

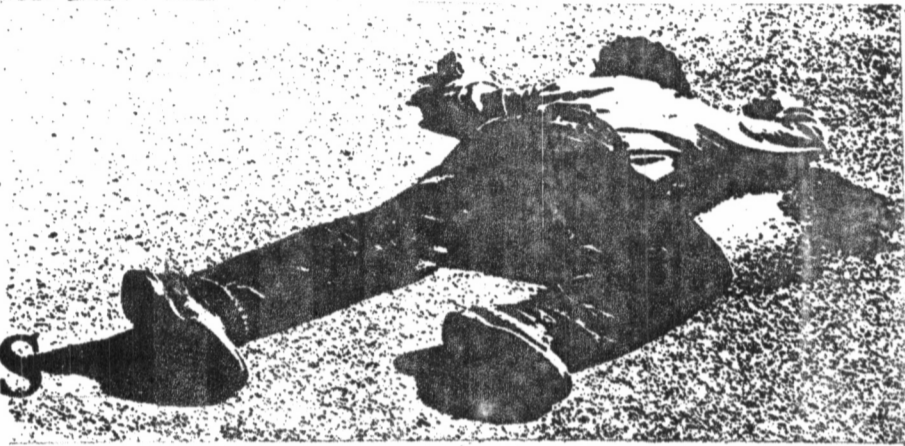
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BURNHAM OCT 1971

Soledad Brother: Prison Letters of George Jackson



WITH

**Margaret
Burnham**

childhood friend of, and
presently lawyer for
ANGELA DAVIS.

a speech given:

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1971

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AN OX FOR THE PEOPLE TO RIDE

A Speech by Margaret Burnham

Margaret Burnham is a childhood friend of Angela Davis, and is presently a member of the legal team working in Angela's defense.

The subject of her speech was SOLEDAD BROTHER: THE Prison Letters of George Jackson, by George Jackson, (Bantam Books, Inc., 1970, 4th printing).

* * * * *

The speech was delivered to attending members of Control, Conflict and Change, on Tuesday, October 12, 1971, at Central Methodist Church, Detroit, Michigan.

An Ox For The People To Ride was the second presentation of the second year program of Control, Conflict and Change, a contemporary education program sponsored by the Motor City Labor League and the Black Workers Congress.

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AN OX FOR THE PEOPLE TO RIDE

a discussion by
Margaret Burnham

Out of a people whose centuries-old life is the history of resistance, countless leaders of struggle, innumerable warriors, have emerged. Despite the most formidable obstacles imaginable, despite a whole nation's desire and design to crush their growth, to confine their potential, and to obscure their role, Black giants have taken their places as revolutionary leaders of a valiant, resisting people. Black people's culture and history, our present-day daily existence, is steeped in struggle; against the slave-trader who ripped us from native lands, we struggled; against the 17th century slave-master's whip, we struggled; to break the slave's chains which defied our humanity, we struggled; against the new wage slavery of the industrial era, against the thief who robbed us of our land and labor, North and South, we struggled; against the threat of death by lynch-mob, by starvation, by imperialist wars, we have always and do now continue to struggle. From out of this fighting tradition have come our leaders, borne and nurtured in struggle, each one a special thread woven into a splendid fabric which is the sum total of a glorious history of resistance.

Although the state whose existence it threatened has always sought to discount, ignore, and eliminate it, because it is rooted in a people's near-ancient culture of resistance, Black leadership has enjoyed a unique strength and resilience. Our history as a people is such that as long as Black people are oppressed and unfree, strong individuals will continue to emerge to give focus and inspiration to our thrust toward liberation.

A characteristic of Black leaders is their precise reflection - in their lives, their personal development, their political thought - of the dynamics of the experience of the oppressed. Mirrored in the Black leader's life is the torment, the contradictions, the quintessential pride, of the Black Everyman. It is precisely because within his own existence, in his own life experiences, are embodied the attributes of the Black experience, that the Black leader bears a profound relevance to his people's struggle. And his contribution to struggle lies exactly in his ability to super-impose on to his personal experience as a part of an oppressed people, a revolutionary overview, an historical context. To forge out of a bundle of harsh personal experiences a weapon for struggle; to transform his personal resentment into a commitment to resistance: this is the task of the revolutionary leader.

Moreover, his qualities as a leader are directly related to his ability to turn the experience of his own personal revolutionary development into an example for other members of the family of the oppressed. He who transforms his life story into a portrait of revolutionary development for the people to see and learn from is truly an historic leader.

Such a figure was Frederick Douglas, whose life's movement from embattled slave to free man to people's spokesman stood as a beacon for millions of other slaves who sought to shake loose their chains. So Malcolm X's reach out of the despairing and desperate circumstances of Black ghetto life which threatened to strangle him, past a total reliance on the spiritual and mystical, and on into profound political consciousness and commitment to struggle, was exposed for all to understand and profit from.

And such a people's warrior was George Lester Jackson. With his own life as the example, he pointed the way to the development of the revolutionary New Man. As important as he was as a penetrating, prophetic, political thinker, George's contribution lies equally in the model of courage and will which he provided with his very life to the would-be broken men, the doomed men, who inhabit the prisons of this country.

His predicament is their predicament; his destiny, their destiny; his enemies, theirs as well; and the answers which he wrought out of cold experience, and sculptured and tooled with the self-taught lessons of objective political realities, they view as meaningful for them as well. Herein lies George's greatness: his genius, his humanity, ~~lay~~ always exposed for all to see and draw from.

Although George passed most of his prison years in relative anonymity vis a vis the outside world, his teachings and his practice have almost always been a matter of legend to his brother prisoners. Through his book, Soledad Brother, millions more can witness the arduous path which George took from "misfit" - an identity imposed from without - to man, to revolutionary man. The book's real significance for progressives and revolutionaries, captive and free, lies not in its value as a fine, abstract literary opus - although that is one plane of George's genius - but in what it tells us about how to become better revolutionaries, about how a revolutionary fuses, within his own entity, theory and practice. It is from this perspective that I would like to open up the discussion of Soledad Brother.

I.

Before we embark on an exploration of George's evolution into a revolutionary leader, let us acknowledge the broad characteristics of the environment in which this development took place.

Back in 1871, an American court described the equivallance between the state prisoner and the state slave in this manner:

A convicted felon is one whom the law in its humanity punishes by confinement in the penitentiary instead of with death . . . For the time being, during the term of service in the penitentiary, he is in a state of penal servitude to the state. He has, as a consequence of his crime, not only forfeited his liberty, but all his personal rights, except those which the law in its humanity accords to him. He is, for the time being the slave of the state. Ruffin v. Commonwealth, 62 Va. (21 Gratt) 790 (1871).

Fourteen years earlier, the Supreme Court of the United States had warned Black men that they had "no rights that the white man was bound to respect." Dred Scott, 1857.

Although they have both since been officially repudiated, these are the two fundamental tenets which to this very day - a full century later - define the Black prisoner's status. As a Black he is born into an inferior class; when he becomes a captive of the state, his status as slave, non-entity, is utterly confirmed. As defined by this nation's law, custom, and history, a Black is less than a man; a Black prisoner is even lower on the scale of human worth. In the larger society, punishment of every kind awaits the Black who attempts to assert his manhood; caution, too, is the pass-word to survival for the Black prisoner, who must always wear the mark of the broken slave. Whatever ego he arrives with, no matter how fragile it might be, it is the function of the prison to divest him of it. George described the process this way:

No black will leave this place if he has any violence in his past, until they see that thing in his eyes. And you can't fake it, resignation, defeat, it must be stamped clearly across the face.

Early in his prison life, George determined to preserve his black humanity in the face of this double assault. As Black, but man, he wages the classic struggle to define his own essence, to cast aside white-imposed standards and ideals, and come into his own. He confronts the Black Everyman's predicament:

Isolated as we were, or are, from our land, our roots, and our institutions, no group of men have been so thoroughly terrorized, dehumanized, and divested of those things that from birth make men strong.

As prisoner, but man, his battle is to keep an intact self-respect:

Old slave. . . wants to go home, so do I, but I don't want to leave anything behind. Since my father didn't bequeath me much to begin with any further losses leave me with nothing.

Precisely how was this struggle conducted by George; what were its concrete dimensions; where did it lead him; what was its impact on those around him; and what are its implications for others who share his status? George's early letters to his parents, which describe his efforts to confirm - for himself and others - his identity as a Black man, provide a sensible starting point for discussion of this subject. These letters show how George protected and nurtured his manhood; how by converting his every act into a rejection of slave status and an affirmation of his manhood, he strove to be the "antithesis" - to use his word - of what prison defined him^m as.

In these early letters we can discern some sense of George's immense power as a human being as it is reflected in his seemingly super human ability to stretch the boundaries of his physical confinement to their outermost limits so as to be able to determine the quality and the direction of his own life. As a prisoner whose status is that of a slave, George wields absolutely no power over the external circumstances of his day-to-day existence. The object of his captors is to render him helpless - psychologically, physically, and emotionally - and to force his total dependence on them:

(O Wing) destroys the logical processes of the mind. A man's thought becomes completely disorganized. The noise, the madness streaming from every throat, frustrated sounds from the bars, metallic sounds from the walls, the steel trays, the iron beds bolted to the walls, the hollow sounds from a cast iron sink or toilet.

Bells dictate the prisoner's daily activity. Even with respect to the most mundane aspects of day to day life, the inmate is not permitted to make any decision that might concede his individuality. Ruchell Magee, when he testified in James McClain's Marin County trial in August 1970, was asked by the prosecutor what time it was when a certain event occurred. He told the court he had no conception of clock time: "Time? Time means absolutely nothing to me. All I know is one bell tells me when to get up, another when to eat." As was pointed out most recently by the rebels of Attica, who complained about the utter regulation of every detail of their lives by the guards, the bell regimen is designed for the sole purpose of producing automations, by completely divesting the prisoner of the power of personal decision-making.

In his book, George constantly speaks of his struggle to preserve a modicum of control over his life. He is continually staving off the personal disorientation, the disorganization of his mental processes:

Control over the circumstances that surround my existence is of first importance to me.

In the beginning, George perceived that the first step toward reversing his fate was to develop the strengths of the "true" Black man. To his mother he writes:

You conceived and Robert sired a man. Nothing can turn me from my resolve.

And again:

I want to be my black self, mentally healthy; I want to look anyone who addresses me in the eye.

From the very first moment of his captivity, he set out this course for himself. Despite the relentless monotony, the rigid conformity of prison life, he refused to let his personality, his mental faculties, or his body, deteriorate. As a Black man, not simply self-preservation, but self-determination, was his goal.

It is in this context that some of George's early negative attitudes toward other prisoners and toward women must be examined. It would appear that he disparages others - even those whom he knows are not his enemies - only to avoid the inevitable self-hate.

By tracing the development of George's attitudes in these two areas - himself in relationship to other prisoners and to women - we can get a glimpse of what, for George, it entailed to become a good revolutionary in prison.

It is easy to appreciate the circumstances which gave rise to some of George's negativism with respect to other prisoners. For in order to persevere over his real enemies, George had to fashion an ego which would be invulnerable.

Thus, the disdain which he at times expressed for his fellow prisoners is more a reflection of his struggle with his own manhood than it is a genuine comment about them. He calls them "cretins":

They have locked me up with a bunch of 20 year old cretins who don't know anything about the ways of the world, hate books, can't think, and won't listen.

George searched for a common denominator on which a relationship with the other prisoners could be built. In his early prison years, he could find very few who shared his insatiable passion for knowledge about the world in general and Black history in particular.

On another occasion George says:

I am surrounded here by fools, degenerates and phonies.

And then again, they are:

. . .grown men acting like high school girls.

As he concentrates on developing his own human potential, he associates less and less with other prisoners:

My life is slowly becoming one of complete alienation.
I talk to fewer convicts every day.

Early on, George understood the socio-economic matrix out of which the oppression of the Black prisoner arose:

I place the blame for the social ills that have caused us discomfort and unhappiness squarely upon the shoulders of those responsible: the people in control.

He pointed the finger of responsibility to the plunder and crimes of the ruling class:

I am deeply sorry that I ever told a lie, stole anything, robbed and cheated at anything - mainly because it is so much like conforming to western ways.

Thus he knew that the "cretin" he spoke of was the oppressed victim, that the "fools, degenerates, and phonies" were men wasted by the brutality of the system. Yet his intellectual appreciation of what gave rise to his and his fellow prisoners' plight yielded, on occasion, to the demand of his own fierce efforts to protect his integrity as a man. George saw many whom the prison had succeeded in reducing to "near-men"; his harsh criticism of them came from a fervent desire to avoid following their lot.

He had seen it happen to hundreds of others; as for himself, George would not permit the instinct for survival to overpower the essence of his manhood. He repeated it often:

It is not important to me how long I live. I think only of how I live, how well, how nobly.

And again:

Although I would very much like to get out of here in order to develop a few ideas that have occurred to me - although I would not like to leave my bones here on the hill - if it is a choice between that and surrendering the things that make me a man, the things that allow me to hold my head erect and unbowed, then the hill can have my bones.

For the convict whom he called "old slave" because he would not assert his rights for fear of losing his parole date; for the brother whom he called "cretin" because he had surrendered his mind; for the "fools, degenerates, and phonies", vanquished by the system outside or by the prison within - for these men who surrounded him he naturally expressed a slight contempt.

Lest I be misunderstood, let me hasten to observe here that, from the very first, the predominant quality of George's relationship with his fellow prisoners was not this contempt and self-alienation which I've just described, but rather a generosity and compassion which was unbound in its intensity. From the commencement of his term, George was a prison leader, a teacher and organizer. Some evidence of these qualities are the hundreds of anecdotes told by thousands of California prisoner and ex-convicts, of how, for example, George tutored some in math and helped others learn to read, of how he would share everything he had - books, money, ideas, - with other brothers.

Yet, with respect to the disparaging attitudes which he sometimes expressed, this is what is significant - as his political consciousness intensified George's criticism is displaced with an unqualified respect and love for these same men. He says in 1970:

Most of today's black convicts have come to understand that they are the most abused victims of an unrighteous order. . . Now with the living conditions of these places deteriorating, and with the sure knowledge that we are slated for destruction, we have been transforming into an implacable army of liberation. . . .

This then, is the love of the revolutionary man, the New Man, for his oppressed kin. This was the culmination of the development to the utmost of his individual strength of character and of his universal human qualities: George's metamorphosis from Man, Black Man, to Revolutionary Man, the conversion of universal human qualities to revolutionary virtues.

We witness a similar development with respect to George's attitudes toward women. Indeed, his approach toward women underwent an even more profound change with the intensification of his political consciousness. The views which he expresses about women in his early letters are manifestly male supremacist:

Women and children enjoy and need a strong hand poised above them. They need direction and someone to show concern for them. . .

In contradistinction to the "masculine" strength and will which he seeks to cultivate in himself, his father, and his brother, women are by nature and social expectation supposed to be weak, passive, even servile. He writes to his mother:

As a woman I can understand your being naturally disposed to servitude. I can understand your feelings but what I can't understand is why you would have me feel the same, considering that I am a man. Why have you always attempted to implant womanly ideas into my character?

Women have no intellect; brain work is men's work; women, entrapped by bourgeois concepts, can never become a revolutionary force:

You are a woman, you think like a bourgeois woman. This is a predatory man's world. The real world calls for a predatory man's brand of thinking. Your way of viewing the world is necessarily bourgeois and feminine. How could I, Robert, or Jon, or any of the men of our kind accomplish what we must as men if we think like bourgeois women, or let our women think for us.

More or less in the abstract - for George is dead, killed before he could be father to a child, husband to his woman - he theorizes in an early letter about what the role of women and family should be:

In the society of our fathers and in the civilized world today, women feel it their obligation to be ever yielding and obedient to their men. Life is purposely made simple for them because of their nature and they are happy. . . In the civilized societies the women do light work, bear children, and lend purpose to the man's existence. They train children in the ways of wisdom that history has shown to be correct. Their job is to train the children in their early life to be men or women, not confused psychotics! This is a big job, to train and propagate the race! Is this not enough? The rest is left to the men: government administration,

the providing of means of subsistence, and defense, or maintenance of life and property against any who would deprive us of it. . . The white theory of "the emancipated woman" is a false idea.

Thus, George at one time shared with many other black men, the myth - now also embraced by Washington's social engineers - that the responsibility for containing the Black man's will to resist, to meet repression with aggressiveness, "fell" in part at the feet of Black women. He considered the Black woman's role to be one of squelching the fighting spirit, of channelling black energies into, instead of against, the system which oppresses us, of fostering passivity in her sons as a response to oppression. A return to woman's "natural" role - as homemaker, servant to her man - he argues with his mother, would be a step toward regaining the proper balance within the Black family. For a time, he accepts the counter-revolutionary doctrine of the present-day cultural nationalist- that only the subservience of Black women to Black men will reverse seemingly distorted relationships within the Black family and propel the revolution forward.

From this distinctly backward and bourgeois concept about women and their role, George's views progressed toward an understanding of what gave rise to the myth of the so-called Black matriarch, and of what the role of woman should be in revolutionary struggle. In a 1970 letter to Angela Davis, he wrote:

I understand exactly what the woman's role should be.
(in revolutionary culture) The very same as the man's.
Intellectually, there is very little difference between male and female. The differences we see in bourgeois society are all conditioned and artificial.

No longer does George look upon women as innately inferior to men; rather, he analyses what he now appreciates is the Black woman's dilemma: for her sons, she wants, above all else, survival:

The Black mother wanted to see her son survive in a grim and murderous white male society.

And thus she encourages submissiveness, conformity, and accommodation as survival mechanisms. It is a bitter compromise with oppression, but what is her alternative? From long and awful experience, she knows that the Black who shows signs of life and a healthful aggressiveness invites the wrath of the oppressor; he risks imprisonment and even death. Shall she urge her children to duel with the wicked terror and brutality of the oppressor - a challenge which might end in their death - or shall she urge the far safer course of compromise and accommodation? Self-preservation impells her actions, not a love for oppression.

It seems apparent that the correct way for the Black mother's sons to avoid the oppressor's pitfalls is not to lapse into submissiveness, but to join together in a collective endeavor to resist oppression. What George calls the "get a diploma boy" or "earn you some money" syndrome is not an answer to the oppression of the ruling class precisely because it obscures the consciousness of the oppressed class, and holds up individual reconciliation with the oppressor as a solution to the oppression of the class. Thus, what the Black woman must teach her child is that his preservation lies not in his passive acceptance of an oppressive system, but in the aggressive steps which he takes collectively with others to defeat his oppressors. Counterposed to an individual response, George posits the necessity for the collective. And, significantly, he comes to view the Black woman herself as an essential participant in this collective effort. Her job does not end once she has identified the enemy for her children and educated them into

a culture of resistance. She also has an active contribution to make to the struggle. She also is a potential soldier and vanguard leader. Thus she bears the double responsibility of raising the resistance fighter and of participating in struggle herself.

In an interview which was conducted on July 28, 1970, and appeared in a local Eby Area newspaper, George briefly reanalyzes the women question. He reiterates his criticism of what he calls the over-protective Black woman:

In our case...it's the women who are going to have to stop emotionally oppressing their sons, and emotionally designating roles that further oppress...

and concludes that equality of sexes is possible, indeed, absolutely necessary, within a revolutionary culture:

...I think we are going to have to reconcile ourselves with the fact that from the smallest cell on up, we're going to have to relate man, woman, as equals, and it won't be easy.

but again cautions that such equality will come about only if women abandon a self-protective, possessive attitude with respect to themselves and their children in favor of a more aggressive revolutionary consciousness:

...the only way that a Black woman is ever going to be liberated is standing in the arms of a liberated man. And the only way that can take place is for her to raise a liberator, instead of a coward (...). ...the only way that the problem is going to be resolved is if women become more aggressive. And I'm not talking about aggressive in the sense of being counterproductive, and disruptive, I'm talking about coming up with ideas and valid contributions.

In a very recent letter written to a Black woman friend, George commented on the development of his own attitudes with respect to the female role:

...from reading my old letters you can see that I went through the classic bourgeoisie-feudalistic pains of withdrawal from motherism and in our case (Blacks) a particularly smothering motherism. I had to also save my brother, my father was beyond saving. The 'stay in your place, woman' was a response, true, but it was o-so-necessary. Don't forget that you are the first generation of revolutionary Black mamas...only together can we make history break its pattern.

At another point in the same letter, George again explained that the Soledad Brothers letters did not reflect his honest feelings on the subject of women, even when they were composed, but rather were written to serve the specific purpose of breaking loose his mother's hold on his brother, Jonathan.

In sum, George himself later repudiated what he calls the "male supremacy" attitudes expressed in his early correspondence; he reaffirms the critical importance of Black men and women struggling together; but posits as a precondition to the development of that struggle, the necessity for Black women to assume an aggressive stance

with respect to themselves, and to respect and nurture healthy, aggressive expression in their children. As he evolved along the path from man to revolutionary man, as he turned his own being into an "ox for the people to ride," George discarded the cultural nationalist view of the role of women, and embraced an ideology which positioned women as a central force and essential ingredient in revolutionary struggle.

In a typically poetic and poignant passage of a 1970 letter, George described the revolutionary woman whom he looked forward to embracing:

The only woman that I could ever accept is the one who would be willing to live out of a flight bag; sleep in a coal car, eat milkweed, bloodroot, wild greens, dandelions, a rabbit, a handful of rice. She would have to be willing to run and work all night and watch all day. She would bathe when we could, change clothes when we could. She would own nothing, not solely because she loved me but because she loved the principle, the revolution, the people.

May we never forget that our enemies made impossible George's union with this warrior-woman, and may we engage them in a struggle which will not end until our victory.

II

This brings us to the second half of this discussion of George Jackson's book. Having dwelled on his evolution as a revolutionary, let us now turn our attention to George's political thinking, keeping in mind, of course, that the two threads - his personal development and the evolution of his political thought - are inextricably related to one another.

As a profound political thinker, George's influence, both within the prisons and on the outside, is yet to be fully appreciated. It was George more than any other single individual who placed the stamp of socialist consciousness on the prison movement.

George himself always looked to socialism, even in the earliest years of his political development. His initiation into socialism came with an identification with the socialist countries of Africa and Asia, to whom he looked for a haven from the decadence of bourgeois capitalism.

In 1965, he wrote home to ask his father to send him the works of Mao and W. E. B. DuBois. He praised DuBois for leaving the United States for Ghana:

Right at the close of his eventful life (DuBois) gave up this life of toil, deprivation, and tears to join his own kind. He left the United States, went to Ghana, and wrote the Encyclopedia Africana.

In 1967, he wrote to Francis, his sister for Swahili and Arabic language books:

Next time you pass a bookstore ask about a book dealing with Swahili, a self-teaching Swahili book...also a good self-teaching book on Arabic.

George turned to Africa and Asia partially because in the early stages of his own political development he was pessimistic about the possibility of a Black-led socialist revolution occurring in this country. Black people, he thought, exhibited, as a result of centuries of oppression, a "fundamental lack of spirit" which stood in the way of the development of a revolutionary consciousness. He wrote in 1964:

Blacks here in the U.S. apparently do not care how well they live, but they are only concerned with how long they are able to live.

This pessimism later gave way to George's unyielding commitment to developing revolutionary socialist consciousness among Blacks in this country.

He was always engaged in a continuing dialogue with those on the outside with whom he communicated and with his fellow prisoners about the merits of socialism. He describes a conversation which he had with his father in 1967 about the "diabolical dog - capitalism." With the rare combination of simplicity and profound incisiveness so typical of George, he described for his father the capitalist system's inherent, inevitable contradictions:

Didn't it raise pigs and murder Vietnamese? Didn't it glut and starve most of us? Didn't it build housing projects that resemble prisons and luxury hotels and apartments that resemble the Hanging Gardens on the same street? Didn't it build a hospital and then a bomb? Didn't it erect a school and then open a whore house? For every church didn't it construct a prison? For each new medical discovery didn't it produce as a byproduct 10 new biological warfare agents? Didn't it aggrandize men like Hunt and Hughes and drawf him?

At first, he placed the blame for the crime of capitalism and all its incidents on the European, whose essence, he wrote, represented the antithesis of the socialist spirit:

The events in the Congo, Vietman, Malaya, Korea, and here in the U.S. are taking place all for the same reason. The commotion, the violence, the struggles in these areas and many more spring from one source, the evil, and malign, possessive and greedy Europeans.... The attempt to impose their theories on the world for obvious reasons of self-gain. Their philosophy concerning government and economics has an underlying tone of selfishness, possessiveness, and greediness because their character is made up of these things. They can't see the merit in socialism and communism because they don't possess the qualities of rational thought, generosity, and magnanimity necessary to be part of the human race, part of a social order, part of a system.

However, George later abandoned this belief in the European's innate unfitness for socialism, and more clearly perceived the wholly class origins of capitalism and its most dastardly offspring, racism. With ever increasing clarity, he identified the class dimensions and implications of the Black Liberation struggle, and endeavored to translate that consciousness into concrete political activity.

Directly attributable to George's early anti-capitalist consciousness was his incisive analysis of the dynamic of racism as it manifested itself within the prison and in the larger society. Himself subjected to the most vicious instances of the disease while in prison, he grew to know every contour of racism, every characteristic of the racist. It is nearly impossible to underestimate the manner in which prison authorities rely on racism as a many-faceted phenomenon to run their institutions. It is no exaggeration to say that it was George who developed an analysis and an approach to this particular feature of prisoner oppression which has put the entire prison movement in a forward gear.

Tom Wicker, New York Times journalist and Attica observer, wrote in the Times after the September 13 massacre:

The racial harmony that prevailed among the prisoners - it was absolutely astonishing (...) that prison yard was the first place I have ever seen where there was no racism.

The seed of the racial harmony of which Wicker spoke in September 1971 was planted by George Jackson back at San Quentin Prison in 1964. In that year, George took a theretofore unheard of step and started inter-racial Political Education classes in the San Quentin yard.

Of all of California's prisons, racism, race wars, and racial stratification are perhaps most intense in San Quentin, where, back in 1964 and even to this very day, Hitler's Helpers and other nazi-like groups flourish. The membership of these gangs is built up by the prison guards; George describes in the book the method by which they seek out recruits from among the new white prisoners.

The impact of the racist prisoner's attack on the Black prisoner, intended to devastate, to annihilate an already meager ego, and also meant as a challenge, a death-threat, is nowhere more incisively and lucidly depicted than in George's book. The feces in the face, the urine and ground glass in the food, the empty seats in the rain shelter while blacks stand in the rain, the prison television room segregated like the old southern movie theatre: all assume a compelling and stark reality in George's book.

The common racist oppression which they suffered created a natural bond between the Black prisoners; together, they devised methods of resistance and self-defense. Black groups like the San Quentin Capone Gang were formed as a counter-force to the white para-nazi organization. Although the immediate occasion for their combination was to combat the brutal, often even deadly, attacks of the white prisoners and guards, under the leadership of George and others, these groups developed a much broader political scope. George brought to the newly organizing black prisoner population a penetrating analysis of the function which racism plays in perpetuating the suppression of the entire prisoner class. Armed with the science of Marxism-Leninism, George illuminated for Brown, Black and white prisoners alike, the common matrix of their circumstances, and identified racism as a purposefully fostered divisive element and as the primary instrument of their continued subjugation.

Early in his own prison experience, George was dubbed as a troublemaker by his keepers, and his name became known throughout the prison community merely because he dared to challenge the system's policies of racial hierarchy and stratification. George perceived the battle against segregation and racial inequity within the prison not only as a traditional method of forcefully asserting the just rights of the Black prisoner, but as a frontal and fundamental assault on the very fiber of the prison system. That is to say, appreciating

its classic place as a weapon in the hands of ruling circles to break and destroy class unity, George properly came to view racism as a factor of even greater importance in the context of the prisoner-slave environment, where it is the king-pin in the maintenance of the prison status quo, the primary barrier to prisoner unity, and prisoner class consciousness, and therefore the pivotal issue around which to wage a potentially revolutionary struggle.

Hence, the political significance of the act of integrating the television room was not fully reflected in the accomplished deed, although that, too, was important; more significantly, the brave act had a distinctly insurrectionary character to it, inasmuch as it was a blow struck at the prison system's life-line. Their reservation of the severest penalties for George and others who challenge racist practices reveals the prison authorities' appreciation of these anti-racist, anti-segregationist acts as a serious form of revolt.

In the report of his 1970 legislative investigation of Soledad Prison, State Sen. Mervyn Dymally of Los Angeles described an incident between a Black and white prisoner which took place in Soledad. George, the Black, and a well-known white nazi-type were both released simultaneously in the prison yard, in an apparent attempt to provoke a fight that would hopefully end in George's death. George knew that his main enemy was not the misled soul who faced him in the yard, but was the man who sat, poised and ready to shoot to kill, in the gun-tower above his head. Mouths fell open with shock all around him when George met his intended adversary in the yard with an outstretched hand. That handshake symbolized an alliance, however tenuous and temporary its beginnings, which the prison authorities feared more than anything else. Its significance, foreshadowing as it did the end to the racial strife which served as the primary nourishment for prison oppression, was lost on no one, neither guard nor prisoner.

Today, race war continues to be the major obstacle to the prisoner unity so necessary for successful prison strikes and rebellions. However, prisoners everywhere now identify white racism as the tool of the class enemy. This development must be attributed to the teachings and practices of George Lester Jackson. It is no exaggeration to say that Attica would probably never have occurred when it did had it not been for George's early contribution.

As for its role in the broader society of which prison is a microcosm, George described racism as "a fundamental characteristic of monopoly capitalism." It is important to remember that George always viewed the fight against racism within the context of the struggle for revolutionary socialism. To be successful, war had to be waged against racism and for the socialist alternative simultaneously. George considered erroneous the thesis which some hold that white racism, in its pervasiveness and brutality poses an insurmountable barrier to the class alliances and solidarity which are a prerequisite to a Marxist revolution. Rather, he considered racism to present a major focus for struggle for all on the left who seek radical change. In his essay entitled, "Towards the United Front," he wrote:

If a united left is possible in this country, the major obstacle must be considered racism, white racism to be blunt. (...) I deny the existence of Black racism, outright, by fiat, I deny it. Too much blood has flowed between the chasm that separates the races, it's fundamentally unfair to expect the Black man to differentiate at a glance the self-accepting racist, the self-interdicting racist, and the

unconscious racist. The apologist's term, 'Black Racism' is either a healthy defense reflex on the part of the sincere Black partisan attempting to deal with the realistic problems of survival and elevation, or the racism of the government stooge organs.

He goes on to describe the nature of the fight against racism which must be conducted:

As black partisans we must recognize and allow for the existence of all three types of racists, as we accept ourselves in relation thereto, but all must still be viewed as the effect of the system. It is the system that must be crushed first, for it continues to manufacture new and deeper contradictions of both class and race. Once it is gone, we may be able to address in depth the effects of its presence but to a great extent, we must combat racism while we are in the process of destroying it.

And he concludes:

Black, Brown, White are victims, fight! At the end of this massive collective struggle we will uncover our new man; he is a creation of the process, the future, he will be better equipped to wage the real struggle, the permanent struggle after the revolution - the one for new relationships between men.

Having examined - albeit cursorily - George's approach to racism, let us turn our attention to his views on the development of the revolutionary movement. Specifically, in his view, how does one go about making a revolution? Who are likely to be the participants in revolutionary struggle here in this country? How will we sustain a revolutionary structure and culture before the moment of the ultimate confrontation? And, finally, what is the proper place of violence in the development of this struggle?

One theme is worthy of repetition before we proceed to explore these questions. Central to all of George's thinking is his belief that only a socialist revolution can eradicate existing social ills such as racism, as these are the inevitable consequence of a distorted system of private property. The goal of the revolution must be to establish economic equality, to dismantle existing hierarchical relationships and restructure property relationships. Always, our fight is for socialism.

As to precisely how to pull off such a socialist revolution in this country, some of George's later and as yet unpublished works are very specific.

As a starting point, it should be said that George is convinced of the possibility of ultimately waging a successful revolutionary struggle in this country. With respect to the participants in such a revolution, George concedes the classic Marxist formulation that the "proletariat must have a main role" in the class struggle. Yet George qualifies this formulation by pointing to the seemingly reactionary character of the white working class as a whole, pervaded as it is by racist attitudes, tied as it is to ruling class oriented labor leaders. The proletariat, George says,

...is still the most revolutionary class, and still the real gravedigger of capitalist society. However, the notion that they alone can or must carry the revolution is too ridiculous and simplistic for any serious consideration at all...

Having affirmed their critical role, however, George never really develops the way in which the involvement of the white proletariat in revolutionary struggle will actually be expressed.

George's primary concern is with projecting the role of Black people, who are, in his words, "the principal reservoir of revolutionary potential" in America.

George identifies three distinguishable factors which converge to place the major burden of socialist revolution on the shoulders of Black people. To begin with, George points out Black people's "desperate historical relation to the violence of the productive system." Thus it is from the racist-inspired super-exploitation of Blacks at the point of production that George deduces the vanguard role of Black people. That they comprise at least one third of the industrial working force is a not insignificant fact in George's conception of the role of Blacks. For it is through the Black worker that the attack at the point of production can occur.

Secondly, Black people's long history of resistance to the barbarities of the capitalist order, of which racism is the most outstanding example, well suits them for their revolutionary destiny. For if it is racism which has most graphically exposed the exploitative character of American capitalism as a whole, it is Black people who have proved that it can be rejected and resisted.

And thirdly, the natural relationship which Black people have to the Third World, the part of the globe most intensely animated by revolutionary movements today, is an important incentive for Blacks to fulfill their revolutionary responsibility here in this country. Throughout, George stresses the point that the revolution in this country must of necessity have an international dimension. As we have already pointed out, his first initiation into revolutionary theory and practice came from his observations of what was happening in the Third World.

Having established the pivotal role of Black people, let us now explore George's thinking as to how we tap this "principal reservoir of revolutionary potential," how committed revolutionaries, the vanguard, propel a progressively developing consciousness forward to the point of the ultimate class confrontation. There are two facets to this mission: the what and the why of revolution on the one hand, and the how on the other.

As to how to create revolutionary consciousness among Black people, a good starting point would be to recall Lenin's formulation of a fundamental law of revolution:

For a revolution to take place, it is not enough for the exploited and oppressed masses to realize the impossibility of living in the old way and demand changes; for a revolution to take place it is essential that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. It is only when the "lower classes" do not want to live in the old way and the "upper classes" cannot carry on in the old way that the revolution can triumph. (Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder.)

Thus two essential elements are the prerequisites of a revolution: the objective conditions affecting the lives of the ruling class is important, but as important is the state of mind of the ruled. An oppressed class not conscious of the need for the socialist alternative can find itself wedded to a social order more repressive than bourgeois capitalist democracy if it does not grab the reins of power and resolve the profound internal political and economic crises of the capitalist order in favor of its own class.

Let us first turn to George's theory of how revolutionaries bring the masses to the "realization of the impossibility of living in the old way," or as George himself put it, "to break the old behavioral patterns that have repeatedly won bourgeois capitalism, its imperialism and fascism, life after death over the last several decades."

George is convinced that the only way of sustaining a revolutionary movement is to begin to lay the foundation for revolutionary institutions as well as revolutionary values in the process of organizing for the revolution. To do this they must be able to relate to concrete indications of what the socialist society will be all about. There must exist among the oppressed people fully revolutionary institutions even though state power remains in the hands of the ruling class.

It should be noted here that in adhering to such a strategic outlook, George was following the tradition of virtually every successful revolutionary struggle. For instance, the whole system of workers' soviets which preceded that actual seizure of power in the USSR was predicated on this idea. There existed liberated areas of China in which people were concretely reorganizing their economic and political structures along socialist lines long before the government of Chiang Kai Shek was overthrown. The same is true of Cuba, and liberated areas are presently to be found in Mozambique and other African countries in which guerrilla warfare is being waged.

Although it differs in some respects from these historical examples of pre-revolutionary structures, George's notion of what he terms a communal "infrastructure" for the revolution is a first cousin to the more typical 'liberated zone.' Central to George's theory is the view that the prime vehicle of organizing and educating masses of Black people, from the very earliest stages to the final stages, is the erection of a Black revolutionary culture. An "infrastructure", as George labels it, must be built in the community which will accomplish a number of objectives simultaneously. First of all, it is to be founded on the principle that people can be reached only when their own needs are at stake. This principle calls for the development of a network of institutions which directly meet the most basic needs of the people. Food, clothing, health, and education are the needs which immediately come to mind.

Functionally, George seems to view these institutions as vehicles to draw the masses into a new unity through an increasing degree of self-sufficiency. It is the people themselves who are to operate these institutions, and each institution will serve a highly political purpose. In the process of working with a food program or obtaining its products, one is initiated into a culture of struggle. The infrastructure is the breeding ground for new revolutionaries; political education must occur on every different level.

Some comparison between the wide variety of existing movement counter institutions and George's infrastructure might illuminate our discussion at this point.

For example, functionally, George's infrastructure differs from the Panther survival programs, the primary purpose of which is to "serve the people." In its emphasis on the internal development of political consciousness, the infrastructure concept more resembles the concept

of the parallel institution, such as lay behind the early development of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the Freedom Schools of the south. Even this is not a precise analogy, however, since a critical difference lies both in the premise upon which the different organizations are organized as well as in their ultimate goals. The MFDP-type parallel institutions developed largely as a response to the status of Black Mississippians as a people locked out of society's conventional institutions. And, an even more important difference, the organization did not look to revolutionary change as the ultimate answer to the social inequities which sprung it into existence; rather, its ultimate goal was its own integration back into a more equitable, but not radically altered, society.

Nor are the institutions of the revolutionary culture to be confused with the all-Black schools and other structures which have emerged as an outgrowth of cultural nationalist trends within the Black Liberation Movement. George was explicit in his criticism of cultural nationalism as a no-struggle program:

During the nationalist or contrived nationalist period of the collective oppressed mentality, the movement is of course frozen, static. This is the level of development favored by the oppressor, the artless, empty ideals of the pseudo-nation, love and respect for a flag, a nationalist song or beat, tempo, fervent belief in a bond or organization that doesn't exist. (Struggle and the Black Man)

But that takes us slightly off the track. Let us return for a moment to the concept of the liberated territory, as exemplified by the free zones of pre-revolutionary Cuba and China, and which we compared earlier to George's theory of revolutionary culture in this country. This comparison must be qualified somewhat, for in a least two areas, the development of liberated territory, or of revolutionary institutions such as the soviet of pre-revolutionary Russia, differ from the infrastructure concept. First of all, in the Soviet Union, in China and in Cuba, the construction of revolutionary institutions occurred in the period which immediately preceded the seizure of state power. These institutions emerged only after the masses had already experienced a long period of struggle against the rulers, and had consequently achieved a far higher level of consciousness and organization than Black people in general have today. Or, if consciousness was not so broad and at such a high level, then there existed in those countries a situation where an area could be physically isolated from the attacks of the oppressors as well as from the influence of its ideologists and its political system. Such is the situation which presently prevails in, for example, Mozambique.

Neither condition exists in the Black community today, and the 'infrastructure' would of necessity assume an entirely different character - that of initiating an essentially uncommitted community into struggle - than its historical cousin, the soviet or liberated zone.

It would appear that the progress of the revolutionary movement could be measured by the extent to which greater numbers of people are absorbed into this community of struggle through the transformation of their material life, their consciousness, their values, and even their psychological make-up.

At this juncture, we should examine the relationship of George's Black revolutionary culture - which takes precedence over all other forms of organizing methods - to the more traditional approach to developing consciousness - through mass activities such as rallies, demonstrations, general strikes and the like. George concedes that:

The effectiveness of rallies and mass demonstrations has not come to an end.

But he continues:

Today the rally affords us the opportunity to affect intensive organization of the projects and programs that will, taken together, form the infrastructure of our communes.

In other words, in its relationship to the internal commune, the function of the mass rally and demonstration is quite different from its traditional function. The goal is not at all to force certain concessions from the system, but rather to draw larger numbers of people into revolutionary struggle.

George does not envisage the mass movement as a force which grows stronger and increasingly revolutionary as it realizes its own power to rip off meaningful concessions from the state. Nor does he even allow for the possibility of forcing concrete changes from the system itself. George completely discounts the room for maneuver which still exists in the system, and as a consequence of what in my opinion is his erroneous estimate of the demands which can yet be realized, he places no faith in the power of the united masses to win meaningful gains. The basic thrust of any attempt to politically organize masses has to be to permit the development of a movement which can become progressively aware of its own power to affect the existing order of things. In George's view, the recognition of power emerges not from mass struggle but from the attainment of self-sufficiency, from a retreat into the revolutionary infra-structure, rather than from a confrontation with the ruling class via mass activity.

This brings us to the question, how does the revolutionary culture relate to its class enemy, how do the infrastructures make for sharper, more intense, class struggle? Here we arrive at George's theories on violence and its role in the development of consciousness and revolutionary struggle.

A good starting point is with Marx himself. George wholeheartedly embraces the Marxist notion that the revolution, whenever it might occur, is inconceivable except as a violent confrontation between the ruling class and the oppressed class. It is fitting to recall here that it was Marx who said that "force is the mid-wife of every society pregnant with a new one."

But while violence is the unavoidable consequence of the inevitable class clash, it plays another role as well in the revolutionary process. With respect to violent revolution, Marx had this to say in German Ideology:

. . . revolution is necessary. . . not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew. . . (p. 69)

What is implied here - and George expressed this view on many occasions - is that the role of violence in revolution also has a re-invigorating effect on the participants. It restores their self-confidence and in general has the cathartic kind of psychological impact that Fanon described in the first section of Wretched of the Earth.

Hence, in George's view, not only is revolution itself inherently violent, but violence plays a pivotal role at all stages on the

road to revolution. From the very first stages of building the movement, the masses must be schooled in the inevitability of violence. This is a crucial task of consciousness-raising. The people must come to accept the fact that as regards violence, "there is no alternative or the alternative is less inviting than a fight."

At this juncture, it is important to recall that the violence we are speaking of now is that of the oppressor. This is always where George starts the discussion. His ideas on violence are tied to his theory that the present state of affairs in United States political rule is such that it will respond to any attempt to oppose it with all the terroristic weapons of the classic fascist regime. The fascist state - which George considers presently to exist - employs violence to the extreme degree. Black people can expect to be its victims whether or not they fight back. "Blacks have been doing all the dying anyway. . ."

This brings us back to the question of how the revolutionary infrastructure survives in the face of state violence. In the very process of the emergence of the revolutionary culture, it will find itself under attack.

They kill Blacks who seriously advocate revolution.
Blacks who attack property relationships are slated
for either the graveyard or the prison camp.

Thus it must be expected that the emerging institutions of the revolutionary culture will be attacked in any number of ways. The attacks will range in form from legal harassment such as shutting up buildings because of housing regulations to the armed military siege.

This is a crucial element in the struggle: the moment of repression. Repression is not just something to be anticipated; rather it will constitute an important factor in the development of consciousness.

A show of organizational skill and valid anti-establishment activity will always bring on the violence from the fascist.

Precisely at this point, the masses will be able to perceive the nature of the system, for it will be showing its real face.

There is another aspect to violence as it characterizes the interaction between the oppressor and the revolutionary group. The violence of the oppressor must never go unanswered. It is to be met with the limited violence of the new community: what George terms 'selective retaliatory violence.' This violence, to be carried out not in a haphazard, random manner, but to be planned and executed by the small foco-motor guerrilla group (and we will define their role in a moment) is highly political in purpose. For it reinforces the consciousness of self-sufficiency if there can be an "eye for an eye", and at the same time it prepares the people for the ultimate form of violent revolution. It teaches the people that:

we must prepare now for armed confrontation; by
no stretch of the imagination can we hope to over-
throw so determined an enemy without force.

George has often expressed the necessity to create a military infrastructure capable of executing this task:

Some of us are going to have to take courage in hand
and build a hard revolutionary cadre for selective
revolutionary violence.

This brings us to the second element in Lenin's equation which we discussed earlier. Revolution can only occur, Lenin tells us, "when the lower classes do not want to live in the old way and the upper classes cannot carry on in the old way." What conditions make it impossible for the upper classes to carry on in the old way, and how do they come about?

Here, then, is where George's theory diverges from the classic Marxist thinking. The point of emphasizing that revolution can only be placed on the agenda when the upper classes cannot carry on in the old way is that revolution presupposes an objective crisis. That is to say, a profound systemic crisis which results from the contradictions within the old order itself is equally as important as the revolutionary thrust of the oppressed and working classes.

George accepts the idea that the ruling class must not be able to carry on in the old way, but - and this is crucial - he says that it is possible for the mass movement, directly expressing itself in the activity of the foco-motor military unit, to bring into being a situation wherein the ruling class cannot continue to rule in the accustomed manner.

He does not believe that there is such a thing as rigidly defined "objective conditions" for revolution. Rather he believes, with the Tupamaros of Uruguay, that it is possible for revolutionaries to create objective conditions of revolution. He places far more emphasis on the emergence of a force capable of pulling off a revolution than on the evolution of objective conditions. And indeed, it would appear that the development of the revolutionary culture is precisely an attempt to create objective conditions for revolution.

It is in this connection that retaliatory violence becomes a critical tactic to be employed in creating the revolution. After George used the metaphor from Mao that a little spark can lead to a prairie fire.

We find in the program of the Tupamaros a description of the indispensable role of the military cadre in sparking revolutionary struggle with which George would agree:

. . .the armed group can help to create the revolutionary opportunity or, in the words of Raul Castro, can be the little motor that starts the big motor of the revolution. The armed group keeps creating, or helping to create, the subjective conditions for revolution from the moment it starts to prepare, but, above all, from the moment it begins to act.
(Tupamaros' Answers To Thirty Questions)

They go on to describe the role of the foco-motor in the Cuban revolution:

Instead of the long process of forming a party of the masses, a guerilla foco of a dozen men was installed, and this action generated consciousness, organization, and revolutionary conditions which culminated in a true Revolution. In the face of the accomplished revolutionary act, all true revolutionaries saw themselves obliged to follow.

Their program differs from that of other left organizations in Uruguay in that the Tupamaros believe that manifestos and position papers do not make the revolution, but "fundamentally it is revolutionary actions which lead to revolutionary situations."

Hence it falls primarily to the military to create, through actions, the conditions for revolution. It is important to point out here that George's position is that the political character of

the struggle is never to be subordinated to the military; rather the military is the natural expression of political development.

The primacy of politics will always remain inviolate as long as the military reads, picks up and works well within the prevailing political matrix.

The military is at once the expression of ever heightening community consciousness and of communal cohesiveness among the masses of Black people. In other words, the revolutionary community grows through resisting the repression which will inevitably greet it, which resistance brings on greater repression, and so on, with an ever-increasing level of violence, until a point is reached where a stage of guerilla warfare prevails.

III

Conclusion

I do not think one can overestimate the profound influence which George has had, both through his writings, his teachings, and his practice - on the prison movement as we know it today. Despite the prison authorities' attempts to ban his book from their institutions, and the current effort to slander his name and obscure his eminence as a leader of Black people, George's name is on the lips of prisoners all across the country. His murder triggered strikes and rebellions in numerous prisons everywhere. The first word out of Attica was that the superb rebellion there was inspired by the news of George's death. Only a few weeks ago, inmates struck throughout the entire Massachusetts system, demanding better living conditions and cessation of brutality within the prisons. They told the press that their action was an expression of their commitment to the spirit and ideals of George Jackson, and was dedicated to his memory.

On the occasion of his death, tributes poured into the Black Panther offices from prisoners all over California who had known George. All attested to George's role as a selfless, untiring, warrior in behalf of the people. Brothers whom George had taught to read and write, those to whom he had introduced Marx, Lenin, Mao, and Fanon, others like Ulysses McDaniel whose plight he drew the outside movement's attention to - all have responded to his murder by rededicating themselves to the principles which George died defending.

A fitting conclusion to this discussion is provided by the following eulogy included in a court petition filed just two weeks ago by the George Jackson Brigade - twenty-seven comrades from San Quentin's Adjustment Center - which expresses their undying love and respect for their slain comrade:

We do not mourn or weep for our fallen Comrade. He - the Dragon - has instilled in our hearts and minds the courage and knowledge to carry on his ideals, in his dynamic spirit. He has made the ultimate sacrifice and his black blood is the nourishment that gives us - the baby dragons - the strength to struggle against the overwhelming odds of repression. We shall avenge him, for we are the ones who knew and loved him the most. We shared his joy and sorrow, his pain and pleasure. We are a part of him and he a part of us.