IN THE BELLY
special issue

The Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition
November 2020

DEAR COMRADES

This is not Volume 3 of *In The Belly*, it's a special issue. While ITB is regularly written primarily by imprisoned people, Editor-In-Chief Stephen Wilson wanted to share this document with you. It is a roundtable, a series of interviews, that he conducted with a group of non-incarcerated comrades who have spent a long time writing and thinking about the Black Radical Tradition.

In these interviews, which were published online by the African American Intellectual History Society on their blog *Black Perspectives*, Stevie and his partners in conversation think about the relationship between confinement and the Black Radical Tradition, or what Stevie calls the "Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition" (abbreviated as IBRT). This version includes sections which were not published on the blog.

Stevie, and the whole ITB editorial group, strongly invite responses to what you read in these pages. Please send us questions, critiques, praise, expansions on these ideas, interventions, and even raw thoughts and reactions. This text is the record of a conversation, and without incarcerated Black perspectives, according to the ideas developed collaboratively in this document, it is an unfinished work. An open conversation. We hope you will read it, engage with it, share it, and push it farther by writing a response.

We are sorry that it's been a minute. As we find our footing, we are trying to work in a way that puts intentional leadership over urgency. As you know, when that leadership is held captive, the delays of mail inspection, email surveillance, lockdown, personal retaliation, and the hole don't respect our self-imposed deadlines. But we're working, and we're receiving all your beautiful writing. Keep it coming. We'll have Volume 3 out by the end of the year.
Yours in struggle,
In The Belly

Cover art by Xavier Clay.

INTRO
IMAGINING A NEW WORLD WITHOUT CAGES

An interview with Stephen Wilson by Dan Berger

Dan Berger, DB // What lead you to convene this roundtable, and what did you learn from doing it? How do you see yourself operating within or extending this tradition?

Stephen Wilson, SW // When I was invited to contribute to Black Perspectives, I initially planned an essay on the need to employ an intersectional analysis in discourses on prisons and policing. My imagined readers were others working within the Imprisoned Black Radical Intellectual Tradition. But then I realized my actual audience would mainly be "free-world" Black intellectuals. Are these folks aware of the work of imprisoned Black radical intellectuals? Did they recognize the Imprisoned Black Radical Intellectual Tradition? I decided to convene the roundtable as a way of introducing or reintroducing Black intellectuals to this tradition. My desire was to encourage engagement with and connection to the tradition and its practitioners. What I learned was that, like every successful endeavor, it won't happen without the support of others. This lesson is applicable to the actual logistics of producing this roundtable and the the preservation, production and expansion of the Imprisoned Black Radical Intellectual Tradition. Without support and connections across the walls, I could never have pulled this roundtable together, and I couldn't do the work I am doing within the tradition.

DB // What threats or barriers do you see to the tradition today?

SW // I see my work within the tradition as mainly a corrective or intervention. I continually challenge those

working within the tradition to expand their definitions of prisoner, freedom, community and blackness. Some folks working within the tradition have truncated definitions that ignore the lived experiences of marginalized persons. Their myopic views of liberation erase so many imprisoned people from discourses on prisons and policing. The solutions they propose not only provide no relief for marginalized prisoners, but also harm so many prisoners who come from communities that exist on the margins and in the interstices of society. I hope my work expands the concerns and foci of the tradition.

DB // One thing that emerges from the conversation is about connections across the walls. What ways do you see, or wish, that people outside participated in or supported this tradition inside? What do you think people on the outside should know or learn about what is happening inside?

SW // The barriers/threats to the Imprisoned Black Radical Intellectual Tradition can be summarized into three categories:

The PIC. A learned prisoner is an affront to the PIC. Those of us working within the tradition continually find ourselves confronted with and challenging policies and procedures designed to frustrate our connections to the free world. Whether it be outright censorship/denial of materials or intimidation tactics (shakedowns/threats of solitary confinement), the PIC relentlessly works to eradicate the Imprisoned Black Radical Intellectual Tradition.

Prisoners. We have yet to learn how to truly work across differences. We allow difference to become division. This only helps the PIC. The Imprisoned Black Radical Intellectual Tradition has different tendencies. But the ultimate goal is one: liberation. Too often, we forget that and commit lateral violence. Another issue with prisoners is

that we have allowed ourselves to become distracted by the jailhouse “amenities” the PIC dangles in front of us. We spend more time playing games than feeding our minds. That is just what the PIC wants. You leave the same way you came in. So they will keep a light on for you. our minds. That is just what the PIC wants. You leave the same way you came in. So they will keep a light on for you.

Allies. So much of the American Prison Movement has moved online. This effectively precludes prisoner participation. Whether it is actual discussions, publication, or events, social media-only activism shuts us out. We need allies to remember this point and find ways to include us. Without our participation, the picture will always be incomplete. We have the most intimate knowledge of imprisonment and policing. The move online coupled with the dwindling of print publications works against the Imprisoned Black Radical Intellectual Tradition.

As mentioned above, accessibility is a major issue. I wish people outside would remember those without internet access and find ways to include them. Also, using their platforms to amplify the voices and works of those working within the tradition is important. I know that without outside supporters providing me space on their platforms and at events, my work would not be known.

I want people outside to know that work is being done inside. We are imagining a new world, a world without cages. We are theorizing and practicing what we want the world to be. Get familiar with our work.

DAY 1
HISTORIES/FOUNDATIONS

Stephen Wilson, SW // What is the Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition?

Dylan Rodríguez, DR // Black radicalism is the Black radicalism created and mobilized under conditions of imprisonment and incarceration. As soon as the colonial chattel project occupied Africa, the carceral Black radical tradition emerged—rebellions against the trade and transport of captive and enslaved Africans are the foundation of the broader Black radical tradition, and the original sites of incarcerated/imprisoned Black radicalisms.

Joy James, JJ // 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—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 the capacity of our traditions.

Toussaint Losier, TL // In his brief preface to the first edition of *Black Marxism* (2000), Cedric Robinson lays claim to the Black Radical Tradition as much more than simply the ideas that emerged out of past struggles for freedom. Rather, it had more to do with how we, as Black people, continue to live through a shared sense of that past. This tradition was, he wrote, "the collective wisdom" that has emerged out of the habits, ways of life, and experiences forged in these struggles. More than an intellectual legacy, it was, for Robinson, a collectively-held historical consciousness. Built up over time, through small acts of resistance and epic moments of revolt, it was "a construct possessing its own terms, exacting its own truths." It was, as he would explain in later writings, best understood as a living culture of liberation. Following Robinson, the imprisoned Black Radical Tradition might be thought of as both a current within this broader culture of liberation as well as its own unique tributary. While, it is certainly part of a larger whole, this culture has at times also branched off, developing more and more on its own terms, as prisons – these sometimes-racially, but always sex-segregated carceral institutions – have been used to suppress Black peoples' struggles. Put another way, if the social function of convict lease camps and supermax prisons hasn't just been to control crime, but also to contain mass disruptions to the prevailing social order, disruptions caused, in part, by Black peoples' struggles for freedom, then that containment has made prison a terrain of protracted struggle that has at times given rise to this tradition as its own unique culture of liberation.

Ori Burton, OB // Black radicals like Queen Mother Audley Moore, Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, and many others have long theorized a normalized condition of black incarceration in the western hemisphere. This suggests that within the context of western modernity, the Black Radical Tradition has always been an imprisoned radical tradition. This being the case, I find myself asking the inverse of this question: What is the *non-imprisoned* Black radical tradition?

Is there a tradition of radical thought and action that emerges from a condition of Black mobility, self-determination, and freedom from the state violence of racial capitalism? Cedric Robinson says yes. He maintains that the extractive and carceral regimes to which we have been subjected over the past five centuries are not the origin point of the Black radical tradition, that in fact, Black radicalism precedes the rending of African people from our indigenous land and our violent transformation into commodities. Consequently, Black radical praxis is not reducible to resistance. Its radicalism emerges not as a result of the countervailing force it presents to racial capitalism, but through the ways in which the bearers of the tradition look beyond oppressive regimes, beyond what Robinson calls "the exigencies of specific locales and of immediate social causes" in order to summon ancestral resources that were not eradicated despite the best efforts of our enemies. In excess of resistance Black radicalism offers a productive, world-making praxis that Robinson calls, the "ontological totality."

But to be perfectly honest I don't really know what the content of Black radical politics is in the affirmative terms I've just laid out. It's much easier to describe what it's not. Black radical politics in prison is not about prisons. It's not about criminal justice. It's not about innocence or guilt. It's not about redemption, re-entry, or fixing broken people. It's about achieving profound transformations in our society, in our political culture, in our social relationships, in our humanity. It's about creating what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls abolition-geographies – liberated territories, which contradictorily are sometimes established within prisons themselves. That much I know, but I don't know it would mean for us to be radical if our politics and organizations were not overdetermined by the immediate need to survive genocide? But I think that is the question we should be asking.

Casey Goonan, CG // There are multiple perspectives

from which the genealogy of a Black radical tradition in the prisons — or, traditions of Black radicalism created by incarcerated people—can and should be told from. I think all of the panelists in this discussion will get to this, but I am hesitant to give a definition beyond what's been said so far. I would emphasize that it is not a discrete lineage of individual thinkers we are naming here, but a constellation of forces that does not gain coherence without a far-reaching cast, an ensemble. The incarcerated intellectual's text must move and circulate to have an impact on social formation, correct? And that requires a variety of formal and informal networks which mobilize for this tradition to move in the world, to materialize as a political discourse and intellectual milieu in society.

A lot of the infrastructure, labor, energy, and collectivity that underpins the formation of this imprisoned Black radical tradition is erased when we fixate on recovering some lost or veiled tradition of individual thinkers. What I have gathered from this line of questioning is that we should always emphasize the important relationships that are built across prison walls. There are vital intimacies, conversations, debates, and needed intellectual exchanges that are the result of relations between people on a spectrum that ranges from "unfree" to "free." This isn't some presumptuous claim to humanism or "unity" in bad faith. I'm not into that. I'm not into obscuring or flattening difference in power, experience, or conditions.

I just want to highlight from the outset that there are *so many people involved* in the making of these "traditions" that it is unfathomable when you begin to map out the networks and layers of discursive community in motion. There are so many people producing these ideas through engaged conversations and intermovement dialogues. It is in these interactions (or the severance of them by unmediated state terror) where imprisoned theorists push the boundaries of thought, space, praxis, agency, and vice versa.

SW // What would you consider the foundation(s) of that tradition? What are some of its foundational texts and major figures?

DR // There are multiple foundations of the incarcerated Black radical tradition, in terms of ideology, geography, organizational origins, and circulated texts. In addition to the forms of Black radicalism, including feminist and womanist Black radicalism, that formed under conditions of the transatlantic trafficking of captive Africans, there is a continuity of incarcerated Black radical praxis across the spaces of the slave ship, plantation, apartheid geographies, rural/urban sites, and prisons/jails. In this sense, the work of citing foundational texts and figures is a matter of historical and spatial focus, rather than canon-creation in the conventional (Eurocentric) literary or academic sense. My own situated foundational references points are Malcolm X (speeches and autobiography), George Jackson (*Blood in My Eye*), Safiya Bukhari (*The War Before*), Assata Shakur, Angela Davis (*If They Come in the Morning*), David Walker (*Walker's Appeal*), the Attica demands, the Pelican Bay and Georgia hunger strikers' demands, and Mumia Abu-Jamal's writing.

TL // Rooted in Black peoples' opposition to domination, this tradition has its foundations in the forms of resistance developed during the late 19th and early 20th century. It was during this period that Black people first faced mass imprisonment through convict lease, prison farms, and the convict lease system. Each of these were institutions that emerged in response to the profound disruption to the social order of former slaveholding states caused by Black peoples' struggles for freedom. The forms of resistance that served as the foundation of this tradition included work slowdowns and prison escape, as well as theft and sabotage. For men, these acts of sabotage included not simply the destruction of prison equipment, but also intentionally injuring themselves.

For women, resistance also took the form of arson, most notably, the burning of the striped men's prison clothes that they were often forced to wear. The prison work song, which both helped to coordinate the actions of dozens of individuals as well as provide some collective relief amidst the boredom and brutality of workday, is best thought of laying the groundwork for this culture of liberation.

Out of this legacy of collective resistance have emerged a number of key figures. First among them is George Jackson and *Soledad Brother* (1970), his collection of prison letters. Other important figures include Martin Sostre, who authored important legal briefs and his own book of prison letters; Angela Davis, whose own trial documents and essays have been enormously influential; Atiba Shana, a writer and theoretician who remained incredibly influential, particularly amongst New African prisoners; Assata Shakur, who is best known for her escape from prison, but also published a number of crucial essays, including, "Women in Prison: How it Is With Us"; journalist Mumia Abu Jamal through his radio series, "Live from Death Row"; Richard Mafundi Lake and Russell "Maroon" Shoatz, both political prisoners who mentored a generation of those within some of the toughest institutions in Alabama and Pennsylvania, respectively; and Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, who has wrote "What's Left of the Left? A Critical Question" and other evolutionary essays. Lastly, influential groups include the Attica Brothers and their "Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Depression Platform," the PBSP-SHU Short Corridor Collective and its "Agreement to Cease Hostilities," as well as the Black August Organizing Committee, the Free Alabama Movement, and Jailhouse Lawyers Speak.

JJ // 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 Marshall Eddie Conway, Real News Network journalist, and author Mumia Abu-Jamal, incarcerated for nearly four decades.

OB // Robinson writes that the Black Radical Tradition evolved largely without consciousness of itself as such and that this generalized lack of historical self-consciousness has had certain benefits. He writes: "There have been no sacred texts to be preserved from the ravages of history. There have been no intellects or leaders whose authority secured ideological and theoretical conformity and protected their ideas from criticism. There has been no theory to inoculate the movements of resistance from change." So to evoke the Black radical tradition is in a certain sense, to defy the very notion of foundational texts. But if we operationalize a capacious notion of text; one that encompasses the scope of Black expressive culture and political praxis, a rich Black radical archive becomes available through oral tradition, artistic production, ancestral divination, and through the deeds of communities engaged in collective struggle. The stories we tellabout Harriet Tubman's life are our foundational texts. The literary and scholarly aspects of Black radicalism are inseparable from its embodied, organizational, and martial aspects.

With that said there are clearly are a number of texts that have been and that continue to be essential to the elaboration of Black radicalism in prisons: *the Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *Soledad Brother, Blood in My Eye*, and *Assata* are unquestionably among them; as are the writings of Angela Davis, Nelson Mandela, and Frantz Fanon. Joy James' anthologies are an indispensable resource. Interestingly, though, when I talk to incarcerated

and formerly incarcerated people about the texts that played a key role in their politicization they rarely mention these texts with the possible exception of *the Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Rather, they are more likely to list obscure and seemingly non-radical works of history, anthropology, and criminology, or works of fiction and poetry that are not explicitly about prisons or radical politics. They cite Henry David Thoreau or something like that. This tells me that what is important is not necessarily the politics of the text in question, but how people relate to the text, what the text enables them to see and do collectively. This is indicative of a radical reading and interpretive praxis in which you are searching for tool of liberation in what you have at your disposal.

CG // I think there is also an importance in emphasizing that there are queer, transgender, and gender-nonconforming Black people that always are theorizing from or are motivated by their encounters and confrontations with police-state incarceration. We can say that Angela Davis is a queer Black woman who is *formerly* incarcerated and a pivotal writer and theorist during the 1970s formation of the American Prison Movement and its late-1990s bridging of all movements against systemic state and interpersonal violence, as the movement to abolish the prison industrial complex. Eric Stanley speaks about this quite a bit. And if we want to talk about how this tradition is both embedded within or the source of inspiration not only for scholarly pursuits but also of revolutionary community organizing, you can start with Marsha P. Johnson who *was arrested* during the Stonewall uprising and *jailed.* If I'm not mistaken, *this* experience is what incites her to start an organization and shelter with Sylvia Rivera called the STAR House in the 1970s. I've learned this from the archival and documentary work of Tourmaline (formerly Reina Gossett) and building on the knowledge of so many abolitionists who archive, write, and theorize the queer and trans liberationist dimensions of PIC

abolition praxis. It's neither abolitionist nor radical thought unless it prioritizes the needs, safety, access, and works to change the material circumstances of the most marginalized of imprisoned/impacted people. It is certainly not radical prison praxis if the framework refuses to study the way *differently positioned people are differently criminalized*, which translates into how imprisonment is experienced as well. Stevie, as a queer and abolitionist prisoner, your work speaks directly to this. You inhabit and sustain this imprisoned Black radical tradition as a community organizer, accountability facilitator, and abolitionist theorist.

SW // When did the IBRT originate? What are the major periods within this tradition?

JJ // 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, W.L. Nolen (who mentored George Jackson) are names that come to mind. IBRT his tory 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.

DR // As I wrote above, I view the origins of the incarcerated Black radical tradition as multiply sited,but the "first" origins emerge during the European colonial invasion of Africa and the initiation of the trafficking of captive and enslaved Africans.

The rough periodization of this component of the Black radical tradition would follow the major carceral institutions that characterized the struggles for Black being and life over the last half millennium: transatlantic slave trafficking, hemispheric plantation chattel slavery, Jim Crow apartheid, the rise of modern prisons/jails, and the post-desegregation expansion of the US carceral-policing regime as a normalized domestic racial/antiBlack warfare apparatus.

TL // As its own unique branch of a deeper culture of liberation, the imprisoned Black radical tradition has its origins in the struggles waged by Black people behind bars. As such, its origins can be found in the late post-Civil War proliferation of convict leasing, prison farms, and chain gangs. Even though they didn't give rise to moments of mass upheaval, these first period of imprisonment gave rise to an oppositional culture that would sustain them amidst inhumane and degrading conditions. If its first main period is marked by the rise and fall in Black peoples' imprisonment on prison farms and in convict lease camps from the Reconstruction era through the second World War, then the second period runs from the 1960's through the emergence of mass incarceration amidst the Reagan-era War on Drugs. It's likely that this moment of renewed prisoner organizing and mass protest marks a third period in this tradition.

DAY 2
TENDENCIES/CONTRADICTIONS

SW // What are the different tendencies within that tradition? What are some of its internal contradictions?

JJ // 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 Maternals: 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.

DR // A few major tendencies, which significantly overlap with and co-create one another: feminist, queer, abolitionist, nationalist, internationalist, socialist, anarchist, liberation theology (Christian), Muslim, atheist, masculinist, heteronormative, anti-colonialist, and trans*. Some of the key contradictions (or tensions, in milder instances): the politics of gender and sexuality (especially challenging heteronormative, sexist, masculinist, and misogynist articulations of Black radicalism—which are ultimately not really radical at all), religious vs. secular and atheist frameworks, tensions between nationalist-internationalist-anti-colonialist praxis, all-Black vs. alliance/solidarity/coalition models of organizing and political visioning.

TL // This tradition's tendencies largely fall under the

broader umbrella of Black Nationalism, ranging from the cultural politics of the Nation of Islam and the Five Percent Nation of Gods and Earths, to the revolutionary nationalism of the Black Panther Party, the Black Liberation Army, and the Republic of New Afrika, to more politically sophisticated factions of street and prison organizations like the Crips, the Conservative Vice Lords, and the Black Guerilla Family. These tensions have largely revolved around larger strategic questions of how to secure freedom, dignity, and recognition of Black peoples' human rights.

One important contradiction that this tradition faces is that while it has been enriched by efforts to mobilize towards these goals, these efforts have largely been defined by the spatially-limited, sex-segregated characteristics of the prison environment. Not only have these characteristics largely constrained the degree to which Black prisoners can organize with one another, they have also largely left Black men and women prisoners disconnected from each other. As a result, just as a mass imprisonment has given rise to a unique culture of liberation behind bars, sex segregation has given rise to particularly gendered conceptions of prison struggle. In women's prisons, this struggle is assumed to be a more covert form of survival as resistance, while in men's prisons, it is expected to pose a more overt and direct challenge. Despite glaring exceptions, these gendered conceptions of prison struggle help to reify, rather than subvert, stereotypical conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Here, mass imprisonment not only gives rise to its own distinct culture of liberation, but also, by its very nature, largely dictates the gendered responses its repression will provoke.

CG // I guess in more recent years, we see the sites and scenes that practitioners in this tradition understand movement-building as taking space and making place within, and it's interesting how the "where" of abolition begins to get mapped moving into the twenty-first-century, and its emergence as a present-day orientation

and approach to praxis in the Black radical tradition. Fundamental to understanding this tradition is in fact the *decentering* of the inside/outside relation as the 20th century came to a close. This geographic revision is seen largely as an historical necessity by its most rigorous theoreticians, and is invoked often by leadership, directives, curation, mediation, intervention, criticism, and embodied contributions from imprisoned Black radicals to the trajectory of the movement to abolish the prison industrial complex.

1998 is a year marking a substantial proliferation of convergences from marches to conferences, and merging not only of nonimprisoned activists. These organizing efforts can be traced back to an urgency galvanized post-"Crime Bill" denaturalization of antiBlack genocide and warfare, an urgency itself given its spark from a decentralized and broad-based apparatus of intellectual, legal, and culture workers whose pedagogical influence cannot be taken for granted. Marches on the outside that year included Jericho 98 March for political prisoners, the first Black Radical Congress, Critical Resistance's first national conference in Oakland, the CR '98 pre-conference in Colorado which Dr. James recently writes about.

For texts that demonstrate the intellectual shifts in perspective on how and where counter-carceral movements take place, I feel Cinosole's brilliantly edited volume *Schooling the Generations in the Politics of Prison* and NOBO's *Black Prison Movements* offer good works to read, which also coincide with a mid-nineties surge in reprinting of George Jackson and Assata Shakur's writings. One of the best collections of writings from the IBRT as we are defining it is Dr. James' edited volumes *Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals*, *The New Abolitionists,* and *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*.

OB // In my view, a major contradiction of Black radicalism in prisons is that Black radical praxis has been one of the major drivers of U.S. carceral development and innovation.

In other words, historically, one of the major consequences of this phenomena is that prisons have gotten better at isolating people, better at surveilling people, better at co-opting radical and proto-radical activities, better at naturalizing discourse of rehabilitation, and better at controlling the flow of information. I do not mean to suggest that better prisons has been the *only* outcome of the radical praxis of imprisoned people, but when we historicize the prisons of today – not just in the United States but around the world – we can trace how particular prison policies, protocols, and programs came into being in reaction to earlier cycles of Black-led struggle. This dialectic is most apparent when we look at the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period termed by one imprisoned intellectual, "the prison rebellion years." At that point, when the U.S. prison population was on the precipice of its meteoric rise, the major municipal jail and state prison systems were not very sophisticated in terms of their management and order-maintenance techniques. Captive populations were basically managed through racism and brute violence. They are still managed through racism and brute violence but also through a diverse repertoire of pacification tactics that had to be adopted in order for prisons to survive the crisis they were facing.

In 1972, immediately following San Quentin, Attica, and several other lesser known prison rebellions, prisons began to attract more federal resources and more expertise, which has enabled them to more effectively punish and incapacitate people and prevent the kinds of rebellions that appeared in the 1970s from reemerging. So right now, as we witness a new cycle of Black radicalism in prisons – from the Pelican Bay strikes of 2013 to the National Prison Strikes of 2016 and 2018. These actions and the many in between have been inspiring and right-on in terms of their analysis and methods, yet despite the deep organizing that made them actions possible – I would wager that the majority of people inside and outside of prisons remain largely unaware that

these events took place. And a major reason for this is that prisons have become adept at public relations – at managing the flow of information and shaping public perception. This is one small example among many of how Black radical praxis heightens the consciousness of the actors on both sides of the struggle. So I think this is something we have to contend with. Prisons are laboratories of repression and prison authorities pay attention to each assertion of political will and they shift their tactics accordingly. For me, prison abolition is about breaking this dialectic of rebellion and counter-rebellion, which has been so central to U.S. carceral development.

SW // What are some of its influences upon other African American intellectual traditions?

DR // Incarcerated Black radicalism challenges all African American (and for that matter, "anti-racist") intellectual traditions that suggest the possibility that robust forms of Black being—that is, the fullness of Black human being *beyond* notions of the "Black citizen," the "free" (and/or "respectable," "responsible") Black person, and African American communities—can be fully actualized within the modern US national project. Put another way, the carceral Black radical tradition suggest a deeply and completely upheaving conceptualization of (Black) freedom and (Black) human liberation that is in confrontation with the modern white supremacist and antiBlack hemispheric and global hegemony.

JJ // IBRT's breadcrumb trail and navigation include: David Walker's 1829 *Appeal*; Haywood Patterson's 1950 *Scottsboro Boy*; Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"; 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;* The Attica Men's 1971 *The Attica Manifesto*; 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*.

SW // Where is the imprisoned Black radical tradition today? What are some emerging trends?

JJ // 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—and mourn our losses—we will continue to build upon our inheritance.

DR // I think it is everywhere, constantly changing, and internally contested while it is also in permanent confrontation with the carceral antiBlack and racist state. It traverses prisons, jails, detention centers, juvenile halls, and reentry homes. Some emerging trends include new organizing strategies (utilizing cell phones, social media, email, and letter-writing), re-visiting Black radical ideological traditions of the recent and long historical past, feminist abolitionist Black radicalism, and trans* Black radicalism.

SW // If someone studies the African American intellectual tradition but does not include the Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition, is that study complete?

TL // Studies that ignore the imprisoned Black radical tradition are not simply incomplete. Even more troubling, they concede defeat to prisons as brutal instruments of social control. For even though they are not fully able to disconnect those they hold from their loved ones, prisons do attempt to convey the idea that prisoners no longer matter, effectively disappearing those held behind prison walls from the rest of society Thus studies that ignore the cultural and intellectual contributions of prisoners to this tradition, as well as how they have forged their own branch of this broader culture of liberation, risk reinforcing the main ideological falsehoods that prisons promote.

JJ // 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 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 Powell 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.

DR // *Fuck no, it is not.*

DAY 3
DEFINITIONS/LOCATIONS

SW // What makes a tradition a tradition? Does it mean having a history and a body of rigorous scholarship? Does it mean having distinguished figures.
What determines inclusion? similar subject-position of the writers? location? topic?

JJ // A tradition is something that we follow not out of habit but out of necessity (customs and holidays are habits that can be shed over generations). A radical tradition as a felt need encourages us to improvise in order to minimize captivity and exploitation.

DR // A tradition literally only requires people as carriers, transmitters, inheritors, translators, and (re)creators of a cultural, political, creative, collective practice of being. Scholarship is one (important) part of this, but we should be clear that "scholarship" is not reducible to *academic* scholarship (that is, work produced by professional scholars). Scholarship is knowledge production that seeks critical analytical, theoretical, archival, aesthetic understanding of a condition. The question of who constitutes the knowledge-makers within that tradition has to be decoupled from the institutionalization of knowledge in the imaginary (white, colonial, antiBlack) academy. If we can to that, shit opens up radically to all kinds of thinkers and creators.

OB // I think about this often. Especially in relation to Robinson's assertion that that for most of its existence, the BRT had developed without consciousness of itself as such. How can something be a tradition when its participants are unaware of it? I think of it in terms of inheritance. Each generation inherits a particular set historical circumstances, momentum, and capacities

that were produced in dialogue with those of the past. Each generation is like a link in a chain.

TL // What a tradition most needs is that people have a sense that what they are involved in has a past and that they seek to shape its future. It's great if they've read all the books and know all the names, but at the most basic level, a tradition requires an awareness that something has come before and a commitment to working to see it continue in the future.

SW // Where do you see the issues/concerns of the Black Radical Tradition (BRT) and the Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition (IBRT) overlapping?

DR // The IBRT is the BRT, no different than the Black radical feminist tradition is the BRT. So they don't just overlap, IBRT is at the center of BRT.

TL // The struggle for freedom and against domination.

OB // I don't see these as separate traditions with separate demands.

JJ // Until we can distinguish "radical" from "revolutionary," I find it difficult to answer this query. If the "Imprisoned Black Radical Tradition" is a legacy of Black captive revolutionaries then the IBRT doesn't really *overlap* with the BRT; it moves beyond it. Both work in tandem but not for the same goals. Reform-minded radicals embed in corporate/public structures. If the textual BRT (I read E. Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie* at age eleven—it offered a filter for the decades that followed) drifts by default into a Talented Tenth ethos, it likely will shy away from revolutionary struggles or seek "revolutionary reforms" (an oxymoron). The IBRT depends somewhat upon the oral tradition of the griot (it appears in more obscure writings and pamphlets).

I've only visited inside. Yet, my decade of anthologizing political prisoners was sparked by long-term imprisoned Black Panther Jalil Muntaquim (JM). JM politely responded to an anthology, *States of Confinement*, from a 1998 conference Angela Davis requested as a prototype for Critical Resistance to take place at CU-Boulder. That prototype followed the BRT as defined by academics. It was named after Professor Davis's UCLA Lecture "Unfinished Liberation"; the academics in charge avoided the opportunity to invite the recently released Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt as a speaker. Although he had been imprisoned for twenty-seven years (framed by COINTELPRO and the LAPD), the former Panther leader was not a celebrity or an academic and his speech would likely not have aligned with academic culture. I negotiated for the publisher to mail 50 copies of States of Confinement to imprisoned intellectuals; the anthology was largely written by academics or professional advocates. JM observed that it did not reflect the conditions or analyses of long-term political prisoners who, as revolutionaries, sought to free their communities from racist repression and capitalism, and thereby change the world. So, to whatever extent it followed the BRT, it fell short.

Because of correspondence with Muntaqim, I joined my students in endeavors to archive the writings of political prisoners, we archived pps/pows in: T*he New Abolitionists; Imprisoned Intellectuals* (the cover is a photo of a shackled George Jackson); *Warfare in the American Homeland.* The BRT and IBRT are replenished through the writings of revolutionary thinkers and captives.

SW // How has the migration of much of social justice activism to online arenas impacted the IBRT?

JJ // With the latest police murders of civilians, and the protests that followed, online arenas are increasingly used as platforms for organizing political acts. Some arenas are private or encrypted.

Popularized online arenas that look like lecture halls if they pursue the ideologies the funders that helped to create their bandwidth are likely not designed for sectors that derive their activism from emergency zones. There are archives like the Harriet Tubman Literary Circle that we designed years ago with the progressive librarians at UT-Austin. It is a repository for the IBRT. And houses works that might be popularized in online arenas, e.g., Russell "Maroon" Shoats's "The Dragon and the Hydra: A Historical Study of Organizational Methods"; Mutulu Shakur's "A Truth and Reconciliation Proposal . . . "; Sundiata Acoli, "Unique Problems Associated with the Legal Defense of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War." Given that there will be hundreds (if not thousands) of political prisoners following arrests of protestors in the wake of George Floyd's murder by police in May 2020, it is incumbent that we prepare to better understand developing carceral phenomena and state/prison repression.

DR // I have to think and learn about this a lot more. It's confusing, and I know online and social media venues have been indispensable to a lot of the political and knowledge work, but I'm not sure how it has affected the IBRT.

TL // This is a trend that has the potential to further strain the relationship between those held behind bars and those involved in the movement outside. Not only does this make it more difficult for prisoners to stay informed about what is taking place beyond the wall, but it also constrains the ways in which they can educate themselves about what we are facing. At the same time, it's important to note that in some parts of the country, prisoners have found ways to make use of the internet to facilitate their own organizing. Beginning with the 2010 Georgia prison strike and continuing with the emergence of the Free Alabama Movement, much of this has been with contraband cell phones. More recently, those held in federal

and state facilities from Alabama to Ohio to California have used smart phones to record video about their inhumane conditions, particularly the lack of protection against the pandemic. Many of these videos have been shared via social media, including Twitter and Facebook Live. Groups like Jailhouse Lawyers Speak has also made use of social media. As prisoners continue to use banned cell phones and other technology to connect with activism taking place on the outside, those activists are going to need to figure out more ways to support these prisoners as they put themselves at risk to engage this online arena.

OB // I don't know. Good question though. My guess would be that it's been extremely difficult to remain a part of the conversation.

SW // How has the loss of print publications coming into and going out of carceral sites impacted the IBRT?

DR // The answer to this question is something I need to learn from incarcerated comrades. From my position, it seems to be pretty devastating in some ways, but I'm not sure whether and how other forms of publication have been able to circulate because and in spite of the state's repression of print publications.

TL // From what I gather, it has impacted significantly. The most telling aspect of this impact has been narrowing the range of information that prisoners have access to, particularly in terms of the ideas and analysis that they have access to. These is a stark problem, with prisoners having less and less access to what at one point would have been print material. At the same time, those on the outside who seek to be in struggle with those on the inside do breaking down these divides. Publications like the *San Francisco Bay View* and *the Abolitionist Newspaper* are just two examples. Groups like the Incarcerated Workers Organizing

Committee (IWOC) produce their own zines, while zine libraries regularly copy and circulate material from the outside in or from one institution to another. Although far from widespread, prisoner solidarity groups have found ways to get print material to prisoners when need be.

OB // Until you asked this question. I hadn't thought about it in quite these terms. I have always had my reservations about the extent to which leftist thought lives online because it's so easily surveilled and because we don't control the infrastructure – the Internet Service Providers, the servers, the fiber optic cables, etc. The net neutrality debate, which is far from over, showed us that we cannot expect to have a "free and open" internet indefinitely. I think there is a need for us to revisit low tech options and purchase some printing presses. Your question makes perfect sense and is another example of why this may be necessary.

SW // Where are the works of imprisoned Black radical intellectuals beings published today?

JJ // As fragments, in different venues from encyclopedias to Essence.

DR // Related to the question earlier, I see a lot of it circulating online, on social media, and through podcasts and the like.

TL // They are being published in a variety of different locations, but for years, one of the most reliable has been the *San Francisco Bay View* newspaper.

OB // Expanding our notion of publication--I would add writes, affidavits, letters, phone conversations, rebellions, and Twitter (for those with access to phones).

DAY 4
INCARCERATION/ABOLITION

SW // No one mentioned the exponential growth of the PIC and its impact on imprisoned radicals' ability to organize and teach. In PA, where I am, there were six state prisons in the "prison rebellion years". Today, there are 25. How has this growth impacted imprisoned radicals' ability to produce work?

OB // Growth is an essential part of the story. Growth and rationalization. In other words it's not just there are more prisons now than there were in the 1970s, but this expanded carceral infrastructure is used in tandem with rational methods for studying and distributing the captive populations across this infrastructure in order to maximize control. This is another unintended consequence of Black-led insurgency and prison rebellion. During the past five decades of prison growth, the narrative of prison authorities has essentially been: "Build us more prisons unless you want another San Attica. We need more space to separate the incorrigibles."

TL // The runaway growth of the PIC has had a terrible impact on the ability of imprisoned radicals to produce. Take just one example: when prison guards assassinated George Jackson, they took ninety-nine books out of his cell. Most these books were on Marxism, History, and Revolutionary movements. Today, prisoners are able to keep, at most, a handful of books.

DR // The state expands capacity to wage carceral war in part by multiplying carceral sites and space. In significant part, this means incarcerated radicals/revolutionaries are subject to more modes of forcible deportation from one prison to the next as the state attempts to undermine their ability to gain traction

and build community with other incarcerated people.

Further, the growth of prison capacity needs to be understood as a multiplication of the state's infrastructure of criminalization—meaning, more prisons means more production of criminalized people (who are criminalized for life, not just while incarcerated). Criminalization undermines the capacity to produce radical political work in multiple ways.

SW // Ori, you are correct in your assumption that most people were unaware of the National Prison Strikes of 2016 and 2018, but I say that it wasn't due to the prisons becoming adept at public relations. I say it was because most of the organizing was done online, precluding prisoner access, and the lack of print publications coming inside that could inform prisoners of just what is going on outside. In this same vein, most prisoners are not familiar with the very people mentioned by everyone: George Jackson, Angela Davis, Russell Shoatz. One major reason is lack of access to the materials they wrote. Prison libraries are not going to stock their works. How will prisoners gain access to these texts? Unbelievably, I am sitting in a prison with Russell Maroon Shoatz right now and I cannot see him! The architecture of these new prisons creates prisons within prisons. We are cut off from one another. The mentoring and education that happened during the 60's and 70's cannot happen today. What does this mean to the continuity of the IBRT?

OB // Prison authorities learned some hard lessons in the 1970s and their political consciousness was heightened as a result. Today, many if not most of the large prison systems have very sophisticated communications management departments that monitor and shape the flow of information in both directions. Your point about the impact of online discourse is well taken and it makes perfect sense, but I want to make sure

we don't underestimate our opponents. Their efforts to shape public perception are a major part of the story.

DR // We need to understand that the state has *done its work* trying to figure out how to criminalize and destroy the IBRT. Where continuity is disrupted, the state's ability to repress and criminalize people who inherit and attempt to reinvigorate the IBRT is further magnified.

TL // These changes signal the degree to which the growth of the PIC hasn't just been about adding more prison beds, but also cutting the IBRT from itself, so that it can't continue. Breaking the continuity of the IBRT has been a key means of prison management overall.

SW // How does penal abolition relate to the IBRT?

TL // Penal abolition is a product of the thought and action of the IBRT.

DR // Hmmm, it depends which strain of penal abolition we're talking about. I know that many of the folks who identify with penal abolition are part of a white Quaker tradition (this was prevalent in the organization ICOPA, for example). Not everyone can get down with this form of abolition. On the other hand, I view the IBRT as central to a Black radical and liberationist abolitionist tradition. It means an abolition of Civilization and a creative remaking of Being and the world.

SW // Black feminist thought and praxis have greatly influenced much of the Black radical activism occurring in "free" society. But inside, there seems to be open hostility toward Black feminist thought and praxis among many imprisoned Black radical intellectuals. Do you see this trend? The tendencies of the IBRT don't seem to be in conversation with one another. Why is that? How are the voices of marginalized populations to be heard in rigidly-gendered and gendering

carceral sites, especially when the most vocal imprisoned Black radical intellectuals promote or willfully ignore sexism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia? What is loss when we silence or erase these voices?

JJ // Are the hostilities and their intensities directed at all types of Black feminist thought? Do the writings of Assata Shakur and Safiya Bukhari generate hostility? When they ignore or vilify the rights and contributions of children, women, LGBTQ, differently-abled intellectuals and activists writ large—based on identity not ideology—then the incarcerated hamper their own liberation.

TL // This is a really important question that we are only just starting to figure out. First, I would say that a broader conversation about how the era in which the Combahee River Collective statement (1977) has become influential also dovetails in which the generalization of mass incarceration as a means of social control has occurred. At the most basic level, this has led to a sharp decline in the level of debate taking place between proponents of Black Nationalist, Marxist, and Feminist ideas, the sort of 'public square' debate that has long been a hallmark of Black radicalism. To the degree that this debate continues, the PIC has left it segmented into debates that rarely overlap with each other. Perhaps more than anything, this dynamic has left the ideas and belief being developed by imprisoned Black women, ideas which don't often map onto Black feminist thought, isolated from not only the discussions taking place amongst not only imprisoned men, but also those outside the prison walls as well.

At the end of the day, the most serious consequence of this has been to develop a rigorous, common sense idea of how the prison serves to reinscribe not only notions of white supremacy and class exploitation, but also patriarchal domination as well.

DR // This is a major point of radical critical intervention

that must be undertaken in the near future. I think part of this tendency may derive from a misinterpretation of Black feminist praxis as inclusionist, petit bourgeois, "liberal," or otherwise not committed to Black liberation and/or Black led revolution. So, part of the problem is that people may not be exposed to the full radical archive of Black feminism, which is in no way separate from the IBRT or the Black radical tradition generally. Take a look at Safiya Bukhari's writing, for example—while she declines to identify as a "feminist" due to its echoing of white liberal (and racist) feminism, there is nothing about her work that should be understood apart from both Black radicalism and radical Black womanism/feminism. I think it's likely the case the Black feminism is not what a lot of (incarcerated and non-incarcerated) radical men (Black and non-Black) presume it to be.

OB // Word. I want to highlight one thing I've been thinking about which is that for many cis-gendered assumptively heterosexual men, the experience of imprisonment provides a powerful education on patriarchy. Prisons are unambiguously hierarchical spaces that are governed by violence and authority. Incarcerated men who are interested in liberation very quickly come to understand the injustice of this form of organization and rule. While they may not invoke the language of feminism (although many do), many of them develop an analysis that links the patriarchal violence being enacted upon them in prison to the patriarchal violence they benefit from and have often participated in on the outside. I've seen this in the prison-based study groups I've engaged with. I've seen men respond to this by trying to improvise new masculinities that are not premised on violence and exclusion. So I think there are some possibilities there to expand on this.

CG // I think this is where my research is somewhat helpful. Because I hear you, Stevie, there is this contempt in a lot of people; but I also would like to challenge this idea.

Because what people don't know is that there is a huge readership of *Black feminist* writing in prisons and jails. Alone I have a mailing list of over 300 imprisoned people, mostly in men's facilities who identify as male, who all are receiving texts ranging from Angela Davis to Julia C Oparah to Assata Shakur to bell hooks to Beth Richie to Rachel Herzing—all people who I would consider practicing a *Black feminist politic* and certainly inhabiting the Black radical tradition. I have folks locked up sending me responses after reading certain texts by Black women, reflecting on their own internalization of misogyny and participation in gender violence, now throwing words around like "heteropatriarchy" just days after reading, and actually beginning to embody the critique to address their own histories. Work by Black feminists are really well received and I'd love to continue to push back against people's conceptions that there is indeed a great antipathy for Black feminism inside.... I think its a matter of access, if that occlusion or antipathy is there, but its from the *same* sources that shape things on the Outside..... mostly cis-men who are patriarchal and aren't reading or listening to people who experience patriarchal violence. So it's also *not* there. You of course would know best, Stevie. But from my experience working from the outside-to-inside, doing a lot of abolitionist educational work across walls these last few years, it feels like the differences between how Black feminism (and certainly Black queer and trans analysis) is received, studied, and/or (under)appreciated is quite similar to every other sphere of social formation, from nonimprisoned civil society to its penal underside. The fact is, there is just not nearly enough support for radical-to-revolutionary Black feminist analysis *anywhere*. This is changing, but we can't lose sight that this is not simply a prison-specific issue.

DAY 5
TEACH/STUDY/PRACTICE

SW // How has the IBRT influenced your work? How do you teach/introduce people to it?

DR // It's central to my work, including my first book and my next one. I teach from my favorite "classic" IBRT writings/books as well as unpublished and newer ones. It was mentioned earlier, but one book I think we need to reprint is *Schooling the Generations in the Politics of Prison!* It's so crucial, and it was not widely circulated. Tons of great stuff in that book.

OB // Assata's biography was the first book I ever read from cover to cover. Before that I didn't think I liked to read. After that you couldn't find me without a book in my hand.

TL // The IBRT has influenced my work, in that much of my current research on the PIC is focused on examining the ways in which key aspects of mass incarceration emerged in response to this tradition. In addition to introducing people to the IBRT through classroom teaching and public scholarship, I try to introduce people to it by directly connecting them to prisoners helping to carry it on today.

CG // The philosophical foundations of PIC abolition, as it is articulated in the intellectual production and narrative-political fabric of Black women's praxis, serves to redefine existing and dominant cartographies of struggle for anticarceral movements at the turn of the twenty-first century. Here we see the conceptualization of the "prison industrial complex" allowing for systemic state and interpersonal terror and violence to be holistically named across macro to micro structural scales. Its a spatial unit of analysis and spatializing descriptive category, and is what Katherine McKittrick also calls a "Black feminist geography."

I will argue the importance of this turn in orientation to the grave. I'm sure historians like Emily Thuma would also. It is also not very well documented, and I hope in the future I can unpack this more for people in my larger work on this intellectual history; but, this approach to seeing space differently results from a poetics of landscape that is forged by imprisoned radical intellectuals first and foremost. It is Black radicals, such as Assata and Safiya, who from within and without the cage, are theorizing how the regime of the prison, its chattel logic and logic of death, extends to every sphere of society. It's these very thinkers whose lives were dramatically disorganized and impacted by their experiences of incarceration.

I think Black feminism (and PIC abolition as Black feminist praxis and the outgrowth of an imprisoned Black radical tradition that circulates within and beyond the reified site of the prison/jail) presents us with really important questions about space, cartographic renderings, and the continuity and horizon of struggles against the carceral-policing regime. Such questions include those related to how hegemonic conceptions of praxis and constraints on political engagement are altered during this period when Critical Resistance—at the very least ideologically—dislodge the reified site/scene of the U.S. "prison/jail" as the anchor of our cartographies of anti-carceral radicalism.

I think the ways Black feminism thinks multi-sited and multi-scaler, from macro to micro and both at once is really important. And this influence on the spatialization of revolt against incarceration, whether by imprisoned people or by nonimprisoned people, is serious and quite possibly the reason that popular insurgency against policing and criminalization are unfolding the way they are today, and on the scale it is finally today. Now we just gotta get the liberal reformist elements out of the way. I think Black feminist conceptions of PIC abolition hold the answer, but it will definitely mean less legislative, academic, and non-profit mediation

if this is to be effectively achieved. A singular cartography of struggle that vacillates in scales rigidly from inside-to-outside is severely limiting and confining for any movement that is, like Black/Native/Queer abolitionism, always-already confined to a particular and peculiar terrain and condition of incapacitation. If the state is decentralized in its technologies and the scope of its violence than movements cannot combat any such enemy as a centralized unit. That is absurd, strategically speaking...

SW // I read an interview Dylan did with Viet Mike Ngo in which they spoke about the differences between the prison environments of yesterday and today, specifically how people read more back then. There weren't so many distractions (televisions, tablets, radios, sports, activities). In light of these changes, how do we get prisoners to engage with this work and to contribute?

OB // I have prison administrators on record discussing the utility of television for keeping incarcerated people occupied and depoliticized. These distractions are part of an explicit pacification strategy. One counter strategy would be to try to explain this to your people in historical context, but I know you're already doing that.

DR // Form study and reading groups! Bridge these groups with study/reading groups in the non-incarcerated world through different means and technologies!

TL // The distractions will be there to one degree or another. As much as they have increased though, there has also been a decline in access to printed material, particular non-law books. Much more than decades, prisons reflexively ban any literature that appears to be radical or revolutionary in nature.

SW // One thing folks who are incarcerated can do is

write in a request a catalog from True Leap Press's "zine-to-prison" distro (408197 Chicago IL 60640) or the South Chicago Anarchist Black Cross Zine Distro (721 Homewood, IL 60430). In fact I write about zines quite a bit and believe them to be a central archive of the Black radical tradition over the last twenty years as produced by prisoners. What roles have zines played in disseminating the works of imprisoned Black radical intellectuals?

TL // Zines plays a crucial role in disseminating these ideas.

DR // Zines also seem to be a great way to get students (esp. advanced high school and college/university students) to engage with the important work of publishing IBRT work and corresponding with incarcerated thinkers and writers.

CG // Zines are wonderful. I send a lot of zines into prison. I learned very quickly that zines have been a staple tool for organizing behind prison walls since the 1990s, and I really can't wait to learn more about this. I think you mentioning South Chicago ABC Zine Distro is crucial here. This ABC in particular became a key source of literature for incarcerated people and prisoner-led/prisoner-populated organizations emerging in this last decade of proliferating mass-scale prison strikes. The archive is housed at DePaul. All of these names folk keep mentioning in this conversation are all published to some degree by South Chicago ABC Zine Distro. From compa Kevin Rashid Johnson's original ink drawings to analysis from organic collectives of Black prisoners organizing study groups and mutual aid networks in the early-2000s. Its all there. Moreover, Mariame Kaba and the entire Survived and Punished network co-create zines with criminalized and incarcerated survivors of patriarchal violence, and imprisoned people who face compounded criminalization, and organize with these texts. This is one contemporary group that I think does really well by sticking with the guidance and leadership of their co-strugglers in state captivity.

SW // I say that best way to honor a tradition is to study it, engage with it, and critique it, while working to expand and extend it. Where is this work being done?

JJ // The best way to honor Black radical traditions is to study, engage, and critique, while working to share within and collectives. Where is this work being done? Everywhere where folks organize. From classrooms to zoom conferences to litigations and petitions for bail funds, demands to release the incarcerated, and protests for freedom. We are not all in ideological agreement. We have never been so. We face different levels of threat, fear, depression and repression. Logically, increasing the zones for study, engagement, critique, and constructive work would 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.

In New York prisons, over 1279 staff and 511 incarcerated have tested positive for covid-19. Solitary confinement is used as "medical isolation" and Governor Cuomo touts hand sanitizer "New York Clean" made by imprisoned laborers (paid on average 65 cents/hour). Over 40,000 people are incarcerated in NY, less than 400 have been released to protect them from a pandemic; in effect, the state recklessly endangers lives to make a political point about its control over society. Simultaneously, protests over the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and others unfold alongside austerity measures. Government has defunded safety nets while refusing to tax billionaires whose wealth largely increased during the pandemic; "first line defenders" and those vulnerable to death are disproportionately Black, Brown and Indigenous. The POTUS enmeshed with the deadly theatrics of comingled

white supremacy and police violence has called for lengthy prison sentences for protestors facing recession, covid-19 and police brutality. Witnesses—who are more than audiences—are vigilant. Today (June 1, 2020), they just declared curfew for NYC. The police tried to intimidate protestors by ramming them with cars, shooting them with rubber bullets, and lobbying tear gas at them. Police exacerbate and inflame violence as provocateurs. Witnesses mobilize. They maintain memory and record archives. As Captive Maternals crafting strategies to quell violence and sustain communities, by resisting, they build (upon) traditions for crises in sites where peaceful protestors and journalists are attacked as if they were combatants in a war zone.

SW // Hortense Spillers said: "Traditions are not, like objects of nature, here to stay, but survive as created social events only to the extent that an audience cares to intersect them." With most prisoners precluded from accessing the IBRT, who is our audience?

DR // This is a heavy question. I have to think about it more. I want to say anyone who alleges to be involved in freedom focused struggle.

CG // I think when people do all of their intellectual work online or in paywalled journals it is only telling of who their analysis is intended for. Print media is what sustains movements behind and across bars more than digital information and cell phones still, no matter what anyone says or how they want to spin that. Spoken stories, verbally shared analysis, embodied memory, and printed words on paper are where the biggest impact is. That's where you find the most sustained communion of ideas converging, I think Sharon Luk calls this the "life of paper."

JJ // The prisoners who become radicalized are creating the IBRT. It's a living legacy.

The elder revolutionaries need to be brought out along with everyone else. Covid-19 is a pandemic. Legal lynchings through medical abandonment/neglect must be contested. Ramsey Orta was not political when he filmed the NYPD murder of Eric Garner on a Staten Island street in July 2014, a month before Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson by police. NYPD in retaliation arrested Orta on a weapons charge. Put him in NY prison. Guards poisoned him and other incarcerated with rat poison. NY had to do a financial settlement. Guards taunted Orta that he would catch covid inside. To my knowledge, Orta became infected with covid-19, as did former Black Panther Jalil Muntaquim (now in his 49th year of a 25-year to life sentence), in May 2020. There are audiences; actors; survivors; and the slain. The state will dissect us unless we can convince it to put down its weapons and relinquish animus and hostilities towards the impoverished and racially-fashioned.

I hear from imprisoned revolutionaries and radicals, and their supporters that they remember the Black Panther Party and its protectors; George Jackson; Attica; the devastating attacks on the people of the Pine Ridge reservation and continued imprisonment of Leonard Peltier. The possibilities of death while just seeking to live is a constant feature of our lives. Under different forms of captivity, from cells blocks to neighborhood blocks, political traditions for survival, dignity, resistance to disappearance and death have existed for centuries. They are always *witnessed*—even if the only ones watching and keeping count are your god and your Mama.

WHAT I NEED
BY REVEREND JOY POWELL

I don't need police to kneel with me. I need you to get your knees off of our necks. Black and Latinx Life is devalued; they refuse to protect or correct. Its not a figment of my imagination – why they want me to forget? I picture George Floyd that day with the officer's knee on his neck; it has me disgusted and totally vexed. We're pushed to the brink and forced to protest. Its really happening; its called "CIVIL UNREST"!!

I don't need to convince or justify your lies of why you choose not to socialize. If it doesn't apply then let it fly. I need you to know that I'll rise, rise, rise. Can't you hear the mother's, father's, and children's cries. Innocent people of color on death row waiting to fry. Why?

What you need to know if I've paid the ultimate price with my life, as an anti-violence activist against police brutality and government corruption. The voices sounding all over the world like a volcano eruption. Now, do you hear us? Are you taking Black life serious? Some have lost it and become delirious.

I visualize George Floyd handcuffed to the back on that cold ground. He pleads, "please get your knee off my neck. I ca't breathe." Repeated history in the 21st century; "PTSD," its hard to erase our memories.

I totally relate, and understand the pain. W're afraid of the terrors, tired and feel drained. Senator Cory Booker's voice rang, "We need transparency and change." My people came here in shackles and chains; yet, nothing has changed it remains the same.

I need to feel safe knowing that finally a database has been implemented to weed the bad apple police out. Instead of tainting the investigations and giving the thugs in blue the utmost clout. Forgetting what the real cause is all about.

African Americans are subjected to the harshest laws with mandatory minimums by design.

The color of my skin seems to be the only crime; racial profiling comes to white supremacist minds. Systemic racism need not go unchecked. The U.S. has created a HUGE mess! We're no strangers to pain, my mind can't escape. My mentally-ill son was killed by police in a most grotesque way! On October 10, 2018 it was a sad day!

We're incarcerated and killed at alarming rates. I pray the anguish my mind will one day escape. If violence is not the answer, then why do they anticipate, on murking people of color? "But its too late." The people are woke and no longer sleep. Our pillows are soaked, for years we weeped.

What I need to know is, what happened to the Emergency Persons Response Team? Is killing Black, mentally-ill "the American Dream"? On the prowl to snuff us out. Will it work, I highly doubt. Terrell had mental illness from a child, it was serious and definitely not mild. Emotionally unbalanced but also serene, dashed his hopes, destroyed dreams.

On the contrary, in South Carolina when Dylan ran full throttle in an African American Church to commit a horrific hate crime. Based upon what he was taught. Cold-bloodedly killed preachers, teachers and others he sought, bragged and gave it no second thought. A well put together hate crime was wrought. The young white boy didn't run; he wanted to get caught.

Shooting or killing him wasn't an option. When the police saw him at the scene, they halt and talked–put him in a bulletproof vest and took him and bought him a meal while we are unjustly criminalized. Basically, this depraved indifference young man was pat on the back and given a prize.

Unity, shame and fear, has moved in weeks what centuries couldn't. Acknowledgement is power, at first they wouldn't. More importantly, what I need is President Trump to cease from his incoherent, racist and psychotic tweets. He needs to eat some humble pie and become meek, he'll no longer be blind but will be able to see.

Trumps incompetent leadership is clearly a joke. He had the audacity to call COVID-19 a hoax!! We unfortunately lost about a hundred thousand folks. Just the thought of Trump makes me wanna scream. Desecrating Holy Ground's to make a low-rated movie scene. His main objective is to cause chaos, and never speak facts. The U.S. President is mad whack to be exact.

We need love, peace and the police abuse to cease! So please stop the violence, don't stay and beat the police. Although some have no decency, morals and integrity.

They maced a 9-year-old girl and busted a 75-year-old man's head open in Buffalo, NY. Now please don't get me wrong. I'm not around for continuing to be on their whipping post, or dragging my knuckles to the ground.

They got invited to the show and I'm the host. The topic is can't you see, we're living history? THE GIG IS UP IN 2020, like thunder we sing. !! No Justice, No Peace, No Racist Police!! We don't want broken promises, we demand accountability. And for once and all, halt the profiling racially.

Is it too much to ask for equal education, abolish mass incarceration, abort disparate treatment and the disinformation on these modern-day plantations. And the fake and phony on the low investigations.

Why can't I exercise my 1st amendment right of "free speech" without being set-up, and beaten, with trumped-up charges, a couple of wrongful convictions and a 6' by 8' cell. In disbelief, I mourn for those lives and share their loved one's grief.

What I want to know is the apologies are real, because thats the only way we can heal. So people of color will not have to feel afraid when we see the police.

R.I.P. to my son, Terrell Blake, George Floyd, and all of the other many people of color who were unjustly killed by police.

LESSONS FROM IMPRISONED BLACK INTELLECTUALS
BY RUSSELL MAROON SHOATZ

We can date the imprisoned Black radical intellectual tradition from when Marcus Garvey, from a US federal prison in the early twentieth century spurred his followers on by writing... "Look for me in the whirlwind." A political prisoner, Garvey was already a world renowned intellectual and organizer, and remained one until his death as a free man.

Malcolm X and George Jackson, on the other hand, highlight another aspect of that tradition: the aimless and antisocial youth, who through self-education and political consciousness, develop a burning need to struggle for justice. Though Garvey's contribution to that tradition is not well known, Malcolm's has been lionized in all arenas. George Jackson, nowadays, is only known among imprisoned and free world radical and intellectual circles.

Presently, the imprisoned Black radical intellectual tradition is a shadow of what it was a generation ago. Its spread has been contained by decades of isolating, through solitary confinement. It happens that technology handicapped the tradition because of its reliance on books, while narrowing the pool of potential adherents through the introduction of an almost endless selection of music, games and television programs.

Added to the imprisoned skeleton of the tradition that remains, small circles exist in the free world. The decades of isolation have been curtailed, allowing imprisoned Black radical intellectuals more room, while a number of them have gained their freedom from incarceration. Technology has the potential to broaden and deepen the tradition. How? Wisely utilized, technology

has the potential to elevate many imprisoned individuals out of their present distraction into organically acquired postures of leverage over their futures.

With the aid of radicals in the free society, the imprisoned radical intellectual can build enough support to gain access to the technology they can offer the imprisoned as the key to their freedom, financial security and self-esteem. After all, the imprisoned possess two key elements of this endeavor: free time and a burning desire to go home.

Join hands between the imprisoned and the free world to struggle for real access to technology for the imprisoned. Offer the imprisoned a real opportunity to learn technology thereby enabling them to leverage this knowledge into freedom, economic stability and self-esteem. In the tradition of Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and George Jackson, know that punishment of imprisonment can be neutralized by utilizing their time and mental capabilities–as earlier imprisoned Black radical intellectuals have done.

OUTRO
BY STEPHEN WILSON

When Garrett Felber contacted me about writing for "Black Perspectives," I was floored. I was familiar with the website because it publishes essays and reviews by some of the best Black minds in the world. I had used materials from the site in study sessions. As I mentioned in the introduction, my initial idea was to write about the need to employ an intersectional analysis in discourses on policing and imprisonment. But I knew that what I was been offered might have be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Imprisoned writers/activists rarely get opportunities to publish on such reputable sites. So I wanted to use my opportunity to attempt something bigger. I wanted to create a connection between the work being done behind the walls and the work being done beyond the walls. I wanted to connect imprisoned intellectuals and free-world intellectuals. Because we need each other if we are to succeed.

Too often, we work in isolation. Those of us inside are unfamiliar with the work and efforts of those outside. Those outside know very little about the work we are doing inside. We have to find ways to work together across the walls.

There are scholars/activists who are connected to people inside and whose work centers our struggles. I reached out to some of those people to help effect a reacquaintance of sorts. It is my hope that the roundtable inspires others on both sides of the walls to connect with each other on future projects, to engage with each other's work, and create more opportunities for collaboration. This is the way forward for us.

Also, I hope I set an example for those behind the walls that they too can initiate collaborative projects. Initiation is major. When I first began to study, I frequently wrote to organizations, publications, presses, and whenever I could get their addresses, individual scholars/ac

tivists. I kept knocking on doors. And people answered and connected. Those connections have enabled me to learn, grow and pay it forward. Years ago, I could not have imagined I would be in conversation with Joy James and Dylan Rodriguez, two people whose work I have studied and deeply admire. But I am. And you can be too.

Our strength is in our relationships, our connections. The walls have been erected to isolate us, to keep us separated. Our task is to render the walls inefficient. Connect with those around you. Connect with those outside the walls. Study together. Work together. And we will win together. Together, our efforts will create a more equitable world, a world without cages.

Always,
Stevie

BIOGRAPHIES

Stephen Wilson is a currently incarcerated, Black, queer writer, activist and student. For over two decades, he was active in the ballroom community and work as an HIV-prevention specialist and community organizer. His work and practice inherit teachings from prison abolition, transformative, and racial justice, Black feminist theory, and gender and queer liberation. Specifically, he works to end cycles of poverty and incarceration that have plagued his community. He works to expose and dismantle the prison industrial complex and to build a world in which we deal with harm without caging or exiling other people. He is a founding member of *Dreaming Freedom Practicing Abolition*, a network of self-organized prisoner study groups building abolitionist community behind and across prison walls.

Garrett Felber is Assistant Professor in the Arch Dalrymple III Department of History at the University of Mississippi. Felber is the author of *Those Who Know Don't Say: The Nation of Islam, the Black Freedom Movement and the Carceral State* (UNC Press, 2020) and co-author of *The Portable Malcolm X Reader* with the late Manning Marable (Penguin Classics, 2013). Felber's work has been published in the *Journal of American History, Journal of African American History, Journal of Social History, and Souls*. Felber was the lead organizer of the Making and Unmaking Mass Incarceration conference and is the Project Director of the Parchman Oral History Project (POHP), a collaborative oral history, archival, and documentary storytelling project on incarceration in Mississippi. In 2016, Felber co-founded Liberation Literacy, an abolitionist collective inside and outside Oregon prisons. He spearheaded the Prison Abolition Syllabus, a reading list published by *Black Perspectives* which highlighted and contextualized the prison strikes of 2016 and 2018.

Russell Maroon Shoatz is a dedicated community activist, founding member of the Black Unity Council, former member of the Black Panther Party and soldier in the Black Liberation Army. He is serving multiple life sentences as a US-held political prisoner/ prisoner of war.

Joy Powell is a former community activist and Pentecostal pastor from Rochester, New York whose career consisted of fighting against gang violence and police misconduct. Reverend Powell was targeted for her anti-police brutality activism and framed on a burglary charge. She was then wrongfully convicted for an old, unsolved homicide case, and sentence to 25 years to life. Powell is in solitary confinement at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women.

Dan Berger is an associate professor of comparative ethnic studies at the University of Washington Bothell and a founding coordinator of the Washington Prison History Project. He is the author or editor of several books, including *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era*, which won the

James A. Rawley Prize from the Organization of American Historians, *Rethinking the American Prison Movement* (coauthored with Toussaint Losier), and the forthcoming *Remaking Radicalism: A Grassroots Documentary-Reader* of the United States, 1973-2001 (coedited with Emily Hobson). He is currently writing *Stayed on Freedom: One Family's Journey in the Black Freedom Struggle*, a biography of the long Black Power movement as lived by grassroots organizers Michael Simmons and Zoharah Simmons.

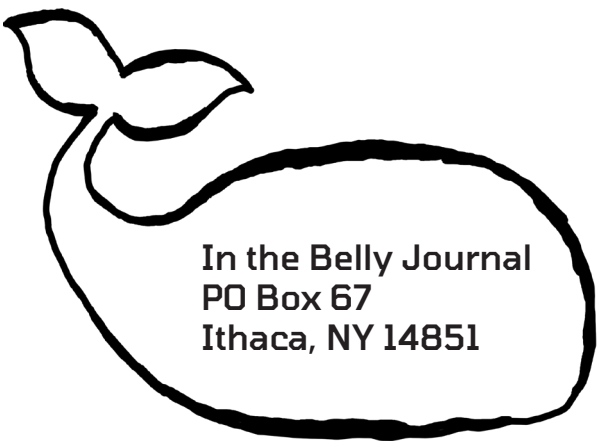
Orisanmi Burton is an assistant professor of anthropology at American University and a 2020 – 2021 fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. Burton's research, which focuses on Black radical politics and state repression in the US, has been published in *North American Dialogue, The Black Scholar,* and *Cultural Anthropology*. He is an active member of the Critical Prison Studies Caucus of the American Studies Association and the Abolition Collective and is completing a book manuscript titled *The Tip of the Spear: Black Revolutionary Organizing and Prison Pacification in the Empire State* that analyzes the prison as a domain of domestic warfare.

Casey Goonan is a doctoral candidate in the Department of African American Studies at Northwestern University. He received his Bachelor's degree in Ethnic Studies from UC Riverside (2013) and his M.A. in African American Studies from Northwestern (2019). His dissertation project, entitled "It's All One Struggle at Base," looks at the history of ideas, strategies, and traditions of grassroots organizing in the movement to abolish the prison industrial complex.

Joy James is the Ebenezer Fitch Professor of the Humanities at Williams College and author of *Resisting State Violence; Transcending the Talented Tenth; Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics; Seeking the 'Beloved Community'*. The editor of *the Angela Y. Davis Reader* and co-editor of *The Black Feminist Reader*, James's anthologies

on incarceration and political imprisonment include: *States of Confinement; The New Abolitionists; Imprisoned Intellectuals; Warfare in the American Homeland*. She is completing a book titled "The Captive Maternal Leverages Democracy." James advocates for political prisoners and works with the Abolition Collective BIUs Blog.

Toussaint Losier is an Assistant Professor in the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies at University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Dr. Losier holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago, with his research focusing on grassroots responses to the postwar emergence of mass incarceration in Chicago. At the UMass Amherst, he teaches courses on African American History, Black Politics, Criminal Justice policy, and transnational social movements. His writing has been published in *Souls, Radical History Review, The Journal of Urban History, Against the Current, and Left Turn Magazine*. He is co-author of *Rethinking the American Prison Movement* with Dan Berger and preparing a book manuscript titled, 'War for the City: Black Liberation and the Consolidation of the Carceral State.'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