



Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, Inc.

August 26, 2022

Dear Friends of Hallie Q. Brown,

For those of you unaware, Black August is a commemoration of the countless organizers, activists, and freedom fighters who sacrificed their freedom and lives in the struggle for Black liberation.

It was started in California prisons in the 1970s by Black freedom fighters who wanted to honor the lives and deaths of Black political prisoners killed by the state ((starting with Jonathan P. Jackson (d. August 7, 1970) and George Jackson (d. August 21, 1971) at San Quentin State Prison)), bring awareness to prison conditions, and to honor the radical tradition of Black resistance against anti-Black state violence and systemic oppression.

August was chosen because it is a special month for Black power building. Revolutionary moments such as the Watts Uprising, Haitian Revolution, Nat Turner Rebellion, Fugitive Slave Law Convention, and March on Washington all happened in August. Additionally, many revolutionaries, such as Marcus Garvey, Marsha P. Johnson, and Fred Hampton, were born in August.

More than fifty years after the first Black August, groups continue the Black August legacy of commemoration by amplifying the history of resistance and creating spaces for Black people to come together in community and honor the legacies of freedom fighters who are still imprisoned or have been wrongly executed.

George Jackson

Born in Chicago, Illinois, Jackson was who started it all. He spent time in the California Youth

Authority Corrections facility in Paso Robles due to several juvenile convictions including armed robbery, assault, and burglary.

In 1961, he was convicted of armed robbery – for stealing \$70 (\$600 in current dollar terms) at gunpoint from a gas station – and sentenced to one year to life in prison.

During his first years at San Quentin State Prison, Jackson became involved in revolutionary activity. He was described by prison officials as egocentric and anti-social. In 1966, Jackson met and befriended W. L. Nolen, who introduced him to Marxist and Maoist ideology. The two founded the Black Guerrilla Family in 1966 based on Marxist and Maoist political thought. In speaking of his ideological transformation, Jackson remarked: "I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels, and Mao when I entered prison and they redeemed me."

As Jackson's disciplinary infractions grew, he spent more time in solitary confinement, where he studied political economy and radical theory. He also wrote many letters to friends and supporters, which would later be edited and compiled into the books *Soledad Brother* and *Blood in My Eye*, bestsellers that brought him a great deal of attention from leftist organizers and intellectuals in the U.S. and Western Europe. He amassed a following of inmates, including whites and Latinos, and most enthusiastically with other black inmates.

In January 1969, Jackson and Nolen were transferred from San Quentin to Soledad Prison. On January 13, 1970, corrections officer Opie G. Miller shot Nolen and two other black prisoners (Cleveland Edwards and Alvin Miller) during a yard riot with members of the Aryan Brotherhood, killing all three. Following Nolen's death, Jackson became increasingly confrontational with corrections officials and spoke often about the need to protect fellow inmates and take revenge on correction officers, employing what Jackson called "selective retaliatory violence."

On January 17, 1970, Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette were charged with murdering a corrections officer, John V. Mills, who was beaten and thrown from the third floor of Soledad's Y wing. This was a capital offense and a successful conviction would have put Jackson in the gas chamber. Mills was purportedly killed in retaliation for the shooting deaths of three inmates by Miller the previous year. Miller had not been charged with any crime, as a grand jury ruled his actions during the prison fight justifiable homicide.

On August 21, 1971, Jackson met with attorney Stephen Bingham at San Quentin prison to discuss a civil lawsuit that Jackson had filed against the California Department of Corrections. After the meeting, Jackson was being escorted by officer Urbano Rubiaco back to his cell when Rubiaco noticed a metallic object in Jackson's hair, later revealed to be a wig, and ordered him to remove it. Jackson then pulled a Spanish Astra 9 mm pistol from beneath the wig and said: "Gentlemen, the dragon has come"—a reference to Ho Chi Minh. It is not clear how Jackson obtained the gun. Bingham, who lived for 13 years as a fugitive before returning to the United States to face trial, was acquitted of charges that he smuggled a gun to Jackson.

Jackson ordered Rubiaco to open all the cells and along with several other inmates, he overpowered the remaining correction officers and took them, along with two inmates, hostage. Five other hostages, officers Jere Graham, Frank DeLeon and Paul Krasnes, along with two white prisoners, were killed

and found in Jackson's cell. Three other officers, Rubiaco, Kenneth McCray, and Charles Breckenridge, were also shot and stabbed, but survived. After finding the keys for the Adjustment Center's exit, Jackson along with fellow inmate and close friend Johnny Spain escaped to the yard where Jackson was shot dead from a tower and Spain surrendered.

Three inmates were acquitted and three (David Johnson, Johnny Spain and Hugo Pinell) were convicted for the murders. The six became known as the "San Quentin Six."

There is some evidence that Jackson and his supporters on the outside had planned the escape for several weeks. Three days before the escape attempt, Jackson rewrote his will, leaving all royalties as well as control of his legal defense fund to the Black Panther Party.

Jackson's funeral was held at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland, California, on August 28, 1971.

Several notable artists and entertainers have dedicated their work to Jackson's memory or created works based on his life. The avant-garde jazz group Art Ensemble of Chicago, affiliates of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, recorded and released the album *A Jackson in Your House in Paris*, France, in 1969. A non-album single was released by Bob Dylan, "George Jackson," about the life and death of Jackson. The song made the American charts peaking at No. 33 in January 1972. The ninth track of the 2011 Blue Scholars album *Cinemetropolis* is named for Jackson and references the Soledad Brothers.

Steel Pulse, an English reggae band from Birmingham wrote a song named "Uncle George" that contains a chorus of "Soledad Brother." The song comes from the band's album *Tribute To The Martyrs*, which also honors other black civil rights activists including Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr. and Steve Biko.

Ja Rule named his 2003 album after Jackson's book *Blood in My Eye*. Saxophone player Archie Shepp dedicated most of his album *Attica Blues* (1972) to the story of George Jackson ("Blues for Brother George Jackson") and the Attica prison riots that followed. Stephen Jay Gould wrote, in his 1981 book *The Mismeasure of Man*, of George Jackson's death in context of "statistically supported" social Darwinism. Quoting Gould about the legacy of failed science which supported racial bigotry and physiognomy, "George Jackson ... died under Lombroso's legacy, trying to escape after eleven years (eight and a half in solitary) of an indeterminate one-year-to-life sentence for stealing seventy dollars from a gas station."

"Soulja's Story" is a song by rapper 2pac, released on the 1991 album *2pacalypse Now*, which makes reference to the Marin County Civic Center attacks.

The 2007 film *Black August* is a retelling of the last 14 months of Jackson's life.

Respectfully,



Jonathan Palmer
Executive Director

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