, but I don't hear academics talking about it. Cleaver said that the liberation movement, black panther, third party, black power movement presented a false united front that the black (petit) bourgeoisie and black radicals were aligned together. They were not, but they felt that in public [or before the “white gaze”] they had to appear unified, as if only one form of abolitionism existed. This was a false front. There was no unified blackness. [The black middle classes were anti-revolutionary, pro-capitalist and did not support anti-imperialist wars.] Black radicals had more in common with movements in the “global south” than in blacks writ large. We have to ask what happened to those [anti-colonial] movements. Short answer: CIA. But we had more in common with rebellions, for freedom control over economy and had Gemini in terms of the reproduction of knowledge. But, to echo Cleaver, black intellectuals lied thinking that an all-black performance or mass would somehow deliver. It didn't. It betrayed us.

We have to dis-aggregate ideologies among blacks. We don't all share the same political thinking. Some people's freedom is to be able to purchase. They would say, “No,” but I'm not talking about Prada bags. I mean, purchase access to powerful people. You become essential as a

black person if you] can bring this many black people to a rally, voting booth. . . access to the apparatus and then I'll have your ear.

FD: At Brown University, while we were trying to formulate demands around the money dispossession and university governance plank, there was sort of a lot of this discussion about the, the money is tainted, any demand we make, we're already, you know, where are you swimming in it? So, one question I put on the table is what have I consented to by already being at Brown? Two things that I'm going to reflect on: I've consented to converting black life into a raw data or raw material; I've consented to not interrogating violence, to allowing violence to continue through the [current] pathways. I think that's just a question: Whenever I'm in a particular setting, what have I consented to by the fact that my presence (I think "consent" is a troubled word). Not to leave us off the hook, but we had some really difficult internal debates around demands around money for this very reason, because we have one hand in, one hand out, some of us have both hands in.

JJ: Some people took money and they gave it for the breakfast programs. Some people asked politely; [others] shook down grocery stores. . . . I don't think that where we're situated is any worse than the Catholic church. They've been paying out a lot of money for their abuses [against children and women]. Some people still go to church. Some people totally turn off. . . . this is like a pedophile ring or something, but the edifice still exists. So, the question for the people I know who stay in church is how do you transform its authoritarian ethos. It's indifference to children and women and [LGBTQ+] and others? It's racist: how many stained-glass pictures of a white Jesus exist?

There's a difference between the churches that become mega churches. . . . capitalism is their speed—they're just accumulating money over money—and the smaller churches that I know in Harlem that are really trying to work their way through scripture. They will not call themselves guerilla intellectuals. But if you tell them there's a war between good and evil and God is on their side and they can humble themselves to a higher power, they would likely risk their lives to do good. Church goers have, there's the sanctuary movement [from the 1980s harboring victims of US-funded contras and death squads in Latin America]. There's the church during the civil rights movement. We can navigate the duplicity of our environments. As kids, we saw the *Wizard of Oz*. there's a wizard behind the curtain trying to make sure people think this is a beautiful, cathedral-like safe space. It's not.

We know that schooling itself is a form of violence. If we can move from the captive maternal who's conflicted that we're stabilizing structures that we know prey on their surrounding environments. Either they're gentrifying the neighborhood, pushing out the working class, or they're trying to take donor money from the right wing and look at people's syllabi and make sure they not offending right-wing donors. This employer does not have my people's future as a priority. The healthy future for my people as a priority, captain maternal stage one, captain maternal to we're moving into a movement arena. . . .

Frederick Douglas [stated that people] don't give you power. You take it. As an academic who can pay their bills, I understand exactly what I'm saying in terms of the implications. [I have] met people who risked their lives and some transitioned in order to pursue freedom and liberation, not just for themselves, but for the entire collective. I understand that to be a worthy life. And I'm not saying that longevity and comfort are equivalent.

FD: We were going to ask you a little bit about the captive maternal. . . . you dedicated your book *Seeking the 'Beloved Community'* to cyborg maternals and ghost warriors, to all who make and made the impossible demand to the state its allies and its apologists to resurrect, the child you killed. The child seems to be another important figure or function in your analysis. Can you talk about the political condition of black children and mothers and how that has informed your [work].

JJ: When you have proximity to [black] children and you have responsibilities to them, then you really understand what terror is because you realize you can't protect them. And that on one level it's just so humiliating. Like you've been around for so long. You're like, I've got chops, right? I got game. I know what to do and I've got money. But the principal is racist. If they go to a school that has fewer resources and the metal detectors, the cops are just like roaming around kids. Their outcome is going to be more limited. And their procurator, your vulnerability to incarceration or violence is going to increase. So, you're going to put them in this school just to keep them from harm. But you know, to here's the conundrum, the principals are racist. So, when they go to that school, the principal and their staff is going to harm them. And so those are your choices, right? How do you nap? Like then we can say, okay, we need freedom schools and we need autonomy. And I totally agree to that. But I would say the vast majority of time, we make choices that are going to be harmful, but we just try to mitigate the degree of harm, which means we, if we've accepted the fact that our children were, I wouldn't say we were okay with it, but it comes to everyday reality.

Kids are going to be harmed. That happens. So, how much harm should they be exposed to? Obviously, [those queries mean that we are] not a free people. The child's position would be,

“I don't want to be harmed. I don't agree to 15% vs 25%, or 40% vs 60%. No harm, period.” As adults, you can forget how much you've suppressed about the violence against you when you were the most vulnerable and you relied on adults to protect you. The adults never clearly told you that they could not. And there were, they were mortified by that fact that it was a fact, or maybe they did tell you, and there was like grow up faster, which is what the, what's the point of having a childhood?

What was it? Two minutes [long]? It would be painful to redirect ourselves to the needs of the child, but it would be amazing. It would be like, like sing ballads about us too, that like, what are we doing this for the kids? Okay. Like they will remember us forever. There'll be singing ballads. Like, you know, whatever. When I think of these movements, you know, when Rosa parks, I believe stated it was when she saw those photographs around image Hill's funeral, is it Mamie till Mobley has just sent you to money, Mississippi to be with your relatives, had no idea somebody was working on the book. It seems like I was always worse. Emmett Till's dad turns out that he was probably lynched in Europe, under false accusations of raping a white woman. That's why there's no father, but he must have loved, his child and so been himself a Captive Maternal.

The mother gives the dead mutilated child to a state that cannot resurrect that child and make them home, we're not accountable to the state. It's not a God. Years later when I'm in Colombia or Brazil or moving around and I'm hearing about mothers losing their children, mostly they're talking about their sons. Right. And I, you know, hearing how, in one case in Brazil, they asked the mother like, well, what if we name a basketball program after your son that the police or the paramilitary kill? Or what if we get a scholarship, like the whole things they buy us out in the U S like, pass the dollar Solomon. Then they do these little, like in New York,

there's Eric Garner law or something. And the cops are still rogue, right? They made these laws after black people, they murder and the mother kept refusing it.

The academics and the NGOs and attorneys decided to just take the mother outside until she calmed down or to give her water, and Advil; then, bring her back so that she can be rational and negotiate. Officials offer little for the murdered child of the mother. The officials ask: "What can we do for you from the state? The mother's statement is: Resurrect the child you killed. But only a God can do that.

When we align with the children, then all struggle is for the children. All power is for the children. And it doesn't mean we don't have structure. We're not always nurturing and raising, but at least radicals are not creating cogs in a factory. We're not creating cops and prison guards. We're not creating like wonks who are just going to talk about trauma rather than addressing their own trauma and acknowledging that the trauma of others, there's not a commodity and you can never meet the needs of children. We will always feel just like you feel before the divine, because we're not defined, we're flawed. I think that brings sanity to our lives in humility and aspiration. That is all about striving. And it gives us meaning that's the way I see it. The bottom line is "Don't let the state pimp your kid." Don't let the social worker pimp your kid. And, you don't pimp your kid. Don't sell your kid to the state. . . . when you ask children what they want and they clearly tell you, and you understand what children need, they don't always get what they want, but what they need is the eradication of predatory formations known as capitalism, imperialism, white supremacy, the shot misogyny, devastation of the natural environment, which has its own beauty in life forms. And the retirement of the managerial class will have its manifests. . . . They need to find some other kind of work to do.

DS: As you're talking about children, I can't help, but think of my time in Cuba and how one of the very first things, when I, I mean, spending real time there with organizers is, you know, they're not coordinating childcare for their organizing meetings and their educational circles where a couple people are deemed to go watch the children in another room. The children are sitting in the circle, listening half the time contributing, even in, you know, off the record conversations, even in the hot spicy conversation sometimes. And so how I've been thinking on this question of how to recreate that here, because just in the very way that we exclude them or include them in structures. A lot of people, when they talk about getting into activism, they say, you know, as a child, I wasn't really interested in this and I wasn't interested in this. And then this big thing happened and suddenly I want to be an activist. In reality, you should be brought up and nurtured and [situated] in a circle and in a community of organizers and activists, and I've had eight-year-olds in Cuba, school me on the Cuban constitution. Here I am an adult, I can barely quote two sentences of it.

JJ: All revolutions are imperfect, but they [the Cubans] have a revolution which they must defend and we don't have a revolution to defend. . . . the examples in which children are valued and also see ourselves as adults [who] don't know everything. Learn how we could struggle for revolution. So that one day we have exactly what you described.

DS: Well, it's been a very generative talk.

Chapter 12

(Re)Thinking the Black Feminist Canon

The Black Feminist Canon⁶²

Paris Hatcher (PH): It is so good to see you, Dr. Joy James! . . . So, a shadow boxer, and abolitionist, the black matrix, and Captain Maternal— these are some of the framings that Dr Joy James . . . has offered the Black Feminist Canon. [S]he has so many articles to read and grapple with . . . Captive Maternals. The Black Matrix is so juicy. I am so excited that you are here to join us today and be in community.

Joy James (JJ): Thank you, Paris. . . . Canon, and thank you, Ra, for that blessing [which reminds me of] Thich Nacht Hanh [who] worked with Martin Luther King to oppose imperialism and war left us: What do you do with the garbage. . . . leftovers? You make compost; from the compost, grow roses.

I am on this journey of trying to figure out . . . Captive Maternals. I see them spontaneously emerge. They are always appearing as teachers...rich in their ideas and in their risk-taking. Sometimes, I call [the youths] “baby Captive Maternals”; and there are the youth, elders, and ancestors. I noticed that Paris [holds] Ida B Wells [as ancestor]. [Ms. Wells] is my favourite ancestor, if you are allowed to have a “favourite ancestor.”

[T]he origin story of the Captive Maternal [emerged] five or six years ago (2014). When I was in Harlem, I watched people, mostly women, but also men, non-binary and trans-people

⁶² Edited Transcript: Paris Hatcher interview with Joy James, Canon: *Black Feminist Futures*. Summer 2021.

organize communities for their children, for their elders. They functioned as stabilizers balancing life in the middle – the fulcrum on a plank, forming a seesaw, leveraging everyone into stability even to the point of the caretaker Captive Maternal’s exhaustion. CMs were/are making sure people are fed, that they get to school, they stay away from the police, from prison, from gangs. They understand their value and dignity. Particularly for children and vulnerable women that are nonatypical or neurodiverse, CMs make sure that they are not preyed upon. I was humbled to watch that life-giving struggle that you wake up, even when you are tired you put people to bed. Even though you would like to take a nap yourself, you make sure people are fed. For me, the Captive Maternal was/is agender. Even though most of whom I saw soldiering as Captive Maternals, appeared to identify as women or girls, or children.

Captive Maternals have stumbling blocks when moving towards political conscious and struggle to protect and liberate their families, kin, communities. Increasingly, academia plays curious roles in stabilizing civil rights markets and defending questionable accumulations within monied networks that annex vulnerable civilians and disparage militants confronting state violence. The most vulnerable activists mobilize and streets, and within under resourced communities. They tend to have low visibility and limited funds. Routinely surveilled, harassed and arrested and criminalized as black activists. Even in the Obama administration, surveillance data was collected on black activists and catalogued in the FBI under “black extremism” index. That I would like to feed my children and not have them shot (by police) becomes seen as a declaration of war against the state. Hence, your surveillance index. The most vulnerable activists mobilized with the most for clarity, with limited funds and low visibility. Routinely surveilled, harassed, most likely to be arrested, most likely to be injured, incarcerated, or killed by police forces or white supremacist vigilantes like the 18-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse, who shot

three white men at a Black Lives Matter protest in Minnesota, killing two, one was armed only with a skateboard. Released on a 4million-dollar bail bond with the support of President Donald Trump, Rittenhouse, who I've referred to as a "serial teen killer" was able to capitalize on white supremacy and become the beneficiary of racist corporate and small-dollar donors. Before he shot BLM white protesters, he was handed bottled water by militarized police forces even though they did not check if he legally possessed the assault rifle he carried and brandished. Reactionary and protofascist elites (in the making, if whiteness is existential wealth under the rule of white supremacy) benefit under these conditions of struggle as their personal identities and ideologies align with dominant fascism or progressivism. The democratic social movements do not reflect the vigilante fascism of Rittenhouse and his supporters. But they are not accountable to the mass when violent tragedies unfold. The mass of antiracists wants material protections. Logically, elites do not invest in popular mechanisms that could replace them. Ideological conflicts, right, the ideological conflicts between, this is the Marxist language.

The black petty bourgeoisie progressive, are largely shaped by the desires and strategies for power. And some is about prestige, because people have egos. That happens. These conflicts might spur new bone growth between a class with leisure and institutional connections and classes marked as expendable workers in hostile and underground economies including COVID essential workers, and prison workers. A number of the petty bourgeoisie betray the interests of the unemployed and incarcerated. On some level of solidarity and engagement, although it is unclear which level, we can forge ties, troop boundaries are rarely sufficiently identified in establishment. I can say that from working with different impacted families, where others have lost their children to police violence. Right? Police executions. The Chicago mothers I know,

Shapearl Wells and Dorothy Holmes, lost their sons to police violence learned much from working in support with them for over five years, in the US and Colombia.

I have recently met other mothers who have lost children, e.g., Samaria Rice. Activists in their twenties as CMs introduced me to Rice and Lisa Simpson. In the work we briefly did, lines of communication were not clear and trust was not fully established. There needs to be a separation between activists mobilizing under a set of ethics based on politics and families directly impacted by police murders of kin; those families are dealing with their grief and trauma as primary, whereas those of us with murdered kin are working through our desires to help and struggle through secondary or tertiary trauma. Parameters and boundaries are established over time. With Ms. Holmes and Ms. Wells it took years. Sometimes organizing is like being in a pressure cooker: you are responding instantaneously to crises that heat up as they unfold. Frictions, disagreements appear among those who are trying to be in solidarity and with those families who have their own internal and external disagreements with each other. Frictions do not completely break relationships but it takes time to build and mend them.

PH: Can you say more about the contradictions embedded in the Captive Maternal?"

JJ: The contradictions in the captive maternal are shaped by [varied] stages. . . . Twenty-something year olds are saying: "Hey, you got the "stages" wrong. Add some more stages." (Laughs) So the contradictions I see are the convictions of political struggle. But they are also a contradiction of the unique political struggles shaped around black captivity. There is a summit that is happening on June 12, 2021. The graphic we used shows 500 years of resistance. . . . protest, civil rights, slave rebellions but there are scores of rebellions on this US map. Those are

the conditions of siege. 500 years is half of a millennium. Under 500 years of struggles you are going to have contradictions. What does it mean to be free? Is it personal attribute, a position? Is this a collective endeavour? Make compromises or go straight hardcore revolutionary? We have no consensus. . . .

When DuBois was finally kicked out of the NAACP —he was becoming more radical and wanted to write and advocate for economic justice— he lamented that he had no radical cohorts. Yet, the antilynching leader Ida B Wells, who became the avatar of investigative reporting, was rejected by DuBois who, aided by Mary Church Terrell, sidelined Miss Wells from the founding conference for the NAACP based on Mary White Ovington, a white philanthropist wanting Wells out of the NAACP because Wells was “too militant.” Today, I read this as code of denigration as “too black.” One cannot deny the specificity of our conditions to generalize the racism. It is not. It is anti-blackness. When he had Wells, as an ally, DuBois did not want her because she was too militant. Wells would disguise herself and go to prisons to take depositions for falsely accused black men and boys. She publicly stated that she carried a pistol in her handbag and would sell her “life dearly,” [hereby warning white assailants that attempts to harm or kill her would come at a cost. Historians said that when she moved to Chicago, people would not want her in the neighbourhood because when they try to come firebomb her house, with the address wrong, your house might burn down. We have many contradictions. But we have a will and we have love. In the struggle, you resolve contradictions.

PH: Another question from Ebony. They say they appreciate you naming that your work is not hostile to black feminisms, but perhaps a call to get clear of black feminisms since it is not a monolith. Also, can you speak to the... plurality or the multiplicity of abolitionism?

JJ: Yes, I always forget the “s”. . . abolitionisms. I think we are trained to forget the “s.” I don't think the academy likes plurality. I think the academy likes order and discipline. Abolitionisms – I wrote it in the plural. . . . and hegemonic discourses [assert the] singular not plural. [If the concept is unified and] is singular you can control one market. If there are multiple forms of abolitionism [or feminisms] you have competitors.

I believe bourgeois feminism is dominant. [The Combahee Collective formed in] Boston because black teenage girls, black women [were being] murdered [and their] bodies were found in dumpsters. This meant Boston had a serial killer. Or serial killers. Samuel Little, who killed and 93 women and would be arrested but later let out of prison. You get numbers that high when those murdered are indigenous or black girls/women that the police forces do not care about.

PH: [S]ometimes our movement does not have teeth. Yes, violence can be generated. We try to make it palatable. We try to make it where everyone can get in around it. What do we lose? . . . Captain Maternal is not an identity, but rather a function. Can you unpack this distinction further? And you also talked about it being ungendered as well.

JJ: Captive Maternals do domestic labour. Who cooks? Cleans? wipes up sheets? It is female labour. The latest data from Christie House, on the trafficking of children, shows that the girls are trafficked. But 40% of the trafficked children are males. The traffickers may be disproportionately male. But there are women trafficking children as well. Boys are more reluctant to disclose that they have been sold as sex slaves. Child trafficking might not be determined by gender but by age and vulnerability. . . .

Political priorities should not be shaped by gender but by need. People need food, a clean place to sleep, shelter and protections. One of the churches I am affiliated with has the only black teen trans shelter in NYC. That is why Captain Maternal is function. If you think about Condoleezza Rice as a black conservative feminist and the invasion and wars in the middle east. She helped to start genocides there [with military and disinformation campaigns]. She was a black woman who grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, as a black girl playing with the four little girls murdered in the Klan bombing of the 16th Street Birmingham Church. Rice is not a captive maternal [she is an imperial operative]. You cannot work for the administration, you cannot lie about the destruction, you cannot do imperialist warfare, you cannot be responsible for the story of the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in countries. This is *not* a function of a Captive Maternal but she [state-aligned and power-seeking as a] black feminist.” [Rice sits behind Kavanaugh on the opening day of his testimony in Senate hearings that will appoint him as Trump’s nominee to the Supreme Court, after Kavanaugh is accused by a white woman of sexual assault.] Guess how many black lives are going to be wrecked by the Supreme Court? I hope that is clear. I can name some other people. But then people will say I am not “nice.”

PH: We do *not* need nice. The chat is going up. That is right! There is a difference. The distinction is really important. . . . what are your thoughts on jobs by the movement? How do you see that complicated – complicating principal organizing? Specifically in the latest iteration of the movement has fallen deep into the nonprofit industrial conference?

JJ: That is a great question. . . .

If you build a movement industry on top of black death and trauma, make sure you are not building on a graveyard. There are new bones, old bones, and corpse bones. Some academic institutions instructed their students through the accumulation of black death. If you start a freedom movement, and you are accumulating, believe me, the people who have the real money made an investment in you. Finance capital does not fund freedom movements.

We have to organize for sanity and for honour. . . . keep kids healthy and allow them to live longer and not have nervous breakdowns as a norm. Everybody should have the right to eat. But this is capitalism. To take care of our material needs we have to change the political economic order. I have worked with nonprofits before, before or during grad school, prior to becoming an academic. We are always doing good. We try to do good. We always confront the suffering. The sad child, the dead child's family. And then we will raise money from their suffering and death. Is that in good faith? . . . If somebody's paying for your movement, if somebody put in \$100 million. . . black activists told me that foundations are donating up to \$1 billion following the George Floyd protests... they are not doing it for black freedom. I am not saying give up the job, just . . . take the resources and redirect them out. But if you start lip-synching [freedom] songs, you are not singing anything that anybody who needs to be free wants to hear.

PH: Exactly. When you have been indoctrinated, and then you forget what this is about. . . .

JJ: Whatever the Kennedys thought they knew about the 1963 March on Washington and how to control it, Black people knew more. When Barack Obama in 2008 at Denver, Colorado's Mile-High Stadium accepted the presidential nomination from the DNC, he called out the "preacher" –

but would not say the name “Rev. Martin Luther King.” Rev. King had delivered the famous “I Have a Dream Speech” at the Washington Mall. In a late-night PBS interview with journalist Gwen Ifill, former King-assistant Jesse Jackson said that the day that Obama scheduled for his DNC nomination—the anniversary of the 1963 civil rights March on Washington attended by celebrities yet allowing no black woman to speak (Mahalia Jackson could sing though) or black queer leader such as James Baldwin forbidden from speaking—was also the anniversary of Emmett Till’s 1955 murder. The fourteen-year-old Chicagoan (Senator Barack Obama (D-Illinois) had his residency in Chicago. Half a century after his murder by white vigilantes, the black child had been kidnapped, tortured, sexually assaulted and murdered by the white Bryants and their kin. That becomes a catalyst for the civil rights movement when later that year Rosa Parks refuses to give up her segregated seat to a white male passenger. Ms. Parks said that she was thinking about Emmett Til. If you murder our children, you trigger a movement.

PH: That is right. The code survives. . . . is it possible for the Academy to have more space? . . . how do you see black academics can they make maroon camps around the academia? . . . [what] about black anarchists?

JJ: Maroon space is essential where you can create it. . . . have a protective strategy to uphold your space. . . . The question of the maroon is the issue of autonomy. Are black people allowed to be autonomous in the academy? . . . [Where is] ideological adversity. How many radicals that you do not have to loan money to so that they can hire lawyers and keep their jobs? . . . Here is my read on the Academy. . . . Do what you gotta do. State universities are government entities. . . . salaries are public knowledge. Ivy league universities are private billionaire corporations. You

are going to build a maroon inside a government entity, or inside a private corporation. Go for it!
You know what that comes with, right?

For the people I am working with now, we are thinking of new schools linked to independence.

PH: How do you imagine this black anarchy piece?

JJ: Lorenzo Komboa Ervin [published his] memoirs as a black anarchist. I do not know that much about anarchism to speak to it. I am not saying that I am an expert on Marxism, but I value it as an intervention. Anybody who could make an intervention to create a corridor as big as an avenue or as small as a crevice in a crack, helps us to slide into intellectual thinking that allows us to think and respond more rapidly and radically. Cornel West stated that Antifa saved his life and the lives of other clergy in Charlottesville, VA when white supremacists stole the life of white antiracist Heather Heyer. If the state cannot control fascists, then it should definitely not attempt to control anti-fascists who are offering protections that the police refuse. Policing is duplicitous.

UN “peacekeepers” were known to rape women and girls in Haiti. The UN stood down when the Clinton administration, and Susan Rice, working within it as a black pioneering state power feminist, told the UN not to classify the war in Rwanda as a genocide. If it had been classified as genocidal, the UN would have had to respond in material support. Anarchists are going to be part of any antifascist movement. [But violence comes in different forms] such as COVID [and AFRICOM and drones in] Africa where it is difficult to get the vaccine.

PH: Your last comments made me think about black women spaces. I think about the move in Philadelphia. I think about the toll side, not the business district but the people. Not just Tulsa, Wilmington, Carolina, not only that we are going to be here but build some type of power. Lila's, and devastation. I also think about the people like Cece MacDonald, that trans woman who is inviting her own freedom was attacked instead of having to go to jail. And how many folks survive being punished. It is often because black women or women of colour and other gender specific people saying that they are going to fight back. When fighting back, how dare they fight back? They are not fighting back.

JJ: That was a very challenging and wonderful set of questions. . . . Vincent Woodard, black queer academic and author of *The Delectable Negro*, has a section in the book that critiques Harriet Jacobs for taking the violence against one enslaved black who is naked and chained to a bed all day to be the tortured sex object of the white male enslaver. The content is “too much” for the respectable public’s sensibilities and the white abolitionists. Woodard reads a lack of respect and care for the broken captive. The abolitionist movement cannot fully deal with reality. Why? Because of its phobias, fears, prohibitions. But Vincent Woodward also writes about same-sex male desire across racial and captive lines. There are limits to my theorizing about the Captive Maternal [I need to learn more this is not] holy Grail stuff. The function, for me, is a political fury. The function is key because politics are key. Kwasi Balagoon, a queer Black Panther, who kept escaping from prison, during his last escape his rope broke so he plummeted to his death. Their courage and love made him a revolutionary. Afeni Shakur the mother of Tupac Shakur was jailed in the Women's House of Detention, while the Stonewall riot for gay rights was a few blocks away in the Village. As a panther, Afeni Shakur began organizing insid

the jail. The captive women began burning their mattresses in solidarity with the Stonewall rebellion of trans women. Solidarity exists; it always existed, if it does not resonate [that might] be in our analysis. But we are always learning. From whoever wants to struggle. That does not diminish or dismiss the violence that happens. I talked about the church that I belong to, where the teens took photographs or bring up photographs of all murdered transwomen. It was this huge photographic cross. It rests in the arms of a white alabaster angel in Harlem. Other churches will not deal with anti-trans-violence or trans-leadership. The last thing I would say is, I have learned to struggle into organize, but I have also gotten played. By people who were inside the movement who get on late night call and they were like "you should stop the summit, or do not organize this and this and that". In part, I am played because I think the conversation is in good faith but also because they are trans, I feel that I should defer to their judgment in order to prove that I am not reactionary or transphobic.

. . . . [T]hen, I find out that the individual received part of the BLM settlement, or distribution pay outs of hundreds of thousands of dollars. I still decided to do the Summit, but I did not want any more late-night calls where strangers tell me to stand down because I'm allegedly benefitting from people I never met [or asked to be my "subject object" of study]. I erred because I focused on identities, not politics. The only identity that should have been known or relevant was if we were (supporting) revolutionary intellectuals. I will stand in defence of any persecuted group; all such groups have the right to self defence. It doesn't mean that they are all ethical and stable and disciplined against manipulation and opportunism.

History teaches us. Joann Little stabbed the white guard that was raping her. There was a huge defense campaign. But Little should have been acquitted; but Little was stealing televisions out of the homes of Black people who likely had modest or few means. Black women should

defend themselves from racist violence. Some work in the underground economies that harm black communities some work for the state that destroys black communities. Anita Hill was verbally sexually assaulted by Clarence Thomas. As a black conservative working for the Reagan administration, she along with Thomas eviscerated workers' rights by denying the claims made by the LGBTQ, black people, people of colour concerning job discrimination and harassment cases. Because she is a black woman, I will support her, but what is she doing? . . . in relationship with predatory structures? . . . The New Jersey six, when the judge sentenced them, and I tried to organize, black lesbians who are village etc. A black man who was harassing them and probably attack them, because they have been attacked before by a homophobic, trans phobic people, they had scissors or kitchen knife or something. It was not seen as self defence. So, when they were prosecuted and they did time. The judge chastised them not just for being black, not just for seeing female body form, but for being lesbians. Part of the narrative is that they should not have even been in the West Village which is white bourgeois, the court does not really care about the black man beaten. The court criminalized Black personal self defence. . . .

Miss Ella Baker, civil rights leader, reportedly was fired because she secured weapons for a Florida black community whose NAACP leaders had been murdered, when their family home was fire bombed. The NAACP fired her for responding to the desperate needs and requests of the black community for security. As noted above, Ida B Wells was kicked out of the founding of the NAACP in Niagara Falls. The NAACP later fired Mamie Till Mobley in the 1950s because she wouldn't stay "on script" while touring to speak on the murder of her son Emmett Till. . . .

I think of Tatiana Jefferson. Technology is not enough. She's standing right in front of the window, with an eight-year-old in the room. [A Texas police officer shot her point black in the chest, firing through a closed window; without announcing himself he had creeps=ed through her

back yard, she thought he was an intruder and carried her licensed weapon with her to the window; he killed her in her own home in front of the child.] We have to think about security with as much importance . . . as we think about our position papers, publications, conference talks. What does tangible security look like . . . for ourselves? I haven't seen much public discourse. . . [P]eople have mystified violence even though we know empires [routinely deploy] violence.

PH: Thank you so much. . . . I am thinking about the dialectics that you invited us into [and] the movement that we need.

Chapter 13

“What Are Our Sources for Struggle?”: Troubling Black Feminisms⁶³

The Malcolm Effect

What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured. – The Prophet Muhammad

Momodou Taal (MT): Our guest today actually began one of her lectures by quoting three individuals. She quoted the prophet Muhammad [see epigraph]. . . [Amilcar] Cabral and . . . Fannie Lou Hamer. . . for reflection and the mediation. Likewise, in similar fashion, I want to quote the prophet Muhammad today in which he says [Arabic followed by English translation]: “Whoever does not thank the people has not thanked God.”

I started today with those words, because I just want to thank my guests for it's very rare you find people who challenge all the assumptions in which you once held. I also have with me Khadija Diskin, who's been in the show before Welcome to you both. . . . The question I'm going to go straight into is “What is the place for academics in revolutionary struggle?”

⁶³ Edited Transcript: Momodou Taal interview “#39 What Are Our Sources for Struggle? – Dr. Joy James & Khadijah Diskin,” *The Malcolm Effect*, June 20, 2021. <https://chartable.com/podcasts/the-malcolm-effect-w-momodou/episodes>

Joy James (JJ): You've already stated the mandate, right? Whoever finds the people . . . and revolutionary. . . spirit-filled and godly. . . there are different manifestations of deity, but a day job is a day job. There is a place for people who garden and farm, for people who mend the roads. . . for the people who sooth the elder and the sick and dying. Then there's a place for us [as academics and intellectuals] as long as our [university] day jobs don't become a form of deification.

Khadija Diskin (KD): I love that sentiment because I think a lot of the time when I've talked to people about radical politics, when I talked with my students, they often get this deep sense of dread, you know, like, "Well, what's my place in this? What can I do?" I would say [that] there's a spare space for everyone. . . it's about finding where you fit and it's about finding how you can resist. . . the joy is just so potent in reminding us exactly that there is space.

MT: Dr. Joy, you said you no longer call yourself a "black feminist." And I've shared it amongst a lot of black feminists with whom I'm in community. They were a bit taken back as well. I'd love to unpack that further with you.

JJ: No insult to anyone who's found their path and comfort and intellectual capacity through black feminism. [H]aving walked those roads for decades, I've found the limitations. Where the road leads is nowhere I currently want to go, or it looks like the road is leading me back into a circle. I say that because the United States presents as an imperial formation. It has accumulated for its version of democracy through chattel slavery and genocide.

Its feminism increasingly takes on the tenor of state feminism because that's where power

accrues in the US under capitalism and (neo)imperialism. . . . embedded in empire, we are paid to conform to state edicts and preferences, or we are punished when we do not. I do not see how black feminism escapes that kind of disciplinary regime unless it is embedded in under-resourced communities.

And that is not what the academy does. It does not embed within working class or struggling or militant communities. It embeds and structure. If it's a large university or Research I, it's about the elites. There are people who teach 4:4 or 4:5 classes a semester or term but not in the sectors where I've been privileged and conflicted in teaching. On the elite academic levels, elites drive the definitional norms of black struggle because they have the money, stature, position, book contracts, book prizes, zoom talks.

That doesn't mean that in our regular lives or our lives outside of the academy, language and culture are not created. It just means that when it's disseminated through industries, book industries, lecture industries, academic conferences, it is bourgeois or petty bourgeois black feminism that dominates. And I'll give you an example. The anniversary of the Combahee Collective is talked about a lot, and rightly so, because [its contributions]. But in the origin story, which is a material conditions under which this collective and this manifesto and the writing about identity politics embedded in progressive politics emerges, it was violence and murder of black girls and women. That was a catalyst for the <inaudible> river collective, but in the current reiterations of it, that origin in violence, right, and type black anti female and Ty sex worker underground economy, if the, the girls and teens were surviving by working in these precarious industries, that origin story becomes diminished if not disappeared. So our lives in the United States and the Americas are determined to survive captivity and predatory violence, not coming from just work entities, but from the state itself. . . . When I shift to the Captive Maternal [after

decades ago editing *The Black Feminist Reader* and *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*] it's because I'm seeking something that I cannot find in conventional black feminism or (petit) bourgeois black feminisms in plurality.

KD: The way I speak of abolitionism for, to this thing, you are definition shaped by leads, maybe out of laziness. Obviously like to ground ourselves in the context of what black feminism means in the UK. It has the specific genealogy too, but a lot of our inspiration comes from the black feminisms of the UN. And actually, how do we have this conversation? I've been since reading Dr. Joy James's work, the more intentional about distinguishing myself from other types of black feminisms. . . . I got my black feminism for the works of Claudia Jones from the works of Angela. I'm now seeing this sort of mobilization of black feminism in commodified and transactional race . . . it's unsettling.

In UK, we don't have the potency of sort of black feminism within the academy of the way it exists. And the U S and what we're seeing actually as the interaction of black feminism, which has become this very, you know, I call it white liberal feminism in black faces, a very transactional thing where we're seeing the black feminist case be made, not for radical politics, not for abolition, not for ending costs, the coloniality and all these other critical ways, which we've seen historically other forms of feminism mobilize, but we're seeing it become about representation, right? We're seeing it become about a particular type of reformism the not only wants to see itself represented within the state, but also wants to see itself page, right. Paige and given the money and given the black woman. Right. And I'm like, what the hell does that mean? What does that, how does that mean? How is that radical, brilliant way to state it? I mean, but I go back to capital and it's what I was trying to write in the versa blog earlier this month, right?

Like, I'll give you the example of the electoral. You know, the presidential elections write in the us the four-year cycle of sucking up all political organizing to elect one of the parties it's duopoly system anyway. And neither of them is progressive. It's always, fear-based like, you just don't want the pro the fascia sin, but then you end up with the liberals or neo-liberals, who was still do Africom and Dren strikes and have starving babies' and pollute water and Flint, Michigan, and put Asians and the Cameroonians and African's and in ice camp, and deport them at disproportionate rates.

JJ: Some people think that the detained children who are worth saving are brown and *not* black. Betrayal is not based on chaos, it is based on engineering. People want to get paid under an Imperial state. I voted for Obama; he turned out to be the first black *imperial* president. I don't vote for imperial presidents anymore [unless it's a buy-in for a temporary insurance policy against] a proto fascist candidate. If the choices of black women are neoliberal or conservative policies, if this is what is on the menu, by default, you will defect to state politics.

The US elected Kamala Harris. . . . Barack Obama. So, what do black people get from that? black enablers for the Imperial state built on white supremacy. . . . interventions around the globe to destabilize every liberation movement. . . . why would black feminism be spared if it were actually a liberation movement? It is spared and leveraged because it is [reduced to] personal liberation [or accumulations by black elites. . . . The crudeness we're seeing in this new black feminist politics that works as an agent of the state.

KD: Dr. Joy, I mean, something that rings in my head a lot of the time is you said you don't leave that the state will fund its own demise or its own bringing down on itself. And I feel like

when we have our movements, a lot of the time would be the black feminists or “Pan Africanists” who are culturally Pan-African.

My next question . . . there is the largest union election taking place in the UK. We have approximately 1.2 million people. The forget, the greater context, our home secretary, who has been publicly enacted some of the most racist immigration policies we've seen. [The home secretary is] a woman of South-Asian descent. She's the daughter of Indian immigrants . . . she's spoken down on BLM movements and [has] directly instituted legislation that penalizes, BLM protesters.

How do we develop a language with which we can critique . . . the push back. . . right-wing folks weaponize identity politics? [R]unning for election to become general secretary of this union. . . . a middle-aged white man. . . said that we should deport Patel our home secretary. . . . [The] black people . . . in my circles . . . would say things like, “Oh, he can't say that he's a white man.” He had to apologize. He said, “All I'm saying is that I hope she gets subjected to the same nasty policies that she . . . puts on some people of color.” Black people were saying, “No, no, no, no, no. We agree with you, but you can't say that.” And it kind of made me think of the kind of conversation you get around [Chicago Mayor] Lori Lightfoot as well when people criticize her. . . “Oh, she's a black lesbian woman. You can't really criticize her.” How do we develop a language?

JJ: We just keep it plain. I worked with these wonderful black mothers in Chicago, Shapearl Welles, and Dorothy Holmes who lost their sons to Chicago police violence. I've worked with them like in the US, but also in Colombia, you know, in different formations, bringing the main

campus there. They are clear about the betrayals of Lori Lightfoot. For them, your opposition is your opposition, it doesn't matter their skin color, what shade or what kind of pumps they wear. Opposition is opposition. This protective language, almost like therapy, therapeutic language in the middle of dishonor, abuse, and annihilation takes forms in deportations, incarceration, disposability. [Your race does not make you an inherent ally (or opponent).]

The COVID 600,000 deaths and the United States, showed that the US did not leverage money or competency to save lives. Money and competency were never for poor people. I'll use the phrase, people of color, but disproportionately, you know, it wasn't every person called a person of color who the most vulnerable, not only to COVID, but as you know, Carol Anderson talks about in her book on the second amendment and guns, but the violence of white supremacy basically being shot by cops and white, you know, terrorists like our underground terrorism is above ground now. And you know, we have the most guns per capita than anybody on the planet.

Pretty much we know who's stocking those guns. I pay taxes for policing. Why don't they start looking for white supremacist terrorists? Well, that's not their thing. They will define black activists as "identity extremists" and create bogus FBI files on that as an internal threat. Your ally is whoever shows up for material struggle. It is not someone who looks like you. The state has longevity because it knows how to mobilize proxy soldiers. They tell you that you can't critique a black lesbian Lori Lightfoot who is pro-police.

As a former prosecutor, she gets a pass. If we allow that to happen, then our politics are not strategic or dealing with material conditions. Ideology is fabricating false coalitions that don't withstand water. If you pour it on these coalitions, they are fragile, thin paper [they dissolve]. The CIA does commercials now recruiting black lesbians. Black women, historically enslaved and battered, can now buttress and support the imperial state. . . . There are always opportunists.

Clarence Thomas is on the Supreme court and he's black. If you think there's black solidarity writ large, then you're not operational in the material world. If you think there's female solidarity writ large, then you're not operational in the material world. If you remember how Amilcar Cabral and Patrice Lumumba were assassinated [by the US, NATO and Portugal]. Not everybody is your friend in a liberation struggle. If you plan to actually participate in struggle, accumulate networks, then you can *pretend* as if everybody's your friend [while doing the real work off camera with close collectives.]

I moved to the Captive Maternal because I saw age, gender, non-gender, neurodiverse and diverse genders love people to the point of sacrifice and to the point of faltering and still building capacity to save what we want to save. There are stages. The celebratory conflicted caretaker, who makes your kid go to the private white school; you know, your kid's going to be traumatized, but you know, you out the percentage and compare it with the kid going to the under-resourced school with the metal detectors and the cops in it. And that's the form of trauma too. It's a bargain on that first level, the second level we're going to protest, right? We're going to throw it down and say, you know, this is a violation of our human rights. This is the 70th anniversary of recharged genocide, which was written in 1951 about US violations of civil/human rights.

. . . . This is the 50th anniversary of the Attica rebellion and violent suppression. When they created a maroon camp inside the prison walls, they created sites for educational programs, medical, food distribution and culture, they sang to themselves and each other to calm their nerves; not everyone self-identified as men although they were classified as such by the state. That's what I mean by diverse genders typify Captive Maternals. Their maroon camps had imprisoned intellectuals talk to the *New York Times*, read the Attica Manifesto to the public as a

petition for human rights, informing the world that they refused to be treated as slaves anymore. From that stage of the maroon [the runaway enslaved, they challenged the state as their captor and torturer.] New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, after consultation with President Richard Nixon, called in the national guard that using military surplus from Vietnam to address human rights struggles as a war zone. The National Guard shot through white guards to kill black rebels. And once they, we took the prison from the Maroons, right. They continue to torture and allegedly murder those people who had resisted. What's the stage after that? What is the stage of a veteran survivor or the stage of a betrayer? And what is the stage of the ancestor that comes after that? I have no clear idea. But the captive maternal, for me, is an attempt to shake off shackles and imperialism filtering into our movements as we watch how we move towards freedom through time and space.

MT: This has been *The Malcolm Effect* with Momodou. Until next time, take care.

Chapter 14

Pragmatism and Revolutionary Love

Black Myths Podcast⁶⁴

***Author's Note:** In the “Architects of Abolition” lecture given at Brown University in 2018, I noted student researchers who noted that Angela Davis: An Autobiography conflated the Black Panther Political Party (BPPP)—a study group organized by academics and former SNCC members—with the Black Panther Party (BPP) by deleting a letter “P” from the former and throughout the rest of the memoir only referencing the BPP. The BPP originally was formed in 1966 as the Black Panther Party for Self Defense following police violence/homicide against a black male teen. Davis had joined the CPUSA in 1968 through the small, all-black “Che Lumumba Club” There is no formal record or recognition by Panthers or scholars that Davis was a BPP member although she was welcomed as an important ally. In a 2020 interview, Angela Davis asserted that from 1967- 1970, she was a member of: SNCC, the Black Panther Political Party, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. There are known records of Davis being a member of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee.⁶⁵ The talk juxtaposes Davis with Kathleen Cleaver who was the first woman to sit on the Central Committee of the Black Panther Party. After her June 1972 acquittal, Davis would sit on the Central Committee of the Communist Party USA.*

⁶⁴ Edited Transcript: Too Black/Ryan interview with Joy James, “MYTH: Angela Davis Was a Black Panther (w/Dr. Joy James),” Pt. II, *Black Myths Podcast*, August 2021.
<https://www.blackpowermedia.org/blackmythspodcast>

⁶⁵ See Joy James, “The Architects of Abolitionism: George Jackson, Angela Davis and the DeRadicalization of Prison Struggles,” Brown University, May 6, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9rvRsWKDx0>

The Black Myths Podcast is an informative conversational show analyzing popular myths about black culture of sociopolitical nature. Translation, we just debunking the bullshit that be said about black people. Hey, while we're genuinely nerds and be doing this research for fun half the time, it does take a lot of work and effort. Not only for us to be able to do this, but you also get people on the show to help bring this content to you. Also, to help us continue to bring you this important program, please consider becoming a Patreon [subscriber and] feel free to just check out our show notes for further information.

BMP: Welcome to *Black Myths Podcast*. I'm your host Too Black. I will be joined later on by my cohost Ryan and we will be having a guest today. Dr Joy James is Ebenezer Fitch Professor of Humanities at Williams College. If you are a follower of this podcast for at least over a year, you may remember that she was on our show just about a year ago to discuss Black August in the bit that "We're not our ancestors" which is a terrible phrase. It gets plastered across a lot of bad T-shirts. The myth was Angela Davis was a Black Panther. This episode of this series is not meant as a shot at Angela Davis. We just wanted to clarify the actual history and what really went down. And our main critique was a lot of times about the aesthetics of black radicalism. As I caught it in the first episode, "Black Militant vibes," I just get collapsed into the single category, this amorphous idea of militancy that doesn't explain really any politics of what people stood for. . . . just guns and black fists and Afros. It's just a vibe. There's really no articulation of what needs to be done. We wanted to walk through the timeline to just lay out who Angela Davis was, what she was involved with [see first podcast "Was Angela Davis a Black Panther? Myth." She was not a member of the Black Panther Party, but she did work with the Black Panther Party primarily as a member of the Communist Party [CPUSA]. She worked with the Black Panther

Party to help organize political education within that party. . . . She thought they were sexist. She didn't really particularly care for the nationalism. It's posted in Episode one, but she was not a member of the party [. . . which] collapsed and [got] lost in history. When you just add it in because she had a 'Fro, you think she was angry. These things are ahistorical and revisionist. They don't really explain anything. We clarify that history.

Coming into this episode, Dr Joy James actually listens to our episode. Maybe she finishes it about two or three minutes before she hops on and talk with us, so it's fresh on her mind. What we end up doing is we just pretty much walk back through that timeline that we laid out in the first episode. But this time we do it from her standpoint. And she offers more perspective than we were able to offer because we mainly just stuck on the ground facts. But she offers an interpretation and layout that gets us to think about this in a much broader way and more so what it means for today and how we understand this idea of black radicalism, how it gets watered down, how it gets sold back to us and so on and so forth. James wrote “Airbrushing Revolution,” which will be linked in our show notes. . . . as we said in Episode 1, Angela Davis is not a god or a perfect person. It's okay to offer critiques. But I do want to underline once again that this series is not about trying to single out one person and bash them. We're not doing that. Anything we say is within a larger context of trying to understand our history, our struggling on liberation. And anyone can get critiqued or anything within that framework without further ado then [lets] get started.

BPM: I noticed in your interview with *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism [MAKC]* you do emphasize “I'm not a revolutionary.” I know you kept saying that; is that in reference to what you're talking about now, as far as academics?

JJ: Yeah. I say the “go to” is I’m a librarian, like you and the [MAKC] hosts. Like, you, I read that autobiography closely. It’s pretty magnificent the way you [Black Myths Podcast] all parsed it [I was thinking “Oh, I forgot to teach that. . . I don’t even remember that part.” [More content appears in the upcoming books *Contextualizing the Young Angela Davis* and *Vanguard*.]

BMP: [Y]ou can be this revolutionary, at least aesthetically. . . . you can also have some privilege. And I think now, I don’t know if people don’t throw around the word “revolutionary” very often nowadays they throw around “radical” at least. You can have these politics, but there’s no real suffering that has to come with it other than maybe the troll on the Internet . . . hope I’m not stepping out of line. But I just found it interesting.

When Alicia Garza got on Twitter and was talking about she had FBI threats, and the Justice Department came to her door and they told her about it, and they’re not FBI this, but they were death threats. She was warned [as] one of the founders of Black Lives Matter. I just found that to be interesting. I don’t want anything to happen to her. I’m going to clarify that. I’m just saying it’s just that’s not normal either. So if you’re really fighting [its] not normal at all [for the FBI to be protective given their lethal history of Cointelpro to destroy black radicals. . . . [given the structure, that’s just an odd relationship.

JJ: [It’s about integration.] . . . back to the integration matrix. . . . [The wave of private elite school integration was likely fueled by the middle classes, as Davis’s family did] integrate into these Northern elite schools, and they [express their racism as] “Can I touch your hair? [It is offensive] but it doesn’t look like a lynching. That tells you that the world, the democracy, is probably accommodating to blacks. I mean, it can be dangerous because, you know people who

died, but nobody's trying to kill *you* in the private white school, and nobody's even spitting on you in school. The teachers are kind or trying to be kind, and you get invited to white people's homes for dinner, whatever. So that tells you what the possibilities are. . . . there's a class division here. If you're the scholarship kid who lives in the Bronx [and] you end up at Yale, then you have a story you can run with for the rest of your life. . . . what percentage of [black people end up like] that? What percentage hopefully don't end up in Rikers. But what are our choices? [People are starving and we] throw food away, we waste water. What is a revolutionary struggle without war? And I'm not only talking about material war. It could be . . . psychological warfare, which the state does all the time; and the universities and colleges do it because they're ideological factories. I only trust the people . . . who will tell you [that] they don't have the answers. I think a lot of people are saying they have the answers. And how could you have an answer if you tell me this is not a war zone so that we don't have to prepare ourselves for war or even create a security apparatus, not just physical, but emotional, psychological. You're telling us if we work harder, vote more. . . . I voted for Obama . . . it's going to be okay for me. I'm petit bourgeois. The way I suffer is not [how others suffer] at Rikers or in maximum security.

BMP: George Floyd . . . his neck gets stomped on, and that somehow has something to do with somebody getting hired at Chase Bank. I've been screaming this on every episode we get a chance.

JJ: That's brilliantly stated. Our deaths fuel capitalism and accumulations—[industries of care and leadership get born whether the catalyst] is our physical death, work death shattering of honor from being spat on or raped. Sexual assault isn't/ wasn't just women or girls It's also men

and boys. The accumulation from our lives in our death is just like clockwork. The difference now, maybe most noticeably so, is that black people can also accumulate more. It used to be the [state and whites] killed you, ran you from your land. Remember, we went from blacks owning 20% of farm land at the turn of the 20th century to 1% today. Only way we lose that much land is if they terrorize us off the land. State, capital whiteness accumulates through terror. But now they can accumulate through social movements. It's so painful and traumatic. I don't think individually we can claim anything. I think the only legitimate claims have to be collective, and we have to be disciplined to that. Does that mean you let the whole neighborhood move into your house now? It does mean that you're going to have to seed ground. I'm directing this to the black leadership that is publicly the black leadership. There has to be an accountability metric with the mass. [Elites] need to stand down, because if you can't get our leadership to stand down, they will continue to accumulate, and by the nature of accumulation, they will become increasingly alienated from [working class and poor black communities].

BMP: Can you clarify what you mean by “stand down”? I'm just curious how you're defining that.

JJ: I said on another podcast that the reason I wrote “Airbrushing” [Revolution for the Sake of Abolition”] was because I was talking to graduate students and they were being intimidated to look like “reasonable radicals.” [That is] more like the older academics [who had distanced from impoverished and working-class communities, such as the ones that George Floyd came from, contemporary elite academics write about those communities. In “Airbrushing,” I was trying to gesture not bash but address what I believe to be the (un)ethical: to call out the simulacra and

profiteering around struggles that disproportionately terrorize the laboring and working classes. Obviously, I was pissed when I was writing it to some degree, but I had been waiting for people to stand down [or stand up and call out the performance politics]. If elites know more wealthy conservatives and progressive than members of the black working class, or militant collectives, then “stand down.” That you accumulate hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars that nobody even knows about until years later [that is problematic]. How many houses do you need funded by movement trauma in order to elevate your profile as someone who [cares about or speaks for Black people or shares their pain or plans to lead them ... against capitalism and imperialism]? Stand down. Individual faculty can earn \$500-900K based salaries based on their public profiles of explaining racism or blackness. [This is capitalism, but how do the wealthy get to] discipline the radicals [as too abrasive and unreasonable?]. . . . [is it] necessary to bash radicals who take more risks. If you're doing that, I just feel you're taking out a competitor [or] gentrifying the neighborhood.

I'm not an Afropessimist . . . I know . . . some of them [who] were really radical, but they just don't organize anymore. If you're bashing . . . because you have to be the authentic black left leadership [but you don't interact with laborers and workers or unionize your organizations then, stand down] . . . the gatekeepers. . . sit and reflect [on the] last 500 years, unless you have something that grounds you [in the mass], that's more than rhetoric or aspiration, you're likely going to [politically] retreat or conform. In the video *Guillotine*, Boots Riley and the Coup replay the *Wizard of Oz*. The scarecrow, lion, tin man, and Dorothy are black. The wizard is a capitalist. The sister who plays Dorothy struts in her red slippers singing “We were in a war before we fought one.” . . . COINTELPRO was lethal [that was just the tip of the state's violence]. . . .

In the stages of the Captive Maternal, I emphasize the Maroon camp [the stage of rebellion for sovereign life] it can have all kinds of allies in solidarity [maroons were multiracial their defining characteristic was that they were rebels.] Grapple with the tragedy that we've inherited [from enslavement, rape, rebellion and militarized forces to destroy resistance], because inside those tragedies and traumas, there's a coda, there's a script. There are analysis that we can use to push things forward. So our children are less terrorized and our elders, as you get older, you're going to care for your parents and, you know, try to help them find dignity while they transition. We should (not) have multiple layers of trauma impeding our abilities . . . to be free, . . . live and thrive to some degree. [In order to do so] we would have to agree that celebrity leadership is done. Yeah, we're done. . . . maybe I'll go to the movie, maybe I won't when it comes out. . . . But once you . . . start marketing yourself and marketing our freedom struggle as an extension of yourself. . . . that's a dead-end road, or it's circular. You just come right back and [end up at the] Pentagon or. . . Deutsch Bank . . . Wall Street . . . it's all about capital. . . .

To come to terms with our grief and our loss, which means to come to terms with reality, we have to agree that all our heroes [in material struggles] were not crazy. All of our celebrity heroes, were not inherently heroic for the mass. Sometimes you just caught between a rock and a hard place and you just have to do stuff to survive. And then the way people tell the story. Leader, but, you know, if the communist leader Chris Hani is assassinated, but Nelson Mandela is your mentor, then I can't really ride with you other than down the block, because we're not going anywhere. Also, to your point about not looking around the corner, you're already in the midst of the violence in the war. . . . maybe it's just time that we acknowledge how vulnerable we are? Physically, emotionally, psychologically; just stop pretending [we are not. The] politics that are performative are pretending that "[We]'ve got this. If you just do A, B and C, we're going

to get one, two, and three and maybe not in your lifetime but one day we'll be free." [We would progress more] if we're just clear that we're raw. George Jackson, this is Black August, right—George and Jonathan were raw. I wouldn't necessarily want to live in the same communal home with them [some police/reactionary would always be] coming for them and go straight bullets on you. But I have to tell you, because they existed, another dimension of me can exist, even if it's only on the level of "what if?" "What if they had survived?" "What if they had made it to Cuba?" "What if an international movement had been able to contain imperialism?" "What if....?"

Instead of binge-watching *Netflix* or some distraction from the pain, face it. What if we flipped the pain? What if our children live to old age? What if no mother or father ever has to look at their child in a coffin as a mutilated being [without] features? I don't want abstract freedom dreams because we know too much. I think it's dishonest based on who we are [and what we've gone through in captivity and its afterlife]. I think we can handle it. I don't know what we will mutate into, but we're not going to mutate to crazy people. We're not going to only retreat into pathology. . . . I've been talking about "Revolutionary Love." [Some of us] are going to mutate into a highly disciplined cadre that follows revolutionary love wherever it takes you. It doesn't have to be militarist, but don't allow people to sell you simulacra.

BMP: I was going to ask you about Attica in relation to pragmatism. . . . One of the craziest things is how a lot of the stuff we've been discussing the capitulating to capital that people tell us is basically more pragmatic. It's more practical. But also, at the same time, we're sitting here talking about how not even just for the black poor, but even how crazy this makes even, like, the black Boogie, because the discipline and the structure of it forces you to lose yourself in many

ways. So, what about that is really pragmatic. And my original question was, how does Attica, partly inspired by George Jackson, complicate our idea of what's pragmatic in the face of war? Because, you know, they did write petitions and things of that nature. They didn't just take over the prison on day one.

JJ: I question how pragmatic are the things we've really been trying that our leaders tell us we should do? I don't know. I know we can say it keeps us alive, but at the cost of what? We're all mortal, so we're going to die anyway, right? I don't think we should go prematurely or violently, right. Or starving [or because we] can't get medicine, you know, you have pandemics medical treatment when you need it. And I don't think we should suicide or OD either or be snuffed out in prison or turned into sex slave. Basic stuff here. There's nothing pragmatic about all these things that I just ticked off like a laundry list. [Violence is deeply] embedded in this culture. This is not a pragmatic culture. What you're talking about is a hustle. Yeah, you can call it a pragmatic one. You're [still] hustling in a predatory zone. That means people do tricks. All kinds of tricks, you know, card tricks. They kind of trick in order to [stay alive or get more money and security.] What's "pragmatic" about that? What is pragmatic about burying your murdered child? There's nothing practical. You can't tax us. Okay, I'm serious. I mean, they do. And if you don't, they'll take your house and your car. How/why do we pay taxes? I'm literally paying for police forces to kill people. Then I'm paying for the compensation packet after they kill you. \$1.8 million for Fred Hampton, Mark Clark [murdered by the FBI and Chicago police on December 4, 1969], \$27 million for Breonna Taylor's family. Six million for Tamir Rice's family. Just let me pay for PreK. I don't mind giving my money to the collective, but this is not practical or pragmatic. This is predatory.

Don't confuse the predatory with the pragmatic, because if it's a hustle around the predatory, so you can live long and have multiple homes and a lot of cars or just put food on the table, I totally understand stage one of the captives, maternal confer, contradictory on do all like, oh, my God, this is so. But I'm going to do it because my kid needs to stay in the school or I need to keep this job. Right. And then to the protests that you say the attic, like, over human. However, you want to define that. The movement, the maroon camp inside the prison, the next stage, and then the declaration of war from the state, because any attempt to be free if you're black, white captive is seen as war. I want to go back to where you sit there. This is pathology. I mean, we can find other key words Besides pragmatic. If accumulation keep skewing towards the top. And you used to have a lot of millionaires, and now you have billionaires, like, becoming the norm in terms of ruling cast. Biden is better than Trump. But you tell that to a woman who was in one of those ice camp, a Haitian sister who met the womb collector who gave her a force, his direct one. She will never have children. Her man leaves her because he wants to. I mean, like, there's nothing pragmatic about consistently breaking people and humiliating them. [Rochester, NY] black pastor said after George Fly was murdered that if you kill us, we'll kill your economy. That was over a year ago. I was listening to WBAI (NYC radio), and that statement keeps radiating. It doesn't even have to be "killed." How about "neutralize"? How can we make people/police forces understand that there will be a cost to killing us? I'm not saying that we have to do it the way George [Jackson] did it. Jonathan was doing something different: [his] was really a high-risk liberation strategy. The rational thought would be that the state would want its white judge, ADA, stenographer to stay alive. There are two women jurors in the van. [The assumption that "the man" would not kill middle-class whites is erroneous. In war the irrational and terror dominate: e.g., drill officers for the Marine Corps reportedly asked

unseasoned troops if they knew what their jobs in Vietnam would be. Correcting their ignorance, a drill sergeant told them: “Your job is to make your enemy die to protect his country.”]

The violence at Marin County administered by the state went beyond practicality, just a utilitarian function for its predatory behavior. The point is not to be pragmatic. The point is, how best to [contain a] predator on all levels? You wouldn't let the predator roam through kindergarten with your kids in it. But you let the predator roam through your community? That's a word. The point is not to be pragmatic. The point is how to deal with the predator. Yeah. Is there a pragmatic way to deal with the predator? You know, we're going to be practical. Okay, here's the deal. This is my understanding of us as a people. If we were pragmatic, we probably all be dead. Or most of this he did right. If we were pragmatic, we would never have a rebellion. Right? We are pragmatic. I mean, you could say, well, pragmatism is real: nearly 200,000 blacks fought in the civil war. The only reason the US sketchily looks somewhat like a democracy is because we black captives and dishonored were never pragmatic. We made demands when they said they would kill us; and not just kill us, kill our entire families. And sometimes they did that, right. Lynching is always collective phenomena. If we were pragmatic, we wouldn't have any civil rights. I'm saying just keep it real. You think the practical is what got us this far? No, it's the imaginative. It's a risk taking in the culture. Let's go back to Birmingham. People. Yes, the murder, the bombs. But also, what happened? My understanding, which nobody talks about is that a sector of the black community wasn't “pragmatic” after the Klan murdered four girls in church. Working class, laboring, lumpen section of the city decided to burn down part of Birmingham. You never hear of that. No, you never hear that because you're focused on the trauma. I focus on the trauma and the laws. You forget our agency. And I'm not saying we could

have done a prayer circle rather than just, like, just put gasoline on stuff and downtown businesses and start fires.

Of course, more people died from that. Black people because white people came out to shoot you and share us were out there to shoot you. What not but the expression of their rebellion. You don't tell me the city kinda got a clue? [They didn't realize that if white klan/police kept murdering black children and kin that they] were gonna lose most of this, that [some blacks would] burn down the entire city. There's a pause. They're stunned because Klan/police thought we were broken and there would be no resistance. Now, do Klan/police come back even more lethal? Yeah, probably. But we still keep resisting. So, this is the way I want to end thinking about this. If you're going to use the term “pragmatic” to discipline radicals, my preference is that you say nothing. You . . . can feel pragmatic all day, all night. If you want to discipline rebels then pony up something tangible . . . raise bail funds, pay for their attorney, feed their kids while they are inside, try to get them out.

You can't just lecture people about being [politically] “infantile” . . . out of your fear or out of your accumulation. [It's their protests in the streets that led to donors giving millions if not billions to quell the protests or ease consciences.] There's nobody we admire who is pragmatic. Malcolm. I've said this before: Malcolm could have [taken and] kept the money. Martin could have just gotten a little quiet church somewhere. Everybody could have been “pragmatic.” But if they were, we would not have any ancestors. What does it mean to be a people without ancestors? You don't exist. Nobody loved you enough to do something impractical so that you wouldn't have to work through a killing field? I would rather take the love than the pragmatism.

BMP: Yeah, rarely my last words. Yeah. Thank you, everybody, for listening. Thank you, Dr. James, for coming in; I know there are consequences to speaking truth to power, so we appreciate you not being pragmatic as well.

JJ: . . . you all are much younger, [your work] is reassuring . . . if I did anything useful, trust that I will send you my gratitude and admiration from the other side. Thank you. Take care.

Chapter 15

On the Rise of the Black Bourgeoisie

This Is Revolution/The Real News Network⁶⁶

Jason Myles (JM): Hello everyone, and thank you for tuning in to another episode of *THIS IS REVOLUTION* in conjunction with *The Real News Network*. . . . let me bring in my co-host, my homie, my dawg. He is the man of the mau-mau hour, journalist writer for *Newsweek*. He is the Pascal Robert [applause].

Pascal Robert (PR): Peace and greetings to the audience, peace and greetings to *The Real News Network*, peace and greetings Jason Myles.

JM: We have a very good guest today. . . . We hit you guys first with Adolph Reed, then we came back with Chris Hedges. Then we had the Yanis Varoufakis show, and today who do we have, Pascal?

PR: We have Professor Joy James [applause].

JM: Yes, we do. In the '80s, the creation of the Black welfare queen was used as a scare tactic, a tool to gut public goods programs that benefited the poor and working class. Bill Clinton, who was sold to the American people as a savior from twelve years of neoliberal rule in the form of Ronald Reagan and George Bush, Clinton doubled down on the right's assault against public goods governance with the omnibus crime bill in '94 and poverty increasing welfare reform in

⁶⁶ Edited Transcript from: Jason Myles and Pascal Robert interview with Joy James, "On the Rise of the Black Bourgeoisie," *This Is Revolution/The Real News Network*, April 2022.

<https://www.controlled.news/joy-james-on-the-rise-of-the-black-bourgeoisie/>

1996. What we call here at *THIS IS REVOLUTION* the 50-plus-year counterrevolution against the New Deal and the Great Society programs.

How have we gone from the racist images of single mothers of color living fat off the system to “Black girl magic” and a growing Black bourgeoisie? Has the Nixonian ideal of Black capitalism finally replaced underclass ideology as a tool of containment for the ruling class? We’re going to discuss this with Dr. Joy James. Dr. James is a renowned scholar of American political philosophy. Her work analyzes the way race, gender, and class are rendered in American society. Today, in the face of the current Supreme court nomination of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, who was appointed by an administration holding the first Black US vice president Kamala Harris, who will discuss race, gender, and class in the current American context. Please welcome Dr. Joy James [applause].

Joy James (JJ): I received applause twice. So, thank you for that [Jason laughs]. That rarely happens, like once is rare. Maybe there’s a metaphor here in terms of what we’re talking about in terms of the rise of Black women through empire. You have the 1980s with Ronald Reagan. . . . I was thinking the two terms of Ronald Reagan come after two terms of Richard Nixon who has incredible racial animus against Black people as well. Nixon is, what, ’68 is the election, ’72, should have been ’76, but there’s the impeachment. You have four years of Jimmy Carter who comes from the South, and it looks like the same with Bill Clinton. Like I’m used to being around Black people so I know how to talk to them and deal with them, etc.

But you still have no sustained gains where wealth becomes shared among the working class and the poor, but there are these opportunities to enter into government. I think Nixon would’ve been one of the first because of his position on affirmative action. So the larger context

is that you have these movements, the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power movement, feminist movement, antiwar movements. This is galvanizing tens of thousands of people, not just in the US, but also across the globe in order to critique the US as a racist imperial project.

So that these presidencies that come in, that follow this, it's to tamp down that desire for struggle. I would argue in some ways they have the capacity to tamp down the skills for struggle. That once you start hiring Black people, once Black people in white corporations or firms or in the government itself, in the academy, which is where I've worked for the last two-three decades, that once you start to absorb Blacks into the structures, then we become part of the infrastructure of the state itself.

That project, obviously, wasn't just a personal pet project of Nixon or of Reagan, again, with a four-year little gap here with Jimmy Carter, or other presidents that followed including the disastrous presidency of George [W.] Bush, who got us into a bogus war in the Middle East. But it's also the product or the project of Barack Obama, who I see as the . . . first Black *imperial* president. The question of all these presidencies, or this legacy of the executive office, is to maintain the state and to allow it to expand and to accrue.

We know that for centuries, accumulations have come out of our labor and out of our loss. I think the question that we're going to tangle with today has been split into a kind of different gender formations where we no longer have the type of solidarity we used to in the 1960s in terms of identifying an opponent and being willing to move against it.

JM: Well, I want to ask this about what you mentioned about the Black introduction into government roles. This is even shown in pop culture of the time. I can't remember the name of the movie with Diahann Carroll and James Earl Jones.

PR: Oh, that's a very important movie. *Claudine*.

JM: *Claudine*. Where it actually gets not that deep into the weeds of you can't have a man in your home. There were people that worked to get the men out of the homes. That's part of that story where they're hiding James Earl Jones's underwear or something like that in one of the scenes.

PR: Very [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan

JM: Very, very, very Moynihan-esque. But let's remember that these programs were born out of not wanting even women to work when they were rolled out in the '30s. That's what a lot of that was for. I can't remember the original name of welfare, but it was designed for non working females. This is an era where... go ahead.

JJ: It was designed for white women. Particularly white women who were widows.

PR: Correct.

JJ: The whole notion of the family is a white project in a white supremacist nation. I mean, if the nation was born out of genocide and enslavement, then part of what it disposes or tries to kill is the very notion of family cohesion and community cohesion in Indigenous and Black communities or nations. This is where it becomes really complicated for me when I try to see what the fulcrum is like on this seesaw, how do you balance this? The nation really works for white women, but to some extent it had to include Black women within the category of human. To some extent. Well, if you were performing the duties of the state, you can entertain them; but as Eartha Kitt found out in the Johnson administration, once she came out against the war in

Vietnam and confronted Lady Bird, the first lady, Johnson's wife, according to some scholars, president Lyndon Baines Johnson, who supported civil rights, gave the pen to King after the signing of voting rights or Civil Rights Act, used the CIA to destroy Eartha Kitt's career [because she "made" the FLOTUS cry about the drafting of black youth to fight in an imperial war killing Asian youths].

. . . . You're told if you can entertain and sing for us or dance for us, or we like that movie, or historically, you nurse our kids literally on your breast, if you can reproduce our family integrity, you are tolerable. If you seek agency autonomy for civil rights and human rights, you're a pain in the neck and maybe you should disappear in whatever way. Lose your job, lose your housing, lose your freedom, go to prison, or like Malcolm and Martin, lose your lives.

JM: I just want to add to that, as those original aid packages were being rolled out, as the New Deal was getting rolled out, I think 1935, divorced women could not get it. Non-widowed women with children couldn't get it. So there definitely were caveats on who could get aid and who could not get aid. But what I wanted to add with your very, very astute point about adding Black people into the government apparatus is when these people were part of the system, so to speak, there was a unified voting bloc with the people that were a part of the system receiving the aid and now the people that have moved up into a new middle class. We definitely see this in the early '70s that are part of the same system. So they're voting in unison to keep these programs.

You definitely see this in the more major metropolitan Northern cities. When you look at a place like Atlanta, when they have their first Black mayor in Maynard Jackson, one thing he

does is increase the business sector. You turn Atlanta, Coca-Cola, the massive airport which becomes a hub. Private capital is now hoisting the same Black people into the middle class. They're not so aligned with their poor and working-class Black neighbors. I believe towards the end of the Jackson administration we actually see the destruction of a lot of the housing. What would we call it? Government housing in Atlanta as well. So there's an interesting juxtaposition when we talk about including Black people into the government apparatus. Trying to protect the system, if you will. Then also when you have private capital and there's the demarcating line, almost, of class.

JJ: This has a practical or pragmatic aspect. Once you're included into an apparatus or structure, then the logic would be that you would protect it. Once you have Black people protecting state accumulations, corporate accumulations, those who are left behind are just seen as even more deficient. This is part of the reason I avoid the language that we've inherited today about, it's not just "Black Girl Magic," but also "Black Excellence." As if that everybody else is mediocre or substandard, which is so aligned with the language of white supremacy. How do you know you're excellent? Is it because you got the corporate job or you got the degree, or JD, PhD, whatever, how many doctorates or whatever is happening here.

But the larger picture is this is a capitalist society that was built on slavery, rape, and genocide, and that the accumulations always accrue to the top. If you are ethical, you would want to tinker with that machinery and not just be seduced by all the, what's the glittery? Well, the glittery could be a Tesla. Back in the day it might have been a Cadillac or something. I don't know. But I think what are the questions we have to think about is what is our collective position on something that looks like a mixed economy or a socialist economy? So how do we stop these

buyouts that turn those who remain in certain zip codes as disposable or vulnerable to poisoned water. Think of Flint, Michigan. Poisoned air, disproportionate exposure to police violence and civilian violence.

PR: Well, what I really appreciate in your discourse is that it's very much in alignment with the narrative that we try to expose on our show is that, like any other people, Black people have class, internal stratifications, and conflicts like everyone else. Unfortunately, because of the way in which society portrays Black life as a unified underclass phenomenon, these stratifications of class, which has been a reality of Black life going back to the days of free people of color societies, is completely obscured to the majority of not only Americans overall, but also to many Black folk in America as well, who are not necessarily connected to those within these communities who are more proximate to capitalist power or the gatekeepers or the racial ventriloquists, if you will.

So the narrative that you are very eloquently exposing is very much in line with what we try to do in terms of trying to complicate the notion of collective community. In other words, and you may disagree with this, and I respect you if you do, is that it's very important for us to complicate the notion that Black people work as a unified community. Because our argument is that that renders Black people to a politics of containment. In other words, Black politics is contained and used as a pawn of the ruling class because the ruling class will choose the racial ventriloquist who speaks for the masses, undemocratically chosen, while the masses have no say in the agenda and they're moved like a piece on a chess board. So Black politics becomes a politics of containment in the rendering of collective community in that fashion. It's something

that we on our show try to challenge effectively. I like to make the argument that there are multiple Black communities, not just one Black community, if you will. I like to [crosstalk].

JJ: No, that's great. It's making me think there are multiple Black feminisms in the plural, not just one form of Black feminism. That should also be stated for abolitionisms, plural, not just one form of abolitionism. But I totally agree with your analysis. Then when you're speaking, I'm starting to think about how we were warned about this. When Malcolm was talking about the big house in the field. So the big house today could be Deutsche Bank, Bank of America, working for the state department and its foreign projects are working for the DOJ.

There was a moment in the 1990s, I think it's [1997], when Kathleen Cleaver was the first woman to sit on the Central Committee of the Black Panther Party. This is Oakland before things went one way and Cleaver left and the party fractionated, in part because of the violence of the COINTELPRO, but also the contradictions and the violence. Which, based on my assessment, largely started coming or originated from Oakland. But Cleaver says in this interview, and for me it's very curious because I believe she's being interviewed by Henry Louis Gates, who's obviously in the big house called Harvard. So Cleaver is saying that the Panthers had to pretend they were a unified front in terms of as Black people, because that had to be projected out, so they thought, as a political strategy. But they clearly knew that the Black middle class, the petty bourgeoisie, bourgeoisie Blacks with means and money and ambition, that they were going to be hostile to the Black Panther Party as a revolutionary or proto revolutionary formation.

But it wasn't even an internal conflict, but also they would be hostile to supporting liberation movements in the so-called third world or global South. There's always been a sector

of the Black communities, as you've said, in plural, that have been trained or prone or see it as an opportunistic portfolio, whatever, to work for the state and to work for the corporation. It doesn't seem to have been really – And impacted people that working in these zones would be an extension of anti-Black violence, but this time with Black faces.

JM: Pascal, do you want to add onto that?

PR: No, I appreciate that assessment. One of the things that we definitely see is with the rise of this incorporation is that the more that becomes this incorporation into the apparatus of the ruling class by what we call the Black political class over time, the more and more the importance of symbolic representation becomes the focus of what is deemed Black political aspiration, and the less redistributive policy of trying to change the material condition of poor and working-class Black people becomes the focus. So much to the point where – I'm reading, actually, a book on Black political history – Was, cynically, the Democratic Party recognizes in the 1980s that they literally can offer Black people the symbolic representation of appointments and political candidates instead of actual policy that changes the material condition of poor and working-class Black people. What we find is the further and further we get away from the Civil Rights Movement, the easier we find that Black communities, plural, are intoxicated with that politics of symbolism and less willing to demand any kind of truly redistributive materialist agenda for working-class and poor Black folk, who are the majority of Black folk.

JM: Would you add to that that there's something to be said about the Civil Rights Movement really pivoting away from getting the communist and socialists out of the movement and really having the movement be about inclusion? As opposed to... [crosstalk]

PR: Well, it's a very good addendum to the point, because if we read Preston Smith's about racial democracy in Chicago, and he talks about how part of the problem of the Civil Rights Movement is that the limitations of the Cold War deny the capacity of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement to really put forth a materialist pro working class agenda. As a consequence, they focus on what he uses the term as racial democracy or racial inclusion. What his argument is is that whenever there's a policy or politics, of Black politics, that is premised on racial democracy, it basically becomes a wealth transfer to the Black petty bourgeoisie or the Black professional managerial class or the Black elites. Because there's no redistributive agenda in racial democracy. Because racial democracy can mean that we literally have a ruling class that is 14% Black, 60% white, and 18% Latino, and now that's democracy and everyone else can basically be either a slave or a surf or a tenant farmer.

That it doesn't make a difference because as long as they're proportionally represented in every level. What he's arguing is that what was needed was social democracy, which was a redistributive materialist agenda that would have changed the actual material condition of poor and working-class Black people's lives instead of just simply asking for racial inclusion. And even Dr. King and Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph in 1965, they realized that the traditional Civil Rights Movement is not going to do what is necessary to change the condition of working-class Black people's lives. That's why they asked for the Freedom Budget for All in 1965, which the Vietnam War denies the ability to really fund it.

JM: Well, Dr. James is back. She was having some technical difficulties. Should we start hitting her with the real questions now?

PR: I know we can just go into light.

JJ: I thought what you just said was pretty real . . . what's more real than that?

JM: Oh, those were the warm up questions.

PR: So, Professor James, in preparation for this show, we acquired your book, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: [Black] leaders and American Intellectualism*. As we said earlier, one of the persistent themes that we have on our show is the way class stratification amongst Blacks facilitates a Black political class that works as racial ventriloquists for the majority of working-class and poor Blacks in exchange for their economic patronage and enrichment from the ruling class, largely to the detriment of the Black masses. Where do you see the contemporary Black academic and Black academics in general in this particular hierarchy? Particularly with the rise of the Obama and the post Obama Black political class, are Black academics more likely to challenge this class hierarchy or reify it?

JJ: Thank you for that. Howard University professors I believe are on strike right now. That is about the conditions under which they labor, which means teach. But the students had gone on strike quite a while before, I think months before. It may have been as late as last year. That was about the conditions under which they lived. Mold, lack of security, I mean just substandard housing. The faculty are paid by Howard. The students are, through tuition or grant money, are contributing funds to Howard, but Howard also is an expression of both state and corporation. If we look at where we are today, I would say we're just in a slog. We're in a marsh. I mean, I can keep throwing things out like mud or something like that. I mean, there's no solid stable ground, in my opinion, in the academy to speak with the integrity, the honesty, and just the brilliance of the people who were intellectuals in the open communities. Meaning, again, plural,

Georgia, Mississippi where my mom's from, Texas where my father's people are from et cetera, et cetera. Because the academy is now an imposition upon intellectualism that is tied to freedom. That means its function is not to march or articulate, even, a clear agenda or strategy for curtailing an imperial racist project, also known as US democracy. There's been so much money flooded into the academy in terms of how the administrative strata, which how many provosts do you need, et cetera, et cetera, have turned into a state or private corporation. For those of us who've come in decades ago, and I will include myself in it, we've been able to secure certain types of monetary packages with health benefits.

But the academy is also, even without a union, they're union busting. It's about extraction from the students, their ideas, their energy, their tuition, and extraction from faculty. Even the ones who are conservative and not really committed to social justice. So I think, if I were going to wrap this up and what I'm trying to say, don't look to academics for answers. I wouldn't even read their books. You have leisure time, you can afford them. Hopefully libraries have some. But we're not trained. Even if that were their case like in the 1960s or something when there was a so-called thing as race people, and that was more legible, we're not trained to serve Black communities. We're trained to treat knowledge as a commodity and then put it on the shelf and hopefully get enough buyers so that it looks like our brand has some content behind it. And even I would argue, and this will get me in trouble, whatever. I would argue that even some of the writing that is about these movements, the writing, for me, sometimes it's not imaginative. It doesn't take risk. It doesn't speak with the voice of the people who created the movements.

When I think about Erica Garner, for instance, transitioning at twenty-seven, leaving a seven-year-old and a four-month-old behind. I wasn't even aware. I was living in Harlem. I

thought I [would] make a donation or go to a march or something like that. But I didn't understand her vulnerability to... Not having sufficient support or better doctors or better care or more alliances. I would say the academics could have been much more helpful. I'm not saying we could have stopped the death, but we could have been much more helpful in these movements. But what we tend to do is to write about them, package that content in between two book covers, and have book tours. I'm not saying that's all bad. That is a form of knowledge.

JM: That is the reality and it's a very stark one when you think about it. Because I think one of the better books, let's just take the Eric Garner case, was not even by an academic. I think Matt Taibbi wrote one of the better books on the Eric Garner situation, really bringing broken windows policing to light for a lot of people. But all that being said, I mean, sadly too, we live in a world where a lot of this stuff is just easily digestible. And how many people are actually even reading the books?

JJ: Then what's our function now? I mean, as academics, I mean, how do you see academics? You can ask me. I mean, I work there, but really, you're the core consumers. I'm supposed to be a producer, but I don't own the company. So, I'm really a worker.

JM: Did you ever read Barbara Ehrenreich's work in late '80s and '90s about the professional managerial class or Catherine [inaudible] newer work on it [inaudible]?

JJ: Yes. Go ahead.

JM: No, I think the academy is definitely a part of the PMC and produces more people that go into the professional managerial class.

JJ: But I wonder to what extent. I understand we're a factory, we are churning out people with degrees who then become managers. I'm wondering to what extent we would own up that there's something much more nefarious about that.

PR: Universities are not created to be counter-hegemonic institutions. I mean, the purpose of the university is to reify a ruling class that maintains the status quo of a functioning capitalist empire, which is the United States, or Western imperialists, or the West overall. Universities are not designed to build revolutionaries. They're designed to create people to solve problems so that you don't have a revolution.

JJ: But when you get to this moment after the movements where people want Black studies, women studies, LGBTQ studies, Chicano studies, ethnic studies, it all looks like that this is, or at least the right wing says it is, an assault on the academy. Like corruption of its core purity, which is just its white supremacy. But why do we believe, or do we believe that because now we're writing about movements or writing about feminism or writing about fill in whatever the blank is, all the good fights. Why do we believe that this knowledge from academic sites is trustworthy?

PR: It's a very, very, very good provocation you put forth. I have a better provocation than I've asked before, is that there was a time in which radical politics within Black spaces demanded

things like Black studies or Africana studies or African American history departments. Can we evaluate the efficacy of that demand if the quality of material life of Black people is degrading as the existence of these institutions proliferate? Is it not fair to say that perhaps the utility of these institutions is counter indicative to the quality of life of Black people over time, and they're serving a purpose other than actually helping solve the problems of Black people?

JJ: So, they're like a Trojan horse.

PR: I think that there's logic to that argument.

JM: I mean, commodifying education to me is also extremely frustrating. The fact that I just can't learn something to learn it, it's kind of a waste of time. I have to spend my money learning something to be some sort of cog in the machine of capitalism. That's the reality for a lot of people. Now we live in a world where we are the commodity and we're very well aware of this. People know when they go Google search something on their phone, they know that they're going to get hit with a whole bunch of ads. Either they ignore them or they succumb to them. But no one seems to mind that they are the commodity. You can turn that commodity now yourself, you can make some money off of it. I mean, we have the rise of hustle culture and which you guys talking about the ineffectual nature of the academy, kind of one and the same.

JJ: Can we pose an alternative to it? Can we build an alternative to it? Like we're doing COVID when they were having those pods? I mean, the wealthy people were having pods that were thousands of dollars to buy in. It's like a poker game. But other people like in Brooklyn, they

were just, I know you got your nieces, whatever. It's just you start understanding that education cannot belong to the state and it cannot belong to the corporation.

As I said before, for me, there's only two types of universities, at least the upper tiers. There are the state universities like UT-Austin, or University of California-Berkeley, and then there are the privates. The Ivies: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Stanford. Then the private colleges where I teach. So how could we create an alternative zone of intellectualism and critical thinking, knowing that the academy, as you both rightly pointed out, was never designed for that? It was designed for elites.

Even as we said in the Talented Tenth, Spelman is named after a Rockefeller, Laura Spelman, and Morehouse is named after Henry Morehouse, who is a white missionary philanthropist. I mean, even the creation of these schools were to create a managerial elite. The Tenth, it's one tenth of y'all. Du Bois signed on to it in 1903, because he popularized the concept in *The Souls of Black Folk*. But when the state was hunting him with McCarthyism and other stuff, he said you couldn't trust this sector [only trade unionists and radicals publicly supported DuBois against the communist witch hunt]. Just as Kathleen Cleaver said in the 1990s, Malcolm said in the 1960s, this sector is engineered for betrayal, but it still has credibility because it has all the shiny diplomas and degrees. So how do we change the very meaning of education and wrestle it back from state and corporation?

PR: That's a great question.

JM: First and foremost, we have to start thinking collectively and not so individually.

PR: Well, I mean, I want to go to a basic question which is that, a step I think is even more basic than that is that we have to come to the reality that most people in America, Black or otherwise, really don't have counter-hegemonic thinking. In other words, most people don't organically see

the system as a problem. They see the fact that they can't participate in the system as the problem, but they don't see the system as the problem.

JM: Well, because we live in a country, and Pascal, I want to get you and Dr. James's take on this. Would you say that we live in a country that is literally based off hero narratives? That one good person can get into this system, which isn't so much corrupt as it just has bad actors? We see the judicial system that way all the time. That it's not a flawed system as much as it is there's just bad people inside. There's bad judges, there's bad prosecutors, but the system itself was built on honor. . . . I think breaking through that line of thinking is the really, really hard part, because it's baked into the idea of American exceptionalism.

PR: Absolutely. Particularly, and Jason, you said something very, very important. When it comes to the law – I studied law, I practiced law, that's where my academic training is in – Is that one of the most effective ways the charade of American exceptionalism is perpetuated is in the reverence of American law in the American legal system. When you challenge the efficacy of the American legal system, what you will get from people trained in it is that there's no other system better in the world. Where else in the world do you have the protection of the rights that you have in the United States?

My response to that is that America creates the illusion of those rights because America has the luxury of extraction to create the comfort that denies the capacity of other people in the world to have that justice because it siphons off so much of the global resources to create this level of diluted comfort amongst its citizens. It's no actual argument to say just because you are eating spam instead of dog food that you have the best meal in town. So the comparative mediocrity of justice in the Western world doesn't make America great. It just means America is the best at masking its mediocrity because everyone else is so bad.

JJ: I would add to that. The mediocrity is just driven by predatory behavior. It's like I mean, how many people could you kill? I can't, nobody can keep count. It's too much. I mean, it's both on the international and the national. And you're right, you get this weird patriotism that's tied to consumerism, if you get to shop it must be a working democracy. What it's doing is you're saying extracting from other countries, other regions, other continents. I mean the Ukraine thing is horrific, but that's not the first war we've ever seen.

When I think of NATO, I'm like, oh yeah, I teach Amílcar Cabral, *Return to the Source*. Who assassinated him? Well, Portugal and the CIA and NATO because Portugal was in NATO. Portugal is the first country to get into African enslavement in the 1400s and it's the last one that wants to get out in the 1970s. I wonder if we would remember our losses, if that would stop this fetish for this democracy which is really incredibly violent. But as long as that violence doesn't personally touch us, we seem like we can be compatible with it.

JM: You see that with the right-wing push against things like critical race theory. The idea that this law theory is being taught in public schools and it's being deduced to, well, slavery is not going to get taught anymore. We're not really going to say bad things about white people and damn it, we're not even going to talk about the Civil War reconstruction anymore. That's all "critical race theory."

JJ: I wonder [crosstalk] sorry, Pascal.

PR: No, I mean, listen, the forces of reaction... I've come to a position, largely as a product of not only doing the show, but really just reading a lot of American political history, is that the

notion that America is a center-left country is a canard, is a charade. America is a reactionary right-wing country and it always has been. The problem, and I see this as a significant problem of all factions of America: left, right, so on, so forth. People take the anomaly of the period between 1944 and 1971 i.e. the New Deal, the Brighton Woods period, the post World War II, the massive expansion of American largesse, the quality of middle life for white men, because it was really white men who had the jobs. To leave it to the *Ozzie and Harriet* narrative of the American family, the standards of what normative patriarchy is, the standards of what a normal family is.

All of these things were an exception to the normal way American capitalism functioned since its beginning. Largely to save capitalism from radicals who wanted something more revolutionary, which brought forth the New Deal. But because that period of time, particularly in 1944 to, say, 1971, is perpetuated through media as the example of America being great, let's make America great again. No one's talking about the Lower East Side in 1913 when they're saying let's make America great again. When they're saying let's make America great again, they're talking about 1954 or 1952, *Ozzie and Harriet*.

JJ: . . . Donna Reed comes to mind too. But we were always the problem. We were always like that, America's great. Then it's like, something's going on with Black people. Because we're talking about the '50s and what comes to mind, Pascal, when you were speaking, was what made me think about Mrs. Mamie Till Mobley with a child corpse [on display to the world]. Like an open casket funeral, for me, is a declaration of war against a state. Then the photos go out everywhere around the globe. I think in some ways in relation to us, and I'm not sure, I just feel like we catch the hell the brunt. It's not just from the cops. I mean, from everything. This is an

anti-Black nation and zone, but it seems to me that they're always looking for Black people to prop up to prove that this is not as lethal, as violent.

I mean, 1963, you put a bomb in the women's bathroom of the church to blow up [civil rights activists who are children]. Spike Lee did the documentary *4 Little Girls*. Right after Martin King delivered the "I have a Dream" [sermon on the March on Washington in August 1963] the Klan is like, "It's going to be a nightmare." I still believe in us as Black people as being the wild card. I think that's how the state sees us as well, which is why you want a Black president, another Black Supreme Court [justice], you want a Black [woman] cop [to head the NYPD], you want a Black mayor. You want a "one of y'all" to police y'all movements and to show that [the US is] not white supremacists to the core.

PR: Well, I really want to respond to that. Jason and I have an ongoing debate, and I'm going to be very honest with you. We have a problem with the trope that exists on the left that Black people are the vanguard of the revolution. I'll tell you wh., Because it denies the fact that, number one, what makes Black people revolutionary is not the melanin in this skin, it's the material condition under which Black people are forced to live in a capitalist society in America and in the world that renders them to surplus everywhere, stemming from chattel.

Number two, when you position Black people as the vanguard of revolution, it denies the fact that large segments of institutional mechanism in Black societies, plural, are premised on reactionary politics, ideology, and worldviews that are sexist, misogynistic, are anti-poor, pro-capitalist, abusive. Whether they be schools, universities, churches, membership societies, you name them. That can Black people be revolutionary? Absolutely. Do Black people have revolutionary capacity? Absolutely. But it's not because of the melanin in their skin. It's because they are ground down disproportionately and capitalism because capitalism requires an N-word

and capitalism requires an N-word so that, unfortunately, white poor people don't believe that there can be one.

JJ: I don't disagree with that, but I want to trouble it, or stir it in the pot. There's nothing inherently, you're right, about our color, per se except for how people respond to it. Meaning police forces, vigilantes, white supremacists, so on and so forth. I don't believe that all Black people would mobilize in a freedom movement because that's not how it works. It never quite worked that way. It's not working that way now and it won't work that way in the future. You're right. I mean, I appreciate your saying, like don't project some romanticism [that] we have a unique role and we were anointed for whatever. But I do believe that there's something about what we've accumulated in our consciousness, in our memory, that we remember. Like whatever stories your grandparents told you about Mississippi, whatever, we understand lineage and inheritance. We also understand that the future could just shift and go either way. Not for people who are like Colin Powell. I mean he can work for Reagan and all those people and still be happy about being...a general and then ending up a secretary of state or at the UN, etc. However, his true career trajectory goes [up] after coming out of the Bronx.

But there's still other people who are political prisoners today. Other people who are young people who are just organizing, walking away from the degree and from the academy and the corporation. Disproportionately, I feel the material conditions, but also the psychological and the emotional conditions under which we live, like eight minutes to choke somebody out while he's crying for his mother, that has an impact. That forms a consciousness.

JM: It does, but let's be honest about that. That ain't affecting everybody the same way. This is where I take a little bit, I don't want to say offense, but it hits me a little in a personal place because I grew up in... Are you familiar with the Bay Area?

JJ: I lived in Oakland for a short period.

JM: I was born in Oakland and I grew up in Richmond, California. So you're probably familiar, mildly even, with those areas. I've lived a bit of an economically precarious life. I don't have felonies, but I've spent a long time driving without a license because I couldn't afford car insurance and my license got suspended. Or I remember there was a time when I couldn't pay a ticket and I was driving without a license. All told, I think I drove seven years without a license.

If I get pulled over by the cops, I'm going to get effed with. I might even get my butt kicked. Because I don't live in a good area, I'm driving a crappy car, and I'm driving it without a license. They might want to tune me up just because they can. The prisons are filled with people that committed serious felonies, didn't get tuned up on the way in. Cops know who to mess with and who not to mess with. I think what happens is, and this is where I get a little upset, is there becomes this, they're getting all of us thing. It's like, not everybody is going to face police violence the same way.

PR: This is a statistical fact, Professor James, off of what Jason is saying. At the exact time the rate of mass incarceration increases post-civil rights – Which starts in the '60s by the way, before the end of the movement – The mass incarceration increases for Black males, and eventually females, without a high school diploma starts to increase precipitously. The amount of

carcerality or imprisonment of Black males, and eventually females, with any level of college education drops like a rock.

What happens is that the mass incarceration, is that exclusively an issue of Blackness? It's an issue of Black race and class, because as James Forman eloquently demonstrated in his book *Locking Up Our Own*, the likelihood of a college educated Black male having an interface adversely with a police officer compared to a Black male with no high school diploma, it's like a ten to one. Even in terms of the wealth of the zip code you live in. Over \$100,000 of per capita income compared to those under 30. The chances of even having a police interaction skewed. So one of the problems with the way in which we talk about we, one of the things that I don't even like is even talking about we when we talk about Black people. I don't want to say we. I want to say there are poor Black people and working-class people who have been ground dust and their class enemies.

JJ: This is really helpful because now I understand better, or will try to articulate better.

JM: I'm not trying to be antagonistic, if I'm coming off that way.

JJ: No, no, no, please. I have a 13-year-old, I know what antagonism looks like.

JM: [laughs] But I don't want to come off that way. I just kind of –

JJ: No, no, no. This is really helpful because you're both right, and I've got to figure out how my language can be clear. Look, when you're talking, I'm thinking [about after] Henry Louis

Gates was arrested [in his Harvard home when neighbors thought there might be a burglary] he's on a beer summit on the White House lawn with Obama and Joe Biden and the white cop; later he traces the cop's genealogy and informs that they share Irish ancestry]. This does not happen to everybody else [or nonelite blacks].

[It reminds me of what] Derek Bill says when he gets stopped when he's driving at night. He's got a white judge's name. He is driving through the South. Derek Bill is the architect of critical race theory, but the radical form of critical race theory. He just talks about calling out the name of the white judge so the white cop knows that he "belongs to" a white person. There are segments [of the] Black communities in the plural who don't care about the working class, who don't care about the poor, who don't care about environmental devastation. That's not us, but then I'm trying to figure out what is the language, or should there not be us? Should it just be radical Blacks, and then what is "radical?"

JM: We had a show the other day, Dr. James, on our *THIS IS REVOLUTION* channel that sadly YouTube did pull down, where we spoke with a man that was on the cutting edge of house music. If you're familiar with house music, that really comes out during the mid '80s and '90s. In our discussion, we're going back in the roots of house music, which is of course disco, and he had made an interesting point about how culturally disco was supposed to be the antithesis of funk in a way.

JJ: Oh, that makes sense.

JM: If funk is their music, it's ghetto. It's not refined. When you think of a band like Chic and Nile Rogers, they are the proggy funk. They are the refined funk people. This is for an elevated class of individual here. You can see it in the way the shows looked, how different they were. So I think it is just baked in. We keep talking about how, and that's why I'm bringing up these kinds of contradictions, because we have to understand how baked into even popular culture there is an otherizing. There's good Black people and then there's always the bad. There's this disassociation. In that documentary on Deutsche Welle about the burgeoning Black bourgeoisie, it starts off with, I believe he's the richest Black man in America, right? Pascal, that first –

PR: Not the, but one of.

JM: I'm sorry, one of the richest Black men in America, that real estate magnate, and he's got Aston Martins and multimillion dollar condos. And he says, I don't live like those rappers.

JJ: Yeah. Because it would've been like a version, like, I guess among white Europeans, their version of old money aristocracy in comparison to crass new money, which is boorish and rough and has no culture. Their money becomes their culture. Their students go to private elite schools. They don't socialize with the riff raff, which, probably people on this call [Jason laughs]. What is their radical project in the face of that? I'm [asking] in terms of the betrayal.

When I talk to Black doctoral students, and some of them, they don't come out of means, they come out of the Bronx. They grew up with Cardi B. So anyway, their families were in the underground economies. They keep saying that when I talk about a captive material instead of about Black feminism, because I'm trying to think of caretaking as a nongendered function. They want to know if I'm willing to engage in the zones of betrayal. Then one of them actually says

we should off the Captive Maternals who betray us. I'm like, no, because that could include me. I have contradictions too. So how do you see the politics now that you've differentiated between the posh and the polish and they can be invited to the White House or get a medal or whatever? Some of our luminaries like Toni Morrison, presidential medal from Obama, some other kind of medal from Clinton, from Bill Clinton. But how do you see us, or do you see us forming political alliances that will not be subverted by the rich and powerful?

PR: I think that you have to have something that we have never had in this country, which is a working-class Black politics.

JJ: . . . Is that like from Adolph Reed too, are y'all in line? Or what are we talking?

PR [Jason laughs] . . . some people who would say, they would call us fans –

JM: Some people that would say –

PR: [crosstalk] just a little bit, maybe.

JM: Have you been following what the young man Chris Smalls has been doing with Amazon?

JJ: I've been following the union [on Staten Island].

JM: I find him fascinating, and I interviewed him a few years ago when the story broke about him. What I found fascinating about Chris was that we had similar stories as far as how we came up and even where we were working. One thing that people don't really take into consideration,

and we talked about this a little bit on our show, is a lot of people on the left got very dejected and confused about Bessemer, Alabama not voting to unionize.

One fact that people didn't really take into consideration, I felt people on the left didn't take into consideration is that job was more money than most of them people had ever made before. I spent time working in the South on oil rigs. It's a nonunion place. The South historically is not a very unionized area. To think that you're going to get cats that, a lot of them, this is unskilled labor. This is the surplus labor we talk about so much when we love throwing around theory. Surplus labor is getting \$19 an hour in a place where \$19 an hour can probably buy you not a house, at least a nice double wide. I don't say that with any sort of disrespect. I say it as far as people need shelter, and that's affordable shelter.

JJ: That's food on the table.

JM: That's food on the table. Why would you want to upset that apple cart? I'm not saying it's justified to not vote for worker protections and some sort of labor power. I just think that a lot of us are a little disconnected ideologically here from the idea that some of these people in these areas are making more money than they've ever made before. It's very risky to try to organize around that. The one thing that got Chris radicalized was COVID and people literally dying on the shop floor.

JJ: Wow.

PR: If the majority of Black people are working-class and working poor or poor, what sense is there to have politics that's not rooted in the actual material condition of most white people?

JJ: it makes no sense, but let me try to parse this out. Because I'm wearing multiple hats here. Like I got the academic hat on, which feels like I should take it off, but then that would be dishonest because I get paid with the academic hat. Then there's this other thing, like when was I last a waitress? I did those menial jobs at some point too. But those years are way in the past, decades in the past. From my setting now, my lifestyle, my employment sector, I can read about the disposition or dispossession and disposability, but I'm not on that shop floor.

I can see that during the first wave of COVID in New York city.... I've said before, I'm in my middle-class apartment, but on one side it's multimillion dollar and the other side is NYCHA public housing. But in New York city, and they stopped giving you the numbers, when they went from losing 20 people a day dying in their apartments, they went from that number to 200 a day, and then they stopped telling you what the numbers were until they could bring them down. The body bags were only coming out on the right side of my apartment where NYCHA was.

That radicalized me, but I wasn't going to be in a body bag. Because I was like, wow, this is the middle class. We're the fulcrum on the seesaw. We got one foot on either side and we're just going to balance. We're not multi-million like we're going to jet out somewhere, but we're also not in public housing and we're not forced to show up as a nanny or a babysitter, whatever, just to keep food on the table. What is the role of the people who are balancing between the two zones? They're never going to be millionaires, but they're never going to be poor and unhoused.

PR: Well, you are a scholar of Amílcar Cabral. I think Cabral had the great, great, great formulation: class suicide.

JJ: Got it. Okay.

JM: But you know what's the neutralizing factor in the idea of class suicide?

JJ: What?

JM: Hustle culture.

JJ: What culture?

JM: Hustle. You're not working hard enough.

PR: In other words, if you are middle class and you're not a millionaire, how come you're not selling Bitcoin? How come you're not driving Uber at night to get those extra hours? Why aren't you doing overtime? You mean you don't have your own business, you don't have four LLCs?

JM: Even beyond the idea of everyone's a millionaire, just the fact you are busy, constantly busy, is a function of not so much success, but every day at work you have to be working over 40 hours. If you're working 40 hours, you're not working hard enough. We're going to hit you up all the time and the moment that you stop and say, I need to take my kid somewhere. I need – No, there'll be someone else to replace you that will work twice as hard. That is very, very prevalent in the PMC culture. When I say hustle culture, I think people just automatically mean, oh, you mean like Bitcoin and those guys. No, I mean, the idea that you have to constantly be working and the moment you're not working, you should feel shame.

JJ: *The New York Times* picked this up with the Supreme court nominee, a woman writer who said she had to balance being a mother and how she's raising her [daughter] and feeling guilty. She was like, how do you even make it to this level of a job offer unless you are putting in more than eight hours a day over decades? But then that is expected if you're to be worthy. Then it's worthy of what? I've called this a predatory **democracy**. . . .

PR: Class suicide, class traitorism. I think it's a matter of reorienting. I mean, for me, I grew up in a middle-class family in Queens in New York. My parents didn't have elite jobs, but my parents also were Haitian immigrants and they came from an upper middle-class kind of Haitian elite in Haiti. They had middle-class jobs. My mother was a nurse, my father was a car mechanic, he owned a couple repair shops. But because of the time I grew up in New York city, we had a nice middle, upper middle-class lifestyle.

But at the same time, the reality of the precarity of life does not obscure me from the fact that people can be ground to powder. Everyone can be ground to powder. That all of my education does not stop me from possibly, literally being on the margins for reasons, health reasons, personal reasons, economic reasons. At the same time for me, part of the process of realizing this is spending a lot of time with poor and working-class communities of Black people who have been ground to dust.

I went to college and law school. I was in a Black fraternity, so I had Black potential PMC career types throughout my teens and 20s and early 30s. Then I joined a community. Basically, I converted to Islam. I became a Muslim. And I was dealing the same way I was dealing with those professional, managerial class, aspiring Black men at 30 years old, my social

sphere were Black men who had been ground to dust in prison for years who accepted Islam as adults. What I found is that those men had more integrity in character than the career professional managerial type guys that I had known my whole life. I started to realize that the politics of that first coterie of men has a large role in determining the quality of life in that second coterie of men. That was a radicalizing experience for me. I'm not saying that we should demand that of everyone to go through that. But I think that there's got to be a process to indulge in that class suicide or that class traitorism to have people realize like, listen, this ain't working for most people.

JM: I don't think most people understand the statistics. There's a common statistic. You hear people like Richard Wolff, the economist, talk about all the time that people are producing more now than we've ever produced before, working more hours, and making less money. I think that's hard for a lot of people to wrap their heads around, especially people that are in the salaried world. Because they took that job knowing like, I'm going to be probably working a lot more, but I'm making six figures. I'm working my way up to elite status. There's a ladder that they can see that includes those 100-hour weeks. How do you get those people to see that those 100-hour weeks is the sham?

JJ: I think in part they already know it. I think people are miserable and they can shop and be entertained. Like how many Netflix series can you watch? But to go back to what Pascal was saying, if the people who are captive find a spirituality and acceptance of themselves that is not dependent upon running around a hamster wheel and are looking for [an out from] predatory structure, then that opportunity is open to everybody. It just would be if you're willing to let go

of the propaganda or the internalization of values that are built on a capitalist economy, if you're willing to let go of those.

What would be the incentive? One would be your misery. Two, would be your compassion because you see how the world is being devastated. But three, I actually think it would take a certain kind of courage. Because it's not like people just say, oh, here's the door. Have a nice day. I mean, they tend to track and punish. I mean, the point is there's not supposed to be an out. When you start creating these avenues or crevices to get out of a kind of machinery, it's not like people celebrate that. I mean, the people who are receiving you do, the people who are looking at your back as you're departing, my experience in academia is that they're going to want to destabilize and delegitimize you. Because once you turn your back on the edifice, it's like the emperor has no clothes, and that's not a narrative you're supposed to be publicizing.

I totally agree. I'm just trying to be honest about, I don't know, maybe there aren't any contradictions and I'm just letting my head get in the way. But let's go back to Black women. The way we are trained is to compensate. Like even the leadership is a compensation packet in some ways. The way I always looked at it, whenever we got a promotion and stuff, it was another form of domestic labor. You were there to clean up somebody's mess. They put you on a grant, you're there to clean up. They want you to build Africana studies, it's because the institution is like, we're looking a little racist here. Come fix and tape something together. You're never actually in control even though you're given these positions that look like you have power. But the fact is, no, like you say, you have more labor and more grind.

JM: Well, we've been talking for almost an hour and a half, and we do want to close with the final question. Pascal, you're ready to ask that final question?

PR: There's so many questions that I have.

JM: We had so many questions and this conversation has been so wonderful.

JJ: I'm pacing around the office [muttering] "What do I think, what's going on?!"

PR: I have a question based on the judge. Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson is currently being nominated to the Supreme Court. Though Judge Brown Jackson has surpassed the rather low bar of having some progressive elements to her judicial record, there is a certain danger to the way neoliberal identity politics was used to advance her nomination. When asked by her Senate questioners as to what value there was to having diversity on the bench, she stated, diversity lends and bolsters public confidence in our system. Can you problematize how that assertion further illustrates the class nature of the Black political project in terms of what the system means for most Black people who are on the margin?

JJ: I would say Obama already problematized [that assertion] when he said he wasn't a president for Black people, he's the president for everybody. For me, it's the dictate of absorption, that you have to absorb, be absorbed by the state and capital, then you have to perform functions of maintenance for it. This happened to Michelle Obama. She wrote that thesis at Princeton that was critical, a bit, of racism in America. Then she spent the next eight years apologizing for it. Being "the mom of the nation." [The US] should be balkanized. That's my position. I would say let the white supremacists have Idaho, but it belongs to the Indigenous, so you can't do that. You still have to fight [white supremacists]. There's a way in which our desire to belong— as if we thought that [belonging] was an insurance policy—[shapes how] we articulate constantly that we're "safe" Black people. That we have no autonomy and that we

don't even want it no matter how much the white supremacist underground starts to play around above ground. I think that becomes the moment when we cut our own Achilles heels.

The logic is you can't expect anything from Black officials because they work for the state. The state has already indicated that it is about accumulation through force, and it is not about distribution of equity or goods or material sustenance for the people, for the mass. I've tried to stop being disillusioned every time a Black woman assumes some level of power at a corporation, within the state. Condoleezza Rice should have cured everybody of that [desire] decades ago [for Black feminism as fetish] or even in academia or in one of these movements.

I've made little, maybe they weren't snarky, queries about "movement millionaires." How do you monetize Black suffering and end up like a millionaire? I mean, how does that even...? It's like, oh, that's what the state and corporations and whites have been doing for centuries. Of course, there's a template. The way you don't want to romanticize Black unity or Black community, I will not romanticize Black women just because they belong to the Democratic Party or they go to church or they're kind or whatever. . . .

The only subject that has a true autonomous persona and independent thinking would be those people who understand the state must be not only critiqued but also opposed. Once you take a job within it, then you become the opposition to freedom movements that emanate from the base. Whether they are environmental, whether about labor, the right to be trans, or the right to have an abortion, there's a lot of different issues that we have to deal with. I really appreciate you both because if I had a tendency to romanticize Black people, you definitely killed it [Jason and Pascal laugh].

I just have to figure out where I go from here. But that whole thing about Black women are going to lead you somewhere. No. Just [follow] the way you've negated the false concept

that Black people as Black people are going to lead you somewhere. No. People who theorize, who will engage in material conditions and material struggles and be accountable to the people they say they represent, that becomes a collective leadership to which we can contribute.

PR: Awesome.

JM: Well, thank you very much, Dr. James, for taking the time to talk with us today. We really appreciate you working with us.

Chapter 16

I. We Remember the Attempts to Be Free⁶⁷

Millennials are Killing Capitalism

Jared Ware (JW): Dr. Joy James, thank you so much for joining us in conversation today.

We're really excited to have you join us for one of our Black August conversations. Your work anthologizing political prisoners, thinking on accountability, celebrity, nonprofits, celebrities and academics in relation to movements, and thinking on the Captive Maternal are all really generative. As we talk to you today, on August 7th, 2021, it is the 51st anniversary of Jonathan Jackson's raid at Marin County Courthouse, in which Jonathan would be killed by police [prison guards], in a plot to liberate his brother George Jackson and the other Soledad Brothers [William, James Christmas]. We want to start a bit with the Captive Maternal to frame this conversation. You talk about this concept, in a lot of your work and your discussions. Your 2016 piece "The Womb of Western Theory; Trauma, Time Theft and the Captive Maternal," lays this out. One of the things you state within that piece is "that leverage, rather than 'feminism' or 'intersectionality' or 'progressivism' might be a useful term for recognizing power and predation." Can you discuss your concepts of 'Captive Maternal' and 'Black Matrix' and that quote about leverage?

Joy James (JJ): Thank you both for inviting me to be in dialogue with you. Let's start on the anniversary of the seventeen-year-old? Because my concept, it's not my personal concept of the

⁶⁷ Transcription of: Jared Ware and Josh Briond interview with Joy James, "We Remember the Attempts to Be Free: Joy James on Black August and the Captive Maternal," *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism*, August 12, 2021.

Captive Maternal (CM) but my formulation of the CM as a descriptor of function in terms of what I saw. I was in Harlem watching parents trying to get protections and services for Black children, which is, you know, an incredible feat like Sisyphus roll the boulder up and it falls back down on you. It's a predatory state. It's imperial. It's white supremacist. It accumulates through terror. Blacks are primary targets indigenous also targets working class, poor LGBTQ trans women, and so forth.

With this seventeen-year-old, the leverage would have been that if they could take hostages. —my hands were up in the air quotes— literally by definition, yes, they were hostages but the raid was actually a barter exchange. It was not to accumulate. It wasn't to rob, Deutsche Bank, which is a criminal enterprise anyway (with any bank that comes to mind) but it was an attempt to save the brother's life. Seventeen is technically still a child, legally, right? The captive maternal as function can be embodied in a child and a teenager in a male and a trans and nonbinary and woman. Most of the examples that I use in the “Womb of Western theory,” are about adult women and struggle for liberation. It is not personal liberation or liberation defined within the framework of bourgeois feminism that has become hegemonic. Now it's multiracial and rainbow and everything else. But its liberation tied to the freedom of a people that only can be materially manifested if you defeat the predator. It's not like “oh, you're here's some land plot and we won't leave you,” I mean, that's not how accumulations through terror work. I mean, they're predatory because they hunt, right? The captive maternal on these various stages, resists the hunt. The seventeen-year-old by going into Marin County, having weapons registered in the name of Angela Davis, means is then how Davis becomes involved. Davis is not actually functioning in this capacity of rebellion or resistance to save the life, not just said George

Jackson, you know, brilliant theorist, who will die a year later in August, 1971. Jonathan died in 1970. The Attica rebellion would follow George's death.

When you get to the level of rebellion, after you've tried cooperation, stabilizing the state, trying to be the "good" Black person through all of these different stages of protests and you can talk about it more when I talked about Attica I kind of break it down, hopefully more clearly. All of these stages but when you get to the point of sacrifice which for me is probably another stage or the captive material, because it's organic, that you would risk your life in order to save a life. And by saving that life, you leave a legacy, even if it's a quote, technical failure, and it's not low tech, right because people die.

Even if it's read as a failure, it becomes in some ways a victory. because we're talking about it some fifty odd years later. We remember the attempts to be free. We remember the attempts to turn the hunt against the hunter. The leverage that this seventeen-year old— by walking in with the weapons and saying to the state, which is always weaponized, "Now I'm in charge"— is vocalizing, for me, the materialization of a form of the Captive Maternal who has reached the zone of rebellion that will start to look like the sacrificial lamb within an hour or so.

The mandate from the state was that there would be no escapes, even if we had to kill Judge Harold Haley, which they did. Even if they made the Assistant DA a paraplegic, which they did. Even though they would kill the Black teenager which they happily did, along with the two other Black incarcerated men, McClain and Christmas and wounding Ruchell Magee, who is still incarcerated as the longest held political prisoner in the United States. This would be the statement of the state: "Captive Maternals who seek those latter stages of rebellion and resistance will be eradicated." Still, Captive Maternals, keep manifesting.

Back to the “Womb of Western Theory.” I opened it juxtaposing an Iraqi feminist who I’m watching on YouTube saying how great it is to be in the US. And then I’m thinking “wait!” I mean, I’m old enough to remember what went down here. You know, nonexistent weapons of mass destruction. The disinformation campaign from the Bush administration includes Condoleezza Rice. Even though she’s a Black feminist, she’s not a Captive Maternal. She works for the state, which is the predatory formation and which is the hunter. I juxtapose the Iraqi feminist after listening to her TED Talk—which is interesting, fascinating and implicates the US, but has no critique of the US because it was celebratory: “Oh, I’m here in the land of the free, the home of the brave.” I juxtapose it with the Black Liberation Army narrative of the wounded, tortured feminist, a Black one. The Iraqi woman has fled a war zone to seek freedom in a democracy that is a war zone for all rebels against predatory accumulation. When you juxtapose the two (this becomes the blowback about the captive material challenging if I am a feminist anymore because the CM is nonbinary. When you juxtapose the two, you see that feminism is not a stable concept. It is always contextualized. But anti-fascism is stable.

You seek one war zone. You flee one. I write that the Iraqi women state that they will wear red lipstick so when the sniper shoots to kill they will know that “they killed a beautiful woman.” It’s very poignant. It has its place in our struggles. But so does 500 years of being tortured and raped. [Under regimes of enslavement and dishonor in which they are trying to figure out] how many ways can they kill you? accumulate through rape with the three-fifth clause and 13th amendment. When you juxtapose those two women in flight feminism [appears] mercurial. The only thing that stabilizes it is context and the context is the democracy itself. Since the Iraqi woman is “I got my card . . . I’m a [US] citizen now, she clearly is not on this side

of struggling against a democracy that accumulates through terror, enslavement and imperialism. Although, she gets to the US in part because of imperialism.

When you get to the second woman, “The Statement from the Black Underground,” in the late 1970s, it is very clear the conditions under which Black communities seek not just survival but freedom. In that clarity, that is the feminism I choose. Am I a liberation leader? Absolutely not. I describe myself as a librarian. But as a librarian, I’m an archivist of the captive maternal. Every time I see their manifestation from the teenager who dies in a hail of bullets because prison guards have a mandate of “no escapes, no matter who you kill,” so they shoot up a van to people with T-shirts with slogans: “I’m one of her daughters.” Which one? The one who was doing sickle cell testing in Harlem as a social worker who loves the people or the one forced by COINTELPRO underground, who becomes a reincarnation of leverage against a violent state? That underground feminism does not register as much on the T-shirt as the above ground which is compatible with what [President Joe] Biden is doing right now: throw a bunch of money at y’all to get you more services, and then hopefully, nobody remembers what we were actually asking and demanding: freedom, decent wages, stop polluting the environment, rein in the billionaires.

The Captive Maternal, in my understanding, are phenomena of complicity and resistance. On the first level, you can work the system, but you stabilize it at the same time. You accept modest gains or the individual games for your child or family or yourself, which become, you know, paltry accumulations. You never accumulate on the level of Jeff Bezos and Warren Buffett and everybody else in the billionaire club, millionaire club, and the state. On the second level, you protest because you understand this is a 360 merry-go-round and you’re not going anywhere. For those of us who are parents, you can put your child in the preppy school with all

the lead kids so they're on the right track, but then the indignity and the dishonor, right, of being you know, like you don't have the right clothes. You're not the right race. The humiliation that you're supposed to defer to this sort of imperial caste does harm itself. Or you can leave your kid and the local under resourced school that has metal detectors and the cops and the kids who are going to underground economies and they're not going to self-regulate because underground economies are just as predatory as above ground. But you know, the bloods on the floor, not through the stock exchange. Either way, it's harm because you never control the environment. You force your child to adapt into a hostile territory. The next stage is: I'm gonna' protest this." Moving from like the conflicted or celebratory, "yay, my kid got into Harvard" —which is a think-tank for imperialism—you move from that to the protest zone. Protests are not the same as a movement but you meet, organize and negotiate with the state or the bureaucracy. There are no real negotiations that shift power to the mass. So then it becomes a movement. We're out in the streets. We take over territory, or we might burn something down. From the movement stage, I mean, where do you go when the movement is not organized and congealed, right?

When I talk about Attica, I'll say more, or I'll be repetitive. From the movement stage, you move into resistance. Think of Jonathan, a seventeen-year-old junior in high school. He must have gone through all the stages: write your brother in prison when you're a ten-year-old or something; go see him when you can when your mom can take you; start protesting with placards for the Soledad Brothers, marching with Angela Davis. The next stage moves beyond the movement . . . to organize something . . . [that I understand] the Panthers on the West Coast did not support it. [Oakland Panthers] saw it as a suicidal mission. [Huey Newton's eulogy at Jonathan's funeral references "revolutionary suicide."] You move from that stage to the stage of rebellion.

But the rebellion and resistance against the state are always punished. The Captive Maternal can be pacifist or militarist. The state doesn't care. It does not allow autonomous zones, particularly of/for Black freedom. What do police forces do? They shoot up a van. Kill everything that moves. It's totally unnecessary. It's performative. Part of their performance, or their messaging to all Captive Maternals, if you ever think there is autonomy, if you ever think your agency registers to change your reality, the material conditions, and the world towards freedom, we have a bullet for you. Captive Maternals keep doing their thing, pacifist, militarist, spiritualist, materialist, combination of all the above. The “Womb of Western Theory” talks about the predatory womb of western theory writ-large, Aristotle on down. It's also talking about that unexpected by-product when you have a breech baby that comes out the wrong way — comes out a rebel, not a clone.

Joshua Briond (JB): I think that [police violence] has the similar effect of public lynching? It serves a similar ideology. Similarly, it represses even the potentialities of Black revolt, in my opinion. Often times, I see the brutality. I often despise the term “police brutality,” because it's contradictory. I think it's like seeing some of the violence that we see from the state. It's deputized like individuals, if that makes sense. It has to be more than just, “Hey, they hate you because of your skin color.” I'm very curious to hear what you think about a lot of these killings. We see how brutal with even like seeing stuff about like the homeless, right, we may see that's how some you saw a video the other day that went viral right with the cops is brutalizing the like the homeless into a knowing they're being recorded and knowing that this is all, you know?

JJ: The performative nature in my opinion, is part of psychological warfare. It's also godlike play. Police are: "Yeah, you can catch me on camera [brutalizing civilians but] I'm still gonna walk away." Derek Chauvin is inside. Think, however, of the percentage in which police predators are actually held accountable? It's really low. I don't have the numbers . . . somebody can go look, and it's really hard to find the data because they don't report all their violence against civilians. This performative violence is tethered to immunity and impunity; and, the indignity that our tax dollars are paying for this.

In New York City, the NYPD cracked open heads [of peaceful protesters decrying the murder of George Floyd]. I know young people who say "Oh, we're gonna pay down some [bill] because my partner, she's got X number of stitches from [police violence at] peaceful protests. I'm looking at [NY Attorney General] Letitia James not even grill the head cop in New York City [Dermott Shea] who projects: "I can lie to you on camera." This is . . . a collection of testimonies about how violent the NYPD was during the protests. Most of the people speaking are middle class or bourgeois whites. They're voters. James is helpful in sidelining [NY Governor Mario] Cuomo for his predatory acts, but she is not a friend to the masses. I'm watching her ask the head cop questions, and he's totally confident. He can lie that NYPD never kettled people in the Bronx and then kept them kettled until after curfew; then took down the barricades, rushed them and cracked open heads, hitting eighty-year-old journalists with green caps on didn't matter. . . human rights workers? Absolutely, doesn't matter. The Human Rights the organization makes a statement, but . . . the hunters. I'm gonna call them the "hunters," are like: "Yeah, we hunt. You have a problem with that?"

Despite the brutality, they will still get a pension, vacation days—or they were penalized and lost five vacation days. . . whatever, they'll do overtime. The amount of money we're gonna

pay in New York City, not just for the millions of dollars in settlements for police brutality against peaceful protesters in the wake of the murder of George Floyd? [Add that to the fact that] the cops are going to charge overtime, which is more than basic pay. They're charging you overtime to beat you. If you stayed within the mind space of liberalism, you would either lose it or you would just have to pretend most of that violence didn't go down. This is why I think there's such mystification about violence, political violence right now, among certain kinds of feminists, abolitionists, activists. If they [analyzed what was] really going down right now, they would realize that there's nothing in their tool kit that will remedy this.

Malcolm said "By any means necessary." You can go either way on the spectrum with that; which means you can also say, "Get out the vote!" I don't have a problem with that. I appreciate Malcolm's candor, like a lynching is a lynching is don't like call it something else. Let's just call it what it is. And there is no candor. In most of the political speechifying or speeches, maybe I don't have to be like snarky with the speechifying because they have to mystify the violence and they have to make the lynching a nonlynching. If that makes sense. It becomes a tragedy, which it always is. It becomes a horror show, which it always is, but it's not... it's never what it is in the real material world right? Which is a horror show that you have to counter by any means necessary. It's a horror like, okay, this horror movie will be over at this time. And we'll lose you know, leave the theater and then we'll all be able to, like, you know, figure out how to work in this system. You can't work in this system on the stage one of the captives maternal to stabilize it, because it is inherently predatory. And it does have a blood lust. I don't care what they say how many crocodile tears they shared about who died when and where how many like memorials they go to, or funerals you know how much money they pay out to families after the murder their kids which come out of my tax dollars, let me pay for pre-K,

okay? Or let me pay for cleaning up the environment. I don't want to pay for murder. I don't want to do compensation for murder, but it's part of the taxing and it's part of the indignity or the dishonor that is waged against us.

. . . If we focus on [lynching], Josh, as you put it on the table, and we don't try to make it a historical artifact, then what we trace is not just the brutality, but the resistance against it. The first person who comes to mind is Ida B. Wells-Barnett, right. Foucault writes in *Discipline and Punish* that torture disappeared from the public because a guillotine was dismantled and taken out of the square. No. He is wrong. 1892 is the height of lynching of blacks in the US where crowds of 10,000 people come out with picnic baskets and leave with body parts. They bring their kids to the lynching “parties.” They're indoctrinating the next generation to be terrorists.

Wells' resistance to that, and the clarity that she had and has still as an ancestor, created longevity. . . . She was too tied to the grassroots; she would call terrorism as she saw it. The most militant voices that call it as they see it —terrorism— get sidelined and marginalized because we are told to mystify the violence in order to get people to perform on levels one and two of the Captive Maternal. . . . The call for autonomy is only legit when you're dealing with a terrorist. If you're dealing with a democracy, then you can always reform and rehab it. My analysis of US democracy is that we have a lot of leeway to shop [if we have money] and to do some other stuff. But it has expressions of organized terror.

I mean, this is why Jon Jackson is not an elder right now This is how we lose Patrice Lumumba, Che Guevara, Malcolm, Martin, Medgar Evers, Fred Hampton. I can't just do this [roll call] all day. There's organized violence to disappear or quote neutralize leadership that trends towards rebellion for freedom.

JB: You wrote a piece a couple years ago about George Jackson entitled “Dragon Philosopher and Revolutionary Abolitionist.” You also wrote “‘New Bones,’ Abolitionism, Communism and Captive Maternal,” and now these are both pieces about different things. But in both cases, you referenced the Captive Maternal. That seems inadequate to me. George Jackson is a hyper-masculinist character; and, the Attica rebellion is a reflection of the same. But you note how Angela Davis dedicated her essay, “Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves” to Jackson, and you use the Attica rebellion to talk about your stages of the Captive Maternal. Explain to folks how you see the Captive Maternal in relation to George Jackson and Attica?

JJ: So first, I'd step back, I relate George Jackson to his mother. That's the namesake right? I believe it's Georgia. Jackson. There's a way in which your children can transform you. I started off talking about like the hustle of getting them into good schools, keeping them away from predatory structures: school to prison pipeline, internet, how about that one? Social media.

In order to keep them not just alive, but to allow them to thrive, you have to learn from them. It's transformative. You know, whether they're your fictive kin adopt- I mean think about our experience for 500 years? I mean, like somebody had the idea to sell your five-year-old twins. After you finally can process that, you still adopt other children in the community and you help raise them. We're always being sold, bartered, broken apart, put in foster care, prisons. We're always being disappeared as families. If Captive Maternal function in the social order and the political order, they obviously function the familial or family order.

When you read the hyper-masculinist, as you call him, George Jackson - I'm not saying that he's not right— but I never said the captive maternal was always a *nice person* – his letters

in *Soledad Brother*, the way he castigates his mother, it's like, "Oh, please stop already." Kids take years off your life just to be candid. Mrs. Jackson changes though, because the torture, the confinement, the enslavement, also known as prison of her child. What little I know of his early child—handful. Got it. It is one thing when an individual acts out their aggression, it is another when the state does it with impunity. You have to decide if you will align with the individual who is now treated as prey to be broken? Or will you align with the state and its punishment? Will you abandon the individual who is constantly rebelling, including against their family? Or will you find the stamina to figure out how do we move from this point to the next point so that we can be free not just from external aggressors, but also internal aggressors in the community; and, our own aggressions against ourselves: our dysregulation, instability, depression, anger, rage. Our volatility. In a hostile world, you get people who can't be quiet, or won't be quiet or don't cooperate. By the time both her sons die, the mother is a militant.

Read the letter. George Jackson's letter in *Soledad Brother*. He writes to the three, four people he loves. His mother. His brother John. Angela Davis. He dedicates his love to them and to their enemies, he basically dedicates his hatred. And so, the hunted will become the hunter. If you annihilate, destroy, damage, harm their kin. I would say that's not a gendered response, though men most likely are socialized to perform that. Women will do it in a different way, more verbal. If there's a hyper-masculinist presentation there's a possibility that there's a hyper-feminist presentation as well if it's about the accumulation of power based on the dishonor or humiliation of others, I've not just experienced that from men. Yes, I got a long list on them. I've also experienced it from women. I don't like hyper-masculinists. I don't really like hyper-feminists. I'm not saying that 'women wanting to be free' is hyper - I'm talking about the presentation style, the code of ethics or morality that gets broken among women.

What you put is so important, Josh, because now I have to make a choice. I'll just go for it. If I had to choose between a moral code that was principled, but not nice and the niceties of petty bourgeois or bourgeois or even, working class protocol, I would probably go with the ethical code that would make me whatever word you want to throw —and a lot of people have been throwing them. Of any word you want to throw at me, “nice” is probably not the first word that comes to mind. I'm not trying to be hyper anything. I'm trying to be clear.

What George said about his family kin? I cannot register with it on the level of a revolutionary because I'm not one. I can definitely register though on the level of family intimacy. If you even think about harming or disappearing mine, I will dedicate the rest of my life . . . and that's what he said that he would do—dedicate his life. . . (then, fill in the blank) to seek balance in the equation. From the different mothers that I've worked with, who've had their children murdered by police forces, they're not really forgiving. Some of their demands have nothing to do with civility. Those demands sometimes may be perceived as hyper. I'm not saying that the descriptor is inappropriate. I know a little bit about how George Jackson got inside [prison]. I don't think he should have been inside. I think [he should have been offered] the whole restorative justice . . . give him a lot of therapy and see how this goes.

George Jackson became a revolutionary because prison guards murdered W. L. Nolen for starting a legal petition to stop prison. Once you realize that they will kill you for following the rules— rules state that if you have grievances, write a petition, send it to the adjudicators and they will bring it to the state— if they will shoot you in the yard for that? Then there are no rules.

George writes that ‘the definition of fascism is ‘law.’ When I first read that, my mind said “Wow. Really?” For Davis, what little bit I know about their exchanges was that: No, this is not

a fascist or proto fascist state. You can work within its systems.’ I’m thinking Jackson analyzed reality from the zone that he occupied, prison as a terror zone.

Even in that shooting, what little I know of if that. If they shoot you, and then they let Black men bleed out in the yard, and then they tell their comrades who also loved them, ‘if you even try to move them to the medical center, we will shoot you too.’ So when you say the hyper-performative trauma will be a guard saying ‘I’m gonna make you watch your loved one bleed out in front of you on penalty of death. I dare you to try to pick him up and take him somewhere so you can save his life,’ this implicates you in the murder. Once you have a regime that starts doing stuff like that, and bringing people back from Vietnam (now from Iraq/Afghanistan) to mill into your prison forces, the guard forces, and the police forces, for them, it’s just a war zone.

What is the human - if that’s what we want to be? I’m not always sure - what is the human in a warzone? I mean, sometimes a warrior, even if it’s going to facilitate your death, meaning your brevity of life, because that becomes the only ethical choice. Malcolm could have taken the money and lived longer. You know, Martin could have, everybody, everybody I named who got assassinated with the help of the US government, CIA, FBI, etc, etc. They all could have taken the money but they didn’t so they had brevity and violent endings, but then they have longevity in memory. Even though that, obviously is not what people were hoping for. They were hoping for more. Does that kind of respond, Josh, to what you were asking?

JB: I appreciate that. Thank you.

JW: To tack on the other point with that question, talk a little bit about Attica in relation to the Captive Maternal and the [stages of the Captive Maternal].

JJ: The glimpse of Attica happened last year when I was speaking on a panel with the Newburgh LGBTQ+ Center. I been talking in part about a NYC church I attended. It had the only Black trans teen center, in a city of 8 million. There's probably no more than 15 beds. But they had produces cross of photographs of murdered Black trans women, and so was upstairs in the sanctuary. The overnights day was like on the ground floor, but up in the sanctuary with you know, it's an old church, you know, so this white alabaster angel is cradling this large cross of photographs of black murdered women. And so I asked, So what's the suit? What does security look like?. . . We were having a dialogue back and forth, and I don't know if they weren't ready for my question, or, you know, I, you know, my little caveat I grew up on what I call the bases of an imperial army. Like when my father died, he was a lieutenant colonel. So, for me, you know, I'm sure I'm traumatized, so many times have layers, I can't even explain it. But for me, like talking about organized violence is just like natural. I mean, like when I was watching my father, he's either jumping out of airplanes in the 101st. Or when my siblings are picking up bullet casings - we survived it - off of firing ranges for play. Violence is everywhere. [I asked them] 'what's the plan?' And then I'm stunned when people are like 'we don't have a plan.' What do you mean you don't have a plan? Everybody has a plan. But no, it's not true. Civilians don't have plans.

By default, either you rely on the police forces or therapeutic [interventions]. The therapeutic does good things, but that's not what it's not made for a war zone. Unless you're a trauma center

and then they keep recycling the wounded into you. You have to stop the war. So, I start to think “Where's this conversation going?” Then I said, “Okay, you asked me to talk about Attica. Let me try with the Captive Maternal.

Stage one. You're a trustee in prison. What do you do? You clean, you mop, you cook. You garden. You deliver towels, books, work in the library and on low level administrative tasks. Your labor stabilizes the prison structure. You're reproducing the zone of terror not because you want to . . . you got captured. Maybe it's out of boredom, you need a job or they pay you twenty-seven cents, a dollar and twenty cents an hour. Some perks. But that labor of caring for yourself and the other incarcerated with whom you forge a community — some are your adversaries and predators — your labor is stolen. Just like enslaved labor. The 13th amendment. It's actually enslaved labor. Your labor is stolen to preserve the structure that holds you as prey.

Stage two, as with Attica in September 1971, you start protesting as if we were humans. Attica people said they were “men.” My understanding is that everybody inside prison didn't probably identify as male, or self-identify as such, but the prison would classify your gender and then send you to the men's prison. It's 1971. You start protesting, start asserting your rights. Arguing that you're tired of this “free” labor, slave labor. Labor which actually on the outside world disproportionately be done by women. Since the prison is “same gender,” there is no gender difference. All of the labor that's feminized outside as domestic labor, wages for housework, or non-wages inside prison for the same labor, is now performed by people perceived as male. You/they start to protest asserting: “Don't pay me 27 cents. Don't call me the N-word. Stop terrorizing.” From that protest stage, either the prison administration listens to you or they don't. But nothing changes. What follows next is the movement stage. Part of the movement stage, of course, was George Jackson's murder. His “assassination” which is what

Foucault calls it, and I'll go with that. The incarcerated were reading George Jackson inside, they were reading *Soledad Brother*. Back to George as a captive maternal. The Captive Maternal is anybody who loves others and the people as a [communal mass]. They're not narcissists, per se, and they're definitely not sociopaths or psychopaths, which some people probably labeled George as. They love people so much that they're willing to sacrifice for them or to focus on them in order to deliver care.

It's not just that the prison tells you to clean, and cook. You care about yourself and others, so you're doing it for them. When you reach this stage of protests, especially after the murder of George Jackson, and if you were reading *Soledad Brother* you probably thought that George was speaking to you through the text. You probably generated an emotional relationship, which I would call "love." It's like when I read Octavia Butler, whether or not she's speaking to me, in my mind is like, 'Oh my God, that's what's going on right now!' And so they care about me, the writer cares about me. They're in my head. Their narratives and experiences let me know that I'm not crazy because they're talking to me. It's not me [as a "problem"]. I am jacked up, but it's also the [predatory] structure. The writer loves me enough to tell me the truth. Jackson's book was edited heavily by his attorney, and the book editor because they wanted him to look more liberal. Still, you could see that George cared for Black people and for captives. When the state murders someone with whom you have a relationship — even if it's just [cerebral] emotional kinship you've never met them—you're moving towards a stage of a captive maternal where rebellion is more likely to happen because you've been traumatized by the death on the other side of a continent.

And so the rules don't apply. I mean, they were always fascistic to begin with - but now you're not going to clean. So, there's a strike, a work stoppage to some extent. Or some refuse to eat, they don't pick up their utensils, everybody and everything is frozen. Time is frozen. It's on pause, because what's the next stage after they murder of your kin?

At Attica, the next stage is rebellion. They take over. Two trustees die [killed by incarcerated]. That, of course, is a tragedy as well. The hostages now become the prison guards. In that stage— past conflicted caretaker, past protest, past movement—they're in marronage. They build a maroon camp inside prison walls. How bold... I mean, come on. That's the max! Historically, we just ran for the hills or the swamps. But no, inside the fortress, captives build ... a media site. . . . an education site. . . . health delivery, food delivery, waste removal. . . . [they] form of security, everybody stays in check. There is culture. Orisanmi Burton is writing a book on Attica. You may want to meet with him. He talks about the incarcerated singing doo wop songs from the 1970s to each other to calm and care for each other. Now they're in full blown rebellion.

What is the state's relationship to maroonage? I'm not a historian, these are the facts I remember. Governor Nelson Rockefeller ends up in a conversation with President Richard Nixon. Sometime later, the National Guard comes in. They have hardware from the Vietnam War, military hardware . . . it's counterinsurgency. A human rights struggle is seen as a declaration of war against the state. What does the state do? They shoot through white prison guards to kill mostly Black rebels. According to Burton after the state retook the prison—I was aware of the torture— they murdered additional leaders.

So, those are the stages . . . from complicit in the reproduction and stabilizing of the predatory formation because it's the only way to stay alive—I have to do what they say or they

will beat me, put me in solitary, deny food . . . I'm forced to cooperate. [Over coming fear, we move to the next stage] to protest. State violence is so off the hook that we need to organize the movement. Now the movements gone to full rebellion. We create a container for ourselves. Build a maroon camp. They try to reach the outside world, the *New York Times* journalists [Tom Wicker]; ask that Panther Bobby Seale show up. Attorney William Kuntsler is on the scene with others.

And then, the war comes to respond to the move towards freedom because we are not supposed to be free. We are captives, right? So, to restore capture, the state goes into full blown war which was not necessary. I've shown in my classes *Eyes on the Prize*, fifty-minute [documentary]. Tom Wicker, the white bourgeois journalist from *New York Times* states on camera that the state “didn't have to come in like that” given the cold and that the food was running out, that the incarcerated would have given in. But back to what Josh said about performative terror. The mindset of the state authorities was like “No, we do not want you to surrender. We want to massacre you.” Because they are messaging with lethal militarism. They're doing psychological warfare. I mean, if captives surrender, then you don't have the spectacle, which is a display of the state's godlike powers in terror. The question became for me, as I was talking to other people, what happens after the troops come in? What happens after the executions?

The memory stays alive through the graphic novel that Big Black [spokesperson for the rebellion who was tortured and sexually assaulted in the retaking of the prison] authored with his wife. It's in the documentary on Attica [by Stanley Nelson]. People keep talking about Attica because they need to emotionally and politically. Actually, it is a library. What I said before in terms of being librarians and archivists, it's a library just as your podcast is a library itself. We

have to remember or we don't understand reality. There's betrayal. It is betrayal for those who forget. It's the betrayal by those who want to clean up Attica and say, well, we can prevent this happening in the future. No, we can't. [We have not sufficiently strategized and organized to prevent future atrocities.] It's the betrayal that's shaped by fear and shaped by accumulations. It's not just white people who betray you. Anybody can betray, who cannot stomach the reality of the zones in which we live, but also the uniqueness of the prison zone. It is sheer war, sheer war.

In a recent conversation with the Max Parthas of Abolish Slavery National Network (ASNN), we were talked the activists inside who or on a prison hit-list initiated by the guards/administration. I think of it as an assassination list. COINTELPRO never ended. Most of the leadership that's focusing on voting haven't told you, one, that this is a war, and, two, that its manifestations from decades ago have become more clandestine. They've diversified by having people of color and LGBTQ join the CIA. The nature of the warfare is the same . . . [it just has different faces].

JW: Thank you for that. I've been reflecting on your essay "Airbrushing Revolution for the Sake of Abolition," which came out last year, and the first time I read it, Josh knows this. Other people probably know this like I was, I was frustrated by it on a couple of levels. Like one, I felt like it had some very scintillating details that are kind of dropped in about, like the CIA and Gloria Steinem and their relationships to Davis's campaign and then maybe also to Critical Resistance. Right? But I wanted more, right? But I've gone back to it a few times, and there's a lot within it that I really do find super generative. And not to say that that isn't either. For me, it was sort of a question of whether it's a critique of kind of liberal alliance, right? Or whether it's a suggestion of a sort of complicity in a kind of act of counterinsurgency. And I think maybe those things are

one in the same right, is part of what it makes me grapple with. But the piece that I did want to talk about a little bit more with you is, is also just this idea of like trial strategy and campaign strategy specifically related to political prisoners, right. It's something that comes up all the time. I mean, I work around and try to support campaigns related to political prisoners. There's a lot of people obviously in that that I tremendously respect and we want to get freedom for all of them.

Specifically, it made me think of a conference I was at where Margaret Burnham spoke. She was on Dr. Davis's legal team during her campaign, and her parents are Louis and Dorothy Burnham who were also in the CPUSA. There were two statements that [Margaret] read at this conference from Angela Davis pretrial. The first one I'm just gonna read quick excerpts from this for people. The first one was right after she was arrested, and Davis stated, “the reactionary pig forces of this country have chosen to persecute me because I am a communist revolutionary participating together with millions of oppressed people in a revolutionary movement to overthrow all the conditions that stand in the way of our freedom.”

Burnham noted that every word of Davis's statement was true, but that it wouldn't play with the jury in Santa Clara County. Burnham then referenced a statement on the eve of Davis's trial, where Davis articulated, “the need to ensure judicial fairness and bail in order that I may better prepare my defense becomes increasingly urgent.” Davis added, “while we may disagree on many things, we are surely united in our affirmation on principles of due process, and equality before the law. Millions of people throughout the world of all political persuasions and national and racial origin have voiced their concern over the fairness of my trial.” So, Burnham discussed at this conference, the distance that Davis had traveled there rhetorically from her capture to the eve of her trial, with the intent on securing her innocence through the apparatus of the US legal system.

Conversely, obviously, we could talk about strategies of other political prisoners we could talk about, and should talk about Ruchell Magee, who as you mentioned, is still incarcerated 50 years later, longest held right, US political prisoner. And we've had folks on the podcast before Sekou Odinga, Jalil Mutaqim, other people within the BLA - which I know Angela was not in the BLA - but people who were in the BLA. They took a stance, some of them, that they had a legal right to rebellion under international law, right? They were combatants, and so they should be treated as prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention. The US of course, doesn't recognize this right. And just treats them as criminals, right. But it's an important thing to think about, these distinctions. Because obviously, none of us want to be in prison for life. Right? So the appeal to innocence if you can get it, it makes sense. It's the thing that you would do as a trial strategy. Your lawyers would tell you to do it. But then it's a huge issue with social movements, right? Because it's like if your movement is actually in a revolutionary phase or in a revolutionary state, then, you know, you can't be innocent. There is no innocence in that. As far as the state's concerned. So yeah, I just was interested in kind of your thoughts on that.

JJ: There's a lot going on. Well, you know. "Airbrushing Revolution for the Sake of Abolition" obviously was controversial. It was published in a liberal blog. That it even got out, probably surprised a lot of people. It was sparked by a conversation with a doctoral student at an elite university. was hearing how doctoral students were, at least from this perspective, but I've heard it from other people, were being pressured to do their research within a certain ideological format that would not be perceived as too militant or too radical. . . . the academy, if it's a public university, shares the ideology of the government, because it's a state entity. If it's somewhere

where I taught like Brown where I was doing those anthologies, the university has the ideology of the corporation, so it's private capital, or its state.

Neither space is actually built for truth-telling about repression, to give you an adequate context for understanding why these rebellions keep happening. If you don't have political context, then the rebellions are simply criminal. I also had been hearing from other people that they were not allowed to talk about war. You could talk about war as a metaphor or an abstraction. But I've spent this time with you (maybe it's my filter going up on military bases) saying that I think the material conditions justify this descriptor. War can only be a metaphor under a certain kind of politics, because if the state is at war with you, then you don't play by state rules. Which is exactly what Jonathan Jackson, George Jackson and the other political prisoners did: they not play by the state's rules. Because the state was hunting, it was predatory. It had killed a number of people, and nobody went to jail for those killings. You can give like Fred Hampton and Mark Clark's families like \$1.8million, whatever, which, you know, compared to \$2 million for Breonna Taylor's money I don't know if you've adjusted for inflation when you get but the point is, you still have dead people. That you loved, and nobody can bring it back. And there's no justice because nobody like nobody has been held accountable.

So in this particular instance, I'm listening to doctoral students saying that there's a way in which their work is being influenced so that it's compatible with, you know, kind of the hegemonic narrative of progressivism, which is in my estimation, not grassroots radicalism.

On another level though, was it the Black Revolutionary Guard did a statement? I'm not on social media, but people send me stuff. And then I was reading you know, they had strong descriptors about Davis and they were largely negative. Like so what you're pointing to like, if

you're reading my work for me to pinpoint somebody as something, you should read somebody else. Because I already told you, I'm not a journalist, I don't do exposés, I'm an analyst. I'm trained in political philosophy, right and for whatever reason by Jesuits and Republicans I was forced to study the Europeans. But like, however, I think my ethical commitments are based on my organizing. It has nothing to do with what I spent years in graduate school doing, and I always rebelled in graduate school.

When I read the BRG and they're like, they're this, and they're that and it's like, well, I know them a little bit. And I'm going to disagree, but I'm going to tell you what I see in terms of structure and also in terms of history. And the data I'm sending has always been out there but it's been written by white, bourgeois academics and British so nobody reads them or cares but when a black woman who says I'm also a feminist when it's just like, oh, hell breaks loose, right? . . . It isn't really a joke. The inside line in that is that you can't critique Black Feminists or Black Feminism unless they[you] go rogue.

Going rogue means that I'm a librarian, and some of this doesn't make sense. Let's try to break it down.

First, people don't necessarily have to be working for the feds. My understanding is Gloria definitely did. But everybody knew that from the *Ramparts* expose` releasing that information in 1967. By 1971-72, Steinem is made the head of Davis's fundraising committee. That was a decision by the CPUSA and I believe, by Stanley Levinson, who had a meeting in Manhattan, and Steinem was invited in, it's like, we want you to do this. So why would a bourgeois white woman who basically says that she only worked with the liberal faction of the CIA - and then they scrubbed that from the media, you can't find that clip anymore - why would you agree to defend Angela Davis and raise money for her? I don't know. I mean figure it out

yourself. I'm the librarian. I put the book on the table, read it or don't, I don't care. I brought it to your attention. If you've been reading, you would have figured it out anyway. Usually when you figure it out, it's this hyperbolic —I'm going back to what Josh said about hyper-masculinist responses such as we're going to tear down Steinem, and feminism. That was not my goal. I've met Steinem decades ago when I was a grad student. The whole package. . . lovely person. Then you look at their politics and it's like, “Oh. . .”? If you met Hillary Clinton, lovely persona then ask: “What are your policies?” Oh, empire? It's state feminism.

One of the things to think about is if this is already public knowledge, what's the big deal when it appears in print in a blog in 2020? Because it's destabilizing the perception of what black leadership should be? What does it mean to be aligned with state feminism? You don't have to be a state feminist. You just need to be part of the revenue stream, whether or not you're ideologically aligned, the revenue stream is promoting your work.

Consider Ms. Foundation. There's a couple of articles to think about. Davis writing on Joan Little after she killed the white prison guard who was raping her. I believe that was 1975. It was a Black woman defense attorney who got Little off, but that piece in *Ms. Magazine* was foundational. . . . Little was a civilian. They were not a political combatant, until that act of self-defense. Then it became reframed as political phenomena.

I would argue, akin to what happened with Clarence Thomas, and Anita Hill, is that the black woman becomes representational for white women. I'm sure some women would want to have that level of retaliation and defense against their rapists. Because there's an analogue, Joann Little works as an anti-rape figure. But if Joan Little was pre-politicized and did a guerrilla act against a police precinct, that would *not* be in *Ms. Magazine*. Okay. Even if her rapist was the cop in the precinct, it still would not be permissible because it's an act against state violence. I

know it may sound a little confusing. . . like this is a local prison guard, so isn't he the state? No, he's just a local flunky, who if he's going to be a serial rapist should have thought about the possible consequences if there's ever a rebellion. So, he never did. But in that era in 1970s, it could work as a feminist modality because it could be spread writ-large over bourgeois white women as the victims of male patriarchy, which is real.

It doesn't often reach the level of reality that you end up in a tussle with your white jailer and stabbing him with his own ice pick. That is rare. That's the anomaly. But you could see the self-defense as the right of *all* women. That's why Joann Little is useful. Same with Anita Hill being sexually harassed. (Cuomo will likely lose his job because he was a predator harasser, *allegedly*, you're supposed to say until proven guilty.) Anita Hill is useful on all these rallies because she's Black, but the charge is genderized. It has no racial component anymore. People don't ask what was Anita Hill doing with Clarence Thomas, besides being harassed by him in the office? They both were working in the Reagan administration in the EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission], to basically toss out job complaints against racist discrimination, sexist discrimination, homophobic discrimination. Workers' rights were being trashed not just by Clarence Thomas, but also by Anita Hill. I stand by Anita Hill's right not to be sexually harassed; but I'm not going to forget the fact that her job, which nobody forced her to take in the Reagan administration, was to eviscerate civil rights. She got reborn after the feminists championed her because as a prototype, she was useful [although she had publicly stated that the anti-abortion Bork was cheated of a seat on the Supreme Court]. *Ms. Magazine* launched the writings of Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, Michele Wallace, all key Black Feminists. I've learned from all their writings. But *Ms. Magazine* is an extension of Clay Felker. Steinem worked for him first in *New York Magazine*. Both of them, if I recall correctly, had

allegiances with the state during the Cold War. So how might you win the Cold? War? [the CIA] can't kill everybody. Win hearts and minds . . . get publications. Produce a kind of feminism that's going to be loyal to the state. Hillary Clinton was a feminist. She was also an imperialist. These alignments between Black Feminists who don't have that much money, or clout or platforms, with white feminists who do usually are transactional. [Eventually, some of the Black feminists will have wealth, stature, influence leveraged through such partnerships]

[State feminists can now claim that they] have women of color; are rainbow; nobody can say they're racist. For me, the telling point is what's the position on US foreign policy? Can we talk about US imperialism? If we can't critique US imperialism, then the transactional politics work for the *state* feminists. They may leverage the influence, raise the profile, sell more books, raise the honoraria and speaking fees, for others; launch people as writers. But those individual accumulations are not mass accumulations for black people, unless you're personally cutting everybody a check. You might be. I don't know how people do their donations. But that's still not enough money. How many books did you sell? Is not enough money for black freedom or reparations. But for the state feminists, what they gain is amazing. The persona of being anti-racist and non-racist because they're rainbow, but it's not the Rainbow Coalition that Fred Hampton talked about. Right? It's a different it's the rainbow coalition of bourgeois and petty bourgeois feminism. So yes they're diverse, we're lesbians, we're trans, we're multi-ethnic, multi-national, we're indigenous, etc. And it's like, okay, so tell me about your position on US policy? Not just denouncing it like you denounce lynching like 'oh, this is horrifying!' I want to know nitty gritty, what's the plan to confront predatory violence, and the hunter? State feminists will agree that there's chauvinism, patriarchy, sexism, homophobia. They will *not* agree, in my

understanding of them, that the state is a hunter, that imperialism is a zone of terror. Once they [acknowledge this] the funding dries.

The article right tells you enough facts; if you want to know more, you find out the rest for yourself. It tells you a few facts that the only people who knew were the people at that conference. What I'm gesturing to is how labor in the academy can be exploited. Especially from younger people, students, grad students, and junior faculty who are doing what they believe to be the ethical thing, but the accumulation is not going to the incarcerated. Accumulation is going to the people who *speak about* the incarcerated. They accumulate the persona of being informed, of being caring, of being right there on the edge of serious politics. My question is what is the relationship between us as academics and the incarcerated and how can the incarcerated check our power [when we] use their stories and narratives? They can't. The incarcerated cannot deny you tenure. The incarcerated cannot stop a multimillion-dollar grant coming in the wake of all the George Floyd protests. There's a lot of money [that was generated from the suffering of the black working class and poor].

From the zone of terror itself from the zone of captivity, in a way they're reliant upon people outside to act in good faith. But what is good faith if it is not disciplined by a political code of resistance? I can't read these codes of resistance without seeing them corrupted by bourgeois funders [if they are not seen as] relevant on the street in terms of people who are actually mobilizing.

[Concerning] Margaret Burnham, we met a couple of times. I also met her mother because worked with a women's group (Women for Racial and Economic Equality [WREE]) years ago, it was aligned with the CPUSA. They asked me to join the CPUSA. I said, "No, I can keep organizing. I didn't realize how it works. If you don't join, your gone. But I learned a lot.

Communist women and Black militants in New York City trained me. Margaret's mother, Dorothy Burnham was amazing . . . incredibly lovely and gracious. I just remember our conversations as always informative and they helped me. I also met Charlene Mitchell who was Angela Davis's mentor. It was Charlene Mitchell, who told me to go to the Schomburg and read all of W.E.B. DuBois' memoirs. That's why I wrote the critique of the Talented Tenth. The academy will corrupt you: that's the short version. The academy and petty bourgeoisie will betray Black mass militancy, and that's what happened to DuBois as he became more communist-minded upon being forced out of the NAACP and his position is 'Oh, man, I wish I had a militant ally' I think, "Wait, you had Ida B. Wells as a grassroots militant and you blew her off." These are part of the cycles we go through. The mystification of violence. The language Davis was using it was not coming from the CPUSA. If the CPUSA was paying for that expensive six-attorney legal defense. . . . you are going to use their language. Also, the language is compatible with the state. When you say we need our legal rights under the state you're saying that this state can function for Blacks (not just Black elites). George Jackson said that US law is fascist, which means it will never function for us. If I wanted to get off a murder charge I would have changed my language too; but you can't pretend that the criminal [in]justice system is representative of a resistant movement. It's not. It is about the individual being able not to spend the rest of their life or decades in jail.

Ruchell Magee could not do that. [His position was:] "I'm a captured slave. And I have the right to be a maroon." This was also the position of the Attica people. You have the right . . . if people are torturing you, if you're being raped, if you've been starved and beaten, if you've been thrown in the hole, so that you can have a nervous breakdown become psychotic, you get to run. I know it's illegal, but just the law of ethics. . . . If you have a torturer you get to try to leave

the enclosure. Granted, they'll shoot you for it. But I can't judge you if they're torturing, and beating you, and there's blood on the floor. Do what you need to do, because it's a war zone [figure out what works best for survival, physical, spiritual, psychological, intellectual, emotional].

So, full wrap with Geronimo Pratt. Geronimo was on trial during the same time as Angela Davis was. It's painful and traumatic. I've never been in jail. 17-18 months? Incredibly painful and depressing. Geronimo did twenty-seven years. When I wrote about his imprisonment after being framed by the FBI and LAP, I said that he was held captive as long as Mandela. A prominent Black academic historian indignantly responded with "how dare you compare to Pratt to Mandela?" I mean, it's not like neither one of us as academics have been inside prison; but Mandela was probably a capitalist. If you want to talk to me about the communist leader Chris Hani . . . I would love to learn more. . . . Mandela, I know he suffered. . . . If I know correctly, he also was cutting unilateral deals with the apartheid regime. Twenty-seven years for Geronimo is real. He was framed under COINTELPRO. You have a question about why Kathleen Cleaver [is centered as the black woman who representative of revolutionary Black Panthers]. Well one, Kathleen cleaver was always there. She got the law degree, I believe, from Yale. As attorneys Cleaver, Stuart Hanlon, and Johnnie Cochran just kept at it until they were able to get Geronimo out after twenty-seven years, with some financial settlement [paid through our taxes] that can't pay for all those years.

Well, when I asked the academics, I'm Assistant Prof, "can we invite Geronimo too?" They all flinch. That's not the profile. He doesn't have that European polish. He's not a woman. He's not a feminist. He's not accepted by the bourgeois mainstream, at all. He's not accepted by whites unless they're white militants. [The vibe is:] Do not bring that kind of persona up on

campus. We plan on having a great conference without him. Academics chose, and it's not necessarily about gender. It's really in part about ideology . . . that what the funders want. That is why all the revolutionaries I know are broke.

Chapter 17

II. We Remember the Attempts to Be Free

Millennials are Killing Capitalism

Josh Briond (JB): In the introduction to “*Warfare in the American Homeland*,” you write how:

Erasing a genealogy mapped by the ‘wretched of the earth’ allows the non-wretched to print over their (our?) texts, to use insurgent narratives as recyclables. This is a practice of the police machinery and its technologies of warfare. Professed allies, “radical” theorists, are selective because they have that right and privilege. In one narrative, Foucault disappears all impoverished and imprisoned black/brown bodies, yet in another he presents, in painstaking delineation, the corpse of the revolutionary icon and prison rebel George Jackson; that killing in a California prison thirty years ago sparked the Attica rebellion and additional killings in a prison on the other side of the continent.”

I’m thinking about this alongside an interview you did with Devyn Springer / *Groundings* Podcast titled “The Plurality of Abolitionism,” which everyone should listen to by the way. There you spent a lot time struggling over the role of the intellectual as opposed to the guerilla intellectual. You talk about the more liberal and/or academic forms of abolitionist thought that have emerged in the aftermath of the more radical potentialities of social movements. Can you talk a little about this watering down of revolutionary struggle to mere abstracts and terms of liberal academic institutional discourse?

Joy James (JJ): I’ll try not to be repetitive. The “New Bones” piece [*Verso Blog* 2021] is based on my reading when I taught Amilcar Cabral’s *Return To The Source*. I knew about *Return To*

The Source because I have a friend who was in the Harlem panthers. NYC panthers were very different from California panthers—West Coast panthers would have been the panthers that Davis aligned with; the East Coast had a militant ideological trajectory. From NYC, you get Dhoruba [Bin Wahad], and others, and the people largely who wrote that letter that I put in “Airbrushing.” So, you know, the “New Bones,” [*Verso Blog* 2021] argument that I was putting forward after being influenced by Amílcar Cabral — like everybody I was traumatized by what seems like planned ineptitude around the COVID pandemic, the loss of life, livelihoods, and housing for so many people.

What's the source of new bones of new thinking? The concept of “new bones” came from the poem from Lucille Clifton. . . . [*New Bones Abolition* 2023 by Commons Notions]. New growth, the source agency in my mind cannot be the academy. It is a source of accumulation. I said that earlier. I'm not bashing anybody, because I'm bashing myself. Me included. Inherently, if most of the people you're quoting are academics, and you're saying that academics politicized you, that's going to be interesting. . . . It's going to be “interesting,” because if we've been able to keep our jobs this long, or get these honorary titles, we are compatible with the structure even if we are seen as contrarians or mavericks within it. We are still compatible with accumulation, within an empire with imperial DNA shot through it right. For academics who survive as long as say I have, the way we risk is modified; it's shaped by our distance from physical terror. The risks taken by the incarcerated when they go on strike look nothing like the risks we take about whether or not we will be published.

Warfare, originally it had a different title, the editors at Duke asked “Are you declaring war on the United States?” I said “Of course not.” Then we had to play around with the title. It

was my last year at Brown where I was demoralized [because of the response to my work with political prisoners].

At Colorado, I sent the anthology that came out of the academic conference at CU Boulder. I got Palgrave Macmillan to mail 50 copies into the incarcerated. There was one person who had been in the BPP and BLA, they wrote back that the book I sent them, which I was so happy to share, wasn't really relevant. When I went to Brown I anthologized political prisoners for years, but I caught hell. . . . it was like 'you need to go. I mean, "How uncomfortable can we make it here for you so you will leave?"' Eventually, I did. Ironically, the academy under capital is so adaptive, a decade or two later, it's fine to write on political rebels. The people that I anthologized in *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, George Jackson is on the book cover, are now having their books in print by respectable academic texts. In 2003, I'm getting called into the principal's office, my colleagues are mocking me. I'm having a nervous breakdown. My contributors are either dying from cancer (one of the Berrigan brothers,) or are murdered. The trauma is secondary or tertiary. It's nothing like being inside prison. But the worries are real: Marilyn Buck's got cancer, how long does she have? There's this constant worry and fear. This is textual and it's painful. I've never been caged like that. The Attica people felt while reading George. I feel. I was reading these folks in real time, they were inside, I'm writing to them and then sometimes when the letters come back then I'm sending contraband because I'm becoming too politicized. It's always secondary, tertiary, but I know the trauma is real.

I don't care if people say I'm lying. I wasn't trying to accumulate. I was already a full professor at Brown. . . . it was just "the right thing to do." The person who put me on this journey was a BLA prisoner who was going into their 30th or 40th years, close to 50 years before they get out. None of that was respectable then, but years later, somehow, it's respectable.

Working with students to create a conference that brought in former political prisoners from across the spectrum: Weather Underground, AIM, Panthers, RNA, like Puerto Rican [Nationalists]. Brown recruited me [with] \$10,000 research funds, which I hear now it's not even *real* money. I spent that money not on my research, but I'm bringing all these people to campus.

Academics increasingly write about political prisoners now. Some people are paying some costs. But when did the state agree to leverage the identity of the rebels? During the time of the Attica rebellion, they just killed them during the takeover and then later quietly snuffed them out. Why is it textually okay to have them appear now? Perhaps because of the way they're being interpreted and how they're being taught.

You can't teach rebellion to the children of the ruling class, or to that scholarship kid who's now going to be a worker but like, well paid for the elites, right? And hopefully join the elites, be a colored version or first generation, you know, got the degree kind of thing. These are ideological factories. So how did they expand to include the rebels? Because rebels are now commodities.

When academia thought it was possibly real, meaning that there will be material organizing in response to comprehension, with a growth of "New Bones," out of these students, it was a threat. [Weeks before the conference, the administration mandated a conference for everybody on financial aid at the same time our conference. The students were so smart, they attended, signed their names on the attendance sheet because if you did not show up there were threats that aid packets could be cut your money—Capital will hurt you in the pocketbook. Then students filtered out one by one from the mandatory meet. Our empty auditorium with rebels teaching—as people kept opening the door—grew to its full capacity. Students were young, brilliant. They did nothing illegal. For *Imprisoned Intellectuals*, they did the research for the

bios, and wrote the research editor notes for chapters: Black anarchists, Quaker peace resisters, Plowshare people, Chicano activists, Indigenous resisters, Black Panthers. Students were also very clear: “When we finish this work, we're going to walk into elite law schools, or my dad will pay for Harvard grad. But only if there's a boundary here. We're not giving up capital or privilege. My response was “Fine, just do what you think is useful.” They offered technical skills. Now there's a place [of more confusion]. . . . there's a disconnect from theory or accumulation and academy and the resistance to what extent it exists on the ground. It's not just a disconnect. It's like the magpie [brood parasites], those two birds that come into your nest and kick out your eggs, and then they lay their own eggs so they look like your eggs? You come back home, sit on their eggs, and they hatch. And you're bewildered “What is this? What did I just hatch?”

You're the product of your labor is used by capital to create the edgy, militant minded, and it doesn't mean they're not ethical. What I'm trying to say is if you do not have an organic connection to radical resistance, and a way for the incarcerated radicals - and there are non radicals who are incarcerated, who also deserve support and to get out but for the incarcerated radicals - to have peerage. Not just to give you their stories, so you can write the book, but to have peerage with you, and to check you. There is no balance of power here.

We're taking the power of the state university or the private corporate university and college and leveraging it as a gift to those who face the most dire conditions of repression. That's not “New Bones.” That is not a return to the source. That is an excavation of the source, that is extraction, from the source, that is accumulation from the source. And goodwill is not sufficient to replace an organized resistance, that understands that whatever you want to describe what we're doing, or trying to do, that we need a security apparatus not just for our emotions or

therapy, we actually need to figure out how to protect each other. One Black pastor in Rochester said after George Floyd's murder—I'd be interested in trying to change all my buying behaviors— that if you kill us, we will kill your economy. I just read that as some form of strike or boycott of purchasing.

When I grew up on military bases, I was socialized. I was in the ROTC in high school, and university. I decided that I was not going to be my dad. But I learned a lot. You can learn a lot in the academy. You can even get a gig as an academic. But if you accept the culture without a critique, that is like growing up, in some ways, on a military base, and being indoctrinated and thinking that whatever you do is a liberation endeavor. This is why we tell the troops “thank you for your service”; and in my brain I add “for the Empire.” Thank you for your service of accumulation for knowledge for whom, what, and to what degree?

JW: I want to talk a little bit about Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, which is an organization that I've worked to support mainly around publishing some of their thoughts, thinking, and in relation to specifically the 2018 prison strike. They've publicly spoken out about abolitionists, which we could think of one, that supported Joe Biden for president, given his history of mass incarceration his pro-police and prison policies. We're all seeing that play out right now in terms of renew to this crime scare, a lot of which is just based on bad data . . . there wasn't a lot of crime happening when everybody was required to stay inside. But even still, a lot of it could be attributed to all kinds of social factors, right around COVID-19 and not having enough support. We just saw that [Biden's] immigration detention is like double what it was right when he took office.

JLS also has in the past vocalized support for prisoner escapes, including, you know, early in the COVID 19 pandemic when people some people were just running away from jails or like low security prisons, and, you know, highlighting the strength of the movement that existed, you know, in the 1970s and early 80s, when things like the liberation of Assata Shakur were possible. Dissidents and prisoners were taking those sorts of risks. They've also been attacked by the far right, including Tucker Carlson for trying to seek out Kyle Rittenhouse's location inside. These are all positions right that I think on some level Josh and I probably would agree with . . . but they are positions that liberals and self-described radical organizations will not or cannot publicly endorse. They're . . . prohibited thought to a certain degree, particularly within a lot of the academic abolitionist sort of lens. They build large coalition's when they're, striking around their demands; 300 organizations expressed solidarity in 2018. But these statements cause them to lose support; also, they've noticed a lot of support has diminished since Biden was elected. People were just walking away because there's a there's a Democrat in office. With relation to Tucker Carlson, the left doesn't have any sort of meaningful counterpunch. If an organization like theirs gets vilified on a platform like that, then all of these Far-Right folks start to attack Jail House's ability to fundraise or organize. There's no left platform that can stand up to that because we don't have the reach.

JJ: Right, there's a lot there because this is like not abstract. It's like totally grounded.

Okay, so let's start with the low hanging fruit. Rittenhouse my understanding of Rittenhouse I was asked this I don't know it's feminists philosophers in Europe like at some platform right and they asked about mothering and I use the example of Rittenhouse like in that restaurant with his mother if he was throwing up white power signs and she was grilling. After he'd shot three

people and killed two, I raise the query if this is a teenage serial killer, who can get a \$2-4 million bounty bail because he has a function. He becomes a symbolic register, an extension of the state licensed to have that weapon? drove out of state? Police earlier gave him bottled water and let him walk away after he shot three people. The state/police forces are structured for that kind of aggression. When I say “hunter,” I’m seriously mean hunter, right? What people often don’t talk about is that the three people he shot were white males at a Black Lives Matter protest.

Part of the messaging is for anti-racist whites. Our first target is black, but we definitely have capacity to intimidate you from ever supporting, in any real meaningful way, liberation struggles, and escapes from terrorism through sanctuaries without police forces invading. Rittenhouse does a free commercial for the extension of the state. He’s protected by the state. The state is protected by reactionaries. . . .

Your allies are not your allies, unless they show up when you really need them. That’s really painful. In a generalized environment where everybody’s out on the street like it’s millions are out for George Floyd. What happens after people get off the streets? Are there above ground and underground networks organizing? mutual aid funds? is everybody tithing now? . . . do we practice self defense? And it’s not just with technology . . . it’s that communal circle that encloses you . . . that a 360 wrap of community will tell you who your core is and who is always going to be there? And it’s not going to be a lot of people which is painful because they flock to you? When it seems appropriate to them, not to you. . . .

So we have to strengthen the alliances with people, have the stability and the commitment to sacrifice? . . . back to Jonathan. I’m not saying he should have done it. I can tell you I probably wouldn’t have done it. I just would be depressed, you know, my brother died [was murdered] and then I go through high school . . . college . . . get a graduate degree.

Sacrifice is inherent in community. Without the sacrifice, you don't have real allies. If they're not willing to sacrifice anything, they're not your real allies. But that doesn't mean that in those concentric circles, they can't be useful. Also, you don't have to tell people everything you are doing.

[Concerning locating Rittenhouse] I don't know if that's a distraction. I'm not saying don't do it because *your funders don't like it*, but I don't understand the political prioritization. . . . [Rittenhouse] is gonna get off or be in protected area [if convicted]. I don't know much about prison culture life but what little I know is that if cops sentenced to prison are given a kind of enclosure within an enclosure it is because cops/police run the prisons.

In terms of the right to flee. . . . If you translate prison violence to domestic violence [state = patriarch abuser] there's no way you're morally denied that right. In civilian partner battering there is a risk that the violator will likely look for you. . . or, drown your kids . . . [do] something in retaliation [against your flight]. I was talking with Criola, an interesting Brazilian, nonprofit activist group in Rio, like last weekend. I was using Latin phrases which didn't translate well in Portuguese, in *locos parentis* and *parens patria*. I'm probably not pronouncing the Latin correctly, but it means “in place of the parent” and the “state as parent.” The parental authority as law is (proto)fascist.

When the state becomes the parent, it invades all levels [of family cohesion]. There is no intimacy that this stay cannot encourage your part. That's a parallel construct to the invitation to speak with them because they asked me to talk about anti-rape organizing. I said that you cannot really do anti rape organizing because it doesn't work within the machine; so you have to simultaneously do antifascist organizing. This means you have to dismantle the parentis patria, this deed is paternal father, authoritarian figure. The prison embodies that more than anything

else. If the prison is beating you, that is a form of violence, including domestic violence. At home, the mundaneness of the terror is that you burnt the casserole, [so the violator wants to break] your jaw in a domestic violence zone.

If the prison assaults you physically accosts you it is still the same nature of violence. . . . the domestic abuser acts like the prison warden or the prison guard to the point that they could disappear you and say it was justified self defense [akin to justified police homicide in the case of twelve-year old Tamir Rice who was playing with a plastic toy gun in Ohio]. Or the abuser says that they could damage you and not leave a mark on you; and no one would be able to trace the violence back to them. . . . Marissa Alexander comes to mind even though I don't fully understand the case. When they tried to defend themselves against their aggressor, they went to prison [the 'stand your ground' defense did not work for them; the prosecutor was the same one who could not prosecute George Zimmerman for murdering Trayvon Martin using that "rationalization." The "stand your ground" defense doesn't work for women (of whatever ethnicity) I have not seen many [cases concerning] rich white women.

You have the right not to be tortured. You have the right not to be raped. You have the right to Sanctuary. Just because the state is acting like the patriarchal, authoritarian father, who can beat you or rape you or disappear you doesn't mean it's legit. This is when George is right. This is when law is fascism. So, either you give us a zone of containment to "protect society," a zone without torture, medical handcuffs, humiliation, solitary confinement, beat downs, psychological intimidation. You create those zones, and I will agree to *parens patriae*. If you do a 180 and simply reproduce terror that I'm trying to fight in my own community, you are just another adversary. It's like Safiah Bukhari said at the Brown conference, when she described death squads coming from Huey Newton to kill NYC panthers and and the COINTELPRO FBI

trying to kill or cage panthers; they were caught between a rock and a hard place. We are all caught between a rock and a hard place between civilian violence and state violence.

What you do to survive it, I cannot judge you which is why I'm not really a harsh critic of George Jackson. Maybe I should be. But I can't find the moral high ground to look down upon him. I am not for the death penalty, either by the state or by freelancers or civilians. I believe life is precious. I do not believe that anybody should endure torture and be told that is the only life they deserve. It's incumbent on the people outside to support the people inside on every metric. On some level, you start getting implicated and then you could be inside which then becomes a problem. But the only thing I can think to address that would be if we took the time, like the pastor [to figure out a bold strategy in real time]. God is the money of this empire, if it's all about making the trains run on time, meaning deportations that increasingly seem to focus on Haitians, and Africans, because the cherubic phenotype of the babies we need to receive don't really look like they're black. It's not just Joe Biden. It's also Kamala Harris supporting these deportations. . . . you have the black feminist role model and the nice white guy role model. . . . But the violence continues [as] the reactionary white supremacist underground, come above ground. Their modality changed about the rapture, now it's "Jesus wants a genocide." They want ethnic cleansing So now I've got to keep one eye on you. And then I've got to keep an eye on the state that is not really policing you if Kyle got out on bail. It's really more than two places that were caught between, but that's why everything has to be communal. Sacrifice is inevitable, hopefully not with our lives, but the priority of care would be for those who are most at risk for torture and death.

Those with the lowest on priority in terms of their feelings —this is going to win me a lot of votes—are privileged academics and intellectuals who are quite wealthy, and quite beloved by

the (petty) bourgeoisie who are not being tortured and so claim that is a stable society. This is not a stable society.

JB: In your essay on new bones, you talk about Cabral as a type of abolitionist source . . . [w]hat is it is specifically about Cabral and the liberation struggle of the PAIGC that resonates dfrom abolitionist tradition. . . . there are lots of anti-colonial or socialist revolutionary movements that we could point to but Cabral specifically seems to stand out among a lot of folks grappling with the concept of abolitionism.

JJ: Cabral was honest. That's how I feel about George Jackson. It's not like I agree with everything they said. But there is an honesty to them. I found that in Fannie Lou Hamer even when she was angry with an earlier Martin Luther King when he leveraged the a compromise with the Democratic Party to nullify or void what the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's [attempts to secure black rights]. Ms. Hamer [is significant] the people who deeply influenced me are never academics. I read, study and learn from academics. The people who make me change are the people who have experiential knowledge of the struggle, because they were [on the ground and in those struggles]. The sacrifices are just stunning. We leave children behind.

Everybody's leaving children behind. Martin King, Walter Rodney and El Malik el Shabazz. Malcolm had four daughters. The whole natality thing was corrupted for us. You want to see your children grow up. Mamie Till Mobley and others had to bury their children. [The children of those assassinated] have to preside over their parents [generations before they should]. Cabral for me stabilizes these zones of grief. The trauma can paralyze you or push you

into shopping or public persona, where you pretend to know what you don't know, which is how we could get free or dial down the terror arrayed against us.

When Cabral says that, in a decade or so they were able to control most of the countryside, I thought I understood part of that. It was the people who worked the land who lived the land, it wasn't going to be the petty bourgeoisie or bureaucrats under the colonial order. That doesn't mean that they had to go to reeducation camp in terms of the city people. I mean, yeah, probably I need to go to one too, but hopefully it's a nice one.

But it meant that they weren't organic, because they had dual loyalties captured maternal stage one, right. But by the time the people who work the land, who have to deal with these reads, The people kidnapping their children, this child soldiers are raping their kids.

By the time they say it's time to resist you know, it's time to resist. There's nowhere else to go. The land, that's the last refuge, that's the last sanctuary incursions into that. You know, it makes sense that this would be the mobilizations. I understand it's definitely us, you know, the urban organizing again, my preference is New York City, not so much, you know, Huey P Newton's panther party, but in return to the source, which is that's all speeches, and there's something about when you talk to people rather than write academic treatises. It's like you're actually talking to people. The academics and nonacademic intellectuals who put their speeches together to be published by Monthly Review; the same press that collected Malcolm speeches, after he was killed.

You can hear not just Cabral but you can hear the people that he's speaking to, in your mind's mind It's painful to read. But I see beauty. It's different from reading Eric Williams, who was compromised by the state base to my knowledge. It's different from Walter Rodney; he and his brother were blown up in a car bomb for organizing for dignity, you know, in life. It's

different because it's a conversation. When I read Cabral, I'm like, Wait, What did you just say? When I reread him he's repeating what he just said. . . . then I'm debating him, I'm trying to figure it out. But everywhere I see in his writings is what I've talked about at the preparation for the “We Still Charge Genocide” tribunal in October. I see and I hear revolutionary love.

I hear love in Amilcar Cabral. It's less like George's love but it's still love. Like George's love was real. And I you know, I challenge anybody to prove you didn't love you may not have liked what he did, but he definitely loved cabals. Love is love of community and the community is loving him back and again, I think that's why when she went to the UN, it was similar to how Cabral went to the UN with satirical knowledge shot through with loss. We're going to these official bodies, or local progressive nonprofits, who technically and publicly say they exist to support us. But [they do not respond] when we say what we need are not just flowery statements or more narratives about our suffering, or posters about our mutilations and death, what we need is *material aid*.

We don't need more words unless those words are accompanied by deeds and the deeds step outside of the political order that reproduces like a machine, the terror and the containment with which we grapple. Cabral is one of my teachers. I came late. I was told years ago [by a Panther] to read him. I just started reading *Return to the Source*, his PDF is online, when I had to teach him. He's a wonderful teacher, as his Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker . . . people too many to name [including] the people who are inside: Mutulu Shakur, Sundiata Acoli, Joy Powell, Leonard Peltier. . . .These are all teachers.

With Cabral there's a gentleness. I think he knew the inevitability that there would not be longevity for him despite the fierce battles to create space for life. Despite those battles and

knowing that you would not be able to see the mutations that happened later, including the gains for freedom, despite all those contradictions, he was steady because the love was steady.

He was incredibly, in my mind, disciplined by love. Now, does that mean as we find out about people's personal lives, about how they might have cheated on their partner or were mean to their children and all Yeah, we're all rough. We're all imperfect. But I would like to think that when I hear somebody speak with that kind of commitment to us, that I also hear love. It becomes tangible, not mystical. If I refuse to mystify violence, I refuse to mystify love. It's revolutionary love that transcends the family, the personal partner, or partners, the self-love or self-loathing, on whatever day it is and how are you are feeling about yourself.

It is that love of us collectively and the better is in the right to live without extraction and exploitation and intimidation. That that is what I hear from Cabral. That's the source; and I need, I need Cabral. I need a source. It's spiritual. I can find it in the religions, you know, the so-called greater religions which are manifestations of spirit in body and I can see in terms of his political phenomena . . . he's not the only one. But he's the one these last months soothes me, and then makes me get up and think about today. Exactly what am I going to try to do today or tomorrow to contribute to the material conditions that enable revolutionary love to be the norm and not the aberration?

JB: Thank you, so much.

JW: It's been really wonderful. To be in conversation with you. Absolutely. You know, we're honored to have you and this was an amazing conversation that we're looking forward to sharing with folks.

JJ: Thank you for your library. The last thing . . . I know it's "time's up". . . but I just want to be clear. I never said I had the answers to anything but I appreciate your wanting to ask questions and to be in dialogue. I feel that in conversation I get deeper clarity of what might be a response that is useful. And, you ask important questions. So, thank you.

JW: Thank you for that.

JB: Thank you

Chapter 18

Universities De-Radicalize, Agape Re-Radicalizes⁶⁸

Political Theology Network

Roberto Sirvent (RS): Thank you all for joining us we're very, very excited for this conversation between Rebecca Wilcox and Joy James, two intellectuals who I admire tremendously. They'll be talking about the de-radicalizing nature of the university, as well as other topics on spirituality, theology and revolutionary movements. Before I introduce Rebecca at first like to thank the Political Theology Network and the Villanova political theology project for making this event possible. I'd also like to thank my wonderful colleague Laura Simpson who's a PhD student at Villanova who played a big role in organizing this. It is now my honor to introduce Rebecca Wilcox . . . a PhD student at Princeton Theological Seminary concentrating in black religion ontology and critical black studies.

Rebecca Wilcox (RW): Thank you, Roberto I really appreciate that. So, we're here. I'm so excited to be able to interview the Dr Joy James. I know everyone else is excited, but this is a really important conversation, for me. . . . [James's] work is discursive with social movements and intellectual traditions that have been brewing in this contemporary moment, not only in the Academy, but also in digital spaces and digital organizing spaces. Your constructions offer

⁶⁸ Chapter transcription of: "How the University De-Radicalizes Students, Professors, and Social Movements": A Conversation with Joy James and Rebecca Wilcox, *Political Theology Network*, Villanova University, January 12, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjeWk4VGNGk>

critical interventions to not only black feminism, political ideology, black male studies and political theory

Joy James (JJ): Thank you. Can I call you “Rebecca”? Thank you, for the kind introduction. Thank you, Roberto and Laura, for organizing.

There's a lot in my mind, and I really want people to ask questions because I see this as a collective conversation because there's no. Joy James: Even though the academy's structured for hierarchy there's no one individual who has the answers pretty much do anything but collectively all the kind things that Rebecca said about me. That came from the intellectual ISM the commitment the copy of political people who are committed to changing the world so that people could live longer and with decency.

We put in the chatter we will soon, perhaps you might want to Google it yourself the palm please call me by my true name. Which is by techno con and he transitioned recently, so he is the Buddhist priest who met with Martin Luther King and help to dialogue and to present the case that we needed to oppose the imperial war against the Vietnamese but also save our own lives here in the United States right. And so, this interconnectedness of beauty that loves and guides and teaches us appearing and disappearing process all types of boundaries so it'll be interesting to see how the academy's supports that interconnectedness or how it's ever said.

RW: Well, I think you opened us up straight to our first question. I want to jump right into this question, so that we can get to the work that actually engages your critical interventions.

I wanted to open with a question that represents the title of our talk about the university and how it deradicalizes social movements. I want to contextualize this question to not focus so

much on the intention of the university, but more of the intent of how people assume that coming to the university can become a type of radical move or organizing from the inside for political commitment. How can we speak to not only those dynamics of survival. . . like coming to the university for survival or healthcare... housing on campus . . . professors just being able to have a job. What can be said about critical black thought in the academy? . . . can [we] rigorously talk about the things . . . that are really critical to our work within the confines of the academy?

JJ: All of those are important questions I'll try to address; but maybe part of this is the origin story: “Why did you come to the academy in the first place?” or “Why are you coming to the academy?” And then, “When do you leave and how do you leave?” The academy is tricky because it's a zone that, on some level, we can retreat into in order to think with structure and support from the edifice. But it can also you know— it's a cheesy cliché we used decades ago when I was growing up—it can eat your lunch. It's the bully. I'm going back decades I don't know how people buy food _and there's a lot of people who don't have access to food— but the whole thing about the bully within the school is that they have free license to extract from you. There's no real protection against the bullies. What happens with the entire structure has or expresses aspects of bullying?

You come with ideas. You come with passion. You come with commitments. But if the academy —and I'm not saying this is accurate, you decide— if the academy can often function as a zone of extraction then you're bringing gifts to it. Gifts that can be taken from you. Sometimes it's just exhausting; you want to give up; like, I had this brilliant idea for a paper or dissertation and I'm emotionally invested right. Then people whittle the ideas/paper/dissertation down or they consume it. It's edible [so they say] “I could use this in my own research; or maybe we could put

you on a poster; or maybe we can take your idea and put it on a poster; maybe we could create a course around it.”

You said I could call you “Rebecca”? The challenge about critical black thought is how do we know when it's actually critical and not a commodity. Our entrance into the academy [is complicated].” If I did the whole historical thing about the talented tenth the concept was popularized by W.E.B. DuBois and *Souls of Black Folks* which came out in 1903. . . he later repudiated it. But it was engineered by white philanthropists that needed to contain the blackness are not just to learn, but to be free.

You can learn, but you may not be learning strategies to be free. However, organically in our communities, we learn and we learn how to be free or how to navigate so that we can survive.

An anti-black or hostile world as I've said before is linked to HBCUs. I'm glad you're from a HBCU [Historically Black College/University]. A premier HBCUs such as Spelman and Morehouse. Spelman is named after Rockefeller Laura Spelman and Morehouse is named after Henry Morehouse who is a white philanthropist and the point was that this talented tenth which was going to be formally educated. This would lead the black mass not towards rebellion for freedom—rebellion comes in different forms, it can be how you love, write poetry, read or give to the world. Rebellion tracks away from consumption. It tracks towards community. Once you create this “overseer” (I'm stealing from Malcolm), once you get this field/house dichotomy, the academy becomes for state and capital the only house that can give you that stamp of approval that [identifies you as] an official leader.

How is that *not* following Spelman as-the-Rockefeller and Morehouse as-white-philanthropist. Is it still critical black studies when it's only engineered inside the “big house”; or

is it critical black studies is if it also emanates from our communities, but not to produce commodities that the “big house” can put on the shelf or the conveyor belt. Does that make sense?

RW: That makes total sense. I'm so glad that you contextualize what you were saying within the framework of historically black colleges and universities, because are embedded in the Bronx right and there was an organizing group called AC shut it down and within this black elite know institution, the merging of more husband and partner university and that's where I meant like organizes like Da'Shaun Harrison. So the question is so interesting because when we got to the university, it was actually being in there that cultivated are politics, being in this group of trans/queer folks who were critiquing Title IX policies on sexual assault cases that were happening on campus.

In the university . . . organizing . . . resistance toward the university. . . we realized how the University was actually parasitic upon this idea of resistance. We're in Atlanta which is the Martin Luther King legacy and there's the Atlanta student movement. [T]he protests you're supposed to protest within university . . . makes us democratic [and]. . . pluralistic, right? [W]hat we realized . . . we're critiquing anti-blackness which the university can actually deliver on with a policy or transition away from. We're [challenging] fat phobia, sexual assault . . . building this type of insurgency. By being students don't have money to pay our tuition fees, don't have housing. [This] leads me to the next question [about] revolution as a more spiritual formation, as opposed to the practical implications. In two recent articles, “New Bones Abolition” and “Airbrushing Revolution for the Sake of Abolition,” you make an important distinction between revolution and abolition, while outlining the ways that neoliberalism distorts revolutionary

tactics with structural reforms. Can you speak to this distinction between revolution as a demand for the end of anti-black predation, period, versus abolition or voting rights as e pragmatic formations that fail to contend with predation. In addition, can you explain how this American democracy or celebrity or neoliberal activism represents itself as a freedom movement. . . .our ability to know when something revolutionary is happening or when a movement is being infiltrated. . . . when [do] we know we are being commodified . . . maybe you could just speak to this distinction between revolution and abolition.

JJ: Okay, I'm going to try or I'm gonna' have to start taking notes.

I'm always thinking about/in the community. Let me back up when you say how do you get to academy my mother told me when I was 12 or 13 that I couldn't do a nine to five job because I don't listen. to defeat way if I wasn't going to be a waitress . . . I've been a waitress [and I've done all types of work]. I need to figure out a gig where I wouldn't continuously get fired right because [I don't listen well to authority figures]. So this is, in part, how I ended up in the Academy. I just want to be clear. When you hear my critique I mean part of it is because it's to pay my bills I didn't go to the Academy, to be enlightened. I love to read I love to learn I love to think and sometimes you know for the younger people, especially for the teachers here. That is how children survive environments that are not always child friendly. I grew up on military bases. The last stop was Texas, which is just the most interesting state in terms of predatory behavior and gun violence. Distill down to home life and figure it out. So how do we save or preserve ourselves? Sometimes by retreating into thought. Sometimes we retreat into literature. Sometimes we retreat into ideas. We find those to be a form at times of respite if not salvation. I

used to climb into tree houses in Texas, and read for hours and just show up at home when it was dinner time.

Maybe this becomes the attraction of the Academy? Maybe we think it's our tree house. It is a sanctuary. But that's not really how it functions. If it's a state university, it is an extension of the government; if it's private then it is a corporation. Like the places I've been teaching the last decades, it is literally capital, especially at the highest form because they have multi-billion portfolios. I mean the entities have endowments they have stopped investment portfolios right that they're never going to lose because they're going to fight the right cause; it's about preservation right of edifices or structures that we don't control so back to the source of the dichotomy or my recognition it didn't come from tags it didn't come from the University. I went in November 2019 to the refounding of the national lines against racism, political repression in Chicago. Chicago's uncomplicated mix bag of radical struggle and intense police repression, so if you say "Fred Hampton, Mark Clark, December 4, 1969, 4am" that's when the Chicago police engineered with the FBI plans to assassinate our leaders. We can fast forward not saying that the current black lesbian mayor functions in the same modality; but Lightfoot enables predatory policing. Can we take an intellectual, spiritual, political stance so that our communities can survive predatory policing. If we survive it is because we engineered strategies for ourselves. The academy never said "Oh, I have a blueprint for you." That's not what it does, but it will take our blueprints for survival.

And then turn them into text or documentaries or syllabi. In November 2019 I go with a research assistant who's a student. And I hear frank Chapman who is older African American who was incarcerated but he was out of prison or got out through the national lines against

racism, political repression. So what is that organization if formed out of Angela Davis his Defense committee after she was acquitted in June 1972 sort of open shop in early 1973.

The co-directors were Angela Davis, her mother Sally Davis and her mentor Charlene Mitchell a black communist leader in the CPUSA. It was Charlene Mitchell, who told me in the 1990s, to go into the Schomburg —sorry it's going to take me a while to get there, but I'll get there—to go to the Schomburg Library in Harlem and research WEB DuBois and read all his memoirs and why he repudiated the talented tenth, so I think Mitchell who's almost 90 now right. saw the trajectory that the Academy, the talented tenth would be hired you know by white institutions and leverage to be a sort of managerial elite. Over the rest of us, but chairman is not an academic he's someone who survived . . . years in prison I'm not sure the amount he's the one who knew Fred Hampton's family, he was someone who was a militant and loved the people. Professor Davis comes to give the keynote. leaves I guess to go there's another conference at Harvard the next day I stay for three like the extension of the whole thing it is a second day after the keynote that Frank Chapman you know says. Maybe I'll say now I didn't say it anyway, I was there, he says I'm not an abolitionist I'm a revolutionary, but I will work with abolitionists. And I always say you know the lights go on or off or their flickering it's like we there's a clear distinction between the two. And the people who were incarcerated who organized on the streets against Chicago that had a black OPS site, like the CIA does like around the world where they just take people to torture predominantly black over years. Chicago PD captain John Burch went to prison for white collar crime, but he was leading a rogue ring of Chicago police. Who would pick a black people they need somebody confessed to a crime to make their numbers look good, they would take him to a up a black op side away from the precinct and waterboard them, you

know you know put shocked electrodes on their testicles men and black women to confess to crimes they didn't commit.

Chicago is tough now just because of gun violence on the street it's just cut off because their cards. Are in another zone of predatory violence. IF CPD right if you can kick in Panther leader Fred Hampton's door, kill Mark Clark and Fred Hampton and claim they shot back at police, and it takes people years to figure out that was a lie. You have the immunity, you have the impunity, you have the power to pull that off so when champion says no abolition ISM is here revolutionary struggles here, but I will work with him "I'm like wait. . . which one am I?" And then I say okay I don't think I'm a revolutionary . . . I never said I was one, I just said that I know some of them. I'm going to be an abolitionist but what kind of abolitionist? The abolitionist who will listen to revolutionaries. Especially as they age and die in prison or out of prison or the young ones from Ferguson, who end up in burning cars? There was another mother who shared her story and struggle at the conference.

There're a lot of us who are mothers and parents. This story shocked me it wasn't from academics, or Chapman who startled me to recognize that I was thinking incompletely about this, these are distinct entities revolution abolition, it was when I went into a side room the next day. And there is a black mother, who is a leader in Ferguson, but live elsewhere, and she starts to talk about her young son who's, not even a radical revolutionary he's studying to pass the exam to be a real estate agent, and she walks outside because the dark sparky and she finds her son hanging from a tree. And how does the mother read it is because she engaged in a revolutionary struggle around Ferguson, that she became a target, but rather than come for the mother you come for the child, I mean if you really want to break somebody come for the child right. She

can't even complete the task and the father stands up, and this is also the word by you know dichotomy with their genders going on right now.

[. . . the gender war it's like we have time for this? I mean fascism is next door but okay well we're just going to go through our cycles . . .]

Structural prediction right, but the father takes over because the mother has to leave because she saw that she can complete the story. And the father, though, for me, he speaks they're both intellectuals, of course, but he speaks in the voice almost like a giving a weather report. Because how do you keep from breaking down? We numb the full range of our emotions and our rage. He completes the story. And then later, you know I'll go up and hug the mother and offer to help but I'm trained as an academic. What do you think I'm gonna do? I'm going to share their story, maybe I'll write about it, but am I engaged on the level right of strategizing. And I'll say confrontation. That the predator as hunter has to step down even if it's only for a moment that we get a reprieve So how do I know what I know because when I can I go into the Community and the Community will tell me what is real do I mess it up later when I'm right yeah of course I'm an academic. But I'm not so emotionally involved in academia, that I can't tell when I'm spinning, and when I'm telling the truth.

RW: Right period um. I love that you shared in a conversation about. Mothers participating and struggle, because it kind of leads me to the next question that I have for you that I want to kind of contextualize within the talking what we're in the platform political theology right and political ideology, being the framework, by which we then start talking about god's activity in the world, or we talk about the political implications.

The political implications of the theological framework what when we tend to like works of James Cone what do these crystal logical things mean in light of our struggles right. So I want to first contextualize it with a talk that you gave a keynote and entitled until the next uprising.

You discuss the theological implications of state violence and how distinct functions as divine through a godlike complex. And this godlike complex is articulated by black mothers who have lost their children to the State and demand the state bring back the child who murdered. You stay in your keynote quote if the state seeks to act like a God and take life, then it should function as a God and resurrect life. If it cannot then it is not a God, it is not pharaoh and his laws are not legitimate when they are predatory. And I thought this was such an important quote because on the one hand it's like. Yes, that's what we do is organize as we make demands of the state and for the state to deliver on.

And the implications of making demands to the state is an assumption that we believe that the state will deliver our demands right, but the way that you contextualize it was. Kind of in a subversive way, we actually don't believe that you have the capacity to bring back life, and therefore this godlike complex is problematic. It's just predatory; but on the other hand, I thought this was interesting because it reminded me of my mother when she, we, used to not be able to like pay bills and be facing evictions. My mother would pray pray pray pray. And she would say in her prayers I put a demand on God right, I put a demand on God to deliver, and you know, make sure these bills are paid. I'm not asking you; this is what you *promised* me.

When I heard you say this call, I was like “Yeah, forget the state.” What does it mean to make that demand to God as a political theologian; to say that if you're going to take life, then you should also resurrect it. What are the implications for political ideology to contend with anti-blackness and the theological implications of anti-blackness as a God. Who has the capacity to

take life, but we do not see an intervention on anti-black suffering. We don't see the ways in which God is resurrecting black life. We only see the ways in which God is making space or the way that theology is allowing black lives to be taken without any type of repercussions. I want to know what would you say as a demand for political theology to take up this tension. If we sit in the James Cone tradition of a cross that gets redemption but a lynching tree that does not, there's no redemption on the lynching tree. What would you say to this intervention as it relates to struggle around anti-blackness with the mothers in the movement and this demand to "Bring back the *life* you take"?

JJ: Again, I start with the origin story because it grounds me, or at least helps ground me a little bit. I first started to think about the statement [when I heard an impacted mother speak. Actually,] we've been making this statement has been made for centuries. . . we don't always hear or it's not always written down in what we read.

I was working with mothers and then ending up in Brazil and Colombia, working with mothers, whose you know, mostly it's son, but also daughters as well right have been killed and murdered by police forces and hearing of one mother's rebellion in Brazil. Of when they offered as they do, they oh he's come, I mean if they're not doing the godlike thing, they're doing the insurance policy thing: "We killed your kid. Sorry. Here's a package deal we can offer." It's monetary because that's all they have. It's material; it's not spiritual.

You bring the mother to a meeting after you disappear the son in Brazil and dismember them. The police/paramilitary violence in Brazil is on another level. There's serious violence in the US, but from my interaction brief with Brazilians, the impunity before Bolsonaro and during and after Bolsonaro is stunning. The US has the highest incarceration rate in in the

globe per capita in terms of us. They have the highest police killings of civilians and they also have the largest black population right outside of the continent. So they bring the mother in to speak with officials who say “Okay, we were not going to tell you” because nobody ever acknowledges the crime “who killed him and how; but we're sorry about what happened to your son.” They speak as if it a lightning bolt came down to take the child, No man, it was your people.

They continue with a package deal: “Here’s what we're going to offer . . . a basketball program, a scholarship in their name.” They go to the checklist. But the mother refuses the offers and simply says “No, bring back the son.” This is an impossible political ask. That’s when I start paying close attention to the narrative. The maternal/mother asks the state for what it *cannot* deliver. Right, because what do we care about more than life? There's nothing more valuable than life. Don't settle for some secondary, tertiary buy out: a sweepstake, car or new house. Those are important but it's life itself that we desire. That loss is always the threat. Why don't we rebel? Because we want to stay alive and be able to eat. Often when we go into the Academy [it is not for truth, virtue or rebellion to serve the mass].

Life is the gold standard; if not gold, then platinum, whatever you want to call it. Nothing matters more than life. If they kill your kid, you say “Okay, you could pull that one off; now return the child.” If they cannot, then why am I talking to you? Anything else you offer—name a school after the child— doesn't matter. My go to 20th century Captive Maternal is always Miss Mamie Till Mobley. Once you murder and torture, and I would see the attack on Emmett Till also as a sexual assault, which nobody talks about as well because he was embodied male in the frame of a fourteen-year-old boy. There's nothing holy except for your love and rage. That's why you can have an open casket funeral for a mutilated teen and totally disturb the mortician

when he tries to clean up [or reassemble Emmett's face]. Mamie Till Mobley said No to conventional politics and violated every rule of decorum under theology or politics, what is a ceremonial burial an open casket funeral for the team you murder. And so, since you cannot bring them back alive, I will imprint with my love and rage their memory on the nation in the globe, which is what she did when the photographs circulated so back to the Brazilian mother. She cannot pull that one off, but her refusal to be coopted becomes the honor [of not just herself or family but also] of the child who was supposed to preside over your burial decades later. I see this in Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death*—the concept of natality. [White supremacy, capitalism, imperialism misogynoir] keep rupturing the timeline for us. we're supposed to grow old; our children are supposed to attend our passing and have some good things to say about us, but even if they don't, we at least we tried.

When you violate not just individual families, but whole families within the carceral-captivity framework, we suffer on different levels because our families are imprinted with the sign of "blackness." Then time doesn't work for us the way it works for the people honor doesn't work for us and the state can take life but it can't return it, so the state doesn't work for us. If the state could resurrect the people it destroys, even the ones who still breathe, those tortured in prison and jails such as Rikers. Khalif Browder police said stole a backpack and then they said he didn't but they kept him in Rikers for several years as a teenager. After his release he committed suicide years later. You hold him because he doesn't have \$50 or \$500 for bail. Look at the state's policing now . . . Who's the Mayor of New York City? Eric Adams, former black COP. The new police Commissioner is a black woman [Keechant Sewell]. We respond to signs and symbols [that tell us there is progress]; and that a lot is what politics is and it's a lot about theology when you mix them together, you get political signs and theological symbols right. We

will have to unveil that our mascot and respond to our needs and our needs are to survive with dignity, to have a roadmap to freedom and not to genuflect to esteem that cannot restore life, but only take it.

RW: But what does it also mean when God also is not resurrecting black life when, God is the demand, then for goes to state and on to the God that can actually deliver right, you can actually resurrect life but for some reason, there is no intervention happening. On black suffering, so what has been the stakes for political theology what happens when not only the state doesn't meet our demands, but God isn't meeting our demands.

JJ: Let me ask . . . what is a resurrection look like? I don't know. We die. We come back. Where's Malcolm? Maybe, he's here.

I'm won't even ask the deity to throw down on this one. I am asking us to first throw down first. Then, we ask the deity, "What's your plan?" If we don't have a plan?. . . I'm not a theologian. I was in seminary. James Cone and Cornel West were my advisors. I walked into seminary because I was coming back from Africa to NYC. When I'm on the continent, it feels different. I'm thinking different. I realize that I need more [spirituality in my life]. So, I go into seminary to meet the gifts of God. I leave early because the store isn't open. What the heck, why did it become a store? Because it's shaped like the Academy?

To the extent that we embody the deity, we bring back life. I don't know the way you teach your five-year-old, your fifteen-year -old, or how you teach your students in the classroom. But whatever they tried to kill that is worthy and relevant to our freedom, that is what we bring back alive, is that blasphemy, you know, like strike me down now I don't. . . . I didn't really

swear. . . . I just made a gesture towards it. At some point, because we've been struggling for decades, some of us for thirty or forty years, it is *your* game now. You cannot keep asking us questions. Okay? Because if we were able to pull it [a freedom movement] off, we would have pulled it off because we love you so much.

There are people inside who've been incarcerated for decades. Sundiata Acoli, Mutulu Shakur, Leonard Peltier, Mumia Abu-Jamal. They let Russell "Maroon" Shoats out when he has stage four cancer, just before he dies. They have been killing us why we've been breathing in prison. We did not get political prisoners out [with the volume and rapidity needed]. Is that, an impossible feat, that only a god can do? Free the political prisoners. Feed the babies. I just don't know to what extent we ever decided to risk everything for agape.

RW: And I think that leads us to this part which I'm not going to break into a two-part question. Because, on the one hand, I hear you. I think this is ultimately the thing that leads you to the captive maternal. This loving care that is compounded upon by the State right like you say you put it as. Every time we stabilize the state builds upon that stability right for its own coherence and then you pose a question back to us right like you throw value and you're like so what's next for the Captive Maternal. And it's like you set up an impossible paradigm right like you're like. We're going to stabilize where we're going to free mall right me we bust him out of prison like your name and the talk on the architects of abolition ISM that you did on it's on YouTube if anybody wants to watch it, but you set you walk us into this impossible task, and then you.

Then know that this resistance is level of revolt not only his blackness capacious for it right like we have the capacity, because of the amount of endurance and suffering that we have to have to go through, but then we also have. The State has the capacity, as long as we're

stabilizing the prisoners can produce the prison Labor right as long as you all are okay, and you take care of each other, then we'll be okay and you'll take care of the stand and so when you when you talk about a God pay it's like. If love becomes the stabilizing force for the state to build upon that stability, then what is to be set of love so that's the first part of the question and then I'll move to the second part.

JJ: I go to church, zoom church. It's Renaissance church in Harlem. Pastor Jordan it's a it's a husband/wife team. She joins talking about a copy as political well right, I mean there are different kinds of love: erotic, familial, fraternal, sisterly love and other forms. But agape is political will, according to Rev. Jordan right because we have to love people we don't like.

Okay, and I had to sit with that, because I prefer to love people I like; it's easier. If I don't like you, it's like why do I have to be bothered with you? The Community has the same contradictions.

And the commitment to Community transcends. All forms of love, I would argue, like the love you have, for your parents or your partner your partner's your multiples the love you have, for your kids or your kid singular plural. Your comrades right, that's because they give you something back, I mean there's some reciprocity where you're on a good day right. What does it mean to love people who maybe want to be capitalists they want to work for ice and be present. to serve like it's totally jacked up it's like "Oh my God, what am I supposed to do with you?" Agape is a form of love but it's not the love of the marketplace. It's not the level like here's a master class on love it's not we have a Ted Talk. It's not a narcotic. It is a journey. I'm still figuring out these sacrifices embedded in it.

What happens if we know we're going to lose even if we win? Jonathan Jackson, seventeen-year-old junior in high school, had a particular love for his brother. Did he keep him alive past a year? No. But that love has radiated over half a century and it had a huge impact on me and my [kin], a panther who said because Jonathan did it as a teenager, he didn't have to do it as a teenager to get his older brother who's in the Black Liberation Army and being tortured inside of some Tombs prison in New York. It's the sacrificial love. One of us does it, and now we know it's possible. Whether or not all of us will sacrifice? I totally doubt it. We're being conditioned to shop and to also to shop in our own movements. You can make money off of black suffering. We clearly know that now. In the last couple years we had rebellions and people marched. . . millions. Then some people got a ton of money. How did this happen?

Again, it's extraction, accumulation, and then sell the movement back to the people. Still, we sacrifice because we don't want to buy simulacra. This isn't a linear response probably even clear to your query but I will tell you what I know, and I will know till I transition. I have seen people love so much that they would die or be cage for decades, do I love like that now I don't think I could pull that off. But I know it's real so if they can do it some deity or deities could be Ogun or Oshun or Yemaya. Don't care. It exists throughout time and space. It's transcendent. That is why the academy cannot eat your soul, because there is something greater than it just as there is something greater than the state that can take life but not restore it.

RW: I'm just sitting with that for a second. . . . What you're setting up is a relationship between a very central claim and political theology, which is "God is love," and then revolutionary love. I think [of] the entanglements. . . . What love requires? What it produces? What its capacity to transcend is? These are always predicated upon black suffering; so the capacity for the examples

that you're using—for one to be caged because they love so much or for one to stabilize the state because they love so much—is the very thing that becomes the very vehicle by which blackness becomes capacious, right? Blackness has the capacity to endure and it puts in question, the project of endurance by way of love. I'm wondering if love is going to be this vehicle by which we have the capacity to transcend. . . . I wouldn't say “transcend” but to endure and maneuver the antagonisms that come with black suffering because of the people that we love also become the vehicle by which the suffering is durable. The suffering doesn't over determine the conditions.

JJ: Let me pause, all right? I want to go back to a journey. I'm trying to figure this out in real time. I'm talking to you about my interpretation of people who've spoken to me or at me or whatever you want to call it. The what hooked me with the church right the Harlem church assertion and because they collectively meet before they write their sermons one person delivers it but they collectively me right there's a community. it's not specifically a hierarchy, it is political will and I'm like Okay, what is, you know Tina Turner asks “What's love got to do with it?” What does political will have to do with it?

Maybe that's the endurance like when you want to leave and you can't I mean you could and clearly a lot of people have already left us, they just talk for us in a bath but their God is like I'm out, you know and I'm going to cash in it's a it's an investment portfolio right. But the people who are not afraid of black suffering and I get it, I mean, why would anybody want to suffer it's like where's the exit door to this. And so people figure it and they have the train or the plane and they're gone and they'll hover and then explain our suffering to bourgeois whites they're not really explaining it to poor whites they're definitely not explained it to the white supremacists

who have come, you know up from the underground above ground and their proto fascist is not full blown they're just waiting for an opportunity right and they've got all the weapons.

I'm not even saying you should get a weapon. I've said it over and over again, I grew up on a military base. I lived with an officer who is likely destabilizing liberation movements around the globe. I kind of watch [troops] do their thing. The level of violence that we're not prepared for is absolutely real. But we're not prepared. Police will randomly pick a card . . . horrible choke someone out. It is horrific but you don't randomly inflict violence unless you're sloppy. [There are strategic plans to get violence to produce; police forces don't deploy violence haphazardly, unless they are] lazy and an unstructured. If they're efficient they figure out what's the greatest return they can get on this amount of violence.

What about the performative violence? using people as scapegoats or as martyrs? The state's capacity to intimidate you is based on its capacity to kill what you love. Freedom, family, honor, dignity, intellectualism. They're like "We can wipe it all out, and then have you watch *Netflix* all day." You would have to undo that capacity for violence. Those other loves that I defined are insufficient without the political will.

I've never —from raising kids to seeing parents transition— loved anybody without suffering. There's no way you love without suffering. Oh, you want no damage? Then don't love that much. We know people who gave their whole hearts that opened and burst. Somehow all that molecular matter ended up absorbed by us. My kids refuse to watch the documentary *Who killed Malcolm X?* with me because they find it too scary and they want to go listen to some rapper. Before they leave, I say "You know Malcolm loved us, right?" They respond: "Yeah, I know." That's all they need to know. Ten to twenty years later, when they need to know that we loved each other, hopefully, that knowledge will be useful.

RW: I could stay here all day because . . . you're working through my [dissertation] project for me. . . the Captive Maternal. . . a statement that you made earlier regarding the gender wars Your work has been positioned as not only a critical intervention to black feminist thought but also a kind of pseudo alliance [by black male authors] in what is burgeoning now black male studies discourse. Recently there was a social media debate between black male studies and black feminists around the Black Panther Party. Black male studies was trying to insinuate that the critique of the Black Panther Party as being sexist is rooted in white feminism and white supremacy. I want to return to the Captive Maternal because the Captive Maternal makes a critical intervention to discourses such as black feminism and gender studies when thinking about the nature of anti-blackness and predation.

You define the Captive Maternal as “an ungendered phenomenon whose generative powers”—which would be what we just discussed, love and care —“have been stolen by the state.” Can you expound on the nature of anti-black violence and the issue of gender as it relates to black feminist critiques of this had a real patriarchy within our socio-political movements, which is a say that black feminism makes an urgent critique of says hetero patriarchy that we need to listen to right as it relates to our socio-political community come movements, but then. You also make this turn in your research to political prisoners, [or radical actors such as] Erica Garner and Amilcar Cabral.

George Jackson to discuss the function of captive maternal as gender phenomena throughout history, and then, can you discuss why it's important to think of the capital maternal and the capacity for loving care and stabilizing as engendered or gender queer rather than gender.

JJ: Okay, thanks for that. The Captive Maternal recognition came from my being attentive and watching how people of all genders— nonbinary, male, female, trans —provide services for the most vulnerable, which would be the child or for elder who's transitioning or is frail. Fragility freaks us out most, at least me. I understand how much we suffer. I didn't quite understand how much we *feel* that suffering. Sometimes knowing what that feels like makes you very protective of the children and/or the elders. I am in the middle. It's the fulcrum on the seesaw. I'm going to try and balance the plank and have folks bring that garbage [dishonor/disrespect/violations] to me because I want to deflect it from the other sectors, who are younger or older, frail and vulnerable in different ways. The commitment to protect them is foundation. It is a guiding light until you start allowing children and elders to be indoctrinated by the state and capitalism in order to offer them “security.”

For example, the Chicago mayor Lori Lightfoot said last year when activists and communities asked her to control the spending in terms of hiring more COPs. I already told you how violent the Chicago people are in, meaning the COPs which you already know and her position was well how is the black and Latino people get into the middle class so. Having jobs that are about policing and subjugating people becomes the vehicle for having money and economic stability. That's stage one of the Captain Maternal. I don't even know if I would even let them in the door, but since I don't control the concept, people do whatever they want with it [others might include them].

We're full of contradictions, but remember we've talked before. You keep moving on to those latter stages towards revolutionary struggle and it can be pacifist, and some people are militarist. And I think sometimes feminists have problems with me because I don't like completely condemned the militarist aspects of it, but I will tell you again. I grew up in the

military and they were always at war or they're planning wars and they were always invading somebody so you know, like I you know it's not funny but "Where's dad, do you know?" He's in Korea or Vietnam or Panama or in Detroit putting down a black rebellion.

We have to choose, whatever stage we're going to be on you're either going to be complicit with the predatory state which I call the hunter you can call it whatever you want. or you're going to have to be its opposition and that's the same with the academy. The academy has expressions of predatory behavior. It can also be a place where you can feed your people, your kids and get health care. You're going to have to decide which side of the coin you're going to play to. So, the Captive Maternal is nongendered. I only figured that out because people ask me questions; like you ask me questions here. When I was finishing the draft of "The Womb of Western Theory," a trans intellectual editor, who had asked me to contribute the chapter to a volume on the Carceral State, raised the query about the gender of the Captive Maternal. You could read the entire draft and without the CM being identified by gender. Then I realized that the Captive Maternal was/is a function not an identity.

There are women like an idea of what their name out there, like Condoleezza Rice who's also on that, like masterclass but Co-teaching with Madeline Albright on something like diplomacy after they like devastated the Middle East right.

Like false claims of weapons of mass destruction embargo that kills 500,000 children in Iraq. Like they would never be captive maternal they don't function that way they function for empire, the one thing I can definitely say is for me the captive material, even if they play with empire. You know, like, I need this low-level job because I got to feed my kids or get housing. However, if you're one of the architects willingly engineering the stability of empire there is no way you are captive. You're an *operative*. Obama, was the first black *imperial* US President.

And we can go from Obama to Kamala Harris, all the way down there's sometimes you have to take the job because you have to feed yourself and your kids. Those jobs are not called the President or the Vice President of the United States if you can get that gig you don't have to take it, you can get another job right, you can teach high school.

It's this desire to be famous and powerful and wealthy that closes the door and the function that opens the door to predatory behavior because you have the state, and you have the capital backing you. Jeff Bezos gives abolitionist Van Jones \$100 million dollars in the Koch brothers pay him to you know basis and Amazon or.

Eviscerating workers' rights while the Koch brothers are just chewing through what's left of climate, we need water, we need clean water, we need air. There's no way you can put all they gave them money for abolition ISM, and so I can roll with them no I'm sorry you if you do you're not a captive maternal and I'm not judging you. It's just clear that you don't function as a CM. There is actually a logic in this. I'm just trying to be consistent. I'm not hating you it's like you know there's a Pam. And then there's a trafficked child. I'm sorry, this is my dichotomy in life right now: you're either a pimp or you're a trafficked kid. So if I play along that spectrum and you're making money then for me you are clearly not captive to anything. Unless you were Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* [in which the protagonist, Don Freeman, takes resources, and training, from the CIA to the black community in rebellion] funneling funds into some underground schooling, housing, food to feed people. Rescue the Haitians and Africans they're deporting out of ICE to be returned to Haiti and killed or wherever they're going back to.

The older I get, the clearer I get: you cannot rehab this [predatory structure]. You would not try to rehabilitate organized crime, you would simply say you'll have to go find another line

of work. And that's the same situation we're in and this functions like organized crime and everybody knows it, but I mean do you do you want to have a strategy to deal with it.

RW: You just like drop my cycle to the next. So, we're going to move to Q and A. You have a few questions here in the box. Quite a few so I know we won't be able to get to all of them, so I'll try to pull a few that people can engage with you. So let's start with... “I've heard Dr James mention in previous talks discussions about betrayal stage of the capital maternal.”

I'm curious to hear if she could elaborate on what that is especially in relation to what has been spoken about today regarding love and I love this question because we've talked about the betrayal stage and I was like look, you need another stage of the capital return.

JJ: It's true. . . yeah, take credit for that one. You did a year or so ago ask “What about the stage of betrayal?” And then, maybe it wasn't you, but somebody else said, “We need to ‘off’ the Captive Maternal.” I was like “Oh, me???”

Stop. I have to change my address now? No it's not funny; but it's kind of funny. Because the truth of the matter is—I've said it before—the younger generation was betrayed by the older generation. We lied by omission to the youth. I was in Canada, giving a talk a couple years ago. And it was mostly sisters and they were different words me like different fields like the Academy dominatrix is that a word like a real dominatrix right. I you know, I was just learning because, like I grew up in an era where you cannot use the Masters tools to undo the Masters house right and then, when I quoted that you know I'm the oldest person in the room. I get their acronyms confused with BDS [Boycott, Divest, Sanctions for Palestinians]. The sisters roll back and they say that we can use the Masters tool and I was like “Wait. Audre Lorde said you cannot.” The

black youths responded: “We don't care.” I then started thinking: “Okay, people are improvising here . . . they plan to survive.”

And this is going to go back to our relationship with violence, so if you know again I'm trying to link it to off the captive material, it is not my preference right.

I'm implicated with my contradictions, but also, I just want to be good, did you can roll up on me think I don't have a plan okay so it's just like that, like somebody will you should just leave alone because, like they're not all grounded in spirituality. If we could agree as a community and hold the line of ethics, you cannot betray us, however, you want to make your money or build your brand. You can't pimp us right as being the collective movement who agreed to be disciplined by a copy and agree to sacrifice and suffer now you know 100% not every day, but to some degree.

Because the idea of who we could be as free is greater than the reality of the minutia of 24 hours a day, seven days a week, you know 12 months a year. If we could agree, however, respectfully lovingly I don't care what adjective you put it on but, though, we will confront betrayal. Then I will say you know don't roll up on my house, but you can roll up to my canvas and you can tell me I'm wrong I don't care and actually half the time I try to say this consistently I don't have answers right, but you have the right to criticize me. Without me going full blown that you're like a romantic or you're not grounded in reality. You guys are inheriting what we left you. Our lies of omission meant we couldn't tell you what we actually saw and knew to be the world. How violent it is. How predatory and unloving it is. Still, there's this beauty. There's this tenacity to love more and give more and more. I don't think we were ever clear about that with you. Definitely the academy is not clear— it has to make money and build its brand.

We lied to you by omission. People can say “Oh, no, you're lying now.” Whatever. I'll just claim my part in it. There are things I wouldn't probably say in a classroom or in a conference based on how violent I see the world to be. But I keep trying to gesture towards you, that if I tell you that I grew up on a military base, I'm not stupid about this.

I'm only talking about my father in the last year, it took me decades to talk. Oh, I was in Nicaragua during the contra war [of terrorists funded by the US during the Reagan Administration as it destabilized socialist governments in Latin America]. In a refugee camp, I met with Salvadorans who had been macheted by the contras. What don't you know Reagan's do it like there's so much heart that the US has exploited around the globe. That, for us to recover. We have to do something absolutely brilliant and breathtaking and we will likely do it, but it won't be my generation, it will be yours. You have the right to say you've betrayed us and it's not Council culture it's like an analysis and it's astute because you have received or maybe you don't.

But you understand how capitalism and imperialism work if you can take black suffering and cash in on it, that is betrayal in terms of the gender stuff like really do really want to fight this I mean.

You have a right not to be turned into prey by anybody. And you have a right not to be battered or dishonored or humiliated by anybody. At the same time, you have to contextualize the personal abuse or the group abuse with the larger terror. Which is that we're moving towards (proto)fascism and we came out of enslavement.

Whatever we do to each other, will never rival those zones of terror, we do need to stop you know, throwing broken, glass and garbage at each other and women trans LGBT Q children neural a typical all of those rights have to be respected, but let's be clear. Everybody died for us. Joy James: Including SIS gender men who were like probably a pain in the neck and patriarchal

everybody re-energize who is discipline to agape. Agape is not the personal property of the any gender or any sexual identity adopting is the wild card. Not everybody will throw it down even if you're the right intersection of identity that's supposed to be the leadership.

The only people who lead are the people who commit and the only people who commit are the ones who are willing to suffer and love simultaneously. has no gender do, how do I organize I only want to organize with women because it's easier, but that doesn't mean all the women that I know are nice people or honest there's no virtue. In your identity construct the virtue, is in the capacity to love and to keep loving when people become a pain in the neck.

. . . . Everything we do for the last 400 years has been turned into a commodity, the gender wars, is a commodity now. People are trading in it like it's a brand. We're smart enough to know when we're being played aren't we, but if we get too emotionally involved in this stuff then it's like it's like a crusade for what. Feed the kids; stop the devastation of the environment; and deal with the empire, as well as our relationships around gender, sexuality, the murder of trans women, the dishonor; but you can't isolate those and think that the empire is not playing you. The state/corporation is cashing in on our conflicts I'm not saying hi to conflicts go for I go full blown open. I'll write about anybody I don't care from Barack on down. But. You know if we can find the capacity, the political Well now, I understand better what the pastor would say.

We don't have to like each other. Agape as political will means that we have to love each other. We have to be disciplined. We don't have very much discipline right now. Everybody's doing their free-range chicken stuff. I would discipline myself to a strategy if someone threw one out that I thought had integrity; and then I would want to tinker with it. But if the collective or community told me to shut up, I would stop doing these podcasts. I don't have a problem with that. However, if people are building brands out of conflict, I don't have time for that.

RW: I think that's real because there on the one hand there is like the brand of it all. And then, on the other hand, it's a real antagonism that people suffer through right like anti-black gender violence is something that people actually die from, and I think to your point, there is a misalignment referring back to the point that you made earlier around Orlando Patterson's notions of social death.

When we talk about the function of natal alienation it's not like we're actually getting at the critique of not only the family that can ship. This idea of love that what I think the critique is situated us in is that these formations this discipline that you're calling for become becomes the impossibility, because of the antagonisms. Right so really.

JJ: Okay, I think I understand and I'm sorry that I wasn't clear. You have the right to self defense. That is not violence. Self defense is not a synonym for violence. I've talked about this with people I was in seminary with; those who went on to become directors of Harlem programs about intimate violence, family violence. A number of us are survivors. We are survivors of rape or survivors of beat downs. We're like "No, you have the right to self defense."

Rebecca, I could have led with that, and then we could have shortened the conversation. But that narrative is prohibited, to be public about that. But I don't care. Like you, I don't care. Do what it takes. Do what you need to do. But do it with your crew; and verbal back-and-forth? I don't consider that self defense. You might see it as some kind of armor; and you'll go ahead and write and speak more. But know that the nitty gritty is material reality. It is a confrontation with violence. If we won't confront a violent state, then we're going to physically confront domestic

battery? We're going to go to the house of the rapists down the block and confront them? This is about strategy.

I left seminary early maybe not just because it was a business, maybe because I may not be a complete pacifist. There's a strong possibility that I'm not. I wasn't trained for pacifism. I said I was in ROTC for years. I'm not trained to be a pacifist. But, I *want* to be a pacifist. This [reminds me of the *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism* “We Remember the Attempts to Be Free” podcast when] they asked how could I refer to the “hyper masculinist” George Jackson as a “Captive Maternal.” How? Because he *loved* people.

But when he threw down, nobody could deal with that. He threw down. You have the right to survive without being battered, humiliated, sex trafficked. Disproportionately, it's women and children, transwomen [who are subjected to this abuse]. In the absence of having a public strategy and making it clear that there will be a community response [for harming us], *we go to words?* I mean, come on. If you want to throw down, I'm totally behind you. but then you throw down on every metric. Not just so like stop at level three or therapy. What's the material plan without having to rely on the COPs or therapy only to have a plan. It will likely look a bit militaristic. So, if you don't want to do that—I can only say after decades of writing about feminism and the need to stop rape, joining a lesbian dojo to offer protections to people— I don't have anything else to say.

RW: Next question, there's a few in the chat. Here's one that says, “Can you speak to the role of celebrity and contemporary black movements. I'm thinking about both the celebrity and fetishization of academics, who formally were a part of radical movements, and members of the entertainment class. What does it mean, for example, for Angela Davis and Cardi B to write a foreword together?”

JJ: My assumption is that people want to be remembered. The best way to be remembered is to be a celebrity. Being a celebrity is not the same thing as agape.

I mean it's a different function like it's not a captain maternal it's a different function. But you know if you can your claim to celebrity and I talking about any individuals like or collective so you. Put the people up on your fridge with a magnet just deal with it, you know, like who you're talking about is sometimes the same folks I'm talking about sometimes not.

This society is driven by entertainment because it's a deflection say oh look over there it's bleeding right. When we really want to do is address our sorrow till, we have to fight this hard, I mean it's freaking me out: oh, my God, when does it stop? It doesn't stop right. So we distract with entertainment: "Oh look at that. . . we were so cute. . . and we get to be president and we get to be rich or they're going to do a biopic" Success like that might make us feel like we have power. That's not power [over economies, militarism, proto-fascism, voter disenfranchisement, neoslavery]. It's distraction.

The real the brilliant people I know you don't know their names and I'm sure you know brilliant people I don't know their names right. Because they're always behind the scenes, but here's the flip side of that the most predatory people I know we're not supposed to use the word evil. But the most violent people who structure military invasions and drone strikes we don't know their names either like so the people you need to know you don't know who they are, because they're behind the curtain. And so. If you want to be entertained maybe just say that 60 minutes a day "I'm just going to do fluff." Listen to the celebrities that would tell us how to organize a revolutionary struggle they look out from the mountain top of their mansion. They're embedded in white power. I literally said that. I realized that the places I teach are white power bastions. Where do you think I'd be teaching?

If academia needs a black unicorn, they'll get one. I don't want to talk about [celebrities] too much, other than to see if there's a line where I can study them to track where we came from in terms of struggles. And where we're going in terms of the mutation of the struggle into commodification I only I only want to watch them to kind of figure out the trajectories and look whatever amount of money they have they didn't write the script.

Everybody works for white power, I mean, where do you think we are like who do you think the funders are, how do you think certain people get out of jail or don't go to prison right. I don't want it to be a distraction, but they can be these moments of study to figure out where we are on the graph.

Like we were like full blown rebellion like half a century ago, and then like people got shut up and murdered and put in prison, and then the people survive. Like they have the right language, but then somehow now they're embedded in the Democratic Party, and then you know people are jet setting around the globe and cetera et cetera and now I'm gonna say something really controversial because that wasn't. We can't do it alone and other revolutionaries knew that. There are the indigenous doing resistance around Standing Rock. What are the white rebels doing having [had] Kyle Rittenhouse shoot them up and then walk for two murders?

There's no way we pull this off solo as Black people. It will be revolutionary-minded lovers to revolutionary-minded lovers joining forces, it will not be an all-black formation. That's why I led with the current mayor of New York City and the current police commissioner, both of whom are Black. That makes the struggle even more painful because I just want to throw down with my people. But my people [black people] have already told me that I'm a pain in the neck.

Any sincere gesture to move forward, so that we leave you something that you're not just you know ripping your hair out asking "What the heck is this, it makes no sense!" means that we must be working with other rebels who love.

RW: I think that's important. I think the hard part is finding the rebels, that are not anti-black.

JJ: But I didn't say they were [or needed to be]. A rebel is a rebel is a rebel. If you can figure out that's an authentic rebel [work with them]. I did not say to have dinner with them every Friday or invite them over to your house. I'm just saying that they have strategy and analysis.

RW: Right and they're a means to an end.

JJ: I don't know if they're a "means to the end." Because you're in rebellion, they need you and you need them. You talked about the Captive Maternal. There was a Latina. Her name was Margarita; notice I speak in the past tense. She was a doctoral student in one of the UCs. She contacted me to write a dissertation on the Captive Maternal. I told her it was really a "black thing" [but I sent her links to articles]; she said she was going to write the dissertation anyway. The lack of support in the Academy, the lack of support in home [being undocumented and with limited resources], she committed suicide. Rebels depart faster than anybody else. Our job is to keep rebels on the planet, as long as possible, because we need them.

RW: This is going to be our final question, but it really speaks to what you just said, I think what you were mentioning earlier so much of critical black thought has been focused around a

particular agenda of black life, and I think. That kind of hijacks people's capacity to be able to think critically about the things that they want to speak about, and so this question says, "Is there a way for institutional black studies to embrace the thought of suicide?" Access from a place of theorizing the university as a side of a plantation where I think one can argue that black studies, has developed a neurotic attachment to the university that prevents it from embracing the abolition of the university.

JJ: I would say "Yes," but with qualifiers. I brought up Jonathan before. I don't know why Jonathan haunts me right, but not in a bad way; he's not a spirit I fear. But he is a spirit. I don't even know how to say it, I mean, because this is what Huey P. Newton called it knew at Jonathan Jackson's funeral after white prison guards killed him in the Marin County courthouse parking lot... Newton called it "revolutionary suicide." There is a complicated narrative, maybe some people were supposed to show up and offer backup but they didn't for varied reasons.

California prison guards [had/have a mandate to] stop all potential escapes even if they kill everybody [which they nearly did that day]; they killed [seventeen-year-old Jonathan Jackson and the incarcerated James McClain, William Christmas,⁶⁹ Harold Haley] a white judge. At Attica [prison in NY the next year white national guardsmen shot through white prison guard hostages in order to kill imprisoned] black rebels, because the worst thing in the world for a white supremacist empire is a black rebel.

⁶⁹ <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/228276> ;

<https://www.pacificradioarchives.org/recording/bb2587>; <https://www.sfgate.com/news/slideshow/1970-Marin-County-courthouse-shooting-144014.php#:~:text=Superior%20Court%20judge%20Harold%20Haley%20was%20killed%20in,who%20was%20critically%20wounded%20in%20the%20ensuing%20shootout>.

I went to seminary in a faith in which political suicide is written into the whole scripture I don't care what they call it like, if you agree to go up on a cross. I mean, come on. There's some transactional thing going on there; it's transactional politics. Sorry . . . forgive me if I went there. But literally, I'm going to give up a life to the beloved so that you guys are going to live. We do that every single day. Parents who don't have enough food in the house, give their food to the kids or to the elders. Or, they take that second, third job to feed their families. Or, adults work in the underground economies which are really dangerous because [they are willing to] sacrifice life and dignity in various ways so y'all get to live and grow up.

That's our inheritance. For some people who are not us and who don't live under the conditions of terror that we live under, it looks like we've committed suicide in small dosages or spectacular ways every single day. Don't fear it. Comprehend it . . . the suicide to having a happy family, the suicide to having a successful career. I can't explain to you how I got to these [elite] spaces, because I just followed [the best I could] the love of the mass in rebellion. For whatever reason, the Academy said: "Yeah, we can use something like that, but we're going to put it in a petri dish; stick it in the freezer; [hide it in a] cubicle."

I rarely wavered. That doesn't make me better than anybody else. It just means resist the reality of suicidal practices. I'm talking not about pills or walking onto the train tracks or ODing on drugs. The practices of sacrificing at this level are organic to who we are as a people; we've done it for centuries; we just don't have a narrative maybe that we want to hear.

Jonathan still follows me; he's a comfort and I'll repeat what my kin said: because Jonathan did it, I don't have to do it. We only need to know that one of us is capable of sacrificial love. We don't know the limits in terms of possibilities because there's no limit to loving in a slave camp.

The love mutates. The more they bring the terror until they break us into the grave and from the grave we come back up like Emmett. Rosa Parks said, I believe, that she was thinking about Emmett Till when she wouldn't give up her seat to a white person on a segregated bus.

We die, but we don't die. We suicide, but we manifest. The point is to embrace each other enough that longevity becomes more of a practical possibility—not the longevity because we sold ourselves within slavery, the point is to reclaim ourselves under enslavement.

RW: I love this as a closing remark. It's like literally I'm thinking theologically because I love the juxtaposition between the crystal logical story right you don't walk to the cross, but then you have Jackson, Jonathan Jackson and I think this juxtaposition is important because there's like, on the one hand, a captive maternal. We think about Jonathan like “This is my brother I'm going to go for it in order to save him [George Jackson]. On the other hand, you have Jesus saying “Take this cup from me.” His father is also saying “I'm going to raise you up in three days.” So, the sacrifice is not as equal right because Jesus gets raised up in three days but Jonathan is like “I'm through with this.”

JJ: I just said, Jonathan was with me. Jonathan got raised. He's here. Y'all are still young(er) [you might not focus on time but] I'm moving towards my death. That's just how it works. That's the architecture. It doesn't change. Death, as scary as it is, it's a death of the body. I'm not even doing the religious thing right now. Departure came with the agreement. You can show up, but then you're going to go out and you won't determine the time or place.

Have you ever watched an elder die? A mother? You came out of her body and then you're just trying to give her a shred of dignity in these half-assed nursing homes because your

brother is in charge of everything now; and people are saving money with the refrain “They're going to die anyway, why spend *real* money?” To me that is maddening. But when they transition [you calm down in your grief because you realize that] they didn't leave you. Nobody who loves you, even if they hated you while they loved you, leaves you.

That's why you transcend. That's why you know you love. That's why you know you are better than whatever garbage people try to shove down your throat. That is why they will keep trying to kill us but will never succeed. The soul— I don't even know what it is— but Jonathan keeps popping up. So, it's real. And that's good enough for me.

RW: I am honored to have been in conversation with you and to figure out these very real moments of struggle. Your discernment and stream of consciousness are unmatched as one of the most incredible political theorists of our time. I am grateful for this opportunity to talk to you.

JJ: I want to say one last thing, and not because you said nice things about me: I love you, Rebecca. I don't know you. But I love you and that works. So, thank you.

RW: Thank you. Thank you, everyone, for coming out.

Chapter 19

In the Spirit of . . .⁷⁰

There has been so much that has been said [at this gathering in preparation for the October 2021 “We Still Charge Genocide” and the In the Spirit of Nelson Mandela Tribunal on the 70th anniversary of the Civil Rights Congress delivering their book-length petition *We Charge Genocide* to the UN in 1951]. [This panel] has been very rich and generative. My thanks to Olga, Drs Patterson, Kwame, Heinze and for everyone that has helped to organize this venue which is incredibly important. Three things that come to mind are: legacy, political strategy and revolutionary love. We have over half a millennium, 500years, of resistance in the Americas against enslavement [through] the black legacy of struggle. A number of those strategies, legal, political communal have been discussed here. All of our struggles are motivated by our desires to love ourselves, our communities and to love our deities. So, to every guiding ancestor, every spiritual being, every sacrificed warrior, every tortured child or family, who has brought us to this current moment of enlightenment— my gratitude; my appreciation for the education but also the inspiration to continue struggling.

I want to summarize what has been said, but also to problematize If we, and we do, have legacy; if we, and we do, have strategies; if we, and we do, have revolutionary love, what does that mean in an asymmetrical war against an imperial state . . . that enforce[es] genocidal politics. As Dr. [Lennox] Hines has pointed out, the US is a rogue state [given its systemic

⁷⁰ Jericho Movement, Spirit of Mandela Tribunal. Webinar 3: “Leading Up Till Tomorrow!” (Legal, Educational, Political Imperatives), August 2021. <https://spiritofmandela.org/spirit-of-mandela-tribunal-webinar-3-leading-up-till-tomorrow-legal-educational-political-imperatives/>

human rights violations]. This is why we appeal to the international community. The international order is obviously in a state of disorder. We know that the US is in arrears in terms of its payments [to the UN]. We know that it cuts deals behind the scenes. It also pursues AFRICOM which has come up in the chat. The US allows Eric Prince, a former Navy Seal, to run a \$billion mercenary club that rampages on behalf of capital across the world.

The US is complicit in numerous crimes against humanity. All of the speakers have well-documented its desires to maintain neocolonial possessions, and its ability to engineer assassinations: e.g., in 1961 with Patrice Lumumba's assassination which led to Malcolm saying "Chickens coming home to roost" when JFK was assassinated. Internal deaths include Medgar Evers' in 1963, Malcolm's in 1965, King in 1968, Fred Hampton in 1969, Dulcie September in the 1980s; Chris Hani in 1993.

We have "trauma milestones" in our memory banks. We also have strategies. We have legacies. We have love. Trauma impacts our struggle. Warriors are still incarcerated. . . . some suffer from cancer. Their names appear in the chat: Leonard Peltier. Sundiata Acoli. Mutulu Shakur. Russel Maroon Shoatz. Mumia Abu-Jamal. . . . I want to problematize . . . after thanking all of you for what you have put on the table. . . with a question: "Where do we go from here?" as King said; or "What is to be done?" as Lenin said. Lenin's not my favorite person so I'm going to ride with King.

The accumulations of 500 years of struggle are a death march and a life march. We give birth. We see our struggles.... casualties. Rebels get locked away and we still continue to struggle. The question I have on the table, and I ask humbly. . . "How [do] we create connectors that amply our struggle to the next level?" I remember what Safiyah Bukhari said [at] Brown University years ago when she was on a panel. She talked about being caught "between a rock

and a hard place” [death squads from Huey Newton and from the FBI/police forces] It is not just predatory violence coming from the state. There is also predatory violence that happens in communities. Even more deadly, I would argue, [is the] fascist predatory violence from the white supremacist underground that is no longer underground.

The January 6th performative [“wanna be”] coup [at the Washington, D.C. Capitol] was signaling to all of us collectively as children of deities, people who should be able to raise their own children and get old as they feed them. The lack of [serious] prosecution of white supremacist terrorists who have reinvented Christianity so that their rapture where Jesus returns means that [there] won’t be Muslim, LGBTQ, feminists or womanists; Black or Indigenous or people of color. . . .

US, Britain and NATO backing Portugal likely facilitated Cabral’s assassination in 1973. . . I see [Amilcar Cabral] as an ancestor who reminds me that our struggles are always international and that anti-blackness is global. . . [In *Return to the Source*] Cabral writes: “We recognize the devastations of lack of clean water, adequate food and shelter. But the cause of those deficits cannot be remedied through policy. If so, then there is no need for confrontation only accommodations with colonialists and petitions for greater benefit packages.”

[T]he democratic party is preferable to the re-invented republican party as. . . white-nationalist. . . the duopoly of the US two parties cannot remedy the predatory violence arrayed against our liberation struggles [and against] our right to live and care for our elders and kids. As a petit bourgeois academic, I think we need to talk more about class divisions inside our communities. . . class can shape . . . our willingness to struggle. I want to be clear: I am petit bourgeois . . . I have my contradictions.... intellectual political warriors fought those [liberation] wars and somehow the energy and the wealth [accrued to] the petit bourgeoisie has . . . [who]

write books about [revolutionary warriors] and make speeches about them... that wealth has never returned to those who took the greatest risks and need the most support. We build communities out of nothing [and with no money]. We create worlds within dead zones. We create life where nothing should be born. [As in Attica in 1971, the] state sees our rights and endeavors ...as a declaration of war against it. There is a lack of support and too much trauma in our movements that is not alleviated by those who have money and leisure time. Again, I implicate myself. The rebels are community defenders and lovers no matter how we get caught up in our own losses and caught [emulating] the predatory nature of the state. We have protests. We have movements. We are war resisters. We did not start the war...the war comes to us. What is the next stage? That next stage has to invent a new level of struggle that has not clearly materialized.

Maybe I read too many Octavia Butler sci-fi novels. . . or not enough of them. There is a transcendent part of our struggle . . . [but] we need to call ourselves to accountability. A lot of money [was] thrown into our movements in order to control our movements. . . . our movements are constantly bought from under us as in gentrification. . . . What is the next level of struggle in asymmetrical warfare?

We have the love, capacity, legacy, strategies. But we lack accountability and the ability to revoke the leadership status of people who accumulate out of the struggles of the most oppressed —the incarcerated, political prisoners, the prisoners of war, veterans. Without an accountability call we will face continued obstacles. Our loving is always seen as war. . . . How can we call ourselves to accountability in collective discipline, with strategies that people wrote with their lives, passions . . . and the love that we still maintain for each other despite our contradictions?

Conclusion

The Agape of Peaches



As a political prisoner of the state, and a member of the Black Panther Party, Peaches's 1969 open letter to her parents highlights Black revolutionary struggle for liberation. A member

of a Black revolutionary party targeted by an imperial state's police forces, the young, anonymous Black woman becomes the embodiment of the Black revolutionary who embraces agape but disappears from history. Peaches rejects the cynicism and the "luxuries" of bourgeois living because she has decided to "serve the people" as an expression of her political will, Agape. How might the celebrity influencer, Democratic Party lobbyist, initiate a dialectical dance for freedom and justice? "Peaches," a family nickname, exists in place of the birth name, family or surname, no belonging beyond the Panthers appears in her brief letter; hence, her place in history is obscured or folded into Davis's iconography in the reconstruction of women's contributions to liberation struggle.

The dialectic between Black submission and Black rebellion is global. The "Negro National Anthem" is now international. Its lyrics reflect the centuries of struggle endured and waged by Captive Maternals. The phrase refers to the "blood of the slaughter" as central and a fixture of Black life and death under this democracy; the lyrics also implicate the deity in our suffering or salvation: "God of our weary years God of our silent tears." Fifty years after her captivity, when she survived a fascistic assault on the southern California Black Panther offices, Peaches' letter to her parents survives. Even if nothing, and no one, exists outside our circles of love and concern, the captives have to struggle to hold our attention and our hearts. So, this text on the Captive Maternal tries to reach and meet agape, the highest form of love that endures only because it is braced by political will.

An anonymous Captive Maternal, Peaches refused to accept the blood of the slaughter as a permanent fixture and so she joined the Black Panther Party in Southern California just as the LAPD was engineering SWAT and testing it on the Panthers. Juxtapose Peaches with the beloved and celebrated author and poet, Maya Angelou. When an affluent community of expats

living in the highlands of Mexico asked me to speak at their church service in February 2022, in recognition of Black History month, they chose two clips from Maya Angelou's performances. The first clip which opened the service featured Angelou in a packed auditorium delighting the audience with a smiling and triumphal performance of "Still I Rise." The second clip that was screened just before I spoke showed Angelou painfully reciting a poem based on Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask." The constant refrain was our grinning, grimacing, shrinking elders reciting to us that it was only because they wore the mask, veiled their outrage and swallowed their bile and white supremacist violence, that the younger generation survived as a people and we continue to this day to do so. Yet, Angelou on screen after reciting the poetry and emitting the shrieks and moans that emanate from us, turns exhausted from the microphone to wipe her tears of exhaustion. Her back is turned to the lectern but the side and elevated cameras capture and preserve her weeping as if it were part of the performance and so a capture for commodities culture.

The poetry of "We Wear the Mask" read by Maya Angelou makes beautiful, and painfully brilliant, how diverse contributions unveil the Captive Maternal's contradictions. In particular, the centrality of "masking" our fear and rage have likely led to emotional and psychological destabilization and muddled our politics for transformative justice. Juxtapose Angelou's performance of that poem in which she turns from a packed auditorium audience in tears with the piercing, poetic 1969 letter of Peaches to her parents, our full vulnerability and love, not just our humiliation and pain, become revealed. In her 1969 open declaration to her parents, Peaches, a Black teenage girl, writes that her love for "the people" was her guiding light

and path of discipline.⁷¹ There are politics here that align as well with Angelou. While Maya Angelou was living with her son in Ghana, she met and began working with Malcolm X, who would be assassinated in 1965 in the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem. Later, Angelou and Toni Morrison would also give eulogies at the funeral of novelist and civil rights activist James Baldwin. His funeral was held at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. I and other seminarians walked from classes and the quad at Union to pay homage for Baldwin, a great lover of people and justice. Angelou was an artist who embodied “Black love” with an embrace that compressed it at times into Revolutionary Love or agape.

Unlike Angelou or Toni Morrison, who edited the texts of Black radicals before she published her novels, Peaches is not an author or poet. She is one of the grunt workers/soldiers at the height of police repression of Black radicals who expressed agape that radiated beyond their contradictions and limitations. Jail or prison highlights Black revolutionary struggle at the height of antagonism and imperialism arrayed against Black liberation. Unlike the assertions or projections of Davis as a Black Panther leader, Peaches was a member of the BPP targeted for “neutralization” by the state. The young, anonymous Black woman becomes the embodiment of the Black revolutionary who embraces agape without officialdom or celebrity. Peaches, decades after she appeared to only disappear from public, wrote a coda that interfaced Walter Rodney’s instructions on genocidal race capitalism/imperialism with agape:

“Open Letter to My Mom and Dad — From Peaches, Political Prisoner”

Mom, Dad,

⁷¹ “Peaches, Open Letter to Parents,” the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party, was posted on Facebook, December 27, 2021.

I'm communicating this way to you because it would take too much time and emotion on my part to do so through glass windows and ear phones.

Mom and Dad, you both have always wanted me to be someone you, others and most of all myself can look up to and respect. All my life I've been taught that people were people. All my life you have told me that no matter what I was or how I was, be the best.

Mom and Dad, I am a Panther, I am a revolutionary woman. I am willing to fight and die for the rights of myself, my people and all oppressed people in general. What greater pride can one have? How much dignity can one feel? How much respect can one receive, if he/she takes the initiative to go after and fight for a goal.

Mom and Dad, I love you both for striving and working and sweating so that I may have the things that I needed. I love you both for what you've taught me.

Sure, I could go out and hold any job I desire. Have all the luxuries in life get set, and die of "natural" death.

But to me there is more life than that. There are the people. People who need to be helped and loved. Not stepped on, used, and misled as "we" have been for so long.

I have found what I've wanted out of life. I didn't find it in the streets, or through dope, or through luxuries. I found what I wanted through the Black Panther Party. And that is to "Love and Serve the People."

Please, Mom and Dad, I love you for what you are, and what you do. Can't you love me for what I am, and what I want to do?

LOVE—Your only child “Peaches”⁷²

Peaches rejects the cynicism and the “luxuries” of bourgeois living because she has decided to “serve the people” as an expression of her political will, Agape. Influenced by celebrities, Democratic Party lobbyists, constant news feeds on war, and rumors of war, disposability of the impoverished and captive communities, how might we initiate a dialectical dance for freedom and justice? “Peaches,” identified only by a family nickname, exists as “Panther” in place of the birth name, family or surname; no belonging beyond her parents and the Panthers, they likely disapproved of, appears in her brief letter. Her place in history is obscured despite the reconstruction of women’s contributions to liberation struggles.

Peaches does not plead for familial love. She already has that from her parents. She does not request Black Love. She embodies it. Peaches petitions in public for familial support for her as a Panther, in the midst of an asymmetrical war between an imperial aggressor and an under-resourced resistance movement largely waged by Black teenagers. As a panther political prisoner, Peaches pleads for *agape*: the parental recognition that her political will to serve the people is an expression of divine spirit. The highest form of love and beauty, Agape rejects distracting games and chooses political will in which love and sacrificial labor shape the revolutionary. How Black women carry the imprint of the anonymous captive resisters or warriors remains somewhat a mystery.

The young Black woman militant has devoted parents. The Panther political prisoner pleads for *agape*: the parental recognition that her political will to serve the people is an expression of divine spirit. From prologue to epilogue, lies a bread crumb trail of agape for the persecuted, protected, and empowered seeking the highest forms of love. Agape materializes

⁷² “Peaches Letter,” Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party, Facebook, December 27, 2021.

when we put down distracting games and in order to pick up political will for the sacrificial labor for revolutionary love as the norm—not the aberration.

Ethical lovers follow mutations of political will. Despite enslavement, segregation, exploitation, poverty, imprisonment, poisoned land/water/air— “We rise” as another Angelou poem notes. This time, or next time, or never on time, deceptions covering predatory powers will diminish as returnees build paths and bridges into the maroonage of revolutionary love.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to all who supported this collection. Collective thinking and dialogue with communities, organizers, spiritual leaders and intellectuals allowed this book to appear in print. The editors of a small European press convinced me that working with them would be generative when they told me that they sell books from the trunk of their cars as they travel to independent, feminist and progressive bookstores. As they spoke on the Zoom meet-in-greet, I could only think of Octavia Butler selling her brilliant and fierce sci-fi novels in the Bay Area in California from the trunk of her car. Butler bequeathed a rich and loving legacy for freedom struggles to shape our imaginations and organizations. (), in the beautiful spirit of a dread doula, shared their art with this book.

Intellectual communities/communal thinkers created the dialogues within this book that helped me to evolve as a thinker and an organizer. Appreciation for the intellectualism and transformative politics of: Too Black/Ryan of the *Black Myths Podcast* and its host *platform Black Power Media*; Paris Hatcher of Canon and the *Black Feminist Futures*; Momodou Taal and Khadijah Diskin of *The Malcolm Effect*; Felicia Denaud and Devyn Springer of *Groundings Podcast*; George Yancy of *Truthout*; Jason Myles and Pascal Robert of *This Is Revolution/The Real News Network*; Jared Ware and Josh Briond of *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism*; Rebecca Ann Wilcox and Roberto Sirvent of the *Political Theology Network* (Sirvent also works with the *Black Agenda Report*).

I am grateful to all who have taught me. I acknowledge that I still have much to learn.

Reprint Permissions

Chapters or segments of chapters first appeared in:

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