

JUNE, 1970
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*Dear Greg,**

I probably didn't work hard enough on this but I'm pressed for time—all the time.

I could play the criminal aspects of my life down some but then it wouldn't be me. That was the pertinent part, the thing at school and home I was constantly rejecting in process.

All my life I pretended with my folks, it was the thing in the street that was real. I was certainly just pretending with the nuns and priests, I served mass so that I could be in a position to steal altar wine, sang in the choir because they made me. When we went on tour of the rich white catholic schools we were always treated very well—fed—rewarded with

*The editor who asked for the author's autobiography.

gifts. Old Father Brown hated me but always put me down front when we were on display. I can't say exactly why, I was the ugliest, skinniest little misfit in the group.

Blackmen born in the U.S. and fortunate enough to live past the age of eighteen are conditioned to accept the inevitability of prison. For most of us, it simply looms as the next phase in a sequence of humiliations. Being born a slave in a captive society and never experiencing any objective basis for expectation had the effect of preparing me for the progressively traumatic misfortunes that lead so many blackmen to the prison gate. I was prepared for prison. It required only minor psychic adjustments.

It always starts with Mama, mine loved me. As testimony of her love, and her fear for the fate of the man-child all slave mothers hold, she attempted to press, hide, push, capture me in the womb. The conflicts and contradictions that will follow me to the tomb started right there in the womb. The feeling of being captured . . . this slave can never adjust to it, it's a thing that I just don't favor, then, now, never.

I've been asked to explain myself, "briefly," before the world has done with me. It is difficult because I don't recognize uniqueness, not as it's applied to individualism, because it is too tightly tied into decadent capitalist culture. Rather I've always strained to see the indivisible thing cutting across the artificial barricades which have been erected to an older section of our brains, back to the mind of the primitive commune that exists in all blacks. But then how can I explain the runaway slave in terms that do not imply uniqueness?

I was captured and brought to prison when I was 18 years old because I couldn't adjust. The record that the state has compiled on my activities reads like the record of ten men. It labels me brigand, thief, burglar, gambler, hobo, drug addict, gunman, escape artist, Communist revolutionary, and murderer.

I was born as the Great Depression was ending. It was ending because the second great war for colonial markets was

beginning in the U.S. I pushed out of the womb against my mother's strength September 23, 1941—I felt free.

My mother was a country girl from Harrisburg, Illinois. My father was born in East St. Louis, Illinois. They met in Chicago, and were living on Lake Street near Racine when I was born. It was in one of the oldest sections of Chicago, part ghetto residential, part factory. The el train passed a few yards from our front windows (the only windows really). There were factories across the street and garage shops on the bottom level of our flat. I felt right in the middle of things.

Our first move up the social scale was around the corner to 211 North Racine Street, away from the el train. I remember every detail of preschool days. I have a sister 15 months older than myself, Delora, a beautiful child and now a beautiful woman. We were sometimes *allowed* to venture out into the world, which at the time meant no further than fenced-off roof area adjoining our little three-room apartment built over a tavern. We were allowed out there only after the city made its irregular garbage pickups. The roof area was behind the tavern and over an area where people deposited their garbage. But, of course, I went out when I pleased.

Superman was several years old about then, I didn't really confuse myself with him but I did develop a deep suspicion that I might be Suppernigger (twenty-three years ahead of my time). I tied a tablecloth around my neck, climbed the roof's fence, and against my sister's tears would have leaped to my death, down among the garbage barrels, had she not grabbed me, tablecloth and all, and kicked my little ass.

Seeing the white boys up close in kindergarten was a traumatic event. I *must* have seen some before in magazines or books but never in the flesh. I approached one, felt his hair, scratched at his cheek, he hit me in the head with a baseball bat. They found me crumpled in a heap just outside the school-yard fence.

After that, my mother sent me to St. Malachy catholic mission school. It was sitting right in the heart of the ghetto

area, Washington and Oakley streets. All of the nuns were white; of the priests (there were five in the parish) I think one was near black, or near white whichever you prefer. The school ran from kindergarten to 12th grade. I attended for nine years (ten counting kindergarten). This small group of missionaries with their silly costumes and barbaric rituals offered the full range of Western propaganda to all ages and all comers. Sex was never mentioned except with whispers or grimaces to convey something nasty. You could get away with anything (they were anxious to make saints) but getting caught with your hand up a dress. Holy ghosts, confessions, and racism.

St. Malachy's was really two schools. There was another school across the street that was more private than ours. "We" played and fought on the corner sidewalks bordering the school. "They" had a large grass-and-tree-studded garden with an eight-foot wrought-iron fence bordering it (to keep us out, since it never seemed to keep any of them in when they chose to leave). "They" were all white. "They" were driven to and from school in large private buses or their parents' cars. "We" on the black side walked, or when we could afford it used the public buses or streetcars. The white students' yard was equipped with picnic tables for spring lunches, swings, slides, and other more sophisticated gadgets, intended to please older children. For years we had only the very crowded sidewalks and alley behind the school. Years later a small gym was built but it just stood there, locked. It was only allowed to be used for an occasional basketball game between our school and one of the others like it from across the city's various ghetto areas.

Delora and I took the Lake Street streetcar to school each morning, and also on Sundays when we were forced to attend a religious function. I must have fallen from that thing a hundred times while it was in motion. Each time Delora would hang on to me, trying to save me, but I was just too determined and we would roll down Lake Street, books and all, miraculously avoiding the passing cars. The other black

children who went to public school laughed at us. The girls had to wear a uniform, the boys wore white shirts. I imagined that the nuns and priests were laughing too every time they told one of those fantastic lies. I know now that the most damaging thing a people in a colonial situation can do is to allow their children to attend any educational facility organized by the dominant enemy culture.

Before the winter of my first-grade year, my father, Lester, prepared a fifty-gallon steel drum to store oil for our little stove. As I watched, he cleaned the inside with gasoline. When he retreated from his work temporarily for a cigarette he explained to me about the danger of the gas fumes. Later when he had completed work on the barrel, I sneaked back out to the roof with my sister Delora trailing me like a St. Bernard. I had matches and the idea of an explosion was irresistible. As soon as my sister realized what I was going to do, she turned her big sad eyes on me and started crying. I lit a match as I moved closer and closer to the barrel. The I lit the whole book of matches. By now Delora was convinced that death was imminent for us both. She made a last brave effort to stop me but I was too determined. I threw the matches across the last few feet. Delora shielded my eyes with her hand as the explosion went off. She still carries her burns from that day's experiences. I was injured around the lower face but carry no sign of it. Our clothes were burned and ripped away. I would probably be blind if not for this sister.

My parents had two more children while we were hanging on there at North Racine, Frances and Penelope. Six of us in the little walk-up. The only thing that I can think of that was even slightly pleasant about the place was the light. We had plenty of windows and nothing higher about us to block off the sun. In '49 we moved to a place in the rear on Warren near Western that was the end of the sun. We had no windows that opened directly on the street, even the one that faced the alley was blocked by a garage. It was a larger place but the neighborhood around the place was so vicious that my mother

never, never *allowed* me to go out of the house or the small yard except to get something from one of the supermarkets or stores on Madison and return immediately. When I wanted to leave I would either go by a window, or throw my coat out the window and volunteer to take out the garbage. There was only one door. It was in the kitchen and always well guarded.

I spent most of the summers of those school years in southern Illinois with my grandmother and aunt, Irene and Juanita. My mother, Georgia, called it removing me from harm's way. This was where my mother grew up and she trusted her sister Juanita, whose care I came under, completely. I was the only man-child and I was the only one to get *special* protection from my mother. The trips to the country were good for me in spite of the motive. I learned how to shoot rifles, shotguns, pistols. I learned about fishing. I learned to identify some of the food plants that grow wild in most areas of the U.S. I could leave the house, the yard, the town, without having to sneak out of a window.

Almost everyone in the black sector of Harrisburg is a relative of mine. A loyal, righteous people; I could raise a small army from their numbers. I had use of any type of rifle or pistol on those trips downstate and everyone owned a weapon. My disposition toward guns and explosions is responsible for my first theft. Poverty made ammunition scarce and so . . . I confess with some guilt that I liked to shoot small animals, birds rabbits, squirrels, anything that offered itself as a target. I was a little skinny guy; scourge of the woods, predatory man. After the summer I went back up north for school and snowball (sometimes ice-block) fights with the white kids across the street.

I don't remember exactly when I met Joe Adams, it was during the early years, but I do recall the circumstances. Three or four of the brothers were in the process of taking my lunch when Joe joined them. The bag was torn, and the contents spilled onto the sidewalk. Joe scrambled for the food and got all of it. But after the others left laughing, he returned and

stuffed it all into my pockets. We were great friends from then on in that childish way. He was older by a couple of years (two or three years means a lot at that tender age), and could beat me doing everything. I watched him and listened with John and Kenny Fox, Junior, Sonny, and others sometimes. We almost put the block's businessmen into bankruptcy. My mother and father will never admit it now, I'm sure, but I was hungry and so were we all. Our activities went from stolen food to other things I wanted, gloves for my hands (which were always cold), which I was always wearing out, marbles for the slingshots, games and gadgets for outdoorsmen from the dime store. Downtown, we plundered at will. The city was helpless to defend against us. But I couldn't keep up with Joe. Jonathan, my older brother, was born about this time.

My grandfather, George "Papa" Davis, stands out of those early years more than any other figure in my total environment. He was separated from his wife by the system. Work for men was impossible to find in Harrisburg. He was living and working in Chicago—sending his wage back to the people downstate. He was an extremely aggressive man, and since aggression on the part of the slave means crime, he was in jail now and then. I loved him. He tried to direct my great energy into the proper form of protest. He invented long simple allegories that always pictured the white politicians as animals (jackasses, toads, goats, vermin in general). He scorned the police with special enmity. He and my mother went to great pains to impress on me that it was the worst form of niggerism to hook and jab, cut and stab at other blacks.

Papa took me to his little place on Lake and fed me, walked me through the wildest of the nation's jungles, pointing up the foibles of black response to crisis existence. I loved him. He died alone in southern Illinois the fifth year that I was in San Quentin, on a pension that after rent allowed for a diet of little more than sardines and crackers.

After Racine Street we moved into the Troop Street projects, which in 1958 were the scenes of the city's worst

riots. (The cats in those projects fell out against the pig with heavy machine guns, 30s and 50s that were equipped with tracer ammunition.)

My troubles began when we were in the projects. I was caught once or twice for mugging but the pig never went much further than to pop me behind the ear with the “oak stick” several times and send for my mortified father to carry me home.

My family knew very little of my real life. In effect, I lived two lives, the one with my mama and sisters, and the thing on the street. Now and then I’d get caught at something, or with something that I wasn’t supposed to have and my mama would fall all over me. I left home a thousand times, never to return. We hoboed up and down the state. I did what I wanted (all my life I’ve done just that). When it came time to explain, I lied.

I had a girl from Arkansas, finest at the mission, but the nuns had convinced her that love—touching fingertips, mouths, bellies, legs—was nasty. Most of my time and money went to the other very loose and lovely girls I met on the stairwells of the projects’ 15-story buildings. That was our hangout, and most of the time that’s where we acted out the ritual. Jonathan, my new comrade, just a baby then, was the only real reason that I would come home at all; a brother to help me plunder the white world, a father to be proud of the deed—I was a fanciful little cat. But my brother was too young of course. He’s only seventeen now while I’m twenty-nine this year. Any my father, he was always mortified. I stopped attending school regularly, and started getting “picked up” by the pigs more often. The pig station, a lecture, and oak-stick therapeutics. These pickups were mainly for “suspicion of” or because I was in the wrong part of town. Except for once or twice I was never actually caught breaking any laws. There just wasn’t any possibility of a policeman beating me in a footrace. A target that’s really moving with evasive tactics is almost impossible to hit with a short-barreled revolver. Through a gangway with a gate that only a few can operate with speed

(it's dark even in the day) up a stairway through a door. Across roofs with seven- to ten-foot jumps in between (the pig is working mainly for money, bear in mind, I am running for my life). There wasn't a pig in the city who could "follow the leader" of even the most timid ghetto gang.

My father sensed a need to remove me from the Chicago environment so in 1956 he transferred his post-office job to the Los Angeles area. He bought an old '49 Hudson, threw me into it, and the two of us came West with plans to send for the rest of the family later that year. I knew nothing of cars. It was the first car our family had ever owned. I watched my father with great interest as he pushed the Hudson across the two thousand miles from Chicago to Los Angeles in two days. I was certain that I could handle the standard gearshift and pedals. I asked him to let me try upon our arrival in Los Angeles that first day. He dismissed me with an "Ah—crazy nigger lay dead" look. We were to stay with his cousin Johnny Jones in Watts until the rest of the family could be sent for. He went off with Johnny to visit other relatives, I stayed behind with the keys and the car. I made one corner, down one street, waited for a traffic light, firmed my jaw, dry-swallowed—took off around the next corner, and ended the turn inside the plate-glass window and front door of the neighborhood barbershop. Those cats in the shop (Watts) had become so immune to excitement that no one hardly looked up. I tried to apologize. The brother that owned the shop allowed my father to do the repair work himself. No pigs were called to settle this affair between brothers. One showed up by chance, however. I had to answer a court summons later that year. But the brother sensed that my father was poor, like himself, with a terribly mindless, displaced, irresponsible child on his hands, probably like his own, and didn't insist upon having the gun-slinging pig from the outside enemy culture arbitrate the problems we must handle ourselves.

My father fixed the brother's shop with his own hands, after buying the materials. No charges were brought against me

for the damages. My father straightened out the motor bed, plugged the holes in the radiator, hammered out some of the dents and folds from the fender, bought a new light, and taped it into place on the fender. He drove that car to and from work, to the supermarkets with my mother, to church with my sisters, for four years! It was all he could afford and he wasn't the least bit ashamed of the fact. And he never said a word to me about it. I guess he was convinced by then that words wouldn't help me. I've been a fool—often.

Serious things started to happen after our settling in L.A. but this guy never abandoned me. He felt shame in having to bail me out of encounters with the law but he would always be there. I did several months in Paso Robles for allegedly breaking into a large department store (Gold's on Central) and attempting a hijack. I was 15, and full grown (I haven't grown an inch since then). A cop shot me six times point-blank on that job, as I was standing with my hands in the air. After the second shot, when I was certain that he was trying to murder me, I charged him. His gun was empty and he had only hit me twice by the time I had closed with him—"Oh, get this wild nigger off me." My mother fell away from the phone in a dead faint when they informed her that I had been shot by the police in a hijack attempt. I had two comrades with me on that job. They both got away because of the exchange between the pigs and me.

Since all black are thought of as rats, the third degree started before I was taken to the hospital. Medical treatment was offered as a reward for cooperation. At first they didn't know I had been hit, but as soon as they saw the blood running from my sleeve, the questions began. A bullet had passed through my forearm, another had sliced my leg, I sat in the back of the pig car and bled for two hours before they were convinced that lockjaw must have set in already. They took me to that little clinic at the Maxwell Street Station. A black nurse or doctor attended. She was young, full of sympathy and advice. She suggested, since I had strong-looking

legs, that instead of warring with the enemy culture I should get interested in football or sports. I told her that if she could manage to turn the pig in the hall for a second I could escape and perhaps make a new start somewhere with a football. A month before this thing happened a guy had sold me a motorcycle and provided a pink slip that proved to be forged or changed around in some way. The bike was hot and I was caught with it. Taken together these two things were enough to send me to what California calls Youth Authority Corrections. I went to Paso Robles.

The very first time, it was like dying. Just to exist at all in the cage calls for some heavy psychic readjustments. Being captured was the first of my fears. It may have been inborn. It may have been an acquired characteristic built up over the centuries of black bondage. It is the thing I've been running from all my life. When it caught up to me in 1957 I was fifteen years old and not very well-equipped to deal with sudden changes. The Youth Authority joints are places that demand complete capitulation; one must cease to resist altogether or else . . .

The employees are the same general types found lounging at all prison facilities. They need a job—any job; the state needs goons. Chino was almost new at the time. The regular housing units were arranged so that at all times one could see the lockup unit. I think they called it "X". We existed from day to day to avoid it. How much we ate was strictly controlled, so was the amount of rest. After lights went out, no one could move from his bed without a flash of the pigs' handlight. During the day the bed couldn't be touched. There were so many compulsories that very few of us could manage to stay out of trouble even with our best efforts. Everything was programmed right down to the precise spoonful. We were made to march in military fashion everywhere we went—to the gym, to the mess hall, to compulsory prayer meetings. And then we just marched. I pretended that I couldn't hear well or understand anything but the simplest directions so I was never

given anything but the simplest work. I was lucky; always when my mind failed me I've had great luck to carry me through.

All my life I've done exactly what I wanted to do just when I wanted, no more, perhaps less sometimes, but never any more, which explains why I had to be jailed. "Man was born free. But everywhere he is in chains." I never adjusted. I haven't adjusted even yet, with half my life already spent in prison. I can't truthfully say prison is any less painful now than during that first experience.

In my early prison years I read all of Rafael Sabatini, particularly *The Lion's Skin*. "There once was a man who sold the lion's skin, while the beast still lived, and was killed while hunting him" This story fascinated me. It made me smile even under the lash. The hunter bested, the hunted stalking the hunter. The most predatory animal on earth turning on its oppressor and killing it. At the time, this ideal existed in me just above the conscious level. It helped me to define myself, but it would take me several more years to isolate my real enemy. I read Jack London's, "raw and naked, wild and free" military novels and dreamed of smashing my enemies entirely, overwhelming, vanquishing, crushing them completely, sinking my fangs into the hunter's neck and never, never letting go.

Capture, imprisonment, is the closest to being dead that one is likely to experience in this life. There were no beatings (for me at least) in this youth joint and the food wasn't too bad. I came through it. When told to do something I simply played the idiot, and spent my time reading. The absentminded bookworm, I was in full revolt by the time seven months were up.

I went to school in Paso Robles and covered the work required for 10th-year students in the California school system, and entered Manual Arts for the 11th year upon my release. After I got out I stopped in Bakersfield, where I planned to stay no more than a week or two. I met a woman who felt almost as unimpressed with life as I did. We sinned, I

stayed. I was 16 then, just starting to get my heft, but this wonderful sister, so round and wild, firm and supple, mature . . . in one month she reduced my health so that I had to take to the bed permanently. I was ill for eleven days with fevers and chest pains (something in the lungs). When I pulled out of it I was broke. I'd collected a few friends by that time. Two of them would try anything. Mat and Obe. We talked, borrowed a car, and went off.

A few days later we were all three in county jail (Kern County) on suspicion of committing a number of robberies. Since the opposition cleans up the books when they find the right type of victim, they accused us of a number of robberies we knew nothing about. Since they had already identified me for one, I copped out to another and cleared Mat and Obe on that count. They "allowed" Obe to plead guilty to one robbery instead of the three others they threatened him with. They cleared Mat altogether. Two months after our arrest Mat left the county jail free of charges.

I was in the "time tank" instead of the felony tank because they had only two felony tanks (that was the old county jail) and they wanted to keep the three of us separated. After Mat left, a brother came into the time tank to serve 2 days. The morning he was scheduled to leave I went back to his cell with a couple of sheets and asked him if he would aid me in an escape attempt. He dismissed me with one of those looks and a wave of the hand. I started tearing the sheet in stripes, he watched. When I was finished he asked me, "What are you doin' with that sheet?" I replied, "I'm tearing it into these strips." "Why you doin' that?" "I'm making a rope." "What-chew gonna do with ah rope?" "Oh—I'm going to tie you up with it."

When they called him to be released that morning, I went out in his place. I've learned one very significant thing for our struggle here in the U.S.: all blacks do look alike to certain types of white people. White people tend to grossly underestimate all blacks, out of habit. Blacks have been over-

estimating whites in a conditioned reflex.

Later, when I was accused of robbing a gas station of seventy dollars, I accepted a deal—I agreed to confess and spare the county court costs in return for a light county jail sentence. I confessed but when time came for sentencing, they tossed me into the penitentiary with one to life. That was in 1960. I was 18 years old. I've been here ever since. I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels, and Mao when I entered prison and they redeemed me. For the first four years I studied nothing but economics and military ideas. I met black guerrillas, George "Big Jake" Lewis, and James Carr, W.L. Nolen, Bill Christmas, Torry Gibson and many, many others. We attempted to transform the black criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality. As a result, each of us has been subjected to years of the most vicious reactionary violence by the state. Our mortality rate is almost what you would expect to find in a history of Dachau. Three of us were murdered several months ago by a pig shooting from 30 feet above their heads with a military rifle.

I am being tried in court right now with two other brothers, John Clutchette and Fleeta Drumgo, for the alleged slaying of a prison guard. This charge carries an automatic death penalty for me. I can't get life. I already have it.

When I returned to San Quentin Prison last week from a year in Soledad Prison where the crime I am charged with took place, a brother who had resisted the logic of proletarian-people's revolutionary socialism for the blackman in America sent me these lines in a note:

"Without the cold and desolation of winter there
could not be the warmth and splendor of spring!
Calamity has hardened my mind, and turned it to steel!!
Power to the People"

George

APRIL, 1970

*Dear Fay,**

On the occasion of your and Senator Dymally's tour and investigation into the affairs here at Soledad, I detected in the questions posed by your team a desire to isolate some rationale that would explain why racism exists at the prison with "particular prominence." Of course the subject was really too large to be dealt with in one tour and in the short time they allowed you, but it was a brave scene. My small but mighty mouthpiece, and the black establishment senator and his team, invading the state's maximum security row in the worst of its concentration camps. I think you are the first woman to be allowed to inspect these facilities. Thanks from all. The question was too large, however. It's tied into the question of why all these California prisons vary in character and flavor in general. It's tied into the larger question of why racism exists in this whole society with "particular prominence," tied into history. Out of it comes another question. Why do California joints produce more Bunchy Carters and Eldridge Cleavers than those over the rest of the country?

I understand your attempt to isolate the set of localized circumstances that give to this particular prison's problems of race is based on a desire to aid us right now, in the present crisis. There are some changes that could be made right now that would alleviate some of the pressures inside this and other

*Mrs. Fay Stender, the author's lawyer.

prisons. But to get at the causes, you know, one would be forced to deal with questions at the very center of Amerikan political and economic life, at the core of the Amerikan historical experience. This prison didn't come to exist where it does just by happenstance. Those who inhabit it and feed off its existence are historical products. The great majority of Soledad pigs are southern migrants who do not want to work in the fields and farms of the area, who couldn't sell cars or insurance, and who couldn't tolerate the discipline of the army. And of course prisons attract sadists. After one concedes that racism is stamped unalterably into the present nature of Amerikan sociopolitical and economic life in general (the definition of fascism is: a police state wherein the political ascendancy is tied into and protects the interests of the upper class—characterized by militarism, *racism*, and imperialism), and concedes further that criminals and crime arise from material, economic, sociopolitical causes, we can then burn *all* of the criminology and penology libraries and direct our attention where it will do some good.

The logical place to begin any investigation into the problems of California prisons is with our "pigs are beautiful" Governor Reagan, radical reformer turned reactionary. For a real understanding of the failure of prison policies, it is senseless to continue to study the criminal. All of those who can afford to be honest know that the real victim, that poor, uneducated, disorganized man who finds himself a convicted criminal, is simply the end result of a long chain of corruption and mismanagement that starts with people like Reagan and his political appointees in Sacramento. After one investigates Reagan's character (what makes a turncoat) the next logical step in the inquiry would be a look into the biggest political prize of the state—the directorship of the Department of Correction.

All other lines of inquiry would be like walking backward. You'll never see where you're going. You must begin with directors, assistant directors, adult authority boards, roving

boards, supervisors, wardens, captains, and guards. You have to examine these people from director down to guard before you can logically examine their product. Add to this some concrete and steel, barbed wire, rifles, pistols, clubs, the tear gas that killed Brother Billingslea in San Quentin in February 1970, while he was locked in his cell and the pick handles of Folsom, San Quentin, and Soledad.

To determine how men will behave once they enter the prison it is of first importance to know that prison. Men are brutalized by their environment—not the reverse.

I gave you a good example of this when I saw you last. Where I am presently being held, they never allow us to leave our cell without first handcuffing us and belting or chaining the cuffs to our waists. This is preceded always by a very thorough skin search. A force of a dozen or more pigs can be expected to invade the row at any time searching and destroying personal effects. The attitude of the staff toward the convicts is both defensive and hostile. Until the convict gives in completely it will continue to be so. By giving in, I mean prostrating oneself at their feet. Only then does their attitude alter itself to one of paternalistic condescension. Most convicts don't dig this kind of relationship (though there are some who do love it) with a group of individuals demonstrably inferior to the rest of the society in regard to education, culture, and sensitivity. Our cells are so far from the regular dining area that our food is always cold before we get it. Some days there is only one meal that can be called cooked. We *never* get anything but cold-cut sandwiches for lunch. There is no variety to the menu. The same things week after week. One is confined to his cell 23½ hours a day. Overt racism exists unchecked. It is not a case of the pigs trying to stop the many racist attacks; they actively encourage them.

They are fighting upstairs right now. It's 11:10 A.M., June 11. No black is supposed to be on the tier upstairs with anyone but other blacks but—mistakes take place—and one or two blacks end up on the tier with 9 or 10 white convicts

frustrated by the living conditions or openly working with the pigs. The whole ceiling is trembling. In hand-to-hand combat we always win; we lose sometimes if the pigs give them knives or zip guns. Lunch will be delayed today, the tear gas or whatever it is drifts down to sting my nose and eyes. Someone is hurt bad. I hear the meat wagon from the hospital being brought up. Pigs probably gave them some weapons. But I must be fair. Sometimes (not more often than necessary) they'll set up one of the Mexican or white convicts. He'll be one who has not been sufficiently racist in his attitudes. After the brothers (enraged by previous attacks) kick on this white convict whom the officials have set up, he'll fall right into line with the rest.

I was saying that the great majority of the people who live in this area of the state and seek their employment from this institution have overt racism as a *traditional* aspect of their characters. The only stops that regulate how far they will carry this thing come from the fear of losing employment here as a result of the outside pressures to control the violence. That is O Wing, Max (Maximum Security) Row Soledad—in part anyway.

Take an individual who has been in the general prison population for a time. Picture him as an average convict with the average twelve-year-old mentality, the nation's norm. He wants out, he wants a woman and a beer. Let's say this average convict is white and has just been caught attempting to escape. They may put him on Max Row. This is the worst thing that will ever happen to him. In the general population facility there are no chains and cuffs. TVs, radios, record players, civilian sweaters, keys to his own cell for daytime use, serve to keep his mind off his real problems. There is also a recreation yard with all sorts of balls and instruments to strike or thrust at. There is a gym. There are movies and a library well stocked with light fiction. And of course there is work, where for 2 or 3 cents an hour convicts here at Soledad make paper products, furniture, and clothing. Some people actually like this work

since it does provide some money for the small things and helps them to get through their day—*without thinking* about their real problems.

Take an innocent con out of this general population setting (because a pig “thought” he may have seen him attempting a lock). Bring him to any part of O Wing (the worst part of the adjustment center of which Max Row is a part). He will be cuffed, chained, belted, pressured by the police who think that every convict should be an informer. He will be pressured by the white cons to join their racist brand of politics (they *all* go under the nickname “Hitler’s Helpers”). If he is predisposed to help black he will be pushed away—by black. Three weeks is enough. The strongest hold out no more than a couple of weeks. There has been *one* white many only to go through this O Wing experience without losing his balance, without allowing himself to succumb to the madness of ribald, protrusive racism.

It destroys the logical processes of the mind, a man’s thoughts become completely disorganized. The noise, madness streaming from every throat, frustrated sounds from the bars, metallic sounds from the walls, the steel trays, the iron beds bolted to the wall, the hollow sounds from a cast-iron sink or toilet.

The smells, the human waste thrown at us, unwashed bodies, the rotten food. When a white con leaves here he’s ruined for life. No black leaves Max Row walking. Either he leaves on the meat wagon or he leaves crawling licking at the pig’s feet.

Ironic, because one cannot get a parole to the outside prison directly from O Wing, Max Row. It’s positively not done. The parole board won’t even consider the Max Row case. So a man licks at the feet of the pig not for a release to the outside world but for the privilege of going upstairs to O Wing adjustment center. There the licking process must continue if a parole is the object. You can count on one hand the number of people who have been paroled to the streets

from O Wing proper in all the years that the prison has existed. No one goes from O Wing, Max Row straight to the general prison population. To go from here to the outside world is unthinkable. A man *must* go from Max Row to the regular adjustment center facility upstairs. Then from there to the general prison population. Only then can he entertain thoughts of eventual release to the outside world.

One can understand the depression felt by an inmate on Max Row. He's fallen as far as he can into the social trap, relief is so distant that is very easy for him to lose his holds. In two weeks that little average man who may have ended up on Max Row for *suspicion of attempted* escape is so brutalized, so completely without holds, that he will never heal again. It's worse than Vietnam.

He's dodging lead. He may be forced to fight a duel to the death with knives. If he doesn't sound and act more zealous than everyone else he will be challenged for not being loyal to his race and its politics, fascism. Some of these cons support the pigs' racism without shame, the others support it inadvertently by their own racism. The former are white, the latter black. But in here as on the street black racism is a forced *reaction*. A survival adaptation.

The picture that I have painted of Soledad's general population facility may have made it sound not too bad at all. That mistaken impression would result from the absence in my description of one more very important feature of the main line—terrorism. A frightening, petrifying diffusion of violence and intimidation is emitted from the offices of the warden and captain. How else could a small group of armed men be expected to hold and rule another much larger group except through *fear*?

We have a gym (inducement to throw away our energies with a ball instead of revolution). But if you walk into this gym with a cigarette burning, you're probably in trouble. There is a pig waiting to trap you. There's a sign "No Smoking." If you miss the sign, trouble. If you drop the

cigarette to comply, trouble. The floor is regarded as something of a fire hazard (I'm not certain what the pretext is). There are no receptacles. The pig will pounce. You'll be told in no uncertain terms to scrape the cigarette from the floor with your hands. It builds from there. You have a gym but only certain things may be done and in specified ways. Since the rules change with the pigs' mood, it is really safer for a man to stay in his cell.

You have work with emoluments that range from nothing to three cents an hour! But once you accept the pay job in the prison's industrial sector you cannot get out without going through the bad conduct process. When workers are needed, it isn't a case of accepting a job in this area. You take the job or you're automatically refusing to work, even if you clearly stated that you would cooperate in other employment. The same atmosphere prevails on the recreation yard where any type of minor mistake could result not in merely a bad conduct report and placement in adjustment center, but death. A fistfight, a temporary, trivial loss of temper will bring a fusillade of bullets down on the darker of the two men fighting.

You can't begin to measure the bad feeling caused by the existence of one TV set shared by 140 men. Think! One TV, 140 men. If there is more than one channel, what's going to occur? In Soledad's TV rooms there has been murder, mayhem, and destruction of many TV sets.

The blacks occupy one side of the room and the whites and Mexicans the other. (Isn't it significant in some way that our numbers in prison are sufficient to justify the claiming of half of all these facilities?)

We have a side, they have a side. What does your imagination envisage out of a hypothetical situation where Nina Simone sings, Angela Davis speaks, and Jim Brown "splits" on one channel, while Merle Haggard yodels and begs for an ass kicking on another. The fight will follow immediately after some brother, who is less democratic than he is starved

for beauty (we did vote but they're 60 to our 40), turns the station to see Angela Davis. What lines do you think the fighting will be along? Won't it be Angela and me against Merle Haggard?

But this situation is tolerable at least up to a point. It was worse. When I entered the joint on this offense, they had half and we had half, but out half was in the back.

In a case like the one just mentioned, the white convicts will start passing the word among themselves that all whites should be in the TV room to vote in the "Cadillac cowboy." The two groups polarize out of a situation created by whom? It's just like the outside. Nothing at all complicated about it. When people walk on each other, when disharmony is the norm, when organisms start falling apart it is the fault of these whose responsibility it is to govern. They're doing something wrong. They shouldn't have been trusted with the responsibility. And long-range political activity isn't going to help that man who will die tomorrow or tonight. The apologists recognize that these places are controlled by absolute terror, but they justify the pig's excesses with the argument that we exist outside the practice of any civilized codes of conduct. Since we are convicts rather than men, a bullet through the heat, summary execution for fistfighting or stepping across a line is not extreme or unsound at all. An official is allowed full range in violent means because a convict can be handled no other way.

Fay, have you ever considered what type of man is capable of handling absolute power. I mean how many would not abuse it? Is there any way of isolating or classifying generally who can be trusted with a gun and *absolute* discretion as to who he will kill? I've already mentioned that most of them are KKK types. The rest, all the rest, in general, are so stupid that they shouldn't be allowed to run their own bath. A *responsible* state government would have found a means of weeding out most of the savage types that are drawn to gunslinger jobs long ago. How did all these pigs get through?! Men who can barely

read, write, or reason. How did they get through!!? You may as well give a baboon a gun and set him loose on us!! It's the same in here as on the streets out there. *Who* has loosed this thing on an already suffering people? The Reagans, Nixons, the men who have, who own. Investigate them!! There are no qualifications asked, no experience necessary. Any fool who falls in here and can sign his name might shoot me tomorrow from a position 30 feet above my head with an automatic military rifle!! He could be dead drunk. It could really be an accident (a million to one it won't be, however), but he'll be protected still. He won't even miss a day's wages.

The textbooks on criminology like to advance the idea that prisoners are mentally defective. There is only the merest suggestion that the system itself is at fault. Penologists regard prisons as asylums. Most policy is formulated in a bureau that operates under the heading Department of Corrections. But what can we say about these asylums since *none* of the inmates are ever cured. Since in every instance they are sent out of the prison more damaged physically and mentally than when they entered. Because that is the reality. Do you continue to investigate the inmate? Where does administrative responsibility begin? Perhaps the administration of the prison cannot be held accountable for every individual act of their charges, but when things fly apart along racial lines, when the breakdown can be traced so clearly to circumstances even beyond the control of the guards and administration, investigation of anything outside the tenets of the fascist system itself is futile.

Nothing has improved, nothing has changed in the weeks since your team was here. We're on the same course, the blacks are fast losing the last of their restraints. Growing numbers of blacks are openly passed over when paroles are considered. They have become aware that their only hope lies in resistance. They have learned that resistance is actually possible. The holds are beginning to slip away. Very few men imprisoned for economic crimes or even crimes of passion

against the oppressor feel that they are really guilty. Most of today's black convicts have come to understand that they are the most abused victims of an unrighteous order. Up until now, the prospect of parole has kept us from confronting our captors with any real determination. But now with the living conditions of these places deteriorating, and with the sure knowledge that we are slated for destruction, we have been transformed into an implacable army of liberation. The shift to the revolutionary antiestablishment position that Huey Newton, Eldridge Cleaver, and Bobby Seale projected as a solution to the problems of Amerika's black colonies has taken firm hold of these brothers' minds. They are now showing great interest in the thoughts of Mao Tse-tung, Nkrumah, Lenin, Marx, and the achievements of men like Che Guevara, Giap, and Uncle Ho.

Some people are going to get killed out of this situation that is growing. That is not a warning (or wishful thinking). I see it as an "unavoidable consequence" of placing and leaving control of our lives in the hands of men like Reagan.

These prisons have always borne a certain resemblance to Dachau and Buchenwald, places for the bad niggers, Mexicans, and poor whites. But the last ten years have brought an increase in the percentage of blacks for crimes that can *clearly* be traced to political-economic causes. There are still some blacks here who consider themselves criminals—but not many. Believe me, my friend, with the time and incentive that these brothers have to read, study, and think, you will find no class or category more aware, more embittered, desperate, or dedicated to the ultimate remedy—revolution. The most dedicated, the best of our kind—you'll find them in the Folsoms, San Quentins, and Soledads. They live like there was no tomorrow. And for most of them there isn't. Somewhere along the line they sensed this. Life on the installment plan, three years of prison, three months on parole; then back to start all over again, sometimes in the same cell. Parole officers have sent brothers back to the joint for selling newspapers (the

Black Panther paper). Their official reason is "Failure to Maintain Gainful Employment," etc.

We're something like 40 to 42 percent of the prison population. Perhaps more, since I'm relying on material published by the media. The leadership of the black prison population now definitely identifies with Huey, Bobby, Angela, Eldridge, and antifascism. The savage repression of blacks which can be estimated by reading the obituary columns of the nation's dailies, Fred Hampton, etc., has not failed to register on the black inmates. The holds are fast being broken. Men who read Lenin, Fanon, and Che don't riot, "they mass," "they rage," they dig graves.

When John Clutchette was first accused of this murder he was proud, conscious, aware of his own worth but uncommitted to any specific remedial action. Review the process that they are sending this beautiful brother through now. It comes at the end of a long train of similar incidents in his prison life. Add to this all of the things he has witnessed happening to others of our group here. Comrade Fleeta spent eleven months here in O Wing for possessing photography taken from a newsweekly. It is such things that explain why California prisons produce more than their share of Bunchy Carters and Eldridge Cleavers.

Fay, there are only two types of blacks ever released from these places, the Carters and the broken men.

The broken men are so damaged that they will never again be suitable members of any sort of social unit. Everything that was still good when they entered the joint, anything inside of them that may have escaped the ruinous effects of black colonial existence, anything that may have been redeemable when they first entered the joint—is gone when they leave.

This camp brings out the very best in brothers or destroys them entirely. But none are unaffected. None who leave here are normal. If I leave here alive, I'll leave nothing behind. They'll never count me among the broken men, but I can't say that I am normal either. I've been hungry too long. I've gotten

angry too often. I've been lied to and insulted too many times. They've pushed me over the line from which there can be no retreat. I *know* that they will not be satisfied until they've pushed me out of this existence altogether. I've been the victim of so many racist attacks that I could never relax again. My reflexes will never be normal again. I'm like a dog that has gone through the K-9 process.

This is not the first attempt the institution (camp) has made to murder me. It is the most determined attempt, but not the first.

I look into myself at the close of every one of these pretrial days for any changes that may have taken place. I can still smile now, after ten years of blocking knife thrusts and pick handles; of anticipating and faceless sadistic pigs, reacting for ten years, seven of them in Solitary. I can still smile sometimes, but by the time this thing is over I may not be a nice person. And I just lit my seventy-seventh cigarette of this 21-hour day. I'm going to lay down for two or three hours, perhaps I'll sleep . . .

Seize the Time.

JUNE, 1970

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You know I had a visit yesterday from an old friend, Joan. They told her she couldn't come back again, an economy move. It costs the state too much to supervise my half-hour visits, so I'll be held incommunicado it seems. They turned my sister away today. Someone is going to have to come up with some guts. These fools must be stopped.

Absolute power in the hands of idiots! It makes me think of Rome and England. Do you know where the barbarians and guerrillas are going to come from to destroy Imperial Amerika, from the black colonies and these concentration camps. The three of us are the only convicts in this joint who have to accept half-hour visits, with a special guard, handcuffed and chained. Now it seems we won't even get that. My sister, my brother can't visit me in what could be the last days of my life! Well, one good thing comes from this experience; no question remains in the minds of any member of my family as to where their energies would best be spent. My father will have a whole den of Panthers there to feed.

With each attempt the pigs made on my life in San Quentin, I would send an SOS out to my family. They would always respond by listening and writing letters to the joint pigs and Sacramento rats, but they didn't entirely accept that I was telling them the truth about the pig mentality. I would get dubious stares when I told them the lieutenants and the others who propositioned some of the most vicious white convicts in the state: "Kill Jackson, we'll do you some good." You understand, my father wanted to know why. And all I could tell him was that I related to Mao and couldn't kowtow. His mind couldn't deal with it. I would use every device, every historical and current example I could reach to explain to him that there were no-good pigs. But the task was too big, I was fighting his mind first, and his fear of admitting the existence of an identifiable enemy element that was oppressing us because that would either commit him to attack that enemy or force him to admit his cowardice. I was also fighting the establishment's public relations and propaganda machine. The prisons all use the clean, straight faces, or the old, harmless-looking pigs to work in areas where they must come in contact with free people. And these pigs are never allowed to use their tusks. Regarding the racism, my father would remind me that there were black pigs too. But, of course, that means nothing at all. They simply work around the blacks when necessary.

One guard or two guards working together is all that's needed to murder any con in the joint. But it isn't really necessary to work around the black pigs. They'll all cooperate or turn their heads.

The black cop could be a large factor in preventing our genocide. But no help can be expected from that quarter. The same stupidity and desperation that brought him to the gates prevents him from interceding. The job, the wage means too much to him. Often he feels compelled to prove himself, prove that he is loyal to the force, prove that he is not prejudiced in favor of us, prove that he is honest. His honesty prevents him from dealing in contraband as every white pig does. Look, I was in San Quentin for seven straight years. I knew *everything* that was brought in and by whom. The white pig actually considers it his privilege to supplement his income by bringing in and selling narcotics, weapons, and, of course, pornography. The black pig is afraid, too unsure of his position to be dishonest.

This same fear will cause him to show more zeal in the "club therapy" sessions than even the whites manage. If the victim is black, he's going to get so mad that the white pigs will have to stand back and let him swing. If they don't have murder planned for that session, they'll have to pull that nigger off of you. A pig—is a pig.

It all falls into place. I see the whole thing much clearer now, how fascism has taken possession of this country. the interlocking dictatorship from country level on up to the Grand Dragon in Washington, D.C.

The solidarity between the prison here and the court in Salinas, between the judge and grand jury, the judge and the D.A. and other city officials. The institution has effectively cut me off from any relief. The *unmeek* have taken over this whole county, the state, the entire country. They work together, to the same end, effective control.

I knew of these links before this, long before this, but

seeing it in operation is pretty frightening. What force binds them together? I'm referring to the intermediary, the physical thing, not the ideal. What is it that really ties that fat rat with a chain of department stores to a uniformed pig? The fat rat wants the country and world policed, made safe for his business to expand. But how does he sell the ideal to the man who must do the policing? Money is the bond I think. They're in it for the money, these pigs and skinny rats. The fascist ideal doesn't really take hold until one gets into the upper levels of the power pyramid. Then any ideal that preserves becomes attractive.

People's government would decentralize this power that they hold over us—these men must be stopped.

Power to the People.

George

JUNE, 1970

13

Dear Fay,

No one here knows about the scheduled court hearing. They say we're not going. The prison doesn't like moving us, so somehow they have managed to arrange with the judge to *leave us out of our own trial!* Or pretrial. Can they try us in absentia (is that the term??)? Some bull (pig I mean) just

said that the judge under no circumstances wants us in his court. In that case they shouldn't mind dropping the whole thing or sending us to another county for trial. Berkeley perhaps. But as you've said more than likely it'll be Orange County.

Why do we accept this sort of thing? We have numerical superiority—but they have guns and money. And then the righteous don't like to cut throats, so we languish in misery.

When you finally get me out of this mess, you'll have to send me away somewhere for a while, somewhere like Cuba or China or Tanzania, so that I can reorient myself. My understanding had been strained to the utmost.

JUNE, 1970
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I don't think we can afford to be nice much longer, the very last of our protection is eroding from under us. There will be no means of detecting when that last right is gone. You'll only know when they start shooting you. The process must be checked somewhere between now and then, or we'll be fighting from a position of weakness with our backs against the wall. (I think we still have the advantage now.) We of the black colony know about that kind of action, fighting off of the wall. It's not the best way to get down.

It's getting tighter here, they're taking our visits. It looks as

if they're stopping our court appearances. They also made a mistake concerning our "money draw" this month. This means we'll be without the little things even.

You may never read this letter either, our mail is being held back, returned, thrown away somewhere. Nice people aren't they? They richly deserve anything we can do to them. This man who just passed my cell counting, he'll never listen to reason. His mind isn't constructed that way. While we reason with him in ideals and ideas, he isn't listening. He is thinking about which rule he'll quote to dismiss us. When he walks away, you'll see the little code book protruding from his ass pocket. That's where he carries his mind, in his ass pocket. When we attack the problem with intellectualism we give away the advantage we have in numbers.

I'm with Bobby! We are going to have to kick him where he keeps his brain, in the region of the ass.

Power.

George