

A Brief History of the New Afrikan Prison Struggle

This article was first written at the request of the New Afrikan Peoples Organization (NAPO). Its original title was "The Rise and Development of the New Afrikan Liberation Struggle Behind the Walls." The New Afrikan liberation struggle behind the walls refers to the struggle of Black prisoners, "behind the walls" of U.S. penal institutions, to gain liberation for ourselves, our people, and all oppressed people. We of the New Afrikan Independence Movement spell "Afrikan" with a "k" because Afrikan linguists originally used "k" to indicate the "c" sound in the English language. We use the term "New Afrikan," instead of Black, to define ourselves as an Afrikan people who have been forcibly transplanted to a new land and formed into a "new Afrikan nation" in North America. But our struggle behind the walls did not begin in America.

The 16th Century Through The Civil War

The Afrikan prison struggle began on the shores of Afrika behind the walls of medieval pens that held captives for ships bound west into slavery. It continues today behind the walls of modern U.S. penitentiaries where all prisoners are held as legal slaves — a blatant violation of international law.

The conception of prison ideology began to take form as far back as the reign of Louis XIV of France (1643–1715) when the Benedictine monk Mabillon wrote that: ". . . penitents might be secluded in cells like those of Carthusian monks, and there being employed in various sorts of labor."¹ In 1790, on April 5th, the Pennsylvania Quakers actualized this concept as the capstone of their 14-year struggle to reform Philadelphia's Walnut Street jail. No longer would corporal punishment be administered. Henceforth prisoners would be locked away in their cells with a Bible and forced to do *penitence* in order to rehabilitate themselves.² Thus was born the penitentiary.

In 1850, approximately 6,700 people were found in the nation's newly emerging prison system.³ Almost none of the prisoners were Black.⁴ They were more valuable economically outside the prison system because there were other means of racial control. During this time most New Afrikan (Black) men, women, and children were already imprisoned for life on plantations as chattel slaves. Accordingly, the Afrikan struggle behind the walls was carried on primarily behind the walls of slave quarters through conspiracies, revolts, insurrections, arson, sabotage, work slowdowns, poisoning of the slavemaster, self-maimings, and runaways. If slaves were recaptured, they continued the struggle behind the walls of the local jails, many of which were first built to hold captured runaways. Later they were also used for local citizens.

Shortly after 1850, the imprisonment rate increased, then remained fairly stable with a rate of between 75 and 125 prisoners per 100,000 population.⁵ The Afrikan struggle continued primarily behind the slave-quarter's walls down through the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. This was a declaration issued by President Lincoln on January 1, 1863, during the height of the Civil War. It declared the slaves free *only* in those states still in rebellion and had little actual liberating effect on the slaves in question. Their slavemasters, still engaged in war against the Union, simply ignored the declaration and continued to hold their slaves in bondage. Some slavemasters kept the declaration secret after the war ended following Lee's surrender on April 9, 1865. As a result, news of the Emancipation Proclamation did not reach slaves in Texas until June 19, 1865. This date, called "Juneteenth," is celebrated annually by New Afrikans in Texas and outlying states as "Black Independence Day."

Post-Civil War To The 20th Century

Immediately after the Civil War and at the end of slavery, vast numbers of Black males were imprisoned for everything from not signing slave-like labor contracts with plantation owners to looking the “wrong” way at some White person,⁶ or for some similar “petty crime.” Any “transgression” perceived by Whites to be of a more serious nature was normally dealt with on the spot with a gun or rope . . . provided the Black was outnumbered and outarmed. “Black-on-Black” crime was then, as now, considered to be “petty crime” by the U.S. justice system. But petty or not, upon arrest most New Afrikans were given long, harsh sentences at hard labor.

Within five years after the end of the Civil War, the Black percentages of the prison population went from close to zero to 33 percent. Many of these prisoners were hired out to Whites at less than slave wages.⁷ Overnight, prisons became the new slave quarters for many New Afrikans. Likewise the Afrikan prison struggle changed from a struggle behind the walls of slave quarters to a struggle behind the walls of county workhouses, chain gang camps, and the plantations and factories that used prisoners as slave laborers.

The 20th Century Through World War II

From 1910 through 1950, Blacks made up 23 to 34 percent of the prisoners in the U.S. prison system.⁸ Most people, conditioned by the prison movies *The Defiant Ones* (starring Sidney Poitier, a Black, and Tony Curtis, a White), or *I Escaped From the Chain Gang* (starring Paul Muni, a White in an integrated chain gang), or *Cool Hand Luke* (starring Paul Newman, a White, in a Southern chain gang) erroneously assume that earlier U.S. prison populations were basically integrated. This is not so. The U.S. was a segregated society prior to 1950, including the prisons; even the northern ones. Most New Afrikan prisoners were sent to county workhouses, Black chain gangs, and obscure negro prisons. Thus, the early populations of the more well-known or “mainline” state and federal prisons — Attica, Sing Sing, Alcatraz, and Atlanta — were predominantly White and male. Whenever New Afrikans were sent to these “mainline” prisons they found themselves grossly outnumbered, relegated to the back of the lines, to separate lines, or to no lines at all. They were often denied outright what meager amenities existed within the prisons. Racism was rampant. New Afrikans were racistly suppressed by both White prisoners and guards. All of the guards were White — there were no Black guards or prison officials at the time. The Afrikan prisoners continued to struggle behind the walls of these segregated county workhouses, chain gang camps, and state and federal prisons, yet prison conditions for them remained much the same through World War II. Inside conditions accurately reflected conditions of the larger society outside the walls, except by then the state’s electric chair had mostly supplanted the lynch mob’s rope.

Post-World War II To The Civil Rights Era

Things began to change in the wake of World War II. Four factors flowing together ushered in these changes. They were the ghetto population explosion, the drug influx, the emergence of independent Afrikan nations, and the Civil Rights Movement.

The Ghetto Population Explosion

Plentiful jobs during the war, coupled with a severe shortage of White workers, caused U.S. war industries to hire New Afrikans in droves. Southern New Afrikans poured north to fill these unheard-of job opportunities, and the already crowded ghetto populations mushroomed.

Drug Influx

New Afrikan soldiers fought during the war to preserve European democracies. They returned home eager to join the fight to make segregated America democratic too. But the U.S. had witnessed Marcus Garvey organize similar sentiments following World War I into one of the greatest Black movements in the western hemisphere. This time the U.S. was more prepared to contain the new and expected New

Afrikan assertiveness. Their weapon was “King Heroin.” The U.S. employed the services of the Mafia during World War II to gather intelligence in Italy to defeat Fascist Mussolini.

[B]efore World War II, Mussolini embarked on a major campaign against the Mafia which enraged the group’s leaders. Fascism was a big Mafia so it couldn’t afford another Mafia to exist. Mussolini’s activities turned Mafiosi into vigorous anti-Fascists, and the American Government cooperated with the Mafia both in the United States and in Sicily. In the eyes of many Sicilians, the United States helped restore the Mafia’s lost power. The Americans had to win the war, so they couldn’t pay much attention to these things. “They thought the Mafia could help them, and perhaps they did” said Leonard Sciascia, perhaps the best known living Sicilian novelist and student of the Mafia.

[D]uring World War II, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), helped to commute Lucky Luciano’s sentence in federal prison and arrange for his repatriation to Sicily. Luciano was among the top dons in the mafia syndicate and a leading organizer of prostitution and drug trafficking. The OSS knew that Luciano had excellent ties to the Sicilian mafia and wanted the support of that organization for the Allied landing in Sicily in 1943.⁹

When Luciano left the U.S., numerous politicians and mafia dons were together at the Brooklyn docks to wave him goodbye in what was the first of many occasions that international drug dealers were recruited by the U.S. government to advance its foreign policy interests.¹⁰ After the war, in return for “services rendered,” the U.S. looked the other way as the Mafia flooded the major U.S. ghettos with heroin. Within six years after World War II, due to the Mafia’s marketing strategy, over 100,000 people were addicts, many of them Black.¹¹

The Emergence of Independent Afrikan Nations

Afrikan from Afrika, having fought to save European independence, returned to the Afrikan continent and began fighting for the independence of their own colonized nations. Rather than fight losing Afrikan colonial wars, most European nations opted to grant “phased” independence to their Afrikan colonies. The U.S. now faced the prospect of thousands of Afrikan diplomatic personnel, their staff, and families, coming to the U.N. and wandering into a minefield of racial incidents, particularly on state visits to the rigidly segregated D.C. capital. That alone could push each newly emerging independent Afrikan nation into the socialist column. To counteract this possibility, the U.S. decided to desegregate. As a result, on May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court declared school segregation illegal.

In its landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which heralded the beginning of the end of official segregation in the United States, the Supreme Court had been made fully aware of the relations between America’s domestic policies and her foreign policy interest by the federal government’s *amicus curiae* (i.e., friend of the court) brief, which read:

It is in the context of the present world struggle between freedom and tyranny that the problem of racial discrimination must be viewed . . . (for) discrimination against minority groups in the United States has an adverse effect upon our relations with other countries. Racial discrimination furnishes grist for the communist propaganda mills, and it raises doubts even among friendly nations as to the intensity of our devotion to the democratic faith.¹²

Malcolm X provides similar insight into the reasoning behind the U.S. decision to desegregate. During his February 16, 1965, speech at Rochester, New York’s, Corn Hill Methodist Church, he said:

From 1954 to 1964 can easily be looked upon as the era of the emerging African state. And as the African state emerged . . . what effect did it have on the Black American? When he saw the Black man on the [African] continent taking a stand, it made him become filled with the desire to also take a stand Just as [the U.S.] had to change their approach with the people on the African continent, they also began to change their approach with our people on this continent. As they used tokenism . . . on the African continent, . . . they began to do the same thing with us here in the States Tokenism. . . . Every move they made was a token move They came up with a Supreme Court desegregation decision that they haven’t put into practice yet. Not even in Rochester, much less in Mississippi. [Applause.]¹³

Origin of the Civil Rights Movement

On December 1, 1955, Ms. Rosa Parks defied Montgomery, Alabama's, bus segregation laws by refusing to give her seat to a White man. Her subsequent arrest and the ensuing mass bus boycott by the Montgomery New Afrikan community kicked off the Civil Rights Movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., a young college-educated Baptist minister, was chosen to coordinate and lead this boycott primarily because he was a new arrival in town, intelligent, respected, and had not accumulated a list of grudge enemies as had the old guard. His selection for leadership catapulted him upon the stage of history. The 381-day-long boycott toppled Montgomery's bus segregation codes. A year later, in 1957, Ghana became the first of a string of sub-Saharan Afrikan nations to be granted independence.

As northern discrimination, bulging ghettos, and the drug influx were setting off a rise in New Afrikan numbers behind the walls, Southern segregation, the emergence of independent Afrikan nations, and the resulting Civil Rights Movement provided those increasing numbers with the general political agenda: equality and antidiscrimination.

Civil Rights Through The Black Power Era

Religious Struggles in Prison

Meanwhile, behind the walls, small segments of New Afrikans began rejecting Western Christianity; they turned to Islam as preached by Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam (NOI) and Noble Drew Ali's Muslim Science Temple of America (MST). The NOI preached that Islam was the true religion of Black people and that Blacks in America were a nation needing land and independence. The MST preached that the Asiatic Black people in America must proclaim their nationality as members of the ancient Moors of Northern Africa. These new religions produced significant success rates in helping New Afrikan prisoners rehabilitate themselves by instilling them with a newfound sense of pride, dignity, piety, and industriousness. Yet these religions seemed strange and thus threatening to prison officials. They moved forthwith to suppress these religions, and many early Muslims were viciously persecuted, beaten, and even killed for practicing their beliefs. The Muslims fought back fiercely.

Civil Rights Struggles in Prison

Like American society, the prisons were rigidly segregated. New Afrikans were relegated to perform the heaviest and dirtiest jobs — farm work, laundry work, dishwashing, garbage disposal — and were restricted from jobs as clerks, straw bosses, electricians, or *any* position traditionally reserved for White prisoners. Similar discriminatory rules applied to all other areas of prison life. New Afrikans were restricted to live in certain cell blocks or tiers, eat in certain areas of the mess hall, and sit in the back at the movies, TV room, and other recreational facilities.

Influenced by the antidiscrimination aspect of the Civil Rights Movement, a growing number of New Afrikans behind the walls began stepping up their struggle against discrimination in prison. Audacious New Afrikans began violating longstanding segregation codes by sitting in the front seats at the movies, mess hall, or TV areas — and more than a few died from shanks in the back. Others gave as good as they got, and better. Additionally, New Afrikans began contesting discriminatory job and housing policies and other biased conditions. Many were set up for attack and sent to the hole for years, or worse. Those who were viewed as leaders were dealt with most harshly. Most of this violence came from prison officials and White prisoners protecting their privileged positions; some violence also came from New Afrikans and Muslims protecting their lives, taking stands and fighting back. From these silent, unheralded battles against racial and religious discrimination in prisons emerged the New Afrikan liberation struggle behind the walls during the '50s Civil Rights era. Eventually the courts, influenced by the "equality/anti-discrimination" aspect of the Civil Rights Movement, would rule that prisons must recognize the Muslims' religion on an "equal" footing with other accepted religions, and that prison racial discrimination codes must be outlawed.

Black Power Through The Black Liberation Era

As the Civil Rights Movement advanced into the '60s, New Afrikan college students waded into the struggle with innovative lunch counter sit-ins, freedom rides, and voter registration projects. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed during this period to coordinate and instruct student volunteers in nonviolent methods of organizing voter registration projects and other Civil Rights work.¹⁴ These energetic young students, and the youth in general, served as the foot soldiers of the Movement. They provided indispensable services, support, and protection to local community leaders such as Mississippi's Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, and other heroines and heroes of the Civil Rights Movement. Although they met with measured success, White racist atrocities mounted daily on defenseless Civil Rights workers.

Young New Afrikans in general began to grow increasingly disenchanted with the nonviolent philosophy of Martin Luther King. Many began to look increasingly toward Malcolm X, the fiery young minister of NOI Temple No. 7 in Harlem, New York. He called for "self-defense, freedom by any means necessary, and land and independence." As Malcolm Little, he had been introduced to the NOI doctrine while imprisoned in Massachusetts. Upon release he traveled to Detroit to meet Elijah Muhammad, converted to Islam, and was given the surname "X" to replace his discarded slavemaster's name. The "X" symbolized his original surname lost to history when his foreparents were kidnapped from Afrika, stripped of their names, language, and identity, and enslaved in the Americas. As Malcolm X he became one of Elijah Muhammad's most dedicated disciples, and rose to National Minister and spokesperson for the NOI. His keen intellect, uncorruptable integrity, staunch courage, clear resonant oratory, sharp debating skills, and superb organizing abilities soon brought the NOI to a position of prominence within the Black ghetto colonies across the U.S.

In '63 he openly called the March on Washington a farce. He explained that the desire for a mass march on the nation's capital originally sprang from the Black grass roots: the average Black man/woman in the streets. It was their way of demonstrating a mass Black demand for jobs and freedom. As momentum grew for the March, President Kennedy called a meeting of the leaders of the six largest Civil Rights organizations, dubbed "The Big Six" (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], Southern Christian Leadership Conference [SCLC], Congress Of Racial Equality [CORE], National Urban League [NUL], Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC], and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund) and asked them to stop the proposed march. They answered saying that they couldn't stop it because they weren't leading it, didn't start it, and that it had sprung from the masses of Black people.

If they weren't leading the march, the president decided to make them the leaders by distributing huge sums of money to each of the "Big Six," publicizing their leading roles in the mass media, and providing them with a script to follow regarding the staging of the event. The script planned the March down to the smallest detail. Malcolm explained that government officials told the Big Six what time to begin the March, where to march, who could speak at the March and who could not, generally what could be said and what could not, what signs to carry, where to go to the toilets (provided by the government), and what time to end the event and get out of town. The script was followed to a "T," and most of the 200,000 marchers were never the wiser. By then SNCC's membership was also criticizing the March as too moderate and decrying the violence sweeping the South.¹⁵ History ultimately proved Malcolm's claim of "farce" correct, through books published by participants in the planning of the march and through exposure of government documents on the matter.

Origin of The Five Percenters

Clarence 13X (Smith) was expelled from Harlem's Nation of Islam Temple No. 7 in 1963 because he wouldn't conform to NOI practices. He frequently associated with the numerous street gangs that abounded in New York City at the time and felt that the NOI didn't put enough effort into recruiting these youth. After being expelled he actively recruited among these street gangs and other wayward youth, and by '64 he had established his own "movement" called "The Five Percenters." The name comes from their belief that 85 percent of Black people are like cattle, who continue to eat the poisoned animal (the pig), are blind to the truth of God, and continue to give their allegiance to people who don't have their best interests at heart; that 10 percent of Black people are bloodsuckers — the politicians, preachers, and other parasitic individuals who get rich off the labor and ignorance of the docile exploited 85 percent; and that the remaining 5 percent are the poor righteous teachers of freedom, justice, and equality who know the truth of the "Black" God and are not deceived by the practices of the bloodsucking 10 percent.¹⁶

The Five Percenter movement spread throughout the New York State prison system and the Black ghettos of the New York metropolitan area.

Origin of the New World Nation of Islam

In December 1965 Newark's Mayor Hugh Addonizio witnessed a getaway car pulling away from a bank robbery and ordered his chauffeur to follow with siren blasting. The fleeing robbers crashed into a telephone pole, sprang from their car and fired a shot through the Mayor's windshield. He screeched to a halt, and police cars racing to the scene captured Muhammad Ali Hassan, known as Albert Dickens, and James Washington. Both were regular attendees of Newark's NOI Temple No. 25, headed by Minister James 3X Shabazz. Ali Hassan and Washington were members of the New World Nation of Islam (NWI). Ali Hassan, its leader and Supreme Field commander, dates the birth of the New World Nation of Islam as February 26, 1960. He states that on that date Elijah Muhammad authorized the New World Nation of Islam under the leadership of Field Supreme Minister Fard Savior and declared that the Field Minister had authority over all the NOI Muslims. Ali Hassan and Washington were convicted for the bank robbery and sent to Trenton State Prison.

The NWI's belief in the supreme authority of Fard Savior was rejected by NOI Minister Shabazz, and thereafter an uneasy peace prevailed between the followers of Shabazz, who retained control of Newark's NOI Temple No. 25, and the followers of the NWI who sought to gain control.

Meanwhile, Ali Hassan published a book titled *Uncle Yah Yah* and ran the NWI from his prison cell. Along with the more established and influential NOI, the influence of the NWI spread throughout the New Jersey state prison system and the metropolitan Jersey ghettos. The NWI began setting up food co-ops, barbershops, houses to teach Islam, and printing presses; and purchased land in South Carolina, all in furtherance of creating an independent Black Nation.¹⁷

The Black Liberation Era

Black Panthers Usher in the Black Liberation Movement

Midstride the '60s, on February 21, 1965, Malcolm was assassinated, but his star continued to rise and his seeds fell on fertile soil. The following year, October 1966, in Oakland, California, Huey P. Newton and a handful of armed youths founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense on principles that Malcolm had preached — and the Black Liberation Movement (BLM) was born.

Subsequently the name was shortened to the Black Panther Party (BPP) and a 10-point program was created which stated:

1. *We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black community.*
2. *We want full employment for our people.*
3. *We want an end to the robbery by the CAPITALIST of our Black community.*
4. *We want decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings.*
5. *We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.*
6. *We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.*
7. *We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.*
8. *We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.*
9. *We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.*
10. *We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the Black colony in which only Black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of Black people as to their national destiny.*

The Panthers established numerous programs to serve the Oakland ghetto — free breakfasts for children, free health care, free day-care, and free political education classes. The program that riveted the

ghetto's attention was their campaign to "stop police murder and brutality of Blacks." Huey, a community college pre-law student, discovered that it was legal for citizens to openly carry arms in California. With that assurance the Black Panther Party began armed car patrols of the police cruisers that patrolled Oakland's Black colony. When a cruiser stopped to make an arrest, the Panther car stopped. They fanned out around the scene, arms at the ready, and observed, tape recorded, and recommended a lawyer to the arrest victim. It didn't take long for the police to retaliate. They confronted Huey late one night near his home. Gunfire erupted, leaving Huey critically wounded, a policeman dead and another wounded. The Panthers and the Oakland-Bay community responded with a massive campaign to save Huey from the gas chamber. The California Senate began a hearing to rescind the law permitting citizens to openly carry arms within city limits. The Panthers staged an armed demonstration during the hearing at the Sacramento Capitol to protest the Senate's action, which gained national publicity.¹⁸ That publicity, together with the Panthers' philosophy of revolutionary nationalism, self-defense, and the "Free Huey" campaign, catapulted the BPP to nationwide prominence.

But not without cost. During August 1967 J. Edgar Hoover issued his infamous Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) memorandum which directed the FBI (and local police officials) to disrupt specified Black organizations and neutralize their leaders so as to prevent "the rise of a Black messiah."

Attacks Increase on Revolutionaries

The Panthers rolled eastward, establishing offices in each major northern ghetto. As they went, they set up revolutionary programs in each community that were geared to provide community control of schools, tenant control of slum housing, free breakfast for school children, free health, day-care, and legal clinics, and free political education classes for the community. They also initiated campaigns to drive dope pushers and drugs from the community, and campaigns to stop police murder and brutality of Blacks. As they went about the community organizing these various programs they were frequently confronted, attacked, or arrested by the police, and some were even killed during these encounters.

Other revolutionary organizers suffered similar entrapments. The Revolutionary Action Movement's (RAM) Herman Ferguson and Max Stamford were arrested in 1967 on spurious charges of conspiring to kill Civil Rights leaders. In the same year Amiri Baraka (the poet and playwright LeRoi Jones) was arrested for transporting weapons in a van during the Newark riots and did a brief stint in Trenton State Prison until a successful appeal overturned his conviction. SNCC's Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael, and other orators were constantly threatened or charged with "inciting to riot" as they crisscrossed the country speaking to mass audiences. Congress passed so-called "Rap Brown" laws to deter speakers from crossing state lines to address mass audiences lest a disturbance break out, leaving them vulnerable to federal charges and imprisonment. And numerous revolutionary organizers and orators were being imprisoned.

This initial flow of revolutionaries into the jails and prisons began to spread a revolutionary nationalist hue through New Afrikans behind the walls. New Afrikan prisoners were also influenced by the domestic revolutionary atmosphere and the liberation struggles in Afrika, Asia, and Latin America. Small groups began studying on their own, or in collectives, the works of Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton, The Black Panther newspaper, *The Militant* newspaper, contemporary national liberation struggle leaders Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Ho Chi Minh, and Mao Tse-tung, plus Marx, Lenin, and Bakunin too. Increasing numbers of New Afrikan and Third World prisoners became more conscious of national liberation politics. The percentages of New Afrikan and Third World prisoners increased while the percentage of White prisoners decreased throughout U.S. prisons. Under this onslaught of rising national liberation consciousness, increased percentages of New Afrikan and Third World prisoners, and decreased numbers of White prisoners, the last of the prisons' overt segregation policies fell by the wayside.

The New Afrikan Independence Movement

The seeds of Malcolm took further root on March 29, 1968. On that date the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika (RNA) was founded at a convention held at the Black-owned Twenty Grand Motel in Detroit. Over 500 grass-root activists came together to issue a Declaration of Independence on behalf of the oppressed Black Nation inside North America, and the New Afrikan

Independence Movement (NAIM) was born.¹⁹ Since then Blacks desiring an independent Black Nation have referred to themselves and other Blacks in the U.S. as New Afrikans.

That same month, March '68, during Martin Luther King's march in Memphis, angry youths on the fringes of the march broke away and began breaking store windows, looting, and firebombing. A 16-year-old-boy was killed and 50 people were injured in the ensuing violence.²⁰ This left Martin profoundly shaken and questioning whether his philosophy was still able to hold the youth to a nonviolent commitment. On April 4th he returned to Memphis, seeking the answer through one more march, and found an assassin's bullet. Ghettos exploded in flames one after another across the face of America. The philosophy of Black Liberation surged to the forefront among the youth.

But not the youth alone. Following a series of police provocations in Cleveland, on July 23, 1968, New Libya Movement activists there set an ambush that killed several policemen. A "fortyish" Ahmed Evans was convicted of the killings and died in prison ten years later of "cancer."

More CIA dope surged into the ghettos from the Golden Triangle of Southeast Asia. Revolutionaries stepped up their organizing activities on both sides of the walls. Behind the walls the New Afrikan percentage steadily increased.

COINTELPRO Attacks

In 1969 COINTELPRO launched its main attack on the Black Liberation Movement in earnest. It began with the mass arrest of Lumumba Shakur and the New York Panther 21. It followed with a series of military raids on Black Panther Party offices in Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Haven, Jersey City, Detroit, Chicago, Denver, Omaha, Sacramento, and San Diego, and was capped off with a four-hour siege that poured thousands of rounds into the Los Angeles BPP office. Fortunately Geronimo ji-Jaga, decorated Vietnam vet, had earlier fortified the office to withstand an assault, and no Panthers were seriously injured. However, repercussions from the outcome eventually drove him underground. The widespread attacks left Panthers dead all across the country — Fred Hampton, Mark Clark, Bunchy Carter, John Huggins, John Savage, Walter Toure Pope, Bobby Hutton, Sylvester Bell, Frank "Capt. Franco" Diggs, Fred Bennett, James Carr, Larry Robeson, Spurgeon "Jake" Winters, Alex Rackley, Arthur Morris, Steve Bartholemew, Robert Lawrence, Tommy Lewis, Nathaniel Clark, Welton Armstead, Sidney Miller, Sterling Jones, Babatunde Omawali, Samuel Napier, Harold Russle, and Robert Webb among others.²¹ In the three years after J. Edgar Hoover's infamous COINTELPRO memorandum, dated August 25, 1967, 31 members of the BPP were killed,²² nearly a thousand were arrested, and key leaders were sent to jail. Others were driven underground. Still others, like BPP field marshal Donald "D.C." Cox, were driven into exile overseas.

Also in '69, Clarence 13X, founder of The Five Percenters, was mysteriously murdered in the elevator of a Harlem project building. His killer was never discovered and his adherents suspect government complicity in his death.

The RNA was similarly attacked that year. During their second annual convention in March '69, held at Reverend C.L. Franklin's New Bethel Church in Detroit, a police provocation sparked a siege that poured 800 rounds into the church. Several convention members were wounded; one policeman was killed, another wounded, and the entire convention, 140 people, was arrested en masse. When Reverend Franklin (father of "The Queen of Soul," singer Aretha Franklin) and Black State Representative James Del Rio were informed of the incident they called Black judge George Crockett, who proceeded to the police station where he found total legal chaos. Almost 150 people were being held incommunicado. They were being questioned, fingerprinted, and given nitrate tests to determine if they had fired guns, in total disregard of fundamental constitutional procedures. Hours after the roundup, there wasn't so much as a list of persons being held and no one had been formally arrested. An indignant Judge Crockett set up court right in the station house and demanded that the police either press charges or release their captives. He had handled about fifty cases when the Wayne County prosecutor, called in by the police, intervened. The prosecutor promised that the use of all irregular methods would be halted. Crockett adjourned the impromptu court, and by noon the following day the police had released all but a few individuals who were held on specific charges.²³ Chaka Fuller, Rafael Vierra, and Alfred 2X Hibbits were charged with the killing. All three were subsequently tried and acquitted. Chaka Fuller was mysteriously assassinated a few months afterwards.²⁴

Revolutionaries nationwide were attacked and/or arrested — Tyari Uhuru, Maka, Askufo, and the Smyrna Brothers in Delaware, JoJo Muhammad Bowens and Fred Burton in Philadelphia, and Panthers Mondo Langa, Ed Poindexter, and Veronza Daoud Bowers, Jr., in Omaha. Police mounted an assault on

the Panther office in the Desiree Projects of New Orleans which resulted in several arrests. A similar attack was made on the Peoples Party office in Houston. One of their leaders, Carl Hampton, was killed by police and another, Lee Otis Johnson, was arrested later on an unrelated charge and sentenced to 41 years in prison for alleged possession of one marijuana cigarette.

The Rise of Prison Struggles

Like the Panthers, most of those arrested brought their philosophies with them into the prisons. Likewise, most had outside support committees to one degree or another so that this influx of political prisoners linked the struggle behind the walls with the struggles in the outside local communities. The combination set off a beehive of political activity behind the walls, and prisoners stepped up their struggle for political, Afrikan, Islamic, and academic studies, access to political literature, community access to prisons, an end to arbitrary punishments, access to attorneys, adequate law libraries, relevant vocational training, contact visits, better food, health care, housing, and a myriad of other struggles. The forms of prison struggle ranged from face-to-face negotiations to mass petitioning, letter-writing and call-in campaigns, outside demonstrations, class action law suits, hunger strikes, work strikes, rebellions, and more drastic actions. Overall, all forms of struggle served to roll back draconian prison policies that had stood for centuries and to further the development of the New Afrikan liberation struggle behind the walls.

These struggles would not have been as successful, or would have been much more costly in terms of lives lost or brutality endured, had it not been for the links to the community and community support that political prisoners brought with them into the prisons. Although that support was not always sufficient in quantity or quality, or was sometimes nonexistent or came with hidden agendas or was marked by frequent conflicts, on the whole it was this combination of resolute prisoners, community support, and legal support which was most often successful in prison struggles.

The Changing Complexion of Prisons

As the '60s drew to a close New Afrikan and Third World nationalities made up nearly 50 percent of the prison population. National liberation consciousness became the dominant influence behind the walls as the overall complexion neared the changeover from White to Black, Brown, and Red. The decade-long general decrease in prisoners, particularly Whites, brought a drop of between 16,000²⁵ and 28,000²⁶ in total prison population. The total number of White prisoners decreased between 16,000 and 23,000 while the total number of New Afrikan prisoners increased slightly or changed insignificantly over the same period.²⁷ Yet the next decade would begin the period of unprecedented new prison construction, as the primary role of U.S. prisons changed from "suppression of the working classes" to "suppression of domestic Black and Third World liberation struggles inside the U.S."

Enter The '70s

A California guard, rated as an expert marksman, opened the decade of the '70s with the January 13th shooting at close range of W.L. Nolen, Cleveland Edwards, and Alvin "Jug" Miller in the Soledad prison yard. They were left lying where they fell until it was too late for them to be saved by medical treatment. Nolen, in particular, had been instrumental in organizing protest of guard killings of two other Black prisoners — Clarence Causey and William Powell — at Soledad in the recent past, and was consequently both a thorn in the side of prison officials and a hero to the Black prison population.²⁸ When the guard was exonerated of the triple killings two weeks later by a Board of Inquiry, the prisoners retaliated by throwing a guard off the tier.

George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Cluchette were charged with the guard's death and came to be known as the Soledad Brothers. California Black prisoners solidified around the chain of events in the Soledad Brothers case and formed the Black Guerrilla Family (BGF). The Panthers spearheaded a massive campaign to save the Soledad Brothers from the gas chamber. The nationwide coalescence of prisoners and support groups around the case converted the scattered, disparate prison struggles into a national prison movement.

On the night of March 9, 1970, a bomb exploded killing Ralph Featherstone and Che Payne in their car outside a Maryland courthouse where Rap Brown was to appear next day on "Inciting to Riot" charges. Instead of appearing, Rap went underground, was captured a year later during the robbery of

a Harlem so-called “dope bar,” and was sent behind the walls. He completed his sentence and was released from prison.

On August 7, 1970, Jonathan Jackson, younger brother of George, attempted to liberate Ruchell Cinque Magee, William Christmas, and James McClain from the Marin County courthouse in California. Jonathan, McClain, Christmas, and the trial judge were killed by SWAT teams who also wounded the prosecutor and paralyzed him for life. Miraculously, Ruchell and three wounded jurors survived the fusillade. Jonathan frequently served as Angela Davis’s bodyguard. She had purchased weapons for that purpose, but Jonathan used those same weapons in the breakout attempt. Immediately afterward she became the object of an international “woman hunt.” On October 13, Angela was captured in New York City and was subsequently returned to California to undergo a very acrimonious trial with Magee. She was acquitted on all charges. Magee was tried separately and convicted on lesser charges. He remains imprisoned to date.

On August 21, a guard shot and killed George Jackson as he bolted from a control unit and ran for the San Quentin wall. Inside the unit lay three guards and two trustees dead. The circumstances surrounding George Jackson’s legendary life and death, and the astuteness of his published writings,²⁹ left a legacy that inspires and instructs the New Afrikan liberation struggle on both sides of the wall even today, and will for years to come.

September 13, 1971, became the bloodiest day in U.S. prison history when New York’s Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered the retaking of Attica prison. The previous several years had seen a number of prison rebellions flare up across the country as prisoners protested widespread maltreatment and inhumane conditions. Most had been settled peaceably with little or no loss of human life after face-to-face negotiation between prisoners and state and prison officials. At Attica Black, Brown, White, Red, and Yellow prisoners took over one block of the prison and stood together for five days seeking to negotiate an end to their inhumane conditions. Their now-famous dictum declared “We are men, not beasts, and will not be driven as such.” But Rockefeller had presidential ambitions. The rebelling prisoners’ demands included a political request for asylum in a nonimperialistic country. Rockefeller’s refusal to negotiate foreshadowed a macabre replay of his father John D’s slaughter of striking Colorado miners and their families decades earlier. Altogether 43 people died at Attica. New York State trooper bullets killed 39 people — 29 prisoners and 10 guards — in retaking Attica and shocked the world by the naked barbarity of the U.S. prison system. Yet the Attica rebellion too remains a milestone in the development of the New Afrikan liberation struggle behind the walls, and a symbol of the highest development of prisoner multinational solidarity to date.

New World Clashes With The Nation of Islam

In 1973 the simmering struggle for control of Newark’s NOI Temple No. 25 erupted into the open. Warren Marcello, a New World member, assassinated NOI Temple No. 25 Minister Shabazz. In retaliation several NWI members were attacked and killed within the confines of the New Jersey prison system, and before the year was out the bodies of Marcello and a companion were found beheaded in Newark’s Weequahic Park. Ali Hassan, still in prison, was tried as one of the co-conspirators in the death of Shabazz and was found innocent.

The Black Liberation Army

COINTELPRO’s destruction of the BPP forced many members underground and gave rise to the Black Liberation Army (BLA) — a New Afrikan guerrilla organization. The BLA continued the struggle by waging urban guerrilla war across the U.S. through highly mobile strike teams.³⁰ The government’s intensified search for the BLA during the early 1970s resulted in the capture of Geronimo ji-Jaga in Dallas, Dhoruba Bin-Wahad and Jamal Josephs in New York, Sha Sha Brown and Blood McCreary in St. Louis, Nuh Washington and Jalil Muntaqin in Los Angeles, Herman Bell in New Orleans, Francisco and Gabriel Torres in New York, Russel Haroum Shoats in Philadelphia, Chango Monges, Mark Holder, and Kamau Hilton in New York, Assata Shakur and Sundiata Acoli in New Jersey, Ashanti Alston, Tarik, and Walid in New Haven, Safiya Bukhari and Masai Gibson in Virginia, and others. Left dead during the government’s search and destroy missions were Sandra Pratt (wife of Geronimo ji-Jaga, assassinated while visibly pregnant), Mark Essex, Woodie Changa Green, Twyman Kakuyan Olugbala Meyers, Frank “Heavy” Fields, Anthony Kimu White, Zayd Shakur, Melvin Rema Kerney, Alfred Kambui Butler,

Ron Carter, Rory Hithe, and John Thomas, among others.³¹ Red Adams, left paralyzed from the neck down by police bullets, would die from the effects a few years later.

Other New Afrikan freedom fighters attacked, hounded, and captured during the same general era were Imari Obadele and the RNA-11 in Jackson, Mississippi,³² Don Taylor³³ and De Mau Mau of Chicago, Hanif Shabazz, Abdul Aziz, and the VI-5 in the Virgin Islands, Mark Cook of the George Jackson Brigade (GJB) in Seattle, Ahmed Obafemi of the RNA in Florida, Atiba Shanna in Chicago, Mafundi Lake in Alabama, Sekou Kambui and Imani Harris in Alabama, Robert Aswad Duren in California, Kojo Bomani Sababu and Dharuba Cinque in Trenton, John Partee and Tommie Lee Hodges of Alkebulan in Memphis, Gary Tyler in Los Angeles, Kareem Saif Allah and the Five Percenter—BLA—Islamic Brothers in New York, Ben Chavis and the Wilmington 10 in North Carolina, Delbert Africa and MOVE members in Philadelphia, and others doubtless too numerous to name.

Political Converts in Prison

Not everyone was political before incarceration. John Andaliwa Clark became so, and a freedom fighter *par excellence*, only after being sent behind the walls. He paid the supreme sacrifice during a hail of gunfire from Trenton State Prison guards. Hugo Dahariki Pinell also became political after being sent behind the California walls in 1964. He has been in prison ever since. Joan Little took an ice pick from a White North Carolina guard who had used it to force her to perform oral sex on him. She killed him, escaped to New York, was captured, and forced to return to the same North Carolina camp where she feared for her life. Massive public vigilance and support enabled her to complete the sentence in relative safety and obtain her release.

Dessie Woods and Cheryl Todd, hitching through Georgia, were given a ride by a White man who tried to rape them. Woods took his gun, killed him, and was sent to prison where officials drugged and brutalized her. Todd was also imprisoned and subsequently released upon completion of the sentence. Woods was denied parole several times then finally released.

Political or not, each arrest was met with highly sensationalized prejudicial publicity that continued unabated to and throughout the trial. The negative publicity blitz was designed to guarantee a conviction, smokescreen the real issues involved, and justify immediate placement in the harshest prison conditions possible. For men this usually means the federal penitentiary at Marion, Illinois. For women it has meant the control unit in the federal penitentiary at Alderson, West Virginia, or Lexington, Kentucky. In 1988 political prisoners Silvia Baraldini, Alejandrina Torres, and Susan Rosenberg won a D.C. District Court lawsuit brought by attorneys Adjoa Aiyetoro, Jan Susler, and others. The legal victory temporarily halted the practice of sending prisoners to control units strictly because of their political status. The ruling was reversed by the D.C. Appellate Court a year later. Those political prisoners not sent to Marion, Alderson, or Lexington control units are sent to other control units modeled after Marion/Lexington but located within maximum security state prisons. Normally this means 23-hour-a-day lockdown in long-term units located in remote hinterlands far from family, friends, and attorneys, with heavy censorship and restrictions on communications, visits, and outside contacts, combined with constant harassment, provocation, and brutality by prison guards.

Effect of Captured Freedom Fighters on Prisons

The influx of so many captured freedom fighters (*i.e.*, prisoners of war — POWs) with varying degrees of guerrilla experience added a valuable dimension to the New Afrikan liberation struggle behind the walls. In the first place it accelerated the prison struggles already in process, particularly the attack on control units. One attack was spearheaded by Michael Deutsch and Jeffrey Haas of the People's Law Office, Chicago, which challenged Marion's H-Unit boxcar cells. Another was spearheaded by Assata Shakur and the Center for Constitutional Rights which challenged her out-of-state placement in the Alderson, West Virginia, control unit.

Second, it stimulated a thoroughgoing investigation and exposure of COINTELPRO's hand in waging low intensity warfare on New Afrikan and Third World nationalities in the U.S. This was spearheaded by Geronimo ji-Jaga with Stuart Hanlon's law office in the West and by Dhoruba Bin-Wahad with attorneys Liz Fink, Robert Boyle, and Jonathan Lubell in the East.³⁵ These COINTELPRO investigations resulted in the overturn of Bin-Wahad's conviction and his release from prison in March 1990 after he had been imprisoned 19 years for a crime he did not commit.

Third, it broadened the scope of the prison movement to the international arena by producing the initial presentation of the U.S. political prisoner and prisoner of war (PP/POW) issue before the UN's Human Rights Commission. This approach originated with Jalil Muntaqin, and was spearheaded by him and attorney Kathryn Burke on the West Coast and by Sundiata Acoli and attorney Lennox Hinds of the National Conference of Black Lawyers on the East Coast.³⁶ This petition sought relief from human rights violations in U.S. prisons and subsequently asserted a colonized people's right to fight against alien domination and racist regimes as codified in the Geneva Convention.

Fourth, it intensified, clarified, and broke new ground on political issues and debates of particular concern to the New Afrikan community, *i.e.*, the "National Question," spearheaded by Atiba Shanna in the Midwest.³⁷

All these struggles, plus those already in process, were carried out with the combination in one form or another of resolute prisoners, and community and legal support. Community support when present came from various sources — family, comrades, friends; political, student, religious, and prisoner rights groups; workers, professionals, and progressive newspapers and radio stations. Some of those involved over the years were or are: the National Committee for Defense of Political Prisoners, the Black Community News Service, the African Peoples Party, the Republic of New Afrika, the African Peoples Socialist Party, The East, the BlissChord Communication Network, Liberation Book Store, WDAS Radio Philadelphia, WBLS Radio New York, WBAI Radio New York, Third World Newsreel, *Libertad* (political journal of the Puerto Rican Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional [MLN]), the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, the May 19th Communist Organization, the Madame Binh Graphics Collective, *The Midnight Express*, the Northwest Iowa Socialist Party, the National Black United Front, the Nation of Islam, *Arm The Spirit*, *Black News*, International Class Labor Defense, the Real Dragon Project, the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee, the National Prison Project, the House of the Lord Church, the American Friends Service Committee, attorneys Chuck Jones and Harold Ferguson of Rutgers Legal Clinic, the *Jackson Advocate* newspaper, Rutgers law students, the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown, the American Indian Movement, and others.

The End of the '70s

As the decade wound down the late '70s saw the demise of the NOI following the death of Elijah Muhammad and the rise of orthodox Islam among significant segments of New Afrikans on both sides of the wall. By 1979 the prison population stood at 300,000, a whopping 100,000 increase within a single decade.³⁸ The previous 100,000 increase, from 100,000 to 200,000, had taken 31 years, from 1927 to 1958. The initial increase to 100,000 had taken hundreds of years, since America's original colonial times. The '60s were the transition decade of White flight that saw a significant decrease in both prison population and White prisoners. And since the total Black prison population increased only slightly or changed insignificantly over the decade of the insurgent '60s thru 1973, it indicates that New Afrikans are imprisoned least when they fight hardest.

The decade ended on a masterstroke by the BLA's Multinational Task Force, with the November 2, 1979, prison liberation of Assata Shakur — "Soul of the BLA" and preeminent political prisoner of the era. The Task Force then whisked her away to the safety of political asylum in Cuba where she remains to date.³⁹

The Decade Of The '80s

In June 1980 Ali Hassan was released after 16 years in the New Jersey state prisons. Two months later, five New World of Islam (NWI) members were arrested after a North Brunswick, New Jersey, bank robbery in a car with stolen plates. The car belonged to the recently released Ali Hassan, who had loaned it to a friend. Ali Hassan and 15 other NWI members refused to participate in the resulting mass trial which charged them in a Racketeering Influenced Corrupt Organization (RICO) indictment with conspiracy to rob banks for the purpose of financing various NWI enterprises in the furtherance of creating an independent Black Nation. All defendants were convicted and sent behind the walls.

The '80s brought another round of BLA freedom fighters behind walls — Basheer Hameed and Abdul Majid in '80; Sekou Odinga, Kuwasi Balagoon, Chui Ferguson-EI, Jamal Josephs again, Mutulu Shakur, and numerous BLA Multinational Task Force supporters in '81; and Terry Khalid Long, Leroy Ojore

Bunting, and others in '82. The government's sweep left Mtyari Sundiata dead, Kuwasi Balagoon subsequently dead in prison from AIDS, and Sekou Odinga brutally tortured upon capture, torture that included pulling out his toenails and rupturing his pancreas during long sadistic beatings that left him hospitalized for six months.

But this second round of captured BLA freedom fighters brought forth, perhaps for the first time, a battery of young, politically acute New Afrikan lawyers — Chokwe Lumumba, Jill Soffiyah Elijah, Nkechi Taifa, Adjoa Aiyetoro, Ashanti Chimurenga, Michael Tarif Warren, and others. They are not only skilled in representing New Afrikan POWs but the New Afrikan Independence Movement too, all of which added to the further development of the New Afrikan liberation struggle behind the walls.

The decade also brought behind the walls Mumia Abu-Jamal, the widely respected Philadelphia radio announcer, popularly known as the "Voice of the Voiceless." He maintained a steady drumbeat of radio support for MOVE prisoners. He finished work the night of December 9, 1981, stepped outside the station, and discovered a policeman beating his younger brother. Mumia was shot and seriously wounded, the policeman was killed. Mumia now sits on death row in greatest need of mass support from every sector, if he's to be saved from the state's electric chair.⁴⁰

Kazi Toure of the United Freedom Front (UFF) was sent behind the walls in 1982. He was released in 1991.

The New York 8 — Coltrane Chimurenga, Viola Plummer and her son Robert "R.T." Taylor, Roger Wareham, Omowale Clay, Lateefah Carter, Colette Pean, and Yvette Kelly — were arrested on October 17, 1984, and charged with conspiring to commit prison breakouts and armed robberies, and to possess weapons and explosives. However the New York 8 were actually the New York 8 + because another 8 or 9 persons were jailed as grand jury resisters in connection with the case. The New York 8 were acquitted on August 5, 1985.

That same year Ramona Africa joined other MOVE comrades already behind the walls. Her only crime was that she survived Philadelphia Mayor Goode's May 13, 1985, bombing which cremated 11 MOVE members, including their babies, families, home, and neighborhood.

The following year, November 19, 1986, a 20-year-old Bronx, New York, youth, Larry Davis, now Adam Abdul Hakeem, would make a dramatic escape during a shootout with police who had come to assassinate him for absconding with their drug-sales money. Several policemen were wounded in the shoot-out. Adam escaped unscathed but surrendered weeks later in the presence of the media, his family, and a mass of neighborhood supporters. After numerous charges, trials, and acquittals in which he exposed the existence of a New-York-police-controlled drug ring that coerced Black and Puerto Rican youths to push police-supplied drugs, he was sent behind the walls on weapon possession convictions. Since incarceration, numerous beatings by guards have paralyzed him from the waist down and confined him to a wheelchair.

On July 16, 1987, Abdul Haqq Muhammad, Arthur Majeed Barnes, and Robert "R.T." Taylor, all members of the Black Men's Movement Against Crack, were pulled over by state troopers in upstate New York, arrested, and subsequently sent to prison on a variety of weapon possession convictions.

Herman Ferguson at 68 years old voluntarily returned to the U.S. on April 6, 1989, after 20 year's exile in Ghana, Afrika, and Guyana, South America. He had fled the U.S. during the late '60s after the appeal was denied on his sentence of 3 1/2 to 7 years following a conviction for conspiring to murder Civil Rights leaders. Upon return he was arrested at the airport and was moved constantly from prison to prison for several years as a form of harassment.

The '80s brought the Reagan era's rollback of progressive trends on a wide front and a steep rise in racist incidents, White vigilantism, and police murder of New Afrikan and Third World people. It also brought the rebirth and reestablishment of the NOI, a number of New Afrikan POWs adopting orthodox Islam in lieu of revolutionary nationalism, the New Afrikan People's Organization's (NAPO) and its chairman Chokwe Lumumba's emergence from the RNA as banner carrier for the New Afrikan Independence Movement (NAIM), the New Orleans assassination of Lumumba Shakur of the Panther 21, and an upsurge in mass political demonstrations known as the "Days of Outrage" in New York City spearheaded by the December 12th Movement, and others.

The end of the decade brought the death of Huey P. Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party, allegedly killed by a young Black Guerrilla Family adherent on August 22, 1989, during a dispute over "crack." Huey taught the Black masses socialism and popularized it through the slogan "Power to the People!" He armed the Black struggle and popularized it through the slogan "Political Power grows out of

the barrel of a gun.” For that, and despite his human shortcomings, he was a true giant of the Black struggle, because his particular contribution is comparable to that of other modern-day giants, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King.

AIDS, crack, street crime, gang violence, homelessness, and arrest rates have all exploded throughout the Black colonies. The prison population on June 30, 1989, topped 673,000, an incredible 372,000 increase in less than a decade, causing the tripling and doubling of prison populations in 34 states, and sizable increases in most others. New York City prisons became so overcrowded they began using ships as jails. William Bennett, former U.S. Secretary of Education and so-called Drug Czar, announced plans to convert closed military bases into concentration camps.

The prison building spree and escalated imprisonment rates continue unabated. The new prisoners are younger, more volatile, have long prison sentences, and are overwhelmingly of New Afrikan and Third World nationalities. It is estimated that by the year 1994 the U.S. will have over one million prisoners.⁴² Projections suggest that over 75 percent of them will be Black and other people of color.⁴³ More are women than previously. Their percentage rose to 5 percent in 1980 from a low of 3 percent in 1970.⁴⁴ Whites are arrested at about the same rate as in Western Europe while the New Afrikan arrest rate has surpassed that of Blacks in South Africa. In fact, the U.S. Black imprisonment rate is now the highest in the world.⁴⁵ Ten times as many Blacks as Whites are incarcerated per 100,000 population.⁴⁶

The ‘90s And Beyond

As we begin to move through the ‘90s the New Afrikan liberation struggle behind the walls finds itself coalescing around campaigns to free political prisoners and prisoners of war, helping to build a national PP/POW organization, strengthening its links on the domestic front, and building solidarity in the international arena. Although the established media concentrates on the sensationalism of ghetto crack epidemics, street crime, drive-by shootings, and gang violence, there has been a long quiet period of consciousness raising in the New Afrikan colonies by the committed independence forces. This heightened consciousness of the colonies is just beginning to manifest itself through seemingly random sparks and the rise of innovative cultural trends, *i.e.*, Rap/Hip Hop “message” music, culturally designed hair styles, dissemination of political/cultural video cassettes, resprouting of insurgent periodicals, and the resurrection of forgotten heroes; all of which presage an oppressed people getting ready to push forward again.

The New Afrikan liberation struggle behind the walls now follows the laws of its own development, paid for in its own blood, intrinsically linked to the struggle of its own people, and rooted deep in the ebb and flow of its own history. To know that history is already to know its future development and direction.

Sundiata Acoli
Leavenworth Penitentiary, Kansas
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