

ON THE RIGHT

William F. Buckley Jr.

GEORGE JACKSON'S ORDEAL

The line is that George Jackson, who was killed a month ago at San Quentin after he had killed, or caused to be killed, five guards, was a victim of America—or of Amerika, as he used to put it. A typical formulation is Tom Wicker's, to wit, "George Jackson, sentenced at 19 for one year to life for confessing to a \$70 robbery. . . . That does sound excessive, does it not? The Los Angeles Times has done a superb job of digging, and we have now a systematic account of what went on before the sentencing, and after it.

On Jan. 5, 1967, 15-year-old George Jackson was six feet tall and weighed nearly 200 pounds. He was arrested for stealing a motorcycle. The judge released him to the custody of his parents.

On Jan. 22, the police picked him up again, this time for stealing motor bicycle equipment. Young George's behavior on this occasion was unusual. When the juvenile officer began to search him, Jackson flailed out with his fists, throwing the officer off balance, and bruising a woman officer who tried to intervene. Disposing of her, Jackson took the officer and bent him over a desk, "slowly force (ing) him toward a long, steel filing spike sitting atop a blotter. "This guy would have put that spike through my back," the official recalls." Other guards arrived in time. The incident, by the way, was the cause of local reform. Thenceforward, all spikes were bent L-shape. Jackson was briefly detained, then released on probation.

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On March 5, 1967, Jackson broke a skylight, but retreated on hearing a burglar alarm which brought the police out in force. He ignored an order to surrender, and a policeman fired four shots, one of which caused a superficial wound. Jackson was sent to a reform school for boys, from which he was paroled a year and a half later, on Dec. 20, 1958.

The succeeding May, he was picked up for following a woman late at night under extraordinary circumstances. The police found a screwdriver concealed in his belt; but he was let go.

On Aug. 20 he became angry with his employer and slashed the seats of a bus, and answered the ensuing complaint by threatening him with a knife. He was arrested. He lied about his age, was treated as an adult, and sentenced to ten days in jail.

On Sept. 24, he and two other youths held up a service station. He was caught and sent to the Youth Authority, but escaped on Oct. 21, and made his way to Illinois.

There, in November, he got into trouble, was picked up by the police, and sent back to California to the Youth Authority. But, on Dec. 30, he escaped yet again—from a hospital to which he had been taken for treatment of minor injuries during a fight.

He was recaptured the next morning, and served under the Youth Authority from February, 1959 to June, 1960, when he was paroled.

On Sept. 19, 1960, back with a friend from a trip to Tijuana, he stuck up a service station and took the fabled \$70. He pleaded guilty and, this being the third conviction,

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he was given the fabled one-year to life sentence. He was denied parole ten times between February, 1962 and June, 1970, having collected 47 entries in his disciplinary file. "Not a record number," writes the Times, "but not too far behind."

There were the minor infractions of the rules, but the curve was towards violence and explicit insubordination. On April 4, 1965, he stabbed a prisoner. Another prisoner claimed on Sept. 17, 1966, that Jackson had tried to stab him during a fight. On Jan. 17, 1967, he came out of a cellblock gang fight carrying a length of pipe. On June 8, 1967, he refused to obey an order, then assaulted the guard who gave it.

On Oct. 17, 1969, guards caught him in possession of a simulated gun, made from a coat hanger and masking tape. On Jan. 18, 1970, he and two other prisoners beat a guard to death, or so it was alleged. (There is no doubt that the guard was beaten to death.) On being led back to his cell block, he smashed a guard in the ribcage shouting, "I'm going to kill you."

And then, of course, the next gun he was caught with, on August 23 of this year, was a real gun, not a false one. That gun was allegedly given to him by a young man I used to know, the kind of man who takes seriously the allocations of blame according to Tom Wickar.