

“WE ARE ALL PRISONERS”: PRIVILEGING PRISON VOICES IN BLACK PRINT CULTURE

Maisha T. Winn

The April–May 1971 and October 1972 issues of *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research* were devoted to the subject “The Black Prisoner,” and featured essays and poetry written by black prisoners as well as community organizers and academics from throughout the United States.¹ In the wake of a series of uprisings by African American and Latino prisoners in California’s San Quentin Prison in 1971, the April–May 1971 issue of *The Black Scholar* took the position that the San Quentin prisoners’ struggle to fight racism and social injustice was an issue that the journal’s readers should engage as well. *The Black Scholar* reported that African American and Latino prisoners in San Quentin formed the Third World Coalition in February 1971, but were met with opposition from the prison guards and some inmates. This incident was one of many uprisings that took place in correctional facilities where African American and Latino prisoners were developing self-awareness and cultural pride. *The Black Scholar* and other publications became vehicles for informing readers outside prison walls about the conditions that black inmates were experiencing behind the walls.

Over half the population of San Quentin is Black and Chicano. Their future well-being depends in large measure on the outcome of this recent protracted struggle against racism. We of the Third World Community at large must take action and organize support for our brothers inside. . . . It’s time for the Third World on the outside to investigate the Third World on the inside. San Quentin is a good place to start.²

This essay is an examination of how black print culture in the early 1970s privileged the voices of black prisoners by inviting incarcerated men and women to share their stories and reflections on the criminal justice system with unincarcerated men and women. “We Are All Prisoners,” was the title given to an open letter to *The Black Scholar* readers from political prisoner Fleeta Drumgo, one of

Maisha T. Winn is Associate Professor in the Division of Educational Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, GA.

the famous Soledad Brothers. “We” referred to “black people” and not just the highly visible “political prisoners” who were imprisoned because of their ideological beliefs, but to all African-descended people who may or may not have experienced clashes with law enforcement officials or the racialized criminal justice system in the United States. Embedded in the title, “We Are All Prisoners,” was the notion that in the early 1970s no black man or woman was completely free of racial constraints that could easily force them to become entangled in the criminal justice system. To illustrate how black print culture sought to facilitate understanding on both sides of the prison walls, I focus on two publications: *The Black Scholar*, based in Northern California; and *Black News*, published by the EAST organization in Brooklyn, New York, whose mission was the same as the antislavery journalists—to “Agitate. Educate. Organize.” While these publications were not solely dedicated to agitation for black prisoners, they were consistent in their efforts to re-educate African Americans about the prison system and to reach out to prisoners with a message of self-education and self-determination. Most importantly, these two publications shared an unwavering commitment to build bridges between incarcerated and unincarcerated black men and women who, according to their contributors, were imprisoned by racialized social structures offering primarily substandard housing, failing schools, job discrimination, and pressures to integrate physically and psychologically.

While *The Black Scholar* and *Black News* are central to this discussion, it is imperative to contextualize their efforts to build bridges between black prisoners and the larger African American community. The lens through which I am viewing this project is the long struggle for black self-determination and its impact on the development of black print culture. The role of Malcolm X in serving as a model of literacy is examined because Malcolm helped to redefine the black prisoner in black cultural consciousness, while promoting the value of self-determination most closely associated with the Black Power and Black Arts movements. I begin with Malcolm X not only due to his influence on poets and writers in the Black Arts Movement, but also because of the model he represented in black print culture for transforming words into action. The changes in black print culture that came with the Black Arts Movement between 1965 and 1975 will be surveyed with a focus on the intersection of reading, writing, speaking, and activism. During this period, black artists and writers moved away from being “sayers” and becoming “doers of the word.” Fiction, poetry, and drama became consciously politicized and complemented the organizing and activism in black communities throughout the United States. Ultimately, the privileging of prison voices demonstrated a deep social commitment to strengthening disenfranchised African

American and Latino people inside and outside prisons through literate practices, including essay and letter writing as well as poetry. Black print culture during the Black Power and Black Arts movements assumed the responsibility of keeping black readers apprised of the life-threatening conditions in U.S. prisons and the deplorable treatment of black prisoners in particular, to remind them of the social, economic, educational, and political inequities in the United States.

LITERACY: BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY

Black print culture's commitment to communication between life inside and beyond prison walls should be contextualized in the highly politicized quest for self-determination. While this cultural value is typically associated with black nationalist movements, and more specifically the Black Power and Black Arts movements during the mid-1960s and early 1970s, the ideals of self-determination are rooted in the efforts of enslaved Africans and African Americans to create their own religious and other institutions and to pursue literacy, viewing education as the substance of their freedom. Free black men and women who created literary and library societies in the early 19th century to educate themselves and others had their counterparts in the early 20th century with the New Negro literary salons in many cities; and in the 1960s with the Black Arts cultural centers, groups, and organizations often sponsored by activist writers.³ While most historians point to the James Meredith "March Against Fear" in June 1966 as the beginning of the Black Power Movement, it was fueled by the fiery and insightful sermons and lectures of Malcolm X, delivered in Harlem and in other cities and on college campuses across the country.⁴ Formerly Malcolm Little and Detroit Red, Malcolm X embodied the ideals of personal transformation and self-determination, main themes for the Black Power and Black Arts movements. Self-determination came to mean black people defining themselves, speaking for themselves, and acting for themselves.⁵ It was the gripping, but timeless narrative in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* about his process of self-education while in prison that inspired prisoners and generated empathy among black men and women outside of the prison system. For Malcolm, the act of learning new words was the first step in his liberation.

I suppose it was inevitable that as my word-base broadened, I could for the first time pick up a book and read and now begin to understand what the book was saying. Anyone who has read a great deal can imagine the new world that opened. Let me tell you something: from then until I left that prison, in every free moment I had, if I was not reading in the library, I was reading on my bunk. You couldn't have gotten me out of books with a wedge. Between Mr.

Muhammad’s teachings, my correspondence, my visitors . . . and my reading of books, months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life.⁶

Malcolm shared his journey from street hustler with limited self-awareness to a man determined to write a fluent letter to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and eventually a leader who used language to inspire and mobilize his people. The article “Breaking through Prison Barriers” was published in *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World*, one of the *Black Papers* published by the Institute of the Black World (IBW), the black think tank and policy center established in 1969. The IBW collective argued that *The Autobiography* contained powerful messages for those imprisoned and those who are “free”; and reminded us that Malcolm’s “manhood” represented a “political methodology for change” for all African people.⁷ This methodology called for the continued quest for liberation through reading, self-education, and continuous personal development; and it is found throughout *The Autobiography*. The road to intellectual liberation is spelled out.

I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive. I certainly wasn’t seeking any degree, the way a college confers a status symbol upon its students. My homemade education gave me, with every additional book that I read, a little bit more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and blindness that was afflicting the black race in America.⁸

“Breaking through Prison Barriers” also discussed the evolving relationship among black prisoners such as the inmates in Attica, less than one year before the deadly 1971 rebellion, who desired a Black Studies program and sought out IBW to help them develop the curriculum. Eventually, the IBW organized a lecture series at prisons in three states, Georgia, Indiana, and Minnesota, and argued persuasively that Malcolm X’s “enlightenment in prison has been the guide for much of the new black prisoner education.”⁹ The IBW associates also emphasized that Malcolm’s “self-education” was not narrowly defined ideologically, but included a breadth of knowledge.

[Malcolm X] studied constantly, he read everything he could, and he put everything in the context of the needs of the Black community. He did not restrict his reading to books and papers of one or another political persuasion. He studied radical and conservative publications. He was willing to read what the white man wrote. But he always knew why he was reading, who he was reading for. Malcolm the student became, therefore, Malcolm the teacher of his people.¹⁰

Not only were Malcolm's incessant study habits an inspiration for black prisoners, but his discipline and ability to synthesize information from a variety of sources also became foundational for black scholars and activists. Malcolm X's life transformed the way many African Americans viewed black prisoners; he provided a model for self-improvement and demonstrated that there was potential in many young people that was often untapped. Conversely, Malcolm X's narrative was haunting as well. And Wendell Wade, in "The Politics of Prisons" contributed to *The Black Scholar's* first issue on black prisoners, noted that there were many more young people behind bars who could be instrumental in fighting for social justice. "The lives of Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver bear witness to the fact that the prisons can be a training ground for the leaders of our struggle. The prisons are robbing the community and the revolutionary struggle of the active element."¹¹

Without the availability of black print media and the commitment of editors, publishers, small newspapers, and journals, the lives of incarcerated men and women would have been swallowed whole in a larger discourse on crime. Black print culture cleared a path for these stories that would eventually find their way into the mainstream. Using historical and contemporary narratives of African Americans to generate a philosophy of African American education, Theresa Perry employs the idea of "freedom for literacy and literacy for freedom" to explain the meanings of literacy and education in the lives of enslaved and oppressed, free and imprisoned, African Americans.¹² Perry believes that literacy was seldom, if ever, an act conducted in solitude. In fact, literacy "was not something you kept for yourself; it was to be passed on to others, to the community. Literacy was something to share."¹³ This ideology is central to the actions within black print culture to restore communication between black prisoners and the larger African American community. Malcolm X's autobiography was a key text in Perry's analysis and especially Malcolm's depiction of his reverence for a fellow inmate Bimbi, who could command an audience of prisoners using words and language eloquently. For a young Malcolm, Perry suggested, this was a defining and redefining point in his life:

Becoming literate, for Malcolm, was a way to claim one's humanity, to equip oneself with a weapon to be used in the struggle for freedom. To be literate also included what you do with your knowledge—with words—whether you could use words to motivate people to action, persuade people of the truth of your assertions, or inspire others to become literate.¹⁴

The Autobiography became a blueprint for people of African descent, whether they were incarcerated or not. Later, Malcolm would deflect potential audience

members' disdain for those who had been incarcerated by reminding them that the United States was synonymous with the word "prison." Jitu Weusi, co-founder of *Black News*, a newspaper established in 1969, and co-founder of the Uhuru Sasa Shule, an independent black educational institution in Brooklyn, New York, in his column on 25 February 1971, "Around Our Way," discussed the place of Malcolm's autobiography in his life.¹⁵

Each Feb. 21st after all the rallies have been held and all the speeches made honoring the memory of El Hajj Malik Shabazz (Malcolm X), I usually retreat to the quiet solitude of my soul for a real memorial tribute. I begin to take stock of what I have contributed for the advancement of self and kind during the past year . . . then I read several chapters of *The Autobiography* and come away feeling meek and humble. At that point I rededicate myself and my every thought once again.¹⁶

Weusi maintained that *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* should be read more than once, and that every reading was a rededication to the struggle for social justice. Liberation Bookstore, a frequent supporter of *Black News*, ran an advertisement in the newspaper that asked, "Have you ever read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* for the second time?"¹⁷ Additionally, Weusi encouraged non-readers who were a part of the Black Power and Black Arts movements to become familiar with the text as well:

We had [men] reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* who couldn't even read. Know what I used to tell them? I would tell them to take it home and have your girlfriend read it to you and that's how some of them started . . . so in other words to be in this movement, to be a part of this movement, to be instrumental in this movement, you had to read.¹⁸

Malcolm's life, therefore, became the quintessential model for self-education and literacy. His autobiography changed many African Americans' perspectives on the black prisoner. Malcolm's methodology created the dialectical relationship between reading and writing, speaking and doing.

FROM SAYING TO DOING, 1965–1975

After the assassination of Malcolm X on 21 February 1965, poet and playwright LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka left the comforts of his bohemian life in Greenwich Village and the Beat Movement, to move to Harlem and open the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School (BARTS), thus committing himself to the black freedom struggle. His geographical and ideological shift inspired count-

less black poets, writers, and activists. The period, 1965–1975, witnessed the flowering of the Black Arts Movement, which produced and cultivated visual and literary artists who were not satisfied with merely writing, speaking, and performing the word, but also *doing* the word. “Doing” the word in the Black Arts Movement was most evident in the quest to establish independent black institutions housing schools, food cooperatives, cultural centers, and publishing houses.¹⁹ Poets, novelists, journalists, and educators established African-centered schools as a response to the lack of schools with rigorous and relevant curriculum for black children throughout the United States. Amina and Amiri Baraka’s African Free School in Newark, New Jersey, Jitu Weusi’s Uhuru Sasa Shule in Brooklyn, New York, Kalamu ya Salaam’s Ahidiana in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Don L. Lee and Carol D. Lee’s New Concept Development Center in Chicago were examples of the institution building by black artists and scholars. These schools not only trained students in mathematics, science, English, and social studies, but also in the arts, culture, and history of Africa and the African Diaspora. In these contexts, students were encouraged to have a sense of purpose while learning. Other examples of “doing” were found in the efforts to establish Black Studies programs in colleges, universities, and eventually jails and prisons, and the active development of other cultural institutions that enhanced the lives of African Americans. “Doing” also manifested itself in the creation of publishing houses and hundreds of newspapers, journals, and other publications created by, for, and about African people.²⁰

The journey from words on the page to words inciting action did not begin with the Black Arts Movement. Critical theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings declared that for African Americans, “literacy is deeply embedded in our conceptions of humanity early on in the construction of the United States and citizenship; that is, one must be human to be literate and one must be literate to be a citizen,” highlighting the profound relationship and preoccupation that African Americans have had with literacy.²¹ This “ethos of literacy” in African American culture has emphasized the relationship between literacy and liberation.²² In the Black Arts Movement, there was a dialectical relationship between black print culture and social activism, and I have argued that the movement was literacy based, and in publications such as *Black News* and *The Black Scholar*, poets and other writers forged the connections between their written words and their “audience.” Black print culture often blurred boundaries between speaker/writer and the audience, which is seldom passive and expected to engage the text and apply it to their social or political circumstances.²³

As early as David Walker’s *Appeal to the Colored People of the World* in

1829, publications by black writers have followed a trajectory of using writing as a way to mobilize people and assist in African Americans' efforts to assert their humanity and full citizenship rights among themselves and to the world.²⁴ Considered to be an early example of black self-determinist thought, David Walker's *Appeal* was a critique of the unjust enslavement of Africans in North America and was based on Walker's travels and observations in various sections of the United States. Walker's *Appeal* explicitly addressed readers as well as non-readers by encouraging non-readers to find someone to read his pamphlet to them. Walker's desire to reach both readers and non-readers symbolizes the critical interface between the written word and action in black print culture; ultimately Walker designed the text to catapult enslaved African Americans into thinking critically about their conditions under slavery and refusing to accept them. Slaveholders and their defenders realized the potential danger of Walker's text and did what they could to keep the *Appeal* beyond the reach of African Americans, free or enslaved, who would read it and be inspired to revolt. Walker's tactical goal was shared by black journals and newspapers from *Freedom's Journal* in 1827 to *The Black Scholar* and *Black News* in the 1960s and 1970s. Black poets, fiction writers, and journalists aligned their artistic and cultural objectives with the larger emphasis on black pride and self-determination. In his essay "Toward a Definition: Black Poetry in the Sixties (after LeRoi Jones)," Don L. Lee asserted,

Creativity and individuality are the two nouns most often used to describe an artist of any kind. Black poets ascribe to both, but understand that both must not interfere with us, black people as a whole. Black poets of the sixties have moved to create images that reflect a positive movement for black people and people of the world. The poets understand their own growth and education from a new perspective.²⁵

Lee's literary positioning included a critique of some artists of the "Harlem Renaissance" in the 1920s who created black art for white patrons, which he referred to as "Renaissance I." In contrast, the Black Arts Movement, "Renaissance II," resembles more closely the "New Negro" literary movement associated with Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). These artistic flowerings were inextricably linked to larger self-determinist movements, including the UNIA plans in the post-World War I era for liberating Africa and the 1960s Black Power demands for black control over black political advancement. These artistic movements reflected a growing awareness among African people of how to use their heritage and culture to guarantee their freedom.²⁶ Even less studied is the profound impact this Black Arts Movement had on black prisoners whose stories and lived experiences, prior to

being included in publications during this period, seldom had a forum. In a study of the “Prison Arts Movement,” Lee Bernstein argued that incarcerated men and women engaged in a surge of literary work that coincided with the Black Power and Black Arts movements.²⁷ During this era, poets Gwendolyn Brooks, Dudley Randall, and Sonia Sanchez, and visual artists Faith Ringgold, Benny Andrews, and others facilitated opportunities for black prisoners to create and display their work. While black prisoners benefited from these collaborations, it is even more critical to understand what the black prisoner came to represent for these black artists. Bernstein found that “incarcerated people were central to the revolutionary aims of the Black Arts Movement both in the works they wrote and in the symbol they provided of ‘imprisonment’ in a racially oppressive society.”²⁸

Black poets, writers, artists, and activists saw the potential in men and women behind bars as well as how the incarcerated could educate the non-incarcerated. Poets and writers Brooks, Sanchez, and others used their talents and gifts to engage in the transformative work of promoting the healing of incarcerated people through writing, art, and education, which these artists believed should be a goal for all African people. Because African Americans and other people of color in the United States were facing oppressive racialized structures in education, labor, housing, and other areas, these black scholars and writers were less interested in making distinctions between those “inside” and “outside” of “Prison America.” Bernstein observed that,

Rather than outcasts from African American communities, incarcerated people provided evidence of the ongoing oppression of all African American people throughout U.S. history. Inspired at times by their own experiences with the justice system or by the writings of Malcolm X, Angela Davis, George Jackson, and Eldridge Cleaver, these artists would use police officers as metaphors for white oppression. In poetry and drama, convicts became potential revolutionaries; in sharp contrast, guards and police became storm troopers for the white power structure.²⁹

Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks was just one writer who spoke passionately about the potential she saw in black prison writing. Brooks’s own evolution from “Negro poet” to “Black poet” encompassed her desire to put writing—especially poetry—into the hands of everyday black people wherever they may have been. Brooks joined poet and publisher Haki Madhubuti to read their poetry in taverns and public spaces outside of institutions typically associated with literature and the arts. In addition, the efforts that black poets, writers, and especially publishers of journals and newspapers made to support the work of black prisoners demonstrated Perry’s aforementioned philosophy of African American

education and the value that literate practices presuppose in building relationships and community. In other words, those who had acquired and mastered aspects of literacy were expected to pass on what they had learned to those with limited or no access. Brooks organized poetry readings and competitions in prisons and developed a relationship with poet Etheridge Knight when he was an inmate in Indiana State Prison. In an interview in the *Black Books Bulletin*, published in Chicago by the Institute for Positive Education, co-founded by Haki Madhubuti to serve as the umbrella organization for the New Concept Development Center, Brooks discussed the contributions of black prisoners like Etheridge Knight. "Of course, I have to be very careful about including prisoners," Brooks admitted, "because some of our best work is coming from prisons. Where people are at last having time to sit down and think over their lives and then to reflect, meditate, and develop their thoughts in poetry and exciting fiction."³⁰

Etheridge Knight was a Korean War veteran who returned to the United States only to find his life entangled with narcotics. "I died in Korea from a shrapnel wound and narcotics resurrected me," he explained. "I died in 1960 from a prison sentence and poetry brought me back to life."³¹ When Brooks met Knight, she had become keenly interested in black prison writing and believed that the prison housed many potential poets and literary artists. *Poems from Prison* was Knight's first collection of poetry. Prior to the publication of this book of verse in 1968 by Dudley Randall's Broadside Press, other black publications such as *Negro Digest* and the *Journal of Black Poetry* included Knight's poems in their pages. In the preface to *Poems from Prison*, Gwendolyn Brooks declared the volume "Vital. Vital. This poetry is a major announcement. . . . And there is blackness, inclusive, possessed and given; freed and terrible and beautiful."³² A character from Knight's poetry, "Hard Rock," took on a life of his own. "Hard Rock returns to prison from the hospital for the criminally insane." Knight tells the story of an inmate with a reputation for rebelling against guards and who continuously challenged authority, regardless of the punishments he received.³³ Claiming Hard Rock as a hero of inmates, Knight's poem described the rise and fall of this prisoner who after electric shocks and other inhumane experiments returned to the prison barely able to say his name. Knight also included poems that paid homage to Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, and Malcolm X. In an edited volume, Knight acknowledged his mentors and supporters, Brooks, Randall, Sonia Sanchez, and Don L. Lee, who encouraged him and whom he referred to as "black poets whose love and words cracked these walls."³⁴ While poets and artists were building alliances with black inmates, black journals and newspapers used their publications as a venue

to crack the walls that symbolically separated the incarcerated from those outside the prison walls.

**FREEDOM IS AN ILLUSION:
PRISON VOICES IN *THE BLACK SCHOLAR***

One example of black print culture's effort to alert the unincarcerated about the issues facing black prisoners was "*The Black Scholar's* Prisoners' Fund." In mailings sent out in September 1972, *Black Scholar* editor Robert Chrisman brought this fund to the attention of the readers, urging them to make contributions above and beyond their individual subscriptions in order to supply black prisoners with copies of the publication. The "prisoners' fund" signaled to readers *The Black Scholar's* commitment to disseminating black history, literature, and other information to African Americans who might otherwise be left out of these conversations. To invest in the literate practices of incarcerated black men and women was to invest in the overall well-being of African-descended peoples globally. However, *The Black Scholar* was not solely interested in redefining literacy in the lives of black prisoners, but including them in the consciousness of African Americans on the outside. Literacy in both instances was much more than the ability to decode and comprehend texts. Being "literate" meant that black prisoners would be able to think critically about the circumstances that led to their incarceration, and understand the racial origins of the laws and processes that governed their trials and imprisonment. Within black print culture, literacy was redefined to include those locked inside prison walls desiring "to be heard in black and white." Black artists, writers, and publishers sought to trouble convenient and misleading binaries such as free/incarcerated, citizen/criminal, or black/white by analyzing relationships between police forces and black communities, the effects of law enforcement practices on black lives, and exposing incarcerated lives to an otherwise engaged public. The pages of black journals, magazines, and other publications in the Black Arts era provided a forum for defining these issues from an African American perspective and forging a relationship between black men and women on both sides of prison walls. In soliciting donations for *The Black Scholar's* Prisoners' Fund, the scholar-activists at the Institute of the Black World explained the need for access to black print culture for those behind prison bars. "There is a renaissance of black cultural and political consciousness within prison walls, a profound need for meaningful literature, for outside contact to relieve the grim isolation of cold steel and concrete. And, there are the rich cultural and creative resources of black prisoners to be unlocked, developed, and fulfilled."³⁵

The Black Scholar's first issue devoted to "The Black Prisoner" was published on April–May 1971. Words of wisdom and protest from the scholar-activist Angela Davis, poet-playwright Marvin X, and several incarcerated and formerly incarcerated artists and activists were included in the special issue. Robert Chrisman, who served as editor for both issues on black prisoners, contributed an essay to the first, entitled "Black Prisoners, White Law." Chrisman anchored both special issues with his argument that black people suffered from "double indemnity" when it came to the U.S. legal system:

Black people cannot be protected by American law, for we have no franchise in this country. If anything, we suffer double indemnity: we have no law of our own and no protection from the law of white America which, by its intention and by the very nature of the cultural values which determined it, is inimical to blackness. . . . In the literal sense of the word, we are outlaws.³⁶

Chrisman was also a poet and professor of English at San Francisco State University when this essay was published. He believed that black people were citizens of the United States and must have a voice in determining the "corrective action" to be taken against anyone accused of committing "crimes."³⁷ Ultimately, Chrisman argued that it was nearly impossible for some people to remain "above the law" when they were facing racialized poverty and discrimination in employment, public education, housing, and other areas. The essay included the voices of the incarcerated, and echoing the title given to the published letter from Fleeta Drumgo, "We Are All Prisoners," Chrisman underscored the cultural goals *The Black Scholar* sought to advance. "[T]he black community outside of bars must never divorce itself from the black community within bars. Freedom is a false illusion in this society . . . we are all prisoners."³⁸ Challenging traditional notions of "freedom" for African Americans, Chrisman urged readers to question their own beliefs about inside/outside lives, given the nature of racial politics in the United States. Chrisman and his contributors echoed the views of Malcolm X, George Jackson, and Angela Davis, who offered stunning perspectives from "Prison America." Fleeta Drumgo, Wendell Wade, and the contributors to this issue urged their readers to consider the inhumane conditions in the nation's overcrowded prisons. They reminded people of the demands for improvements that sparked the prison riots at Attica in New York and San Quentin in California. The conditions were not improving.

Next came comparisons of the free and the unfree African Americans and how similar their conditions were historically. The contemporary situation had scarcely improved considering the under-resourced educational systems and unfair hous-

ing practices. Writers sought to use their words to incite action. “A written text can function as a call,” literary historian Fahamisha Brown found in a study of poets and writers prominent within the African American literary tradition.³⁹ Black print culture thrived on intense debate, discussion, and analysis, but it was pointed toward action. *The Black Scholar*’s examination of “The Black Prisoner” in 1971 sought to move readers on both sides of prison walls to actively engage in the struggles for social justice.

Angela Davis’s contribution to the 1971 issue, “The Soledad Brothers” was written from her Marin County, California, jail cell where she was awaiting trial. She was later exonerated of the charge of supplying guns to Jonathan Jackson, the younger sibling of Soledad Brother George Jackson, in the fatal attempt to free his brother. Davis urged *The Black Scholar* readers to put action behind the slogan “Save the Soledad Brothers from Legal Lynching.”⁴⁰ The Soledad Brothers, George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette, were falsely accused of killing a prison guard on 16 January 1969, and were facing the death penalty. George Jackson’s prison memoir *Soledad Brother*, published in the fall of 1970, became a national bestseller, but was considered contraband in California’s prisons.⁴¹ Davis placed the struggle of the Soledad Brothers in historical and contemporary context and within the discourse of black oppression in the United States and abroad. Davis focused on the unfortunate connection between the U.S. prison system and African Americans: “[B]lack people have become more thoroughly acquainted with America’s jails and prisons than any other group of people in this country.”⁴² From convict lease and prison farms in the South to contemporary practices in the California prison system, Davis made clear the reality that state prisons profited from inmates’ free labor. U.S. prisons were becoming racially homogeneous institutions with inmates of color predominating. Davis believed this was a new form of enslavement. As a college professor, Davis understood the importance of the inside/outside prison connection before her incarceration, but her situation nonetheless demonstrated that regardless of education, class, or professional status, African Americans could be targeted for incarceration for their political ideologies as well as their inscribed racial status. Davis’s “The Soledad Brothers” was published simultaneously by *The Black Scholar* and *People’s World*, a widely circulated black newspaper. This demonstrated a commitment to disseminate information more broadly on the conditions facing black prisoners.

Published letters and “letters to the editor” have made an important contribution to black print culture historically, especially those written by black prisoners during the Black Power era. Two letters from Soledad Brother Fleeta Drumgo were published in *The Black Scholar*. Both letters were accompanied by thumb-

nail-sized photos of well-known leaders and scholars, including W. E. B Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X; and political prisoners Angela Davis, H. Rap Brown, John Clutchette, Ahmed Evans, George Jackson, Ruchell Magee, and Bobby Seale, demonstrating that African Americans with varying ideologies, religious beliefs, and political affiliations had been portrayed as "public enemies" throughout American history. Drumgo opened his letter thanking *The Black Scholar* readers and affirming the black prisoner population's engagement with the struggle for equality and justice beyond prison walls. He also noted that *The Black Scholar* was "a bad book" among the prisoners—"bad" of course meant important in raising their consciousness. Drumgo's self-assured tone in this first letter shifted in closing to a forceful plea for those outside to acknowledge their connections to those behind bars:

In conclusion let me say on behalf of all of us in the maximum, please don't reject and forget us because this allows the monster to brutalize, murder, and treat us inhumanely. We are of you, we love you and struggle with you.⁴³

In addition to letters, black prisoners contributed critiques of the prison system within the context of their experiences. *The Black Scholar* invited incarcerated men and women to speak for themselves. Rather than objectifying prisoners and analyzing their lives from a comfortable distance, the contributors told their own stories and provided a critical witnessing from the facilities where they were held. Wendell Wade wrote from his prison cell in Tehachapi, California. At the time of publication, Wade awaited trial for a shootout between the Oakland Police Department and the Black Panther Party in 1968, which resulted in the death of Panther leader Bobby Hutton. In "The Politics of Prisons," Wade predicted, "The issue of black prisoners has grown to monumental proportions and will undoubtedly become the number one problem facing black people in North America."⁴⁴ Wade's analysis of the situation in 1971 foreshadowed the later crisis in U.S. prisons. In a 2008 study, the Pew Center on the States reported that 1 in 100 adults were incarcerated in the United States, making it the largest incarcerator in the world.⁴⁵ The statistics on black men and women were even worse: While 1 in 355 white women ages 35–39 were incarcerated, 1 in 100 black women in the same age group were behind bars. Wade's statement was even more prophetic when examining figures for black men. For black men 18 years of age or older, 1 in 15 were incarcerated in 2008; and for black men ages 20–34 the figure was 1 in 9. Given the current prison crisis and the formation of the prison industrial complex that targets black men, women, and children for its private and public jails, pris-

ons, and detention centers, Wade's essay challenged the narrow and limited views that black people were the "criminals." He insisted that it was not just a matter of survival, even though "acts of survival" seem justified, but the racialized functioning of the criminal justice system.⁴⁶ In positing the existence of the "school-to-prison pipeline" or the "celling" of black youth, Wade was again prescient.⁴⁷ Writing in 1971, Wade observed that "educational institutions do not prepare or enable blacks or the poor to have access to jobs, or the means of survival while they are receiving that 'good education.'"⁴⁸ Wade's sarcasm revealed the stark reality that for many black children the quality of public education they received did not provide them with the skills needed to go on to advanced education or to obtain a middle-class standard of living.

Davis and Wade spoke from personal experience about jails and prisons in the state of California in particular. California's prison system in the late 1960s and early 1970s was already earning its reputation as an inhumane warehouse for California's poor and people of color. Anthropologist Ruth Gilmore's *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* is a study of California's prison system. She found that the state's prison population "grew nearly 500 percent between 1982 and 2000," with African Americans and Latinos representing two thirds of the prison population.⁴⁹ Currently California is the "undisputed leader" in prison spending. In 2007 the "Golden State" spent \$8.8 billion on prisons while decreasing spending on all levels of public education.⁵⁰ Wade offered an analysis of California's prison system, which focused on the purposeful camouflaging of the institutions themselves: "These prisons have been built without bars being clearly visible. They are attempting to create the illusion that the prisoners aren't in prison at all."⁵¹ In California where the surrounding physical environment did not reflect the horrors inside the state's prisons, Wade wanted to reveal what went on within carceral spaces.

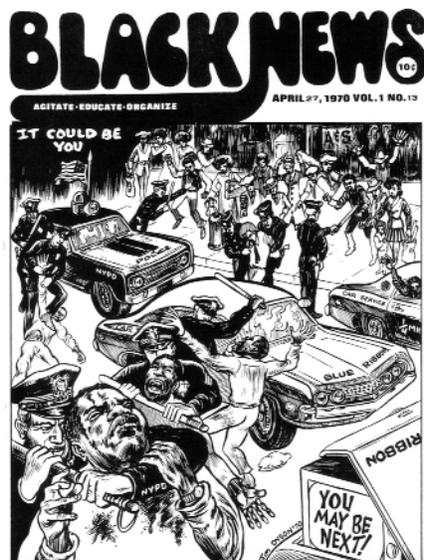
Other prison voices in *The Black Scholar* included Clifford (Jabali) Rollins, former inmate, who deconstructed the prison guards' methods for aggravating tensions and conflicts among the ethnically diverse prison populations, thus fueling the public's view of prisoners as violent, uncontrollable, and needing to be locked away. Rollins understood this strategic and purposeful pattern of the prison administration to be a useful tool to justify the need for harsh rules and to isolate groups in order to abort efforts to organize among themselves. Rollins's autobiography was an example of the possibility of self-education in prison. He summed up his life events as "standard" for a young black man growing up in the Watts neighborhood in Los Angeles.

I went through most of the standard ghetto changes brothers go through and it ended with my serving 10 years on armed robbery/murder charges. My thought has followed a steady evolution from the nationalism of Islam, to Malcolm X; I am now involved in Pan-Africanism.⁵²

At the time his essay was published, however, Rollins was teaching creative writing and was the coordinator of the Prison Involvement Community Organization (PICO) in California. Like many black prisoners, Rollins was inspired by Malcolm X and continued his outreach to prisoners after his own release. In "Fascism at Soledad," Rollins described black prisoners' efforts to avoid entrapment in racial conflicts in prisons to facilitate the much needed organizing around the cramped and overcrowded conditions. "The new style of convict," Rollins asserted, was "alert, capable of abstracting, frighten[ed] the prison authorities."⁵³ Rollins and other formerly incarcerated men and women were appreciative of the books, journals, magazines, and newspapers that assisted in their re-education and the publishers' willingness to make space both literally and figuratively for prison voices in their publications. This effort on the part of magazine and newspaper editors created a direct connection for black prisoners to the black community and interested artists. Black journals, newspapers, and other publications were largely responsible for creating awareness around these issues.

As one of the responses to the September 1971 Attica Prison riot and the murder of George Jackson in San Quentin Prison on 21 August 1971, the October 1972 issue of *The Black Scholar* was dedicated to the "The Black Prisoner." Jackson's death hurt many people because his memoir *Soledad Brother* served to redefine the black prisoner in ways similar to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Jackson's letters in *Soledad Brother* did not focus on literacy and learning as did Malcolm X's autobiography. Instead, Jackson included a critical analysis of his schooling experiences, placing them in dialogue with the larger discourse on public education for black children. Jackson concluded, "The school systems are gauged to teach youth what to think, not how to think."⁵⁴ In many letters Jackson did note his own development of a commitment to his studies while incarcerated. Again, *The Black Scholar* used its pages to expose the psychological and physical abuse of the prison population and to tell the truth about how Jackson was killed:

It is important to understand why the authorities are trying to stop all communication between prisons and the outside community. A few years back they were able to carry out any kind of torture and the people did not hear anything about it. Now, growing outside support has given strength to the prisoners.⁵⁵



Front Page of *Black News*, 27 April 1970. Courtesy of Jitu Weusi.

Both issues of *The Black Scholar* on the black prisoner underscored the need for those outside prison walls to know what goes on behind those walls. Racialized poverty and mis-education often led to criminal activity for survival. However, *The Black Scholar* allowed readers to consider more difficult questions: Where do the lives of incarcerated and unincarcerated converge and diverge? In what ways did enslavement, Jim Crow segregation, and employment inequities account for the high levels of black incarceration in the late 1960s and early 1970s? *The Black Scholar* also provided black prisoners a space to reflect upon their choices and replace the labels “criminal” and “convict” as their sole descriptors.

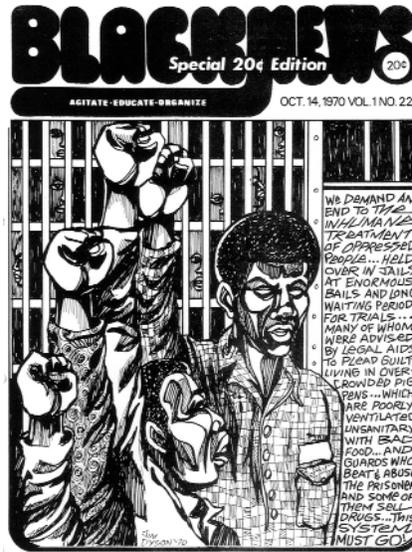
“IT COULD BE YOU”: PRISON VOICES IN *BLACK NEWS*

Delivering on its promise to “Agitate, Educate, and Organize,” *Black News*, published in Bedford Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, New York, devoted the 27 April 1970 issue to examinations of police brutality and black oppression. Taunting “It could be you,” and “You may be next!,” *Black News* artist Jim “Seitu” Dyson depicted a chaotic streetscape with policemen placing black men in chokeholds, while other police officers pointed their batons at black men, women, and children

who were witnessing these injustices to warn them against getting involved.⁵⁶ The lead article featured one of the few photographs used in this newspaper, which used mostly drawings and illustrations. The photo showed two young black men being beaten by the police. *Black News* emerged as a response to the efforts in the Ocean Hill–Brownsville area to gain “community control” over neighborhood public schools, but addressed more than the “mis-education of black youth” and the re-education of their parents and teachers.⁵⁷

Black News also sought to be a forum for African-descended people whether they were from Brooklyn Heights, the public housing projects, or the “Big House” at Sing Sing. *Black News* was an outgrowth of the EAST organization, which included the school Uhuru Sasa Shule, a food cooperative, and a music and cultural arts center. The pages of *Black News* were used to organize people in the community to oppose the financial disparities in educational resources and the racial discrimination in housing. The newspaper also promoted positive images of black people, carrying advertisements for black bookstores, hair care centers for Afros, and other black-owned and operated businesses in the area. *Black News* was published between 1969 and 1984 and one consistent theme was to draw attention to police brutality and the operations of the criminal justice system. For the cover of the 14 October 1970 issue, Jim Dyson’s illustration featured black men behind bars with fists raised and the caption: “We demand an end to the inhumane treatment of oppressed people . . . held over in jails at enormous bails and long waiting periods for trials . . . living in overcrowded pig pens . . . this system must go. . . .”⁵⁸

Dyson’s provocative illustrations were often layered with images and words grabbing the reader’s attention. In a statement issued by the staff, and similar to the one that appeared in *The Black Scholar*, *Black News* concurred that the penal system was “designed to intimidate the poor, Black, and hungry.”⁵⁹ The physical conditions in most U.S. prisons were unhealthy with poor ventilation, extreme overcrowding, and lack of nourishing food, and the *Black News* supported the prisoners’ protests and strikes. “*Black News* . . . identifies most strongly with [black prisoners’] courageous actions. . . . You have pointed the way to actions which must be followed at all levels by the communities in the prison outside of your prison; it is now up to us in the prison outside to bring your point home by ridding ourselves of this murderous system.”⁶⁰



Front Page of *Black News*, 14 October 1970. Courtesy of Jitu Weusi.

The 20 November 1970 issue featured a Jim Dyson illustration of Angela Davis in several profiles with a “Free Angela Davis” poster covering a “Wanted” poster. Two articles were devoted to her flight from police, capture, incarceration and trial, and specifically challenged the *Black News* readership by asking: “Where are the Blacks?” At the fundraisers and rallies generating support for Davis’s defense and the “Free Angela Davis” campaign, *Black News* reported that most of the participants were white and sought to chastise those in the black community who were not actively supporting the cause.

Black journals, newspapers, and other publications used their pages to speak to and affirm each other. *Black News* frequently advertised *The Black Scholar* and sold copies at its umbrella institution (the EAST) along with other black newspapers and magazines, including *Muhammad Speaks*, *The Black Panther*, and various newspapers from the Caribbean. The black bookstores advertised in *Black News* announced that they sold *The Black Scholar*, suggesting a common and overlapping readership. Most importantly, *Black News* aligned its editorial perspectives on the prison system and the Attica Prison massacre with those of *The Black Scholar*.

With a backdrop of a seemingly endless black hole, dark faces with fists extending through prison bars and guns and weaponry aimed towards them, the

22 October 1971 issue of *Black News* read: "Tombs . . . San Quentin . . . Kent State . . . 400 years of death . . . Attica . . . and more to come." The list of prison names and sites of violent police confrontations included Kent State University, where in a May 1970 standoff between National Guardsmen and unarmed students protesting the escalation of the war in Vietnam, four students were killed. Jim Dyson's illustration communicated the belief that the massacres in San Quentin and Attica were only the beginning of a backlash against black prisoners. The lead article was an open letter, dated 30 September 1971, to Governor Nelson G. Rockefeller from the Newark Black Leadership Congress, specifically members of the NewArk Penal Reform Committee, criticizing him for the mistreatment of the families of the prisoners killed during the Attica uprising. "Black people, 'prisoners,' are [neither] considered, nor treated as human beings and since they (Black prisoners) are not, neither are their families."⁶¹ The authors David H. Barrett and M. W. Dhati Changa then cited Robert Chrisman's essay in *The Black Scholar* expressing the belief that all black inmates should be considered "political prisoners." Whether it was the victimization by racist police forces or "resisting the draft, or activity in Black Power or Black Nationalist organizations—the state's action against [African Americans] is always political."⁶² Ultimately, the authors declared that the prison rioting at Attica was no different from the turbulent urban insurrections that took place in the 1960s and were responses to the ongoing problem of police brutality.

In the same issue, Jitu Weusi's column, "Around Our Way," offered a different perspective on the idea that "we are all prisoners." Weusi declared, "We are all criminals," and suggested that *all* black people were viewed as criminals by many in authority, but only some brothers and sisters were "unfortunate" enough to get "caught."⁶³ *News's* tone was more militant than *The Black Scholar*. Adhering to its mission to "agitate, educate, organize," the articles in *Black News* were confrontational with a hint of sarcasm, in order to move people from reading the paper into action. Weusi criticized the predictability of the "script" offered by the authorities following rebellions and killings at correctional facilities. Weusi and those he interviewed for the column focused on the need to counter the distorted information in many mainstream newspapers. Weusi emphasized that black people "SHOULD BE ABOUT DOING. . . . We've got to stop weeping and memorializing. . . . The brothers made their moves and now it's up to us to make our moves."⁶⁴ Weusi's voice and style were indicative of the militant tone of the entire newspaper and reflected the protest traditions of publications in black print culture since the early 19th century.⁶⁵

The commitment *Black News* made to examine life "on the other side of the

wall,” continued throughout the early 1970s. Two issues were dedicated to a Brooklyn resident, the South Carolina-born Sonny Carson, whose story would eventually become the 1972 memoir *The Education of Sonny Carson* and later a film. *Black News* used Carson’s story as the urban bildungsroman to show the tensions in the lives of black youth and the inevitability of the public school-to-prison pipeline for black youth. *The Education of Sonny Carson* detailed Carson’s life growing up, trying desperately to fit in at school while being pulled in other directions by the lure of gang life. Carson’s “education” largely took place in the streets and later in prison.⁶⁶ However, it was Carson’s life after imprisonment that made his story that much more critical to *Black News* readers. Like Malcolm X, Carson used his life experiences and knowledge to organize people against social injustices and became something of a hero in Brooklyn. While telling Carson’s story, including the problems he faced in school with teachers, and his effort to become a “good boy,” *Black News* argued that this was a difficult persona to sustain. “But the ‘good boy’ pattern is not the one most allowed in the Black community, only the most praised by whites. . . . Imbued with a sense of justice and righteousness, Black youths continue to rebel in most cases, at the constant oppression of whiteness (police beatings, teacher whippings, merchant cheating, etc.).”⁶⁷

Black youths were central to *Black News*, not just as distributors of the newspaper in the neighborhood and in other New York City boroughs, but they were also the newspaper’s impetus. Weusi and the co-founders of *Black News* were also members of the Afro-American Teachers Association (ATA), headed by Al Vann. Located in Brooklyn, the ATA organized classes and study groups for students and parents in their offices. Classes included General Equivalent Diploma (GED) preparation, mathematics, and reading. The focus on Sonny Carson was purposeful because these educators believed Carson’s story would resonate with young readers and their parents. Carson’s school, a vocational high school, referred to as “the factory,” also gained the reputation as a prison. At age seventeen Carson found himself sentenced to three years in a reform school for his involvement in a robbery:

Sonny was well along the path forced on some of our ablest and most creative minds. Locked away in prisons under the most inhumane conditions imaginable (Remember Attica) we find the cream of our manhood imprisoned by a law-breaking criminal system . . . the reform school/prison pattern is set up to break a brother’s spirit . . . keep him caged and away from his community long enough to disorient and mark him for life.⁶⁸

Invoking the recent memory of Attica, Carson’s story was relevant beyond Brooklyn; it was the story of countless youth in urban areas throughout the United

States. Ultimately, *Black News* wanted its readership to understand that the incarceration crisis for African Americans mirrored other struggles for African peoples, particularly in southern Africa. Four years after Attica's uprising, *Black News* published an article urging readers to remember that "Attica was not the beginning and it will not be the end of oppression or rebellion."⁶⁹ The *Black News* staff asked its readers to consider Attica in a global context by comparing it to struggles of oppressed and imprisoned political prisoners in Angola, South Africa, Vietnam, and Laos.⁷⁰

In his 1971 "Open Letter to My Sister, Angela Y. Davis," novelist and social critic James Baldwin concluded with an acknowledgement of Davis's and others work in raising awareness about the racial injustices committed against black people. Baldwin wrote, "The enormous revolution in Black consciousness which has occurred in your generation, my dear sister, means the beginning or the end of America. . . . If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own—which it is—and render impassable with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night."⁷¹ Privileging prison voices in black print culture in the 1970s was inspired by a larger social movement in which reading, writing, speaking, and doing were critical. Baldwin's compelling letter inspired the title of Davis's book *If They Come in the Morning*, which contained the writings of black inmates, scholars, poets, and activists that originally appeared in black newspapers, journals, and other publications. During the Black Power and Black Arts movements, black publications served as vehicles for examining the impact of the prison system on the daily lives of African Americans.

A major thrust of black print culture in the 1970s, in journals and newspapers in particular, was to reimagine the role of the black prisoner as a key figure in confronting racial inequality and injustice for African peoples everywhere. A second objective of black print culture during the decade was to reconsider the relationships between incarcerated and unincarcerated. *The Black Scholar*, *Black News*, and other publications sought to inspire African Americans on both sides of prison walls to engage in the struggle against the oppressive and inhumane conditions of prisons inside and prisons outside. The pages of these publications carried the dialogue about those incarcerated to communities otherwise splintered by class, indifference, and lack of information. Poems, letters, essays, and reflections penned by black prisoners and by scholars and social activists who were sympathetic to their plight became instruments for re-education and these texts came

with history, context, and instructions for action.

NOTES

¹“The Black Prisoner, I,” *The Black Scholar* 2, nos. 8–9 (April–May 1971); and “The Black Prisoner, II,” *The Black Scholar* 4, no. 2 (Oct. 1972). “The Black Prisoner I” included Ahamad A. Aswadu, “A Black View of Prison,” 28–31; Robert Chrisman, “Black Prisoners, White Law,” 44–46; Angela Y. Davis, “Soledad Brothers,” 2–7; Fleeta Drumgo, “We Are All Prisoners,” 32–33; Clifford (Jabali) Rollins, “Fascism at Soledad,” 24–27; Wendell Wade, “The Politics of Prisons,” 12–18.

²“The Struggle at San Quentin,” *The Black Scholar* 2, nos. 8–9 (April–May, 1971): inside cover.

³For discussions of enslaved Africans seeking education, early 19th-century literary societies, and activist writers in the 20th and 21st centuries, see James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988); V. P. Franklin, *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of African American Resistance* (Chicago, IL, 1992); Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC, 2002); Elizabeth McHenry and Shirley Brice Heath, “The Literate and the Literary: African Americans as Writers and Readers—1830–1940,” *Written Communication* 11, no. 4 (1994): 419–443; and Maisha T. Fisher, *Black Literate Lives: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York, 2009).

⁴Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York, 2006); V. P. Franklin, ed., “New Black Power Studies: National, International, and Transnational Perspectives,” *The Journal of African American History* 92 (Fall 2007): 463–576.

⁵Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York, 2003): 51.

⁶Malcolm X with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, 1965), 174.

⁷Institute of the Black World, “Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World,” *Harvard Educational Review*, monograph no. 2 (1974): 114.

⁸Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 180.

⁹Institute of the Black World, “Education and Black Struggle,” 113.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 115.

¹¹Wendell Wade, “The Politics of Prisons,” *The Black Scholar* (April–May 1971): 16.

¹²Theresa Perry, “Freedom for Literacy and Literacy for Freedom: The African American Philosophy of Education,” in *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African-American Students*, ed. Theresa Perry, Claude Steele, and Asa G. Hilliard III (Boston, MA, 2003), 12.

¹³*Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 21–22.

¹⁵Jitu Weusi initially published under his birth name Les Campbell and sometimes as “Big Black.”

¹⁶Big Black, “Around Our Way,” *Black News*, 5 February 1971.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 25 February 1971.

¹⁸Jitu Weusi, interview with the author, 24 April 2007, Brooklyn, NY.

¹⁹Don L. Lee, preface to Gwendolyn Brooks, *Report from Part One* (Detroit, MI, 1972), i–iv.

²⁰James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005); Melba Boyd Joyce, *Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and Broadside* (New York, 2004); Julius Thompson, *Dudley Randall, the Broadside Press, and the Black Arts Movement, 1965–1995* (Jefferson, NC, 2005).

²¹Gloria Ladson-Billings, “Reading, Writing, and Race: Literacy Practices of Teachers in Diverse Classrooms,”

in *Language, Literacy, and Power in Schooling*, ed. Teresa L. McCarty (Mahweh, NJ, 2005), 135.

²²Franklin, *Black Self-Determination*, 147–185.

²³Maisha T. Fisher, “The Song Is Unfinished: The New Literate and the Literary and Their Institutions,” *Written Communication* 21, no. 3 (2004): 290–312; Fisher, *Black Literate Lives*.

²⁴David Walker, *David Walker’s Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829; reprt. Baltimore, MD, 1993).

²⁵Don L. Lee, “Toward a Definition: Black Poetry of the Sixties (After LeRoi Jones),” in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle (Garden City, NY, 1971), 247.

²⁶Tony Martin, *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, the Black Arts, the Harlem Renaissance* (Dover, MA, 1983).

²⁷Lee Bernstein, “Prison Writers and the Black Arts Movement,” in *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, ed. Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford (Piscataway, NJ, 2006), 297–316.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 298.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 302.

³⁰“*Black Books Bulletin* Interviews Gwen Brooks,” *Black Books Bulletin* 2 (Spring 1974): 32–33.

³¹Etheridge Knight, *Poems from Prison* (Detroit, MI, 1968), back cover.

³²Gwendolyn Brooks, foreword to *Poems from Prison*, by Etheridge Knight (Detroit, MI, 1968), 9.

³³Knight, *Poems from Prison*, 11.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 10.

³⁵This was published in a mailer printed by the Black World Foundation in Sausalito, California, circa 1972.

³⁶Robert Chrisman, “Black Prisoners, White Law,” 45.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*, 46.

³⁹Fahamisha P. Brown, *Performing the Word: African American Poetry as Vernacular Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1999), 29.

⁴⁰Davis, “Soledad Brothers,” 2.

⁴¹George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (1970; reprt. New York, 1994).

⁴²Davis, “Soledad Brothers,” 2.

⁴³Drumgo, “We Are All Prisoners,” 33.

⁴⁴Wendell Wade, “The Politics of Prisons,” 12.

⁴⁵Pew Center on the States, *One in 100 Behind Bars in America, 2008* (Washington, DC, 2008), 6.

⁴⁶Wade, “The Politics of Prisons,” 12.

⁴⁷For further contemporary discussions of the school-to-prison pipeline, see Garrett A. Duncan, “Urban Pedagogies and the Ceiling of Adolescents of Color,” *Social Justice* 27 (Fall 2000): 29–42; Erica R. Meiners, *Right to Be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies* (New York, 2007).

⁴⁸Wade, “The Politics of Prisons,” 13.

⁴⁹Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, CA, 2007), 7.

⁵⁰Pew Center on the States, *One in 100 Behind Bars*, 11.

⁵¹Wade, “The Politics of Prisons,” 14.

⁵²Rollins, “Fascism at Soledad,” 25.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴Jackson, *Soledad Brother*, 54.

⁵⁵“The Black Prisoner, II,” *The Black Scholar* 4, no. 2 (October 1972): inside cover.

⁵⁶Jim "Seitu" Dyson, *Black News*, 27 April 1970.

⁵⁷Fisher, *Black Literate Lives*.

⁵⁸This is an excerpt from a statement that appeared on the front cover of *Black News*, 14 October 1970.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰"All Black Inmates Are Political Prisoners," *Black News*, 14 October 1970.

⁶¹David H. Barrett and M. W. Dhati Changa, "Newark Penal Reform Committee," *Black News*, 22 October 1971.

⁶²Barrett and Changa, "Newark Penal Reform Committee."

⁶³Big Black, "Around Our Way," *Black News*, 22 October 1971.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵Fisher, *Black Literate Lives*, 60.

⁶⁶Mwlna I. Abubakika, *The Education of Sonny Carson* (New York, 1972).

⁶⁷"The Education of Sonny Carson," *Black News*, 4 August 1973.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Black News*, October–November 1975.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹James Baldwin, "An Open Letter to My Sister, Angela Y. Davis," in *If They Come in the Morning*, ed. Angela Davis (New York, 1971), 23.