

THE LAST WORDS OF A SOLEDAD BROTHER

by George Jackson

Thoughts, in extremis, on the black man in America

George Lester Jackson, twenty-nine, known inside San Quentin as inmate No. A-63837 and beyond those walls as the author of Soledad Brother, was shot to death by a guard during what was described as an escape attempt last August 21. Officials said that a visitor passed Jackson a .38 revolver which he smuggled into his cell block in the "adjustment center" under a wig. Prisoners briefly took over the cell block, killing three guards and two white inmates. Then Jackson ran from the "adjustment center" in an apparent bid for freedom which would have required his scaling a twenty-foot wall. A tower guard opened fire. America's best-known prison author, Henry David Thoreau, spent only one night in jail; George Jackson spent more than 4,000 nights, beginning when he was fifteen. In January, 1970, he and two other black prisoners—the "Soledad Brothers"—were accused of killing a white guard two days after another guard shot and killed several black inmates. His brother, Jonathan Jackson, was shot to death August 7, 1970, in an effort to free three convicts from a San Rafael, California, courtroom. A judge, Jonathan and two of the prisoners were shot to death in the gunfight which the audacious attempt provoked. The letter below was written to Greg Armstrong, a senior editor at Bantam Books who edited Soledad Brother, in June, 1971, when Jackson had two months to live. On the April 6, 1971, date referred to, Jackson, who said he had been jabbed in the ribs, flattened a courtroom bailiff with a karate blow to the head.

Dear Greg,

This is my eleventh year of being shoveled into every major prison in the most populous state in the nation—and the largest prison system in the world. What I have seen in these eleven years is the living situation. The experience is quite different from the columns of figures neatly arranged to give the impression of well-studied, detached, scientific and calculated analysis. Hidden are the facts that, at each institution I've been in, 30 to sometimes 40 percent of those held are black, and every one of the many thousands I've encountered was from the working or lumpenproletariat class. There may be a few exceptions, but I simply have not met any of them in my eleven years. Where I am confined now in San Quentin Prison, California, awaiting trial for two alleged crimes, conviction on either of which would subject my lungs to the poison-gas treatment, there are seventeen cells in what is euphemistically called "the adjustment center" but is far more accurately known as the hole. The A./C. is San Quentin's triple maximum security, and all of these cells are filled—eleven of them with black men—every one of them without exception from the working class.

I've been arrested, interrogated or investigated more times than I care to count. I've learned ten times more about the process than the most expert single groups of inquisitors. From the first moment I'm

brought into this scenario, I attempt to establish control over the exchanges that will take place between myself and my captors. Depending on the situation, one learns to feign either indignation, surprise, idiocy or fear. At times the peasant-philosopher face will work. I don't think I am an exception at all, as most blacks learn by age fifteen how to handle the cretins who hire out as guns for the privileged. There is only one type of inquisitional situation that I personally cannot control—the sessions that begin with violence. In those cases, guile fails and blacks learn to fight multiple opponents while handcuffed, or at least learn how to protect the groin area. I simply have never managed to develop a technique against nine armed men who are fascinated with damaging my private parts! But, I'm still learning!

"All black people, wherever they are, whatever their crimes, even crimes against other blacks, are political prisoners because the system has dealt with them differently than with whites. Whitey gets the benefit of every law, every loophole, and the benefit of being judged by his peers—other white people. Blacks don't get the benefit of any such jury trial by peers. Such a trial is almost a cinch to result in the conviction of a black person, and it's a conscious political decision that blacks don't have those benefits." (Howard Moore [Angela Davis'], attorney, official "of" the court, but not "for" the court—he's in a position to know—he's honest, black, and dedicated enough to tell.)

The purpose of the chief repressive institutions within the totalitarian capitalist state is clearly to discourage and prohibit certain activity, and the prohibitions are aimed at very distinctly defined sectors of the class- and race-sensitized society. The ultimate expression of law is not order—it's prison. There are hundreds upon hundreds of prisons, and thousands upon thousands of laws, yet there is no social order, no social peace. Anglo-Saxon bourgeois law is tied firmly into economics. One can even pick that out of those *Vital Statistics*. Bourgeois law protects property relations and not social relationships. The cultural traits of capitalist society that also tend to check activity (individualism, artificial politeness juxtaposed to an aloof rudeness, the rush to learn "how to" instead of "what is") are secondary really, and intended for those mild cases (and groups) that require preventive measures only. The law and everything that interlocks with it was constructed for poor desperate people like me.

Jonathan, my younger brother, understood this point perfectly. The purport of the raid on the Marin County Courthouse was more significant by far than its calculable effects. I knew him well, since he was and still is my alter ego. He went to liberate and to educate with aggressive and free action. He knew that as he proceeded in liberating there would be more action. He wasn't a speechmaker, and neither am I. Escape from the myth, the hoax, by moving people into action against the terror of the (Continued on page 159)

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(Continued from page 111) state—counter-terrorism—is the real significance of the August 7th affair. To Jonathan, the striking exposure was “audacity, audacity, and more audacity.” Theory and practice, strategy and tactics were based in his mind on actual confrontation within “this” particular historical development. He must have calculated that *foco* [people’s] army activity that was hidden and nameless, operating where the objective conditions for revolution already existed and had existed for a dozen decades, would survive and grow if, at the same time, the Black Panther political apparatus continued to develop its autonomous infrastructure. Proof of his theory was built right into the action: five desperate men were offered arms as a means to freedom—three took them.

Proof of the role of law within the totalitarian-authoritarian relationship was also built into the action. In a fit of reckless, mindless gunfire, one hundred automated goons shot through the bodies of a judge, district attorney, and three female noncombatants to reestablish control over all activity. To prevent certain actions, no cost in blood is too high.

It would seem that so much free fire would be difficult to explain, but it is not. Freedoms are invariably being protected with this gunfire. Freedom must then be interpreted a thousand separate ways, but it actually comes down to freedom for a few families and their friends—freedom to prey upon the world.

Acceptance of enslavement is deeply buried in the pathogenic character types of capitalism. It is a result of the sense of dread and anxiety which is the lot of all men under capitalist rule. Compulsive behavior and disordered obsessional longings are actually made synonymous with “character” in our disordered society. But to emphasize these conditions before examining the institutions from which they spring is to confuse effect with cause and further cloud the point of attack. So far, cultural analysis has established that the psychosis is so ingrained, the institutions so centralized, that what is needed is total revolution, the armed struggle between the haves-nots with their vanguard and the haves

with their hirelings or macabre freaks that live through them, civil war between at least these two sections of the population is the only purgative. Total revolution must be aimed at the purposeful and absolute destruction of the state and all present institutions, the destruction carried out by the so-called psychopath, the outsider, whose only remedy is destruction of the system. This organized massive violence directed at the source of thought control is the only realistic therapy.

Analysis of the oppressed mentality and the psychopathic personality that accrue from contact with the prevarications of American culture must be carefully integrated with the analysis of the source. Simple interpretation of effects tends to calcify—it certainly promotes defeatism. “Action makes the front.” One can quietly refuse to accept the constrictions of bourgeois culture,

can reject himself, hate the self and turn inward. By so doing he accomplishes a form of individual revolt, but here again we find another unconscious manifestation of the thing we hate—individualism—a now attitudinal instrumentality of bourgeois culture. We cannot escape—one simply cannot reject constrictions without rejecting and putting to death the constrictor. An armed attacker cannot be ignored. Gandhi and the gurus were all abject fools. I would certainly be dead if, when critical flash points matured, I hadn’t backed my rejection with blows. I would hate to have been a Vietnamese in Mylai without arms. I hate encounters like the one at my last court appearance on April 6, 1971, when the enemies who attacked me had all the weapons. I would hate to run into freaks who have Mike Hammer/J. Edgar Hoover complexes without being armed. My pledge is to arms, my enemies are institutions and any men with vested interests in them, even if that interest is only a wage. If revolution means civil war—I accept, and the sooner begun the sooner done.

I don’t think the enemy can be identified any more carefully than this. Further identification must be made in the process. I feel elated that my brother died with two guns in hand. I’m going to miss him and all the others, though death in our situation is only a release. I miss people intensely. I miss him intensely, but he and the others who sought freedom died at the throat of the principal repressive institution of the empire—they died making real attempts at freedom.

I paraphrase Castro on trial after Moncada: “I warn you, gentlemen, I have only begun!”

George