

11

Violations (for Emily)

Mississippi goddam.

—Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam”
Nina Simone in Concert, 1964

A house is not a home.

—Luther Vandross, “A House Is Not a
Home,” *Never Too Much*, 1981

As an already- and always-raced writer, I knew from the very beginning that I could not, would not, reproduce the master’s voice and its assumptions of the all-knowing law of the white father. Nor would I substitute his voice with that of his fawning mistress or his worthy opponent, for both of these positions (mistress or opponent) seemed to confine me to his terrain, in his arena, accepting the house rules in the dominance game. If I had to live in a racial house, it was important, at the least, to rebuild it so that it was not a windowless prison.

—Toni Morrison, “Home”

There is something about violence and violations in the “household” that begs for silence.¹ And disavowal. Academe, one of the most influential gathering places of state and counterstate intellectuals, is one “household” in the American homeland and its expanding archipelago.² It is there that I sit while I write this essay. (Like predatory gentrification, academe has extended itself into my very

Originally published in a slightly different form as “Violations,” introduction to *Warfare in the American Homeland: Prison and Policing in a Penal Democracy*, ed. Joy James (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3–16.

kitchen.) The crafting and shaping of this anthology, by academics, have occurred on a battlefield. In fact, the book was born in a state of war—specifically, the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq (sans Iraqi weapons of mass destruction or connections to al-Qaeda and September 11) and what has really worried some, the effectiveness of Iraqi resistance movements a year after the world was informed that the war was over and the United States had won.³

Ostensibly, this work first raised its head in the expanding military theater of U.S. imperial aspirations and its domestic/foreign policy with their attendant human rights abuses. Yet, in truth, however you wish to define it, the smaller, closeted military theater (the “pit” as opposed to the amphitheater) permitted the ducking and dodging of difficult struggles precisely because academe is not the “streets.” So what it and this academic engagement offer is not a political coalition (although old political ties and shared respect among some contributors indicate that coalitions exist and so manifest here—just not as an editorial process or text). Not a home, this literary intervention, a politics of sorts, challenges while it also reproduces containment.⁴

Trace the genealogy and map the “penalscape” and one finds that institutional intellectuals are rarely the “guerrilla intellectuals” that some academics emulate or necessarily the “native intellectuals” analyzed by Frantz Fanon. Nor, I believe, should they be: The “academic archipelago,” with its increasing dependence on and enthrallment with corporatist and statist structures and funding, is not the most trustworthy of training camps for peace combatants seeking just distributions of power and wealth. Has the academic genealogist displaced the scientist who replaced the priest? Some see the roles of progressive academic intellectuals as synonymous with those of insurgent intellectuals, a conflation that produces considerable confusions about the function of political coalitions and the cooptation, commodification of “subjugated” forms of political power. This suggests to me that to project or to perform insurgency must be one of the technologies of warfare deployed, and perhaps delighted in, by a goodly, ungodly number of Americans. Ever-present projections of apparitions of cultural characters such as John Wayne and Clint Eastwood—or, now, the white skins, black masks of the fugitive convict “Riddick” (Vin Diesel’s “ambiguously raced” murderous con with a heart of gold) or *The Matrix*’s “Neo” or anime’s hipster *Cowboy Bebop* bounty hunter “Spike

Spiegel”—suggest how burdensome certain burdens can be for progressives in an ambitiously pugilistic, hero-addicted society.

When has the archipelago got you by the “*cojones*”? to quote Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s castigation of the Cuban government’s downing of the Miami-based, anti-Castro Brothers for the Rescue planes as they violated Cuban airspace. The answer: When your jailer dons drag to become you and usurps and reproduces your voice and politics without taking your place in the cell. Mimetic becomes apocalyptic in the penal landscape that is passing for a homeland—and logically so, for this is where death is manufactured.

Michel Foucault was right in (more than) one sense: It is difficult to locate the outside, particularly if the very voices of the physically subjugated become mimed by their surrogate guards who then perform as their liberators. Your own language and stories used against you? What violation, whether misdemeanor or felony. What violence, to be lectured on obedience with your own words, to have your own “bio-stories” reworked and recited back to you—now as spectacle turned captive audience—by anointed bard(s). Listen to the charge of “reverse racism” or “(hetero)sexism” or “class warfare” (in the absence of structural reversals of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism) that supplants articulations of nonelite black, female, queer, or poor people’s rage with the narratives of white victimization and racial or elite outrage, the verbal slippage of “by any means necessary” from the mouths of police and city or state officials in their assaults on and slaughters of black militants and their progeny (e.g., Philadelphia Mayor Wilson Goode’s oration before the 1985 bombing of the MOVE Organization).⁵ Or witness the bio-political power of the Pygmalion who projects Medea onto those who refuse to mammy. Finally, consider the academic “expert” and “rearticulation specialist” on the lives and narratives of those imprisoned in the household or its formal detention centers: Immigration Customs Enforcement—the former Immigration and Naturalization Service—holding cells, psychiatric wards, jails, police precincts, maximum security, death row, closets, or basements, hiding places from domestic batterers or the predation of aggressively “affectionate” adult kin. Consider all these “violations.”

Yet the very calling out or detailing or analyzing of violations perhaps at times reproduces new forms of erasure, distortion, and violence. Thus, in the professionalism of prison discourse,

the jailer (multitudinous rather than monolithic) may assume the position of the jailed in the rhetorical sense and mask his or her dual role as guard (or guardian of a certain order). There is a reality of nonduality, one that reveals that penal territory is so massive, so intricate, and so internalized that it circumscribes and burdens all. Hence, everyone is “incarcerated” in some sense, and captivity and violation are shared carceral experiences. Yet in maneuvers one can as a “theorist” or “performer” siphon off the political discourse of the imprisoned and hence engage in an elite form of criminality—identity theft. Such theft dispossesses the imprisoned of the labor and “wealth” they produce—the meanings and narratives of their confinement, the meanings and narratives of their resistance to repression, the meanings and narratives of their lives. (Curiously, with identity theft, those who have been robbed must prove that they themselves are not the thieves.)

Everything but the Burden is the title of the cultural critic Greg Tate’s book on white and multicultural America’s enthrallment with and appropriation of hip-hop and black culture.⁶ “Everything but the burden”—I grimace as I begin to trace and sketch my dialogue with elite voices chronicling the “gulag.”

Michel Foucault’s and coauthors’ pamphlet *The Assassination of George Jackson* offers an important contribution.⁷ Foucault will function as a convenient foil here for his alleged past “erasures” of antiblack racism (and sexist) violence and terror in his text *Discipline and Punish*. Yet, this anthology, the product of collective endeavors and battles, is a product or construct, a discourse in which several of us, while attempting to tunnel our way out of a penal site—structural racism and sexism and the pathologizing of antiracist rebellion and slave resistance—found that we had merely dug ourselves into another prison corridor or cell.

It is fairly easy to begin as an ally “liberator” and slide into role-playing as ally “appropriator.” For instance, “white antiracists” or “people of color (POC)” are amorphous groupings that mask the ethnic chauvinism and antiblack racism and that lie within. Such formations can provide a rainbow prism of hatreds and envy solidified by a refusal to “bow down” to blacks and their demands for recognition based on “exceptionalism.” The quandary, though, for those who never sought genuflection is what is the value of recognition for the “uniqueness” of black bodies for whom white supremacist cultures and state policing practices in the United

States have reserved an exceptional place: that of targets for excessive force and the penal site. What does it mean when “people of color” or antiracist whites wear the black body to exercise their grievances and outrage at white supremacy but maintain their distance (and disdain?) for the antithesis of whiteness.

Women, black women, even those intimately aware of trauma, can also violate and appropriate others, particularly if they are housed in the most repressive sites of the archipelago, its domestic (and foreign) prisons. Asha Bandele’s memoir, *The Prisoner’s Wife*, offers an illustration of facile moves that glorify the mundane resistor by mapping over the narrative of the impersonated insurgent. Such moves extinguish the political risk and vulnerability that differentiate the “free” person, albeit one regulated to the household by racial-sexual stigma and practices, and the unfree person, locked in prison. Cloaking the middle-class author in the dress of the prison revolutionary George Jackson, the Readers’ Club Guide for *The Prisoner’s Wife* poses two queries that struck me as masking and violating gestures:

The Prisoner’s Wife features allusions to *Soledad Brother*, George Jackson’s seminal portrait of the struggles, politics, and intricacies of prison life. How has Jackson’s book—the work of a brave and embattled man—influenced our culture’s perceptions of political imprisonment, racism, and the United States justice system?

In what ways can we view *The Prisoner’s Wife*—the work of an equally brave

and similarly embattled black woman—as a useful, even indispensable, counterpoint (and complement) to the messages in Jackson’s *Soledad Brother*?⁸

It is noted that the Readers’ Club recognizes a black revolutionary. Yet, mimetic performance, even one that must cover Jackson’s ideology as a militarist in order to appropriate and wear his iconic persona, is an equal-opportunity affair. Still, one must note that drag is not worn with equal risk—that is, those already designated part of the privatized realm for subordination, for example, black women such as Bandele, when performing insurrectionist, are likely to pay a heavier price for their theater than those designated part of the public realm of rulers and authoritative

intellectuals and politicians such as white neoliberal or neoradical male intellectuals.

Some valued and mimed for their presentations of radicalism may never pay the price of the ticket (to use James Baldwin here) in the academic landscape, a surrogate for and derivative of the American penalscape. Useful registers—reliable in strategies to survive warfare—rather than globalizing genealogies offer precision. Remember the color codes of Homeland Security, red, orange, yellow flags, as precautions against erasing or glossing over subjugated and insurgent knowledge.

Back to the foil. Consider Foucault's interview at New York's Attica prison.⁹ Attica was the site of the state's killing of over thirty men, mostly African American and Latino, who protested the slave-like conditions of subjugation. For Foucault in the Attica interview, crime is a "coup d'état from below." *Yellow*. The United States and its economic and political and social structures were and are founded on theft of (Indigenous) land and (African) labor. Hence, the most significant criminals, and the least interested in battling the state, come from "above"—in property theft (white-collar crime), drug trafficking (money laundering is the most profitable; growers and street dealers garner only a fraction of the trade), and organized violence and murder rationalized as warfare—Vietnam, Kissinger's Cambodia. (Surely, state violence, Reagan's contras in Latin America and Southern Africa, the School of the America's training of death squads, the occupation of Iraq, and the theft of national and global resources and lives must register somewhere.) When the coup d'état from below meets the coup d'état from above, the reinforcement of the penalscape follows.¹⁰

What constitutes critical theory that can analyze this troubled symbiotic relationship?

Within the interview—which here serves as an illustration or contrast for my larger argument that the technologies of containment encompass "radical" academic discourse—coupled with the vanishing of state criminality in his narrative are Foucault's comments about Attica's architecture that refer to "Disneyland" (Baudrillard?) and the "cleanliness" of the prison halls (which he equates with nineteenth-century French parochial schools). *Orange*. Those who fear the physical terror of imprisonment may dissociate Attica from the "Magic Kingdom." Rather than foster a lack of imagination or theoretical verve, closer proximity to state captivity and violation

shape even the gallows humor of the dead zones of the household and the penalscape. Those policed in virulent, violent fashions may have different cognitive skills that produce different, deeper meanings.

Foucault's comments about the physical structure of Attica disconcerted some. Foucault is usually vigorously defended against the ignorance of non-Foucauldian scholars (although the "discredited knowledge" of Toni Morrison comes to mind: as the affliction of all blacks must shape perceptions of ignorance and allow many to ignore the query, "Where are the people—my people?"¹¹ as some form of infraction).

A violation that any chorus member who marks the demise of (black/brown) renegades seeking freedom will remember: In his interview, Foucault does not once mention the men who rebelled in Attica and who were *massacred* there (to use the terminology of Tom Wicker, the white, liberal *New York Times* writer). Not one man, not once, does he name. *Red*. To say nothing of the victims when one enters a mass graveyard is a breach of trust if one enters not as a national guardsman, or as Governor Nelson Rockefeller, or as an idle spectator or consumer, but as an ally.

Erasing a genealogy mapped by the "wretched of the earth" allows the nonwretched to print over their (our?) texts, to use insurgent narratives as recyclables. This is a practice of the police machinery and its technologies of warfare. Professed allies, "radical" theorists, are selective because they have that right and privilege. In one narrative, Foucault disappears all impoverished and imprisoned black/brown bodies, yet in another he presents, in painstaking delineation, the corpse of the revolutionary icon and prison rebel George Jackson; that killing in a California prison thirty years ago sparked the Attica rebellion and additional killings in a prison on the other side of the continent.

As did Jackson, the Attica captives and insurgents fashioned reformist and revolutionary moves and were murdered for those acts. Who witnesses this? Who supplants them? Who performs their guerrilla theater? Who loves what they represented and the families of their origins as they fashion new survival and liberation from war? Who understands that they were both violators and violated? And who comprehends that the most civil and surgical of violations, those that leave no mark on the physical body, would be erasure or dismemberment through mimetic performance that discredits the legacies of the "household"—their resistance.

Hence, the mesh of “revolutionary” desire and anxiety concerning the academic, elite cartographer and genealogist that I bring as editor to this work. A new “progressive radical” order can continue to elide the “household” that I am “forced” to occupy and, in complicity, reproduce. When the “household” of the disappeared—poor communities, prisoners, queers, red/black/brown peoples, women, children—reappears and dictates its own narrative, in its own voice, with its own unmitigated desires, surely that is, this is war.

Many are weary of warfare. Yet there are distinctions to maintain between wars of survival and liberation and wars of conquest and annihilation. Most fear violence and the realization that noncombatants largely are the victims of carnage or the designated targets. In contemporary warfare, since World War II in the foreign theater, the casualties have been in the majority women and children (giving perverse meaning to the chivalric chant, “Women and children first!”). In the domestic theater, women and children have always dominated the landscape of broken and scarred bodies and minds and disoriented souls. Still, exhaustion and terror cannot prevent movement; one must travel or become buried under the penal landscape. Those who don’t resist violation don’t survive. Some who enact survival and liberation possibilities do.

Captives and rebels are not saints merely because they (or we) are exploited or abused. Some relegated to confinements seek rewards and approval for loyalties that “reproduce” the national(ist) “family” and its “coherence.” According to the official, conventional narratives, it is safer to harbor and shelter within a penal democracy, despite its abusive excess. Some measure of safety is promised in exchange for obedience and conformity to and within the household. Is it not better to be a black woman in the Southern United States than a black woman in South Africa or Sudan?¹² In Sudan, Arab Muslim militia men (embraced by the terms “people of color” and “Third World people”), in their ethnic cleansing and genocidal warfare, rape and mutilate African, Muslim, Christian, and animist women, girls, and boys, cursing them with the Sudanese epithets of “black,” branding survivors on their hands to ensure that private trauma enters public record. The archipelago is global, and so not always “American.” There are multiple predations confronted and little adequate shelter—for some prey.¹³

Nevertheless, resistance, in all of its contradictions and imperfections, continues. In the United States, antiviolence activists in the

“abolitionist” movement embrace violent men rather than jettison them to a “fatherly” state that punishes and destroys. Such activists grapple with what to do with the rapists, torturers, and the killers of children and women (and the lucrative market for sexual violence that dismembers). The antiviolence movement is multifaceted. In his essay, “Killers” in a volume of writings by prisoners, Prince Imari A. Obadele describes and protests against “virtual rape”—male prisoners’ “killing” of female guards with their eyes, masturbating in front of them as a form of warfare known as “taking the pussy.” The women who do not report these violations are considered “good” women.¹⁴ Obadele relates that he could care less about his female captors, yet he condemns the practice (for its implications for parolees): Predators require prey, don’t they?—no matter what gender or on which side of the concertina wire.

A collection that contests the homeland as predacious territory explores both repression and resistance to violations contributors offer “critical thought” and political responsibility to the mapping of strategies based on peace and freedom in this moment of love and war so aptly expressed by Georgia Jackson to the captive after the burial of her seventeen-year-old Jonathan:

My dear only surviving son,

I went to Mount Vernon August 7th, 1971, to visit the grave site of my heart your keepers murdered in cold disregard for life.

His grave was supposed to be behind your grandfather’s and grandmother’s. But I couldn’t find it. There was no marker. Just mowed grass. The story of our past. I sent the keeper a blank check for a headstone—and two extra sites—blood in my eye!!!¹⁵

NOTES

1. My understanding and critique of the “household” is situated in part in experience and in part in the political theory of Hannah Arendt, discussed in chapter 19 of this volume.
2. In his translation of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918*, Thomas P. Whitney notes Solzhenitsyn’s use of the archipelago as metaphor:

The image evoked by this title is that of one far-flung “country” with millions of “natives” consisting of an *archipelago* of islands, some as tiny as a detention cell in a railway station and others as vast as a large Western European country, contained within another country—U.S.S.R. This

archipelago is made up of the enormous network of penal institutions and all the rest of the web of machinery for the police oppression and terror imposed throughout the author's period reference on all Soviet life. Gulag is the acronym for the Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps which supervised the larger part of this system.

See Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

3. As of March 16, 2007, the Department of Defense (DOD) recorded 3,197 U.S. military deaths of U.S. soldiers in Iraq, in addition to 24,042 soldiers wounded in action: see U.S. Department of Defense, "OIF/OEF Casualty Update," accessed March 18, 2007, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/casualty.pdf>. DOD issued no authoritative estimates on the number of Iraqi civilian casualties. Iraq Body County, a group of volunteer U.S. and British academics and researchers estimated between 59,236 and 65,160 Iraqi civilian deaths in March 2007. See "Iraq Body Count," accessed March 18, 2007, <http://www.iraqbodycount.net>. Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore published findings of a study in the medical journal *Lancet* suggesting that the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 resulted in more than 654,965 civilian casualties by fall 2006. See Les Roberts et al., "Mortality after the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey," *Lancet* 368.95 (October 2006): 1421–1428.
4. Bernice Johnson Reagon provides wry, cautionary commentary about coalitions:

Coalition work is not done in your home. Coalition work has to be done in the streets. And it is some of the most dangerous work you can do. And you shouldn't look for comfort. Some people will come to a coalition and they rate the success of the coalition on whether or not they feel good when they get there. They're not looking for a coalition, they're looking for a home!

See Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (Albany: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1983).

5. The MOVE Organization, its most prominent member being death-row intellectual and former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal, who joined after the 1985 tragedy, was decimated by an aerial bombing by police using Vietnam War surplus in Philadelphia. Eleven people died in the 1985 conflagration, including four children. See *The Bombing of Osage Avenue*, dir. Louis Massiah (videocassette, 1986).
6. See Greg Tate, *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture* (New York: Harlem Moon, 2003).

7. See Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (GIP), *Intolérable 3: L'Assassinat de George Jackson* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
8. See Asha Bandele, *The Prisoner's Wife* (New York: Scribner, 1999).
9. See John K. Simon, "Michel Foucault on Attica: An Interview," *Telos* 19 (1974): 154–161. In September 1971, prisoners at New York's Attica rebelled against the prison administration's failure to address complaints about the poor living conditions. The uprising grew from solidarity among prisoners following the August killing of George Jackson by guards at California's San Quentin prison. More than 1,500 prisoners, across racial lines, seized the prison and held hostages. Despite the warnings of observers and mediators selected by the prisoners, New York's Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered that the prison be retaken by force. State troopers stormed the grounds; they fired some 4,500 rounds of ammunition at prisoners and the hostages. Forty-three people were killed, and 150 were injured, nearly all from the fire of the state troopers. Following the suppression of the rebellion, prisoners were tortured. Sixty prisoners charged with inciting the rebellion were defended by volunteer lawyers and a national movement. By 1976, nearly all of the charges had been dismissed; in 2002, New York State awarded survivors an \$8 million settlement. See Freedom Archives, "Thirty Years After the Attica Rebellion" (sound recording, 2001), accessed September 26, 2012, <http://www.freedomarchives.org>; *Eyes on the Prize II: A Nation of Law? 1968–1971* (Blackside Productions, videocassette, 1987); and Tom Wicker, *A Time to Die* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Books, 1975).
10. Foucault states: ". . . committing a crime questions the way society functions in a more fundamental way? So fundamental that we forget that it's social, that we have the impression that it's moral, that it involves peoples' rights. . . ." Simon, "Michel Foucault on Attica," 161.
11. See Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," in *Black Women Writers*, ed. Mari Evans (New York: Doubleday, 1984).
12. Rape and domestic violence against women and children in South Africa have been widely reported. See Amnesty International, "South Africa: Women, Violence, and Health," February 17, 2005; Amnesty International, "Southern Africa: Women and Children Still Facing Discrimination and Violence," December 5, 2002, accessed July 20, 2004, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf030122002>.
See Human Rights Watch, "Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic Cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan," *Human Rights Watch Report* 16, no. 6A (May 2004); Amnesty International, "Korma: Yet More Attacks on Civilians," July 31, 2006, accessed August 28, 2006, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR54/026/2006>.

- Documentation of the abuse of women in prison can be found in Amnesty International, "Abuse of Women in Custody: Sexual Misconduct and Shackling of Pregnant Women," March 2001, accessed July 10, 2004, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/custody/abuseincustody.html>; idem, "'Not Part of My Sentence': Violations of the Human Rights of Women in Custody," 1999, accessed July 10, 2004, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/019/1999>. For a report on male rape in prison, see Human Rights Watch, *No Escape: Male Rape in U.S. Prisons* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2001).
13. In Greek mythology, the second labor of Hercules was to slay the Hydra; when one of its heads was cut off, two more grew in its place. The battle against an archipelago as "Hydra" suggests George Jackson's avowal in *Blood in My Eye*: "If one were forced for the sake of clarity to define [fascism] in a word simple enough for all to understand, that word would be 'reform.'"
 14. See Prince Imari A. Obadele, "Killers," in *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*, ed. Joy James (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).
 15. An early printing of Jackson's *Blood in My Eye* (Bantam, 1972) attributes this statement to Lester Jackson; a reprint edition (Black Classic Press, 1990) offers no source. Mothers birth and bury. I see the bloodshot eyes of Georgia Jackson, not the father Lester or "anonymous." The title of an interview with Georgia Jackson, "I Bought the Plot a Year Ago, I Knew They Would Kill Him" (*Sun Reporter* [San Francisco], August 28, 1971), supports this attribution.