

## WASHINGTON POST, Newspaper Profile of Johnnie Tillmon, and Irate Letters from Readers (1968)

Shortly after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., NWRO and other organizations marked the beginning of the national Poor People's Campaign with a Mother's Day march through riot-torn neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. Coretta Scott King and Johnnie Tillmon were the two headline speakers of the event, which called for a repeal of restrictive national legislation on public aid. One sign of the increasingly fractious and divisive politics that surrounded welfare benefits in the late 1960s was the response of readers to a profile of Tillmon that ran in the women's section of the *Washington Post* newspaper.

### Letter from "A Disgusted Reader" to *The Washington Post* [post-marked May 14, 1968]

This marching story is silly—not by you but by the marcher.

1. She receives more money from Welfare than I do or many more people do on retirement, also what has happened to support help from her Husband.

Also its a fact that a lot of women have children to receive more welfare money. I have been told that by some.

Also if she can work & make as much as her Welfare, why don't she? I can't go to Calif. on my retirement how could she afford to come to DC.

... [O]ur family never had or will have money to go to college. What do the negroes expect? that all the white should help them—why not the rich colored people help the colored. They don't want to work.

Source: Carolyn Lewis, "She Marched to Change Children's Future," *Washington Post*—For and about Women, May 13, 1968, p. C1, and Response Letters sent to NWRO by Carolyn Lewis, June 4, 1968. From: George Wiley Papers, Box 21/Folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

# 18

## Prison Rights Activism

—HEATHER MCCARTY

The United States erupted in protest during the 1960s and 1970s and, like other Americans who became activists in this period, those who were locked away in prisons also found themselves seeking greater rights and trying to improve their living conditions. In particular, the civil rights and Black Power movements of this era inspired prisoners to become activists and they came to adopt much of the ideology as well as the tactics embraced by these movements. Mirroring the evolution of the civil rights movement on the outside, the prisoner rights movement began with convicts attempting to effect change by working through the system. Over time, as some prisoners and their supporters grew frustrated with the limited and slow nature of change, a segment of the movement grew more militant and more willing to engage in direct action to achieve their goals.

A variety of factors both internal and external to the penal system itself also inspired prisoner rights activism in the 1960s and 1970s. Changes in penological practice, prisoner demographics, and the social and racial climate of society in general, to name a few, contributed to prisoners becoming better organized and demanding increased rights and input in prison policies. Throughout this period, the prisoner rights movement attempted to address a wide range of issues including prison conditions, religious freedom for prisoners, capital punishment, parity for women prisoners, and prison and parole sentencing. While convicts and their supporters employed a mix of tactics to achieve their goals, the prison rights movement in this period largely focused their efforts on legal and direct action tactics.

Prisoners had been protesting the conditions under which they lived long before the 1960s. Convicts have a long history of trying to draw attention to the inhuman treatment and the brutal conditions they endured. Whether rendering themselves crippled to avoid forced labor under the brutal whip on Southern prison farms, or initiating hunger strikes to highlight the practices embraced by Northern

penal institutions, prisoners have tried to improve their lot for centuries. Efforts to improve the U.S. prison system, however, achieved limited success because the 1871 ruling in *Ruffin v. Commonwealth* defined prisoners as “slaves of the state”—individuals without constitutional rights. This status left prisoners little power to legally challenge the prison system.

Little changed in the legal landscape for prisoners until 1964, when a group of Black Muslim prisoners—African American prisoners who practiced the Muslim faith—went to court arguing that prison officials denied them their rights to worship. In their now famous case, *Cooper v. Pate*, the court not only ruled that convicts had a right to religious freedom but, by extension, that prisoners had rights under the constitution more generally. Many penal scholars attribute the emergence of the modern prisoner rights movement to *Cooper v. Pate* because it permitted prisoners to file lawsuits on their own behalf and to legal efforts by Black Muslims in general. Between 1961 and 1978, federal courts ruled on 66 cases related to Black Muslims alone.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, many prisoners relied heavily on jailhouse lawyers to help them navigate the legal system. Jailhouse lawyers were convicts who taught themselves rudimentary legal skills while imprisoned and helped other prisoners prepare post-conviction petitions. Fearing the power that jailhouse lawyers could exert over their fellow convicts, many prisons forbade them from providing legal assistance. Ironically, this only led to more legal challenges to prison authority. In 1969, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Johnson v. Avery* that jailhouse lawyers were indeed permitted to provide legal assistance when prison officials failed to provide adequate legal services for convicts. This victory expanded the practice of jailhouse lawyering, and many jailhouse lawyers proved to be worthy adversaries winning legal victories for convicts around the country.

While jailhouse lawyers helped prisoners bring legal challenges, the large number of prison litigation cases that took place during the 1960s and 1970s would have been impossible without support from outside activists, especially lawyers and law students who offered both their time and expertise to convicts. With this additional support, prisoners’ rights petitions filed in federal courts more than quadrupled between 1970 and 1979. Many lawyers involved in earlier civil rights work, such as those in the National Lawyers Guild, brought their experience to the prisoner rights movement. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) established the Prison Project in 1972; it was and remains the most successful prison litigation group in the United States. Even the American Bar Association committed itself to advancing correctional reform in 1970. By the close of the 1970s, prisoners and their advocates had improved convicts’ access to due process rights through cases such as *Wolff v. McDonnell*, which guaranteed procedural protections to prisoners facing disciplinary action. They also successfully challenged censorship of prisoner mail, limits on communication with lawyers, and poor conditions of confinement. Their success filing Eighth Amendment cases not only helped to protect prisoners from cruel and unusual punishment but it also provided them with access to medical care, soap, water, clothing, and limited the length of time prisoners could spend in isolation.

As successful as many of their forays into the legal system were, legal tactics took time and change often came slowly. By the late 1960s, some prisoners began

to grow frustrated at the slow nature of legal pursuits. Just as other activists in this period became more militant so did some prisoners, and they started engaging in direct actions. Prisoners and their supporters continued to use legal avenues, but direct action tactics proved successful in garnering attention for convict grievances. Prisoners began to enjoy greater support from white college students who had become more militant in the free speech and anti-war movements, and other militant groups such as the Black Panther Party took up their cause. A number of the activists in these outside movements became convicts themselves and they began encouraging the prisoners already there to launch their own struggle for increased rights. They argued that all prisoners were victims of an unjust system and advocated that prisoners unite together as a convict class. Prisoners periodically used this unity to transcend racial divisions and work together against the prison system. They organized large-scale protests to lobby legislators and the public to support changes in the prison system.

California’s prisoners were some of the first to utilize more militant tactics. They organized some of the first large-scale prisoner work stoppages in the early 1960s and by the late 1960s, they were shutting down prison operations around the state with support from outside activists. In 1968, California prisoners organized the Unity Day Strikes that closed down prison operations at San Quentin State Prison, while prisoners at Folsom State Prison organized a sympathy strike. Outside activists helped to publish prisoner concerns in local newspapers and held rallies outside of San Quentin’s gates to publicize the weeklong strike at San Quentin. As a result of the protests, officials agreed to allow an interracial group of prisoners to undertake a comprehensive study of prisoner grievances at San Quentin, and they promised to forward the findings to the head of the California Department of Corrections and the state legislature. These prisoners prepared a 78-page report entitled the *Convict Report on the Major Grievances of the Prison Population with Suggested Solutions* that addressed poor prison conditions and analyzed the failings of the California Department of Corrections. The administration initially attempted to prevent the convicts from delivering their report, but in the end they successfully forwarded their findings to the state legislature.

Inspired by the outcome of protests such as the Unity Day Strikes at San Quentin, prisoners across California decided to strike in order to draw attention to prison conditions across the state. The longest nonviolent strike took place at Folsom Prison in November of 1970 when almost all 2,400 prisoners refused to work or leave their cells for 19 days. The prisoners issued a manifesto with 31 demands, ranging from calls for improved living conditions to the release of all political prisoners. The Folsom work stoppage and other prisoner strikes inspired prisoners across the country to organize their own protests for greater convict power and better prison conditions.

Like their counterparts in California, prisoners at the Attica State Correctional Facility in upstate New York sought to improve prison conditions there. In 1970, a group calling itself the Attica Liberation Faction—comprised of Black Panthers, Black Muslims, radical whites, and Puerto Rican Young Lords—wrote several letters to the commissioner of corrections enumerating a list of 29 grievances and requesting that he to address them. Notably, these grievances mirrored many of the demands

that Folsom prisoners had drafted in their recent manifesto. The response to the 1970 letters consisted of little more than vague promises of future discussions that never materialized. The disappointments of approaching officials in a peaceful manner, in combination with the long-standing tensions between prison officers and prisoners at Attica, eventually led to the largest prison riot of this era on September 9, 1971. After 1,281 prisoners seized control of the prison, taking scores of guards hostage, once again they asked officials to address their grievances. This time, however, they had the chance to directly tell all Americans what they felt needed change in the prison system—prison administrators agreed to let television cameras inside. By September 8, 1971, prisoner speeches had been broadcast to the entire nation. Although observers recommended that the State of New York continue negotiating with the prisoners so that this riot might end peacefully, after four days Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered that the armed state troopers retake the prison by force. Trooper bullets killed 29 prisoners and 10 guards and severely wounded 89 others.

Prisoners engaged in numerous direct actions similar to Attica and Folsom on a smaller scale around the country during this period. Direct actions, regardless of size, were typically organized by a relatively small group of more radical prisoners and supported by outside activists. These convicts often self-identified as political prisoners. Some convicts believed that police had targeted, framed, and imprisoned them in order to neutralize their efforts as political agitators. Others argued that all crimes committed by racial minorities and the poor were responses to their oppressed status and therefore political in nature. Soon numerous activists in social movements outside of prison also adopted this perspective and rallied around famous political prisoners such as George Jackson, Eldridge Cleaver, and Ruchell McGee. When California prison officials charged black prisoners George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette on January 27, 1970, with the murder of a white prison officer, outside activists formed the Soledad Brothers Defense fund to help fight the charges. Activists maintained that prison officials framed these men. Seven months later when a guard shot and killed Jackson alleging that he had tried to escape, prisoners and prisoner rights activists on the outside grew even more radical.

In addition to organizing support for political prisoners and aiding prisoners' direct actions inside of prison, outside activists tried other tactics to bring about reform in the prison system. Groups studied prison conditions and lobbied prison officials and legislators for change. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker group active in the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, and the prisoner rights movement, studied prison conditions in the United States and issued *Struggle for Justice* in 1971, a scathing critique of prisons and sentencing guidelines. Chief among the problems they identified were class-based criminal laws, forced treatment, and lengthy periods of inhumane incarceration.

As the 1970s came to a close, all radical political activism declined and prison activism was no different. Politicians from the Nixon administration ushered in a more conservative era, one in which voters fearful of recent increases in crime supported stronger law and order policies. By the 1980s, the public no longer viewed prisoners as reformable and worthy of rehabilitation; instead they perceived criminals as dangerous degenerates. As the nation turned to tough-on-crime policies, outside activists began to abandon the prisoner rights movement in favor of other

causes and the activism within prisons began to wither. Ultimately, the diverse nature of the prisoner rights movement led to its downfall because it was not strong enough, nor ideologically coherent enough, to weather the funding cuts and a lack of public support that it faced in the late 1970s and thereafter.

Nevertheless, the prisoner rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s had a lasting impact on prison systems in the United States. Prison rights activists both inside and outside of prison brought about improvements in living conditions, extended due process protections, secured religious freedom, guaranteed access to legal materials, ended censorship, and even briefly limited capital punishment in many states. The movement extended constitutional rights and protections to prisoners and raised public awareness of prison conditions and problems with the judicial system. Prison systems have moved toward legal due process, extending increased protections to prisoners, and prisoners' constitutional rights have been recognized. Today's activists are using the tools made possible by early prison activism to continue to fight long-standing prison issues such as overcrowding, poor living conditions, inadequate health care, and mismanagement.

### SAN QUENTIN PRISON, *The Outlaw* (1968)

Prisoners at San Quentin State Prison produced an underground newspaper called *The Outlaw*. The paper was produced anonymously without approval of prison officials. Prisoners used this newspaper as an organizing tool to bring convicts together across racial and ethnic lines to demand more say in prison operations.

#### The Outlaw

San Quentin Prison, July 1, 1968

The red-necked Bushbeater is Beat Again

At last the muckrakers who publish the OUTLAW have been apprehended and sent away. Never again will that subversive rag disturb the stagnant placidity of San Quentin. But what's this?? THE OUTLAW!!! Better luck next time Red [Convicts' nickname for San Quentin warden Louis Nelson.]. How many bum beefs does that make now??? About 27. Give it up Red, or tell us where it's at. Don't you realize you've got 4,000 of us?!!!!

... Some of us cons don't seem to know what side we're on. We're obsessed with near-sighted disputes based on race, ideology, group identity, and so on. We expend our energies despising and distrusting each other. All of this is helping the CDC. We permit them to keep us at each others throats. A handful of us are calling for

Source: *The Outlaw*, reprinted in Robert Minton, Jr., ed., *Inside: Prison American Style*, New York: Random House, 1971, pp. 13–17.

UNITY. This is for a purpose. We want to crush this empire that has been erected on our suffering. We call for 4,000 united convicts. Wake up!!! put your prejudices, biases, and class distinctions aside for the purposes of our fight with the CDC. . . . UNITY that will rally to us support from the outside that will carry our plea to the proper places. . . .

We will lose everything if we play into the CDC's hands and let them move us into a riot situation. . . . DON'T let a riot or fire or any disturbance allow his [the warden's] bully hand to fall. . . . Don't let the pigs harass you into a bad move. Let's Get It Together for a while . . . UNITY, BLACK, BROWN, WHITE, UNITY!!!

### SAN QUENTIN PRISON, "Bill of Particulars," A Convict Report on the Major Grievances of the Prison Population with Suggested Solutions (1969)

Prisoners conducted independent surveys with fellow convicts to identify the major grievances with operations at San Quentin State Prison in 1969. They compiled their findings into an 85- page report, including suggestions for remediation, and presented it to prison administrators in February. The "Bill of Particulars" summarizes the issues prisoners raised.

#### Bill of Particular

- I. Objection to Adult Authority Resolution #171, primarily the refixing of the term of imprisonment at a length greater than originally fixed;
- II. Objection to the method of effecting parole violations;
- III. Objection to the long terms served by parole violators;
- IV. Objection to the Adult Authority speculating about the degree of criminal involvement greater than the facts warrant;
- V. Objection to the inordinate amount of time being served by first termers in certain offense categories;
- VI. Objection to apparent lack of consideration given to time served in the deliberations that pertain to the determination of the term of imprisonment;
- VII. Objection to allowing criminal acts of recent offenders to aggravate the standards used in fixing the term of imprisonment of inmates who have already served x-number of years for similar offenses;
- VIII. Objection to basing denial upon the so-called "voice of the public" or the "public mood", when in fact the public hasn't said a word or otherwise manifested its mood;

Source: Bill of Particulars, *A Convict Report: On the Major Grievances of the Prison Population with Suggested Solutions*, San Quentin Prison, February 1969, 3, in the possession of the American Friends Service Committee, Oakland, CA.

- IX. Objection to the constantly changing structure and policies of the Adult Authority and the failure to give the inmate population any indication of the reasons for, or the ramifications of, the changes;
- X. Objection to the inadequate record kept of the Adult Authority hearings, and the lack of meaningful comment therein;
- XI. Objection to the lack of continuity in Adult Authority expectations, demands, and policies from hearing to hearing and from member to member;
- XII. Objection to the fact that the inmate body has no organized voice or other means calling for mitigation, while forces demanding aggravation have full and free access to the communications media.

### GEORGE JACKSON, *Soledad Brother* (1970)

The excerpt below is from a letter written by famed political prisoner George Jackson to his lawyer and friend Faye Stender of the National Lawyers Guild Prison Project written in April of 1970.

Dear Fay . . .

Nothing has improved, nothing has changed in the weeks since your team was here. We're on the same course, the blacks are fast losing the last of their restraints. Growing numbers of blacks are openly passed over when paroles are considered. They have become aware that their only hope lies in resistance. . . . Up until now, the prospect of parole has kept us from confronting our captors with any real determination. But now . . . we have been transformed into an implacable army of liberation.

. . . the last ten years have brought an increase in the percentage of blacks for crimes that can *clearly* be traced to political-economic causes. There are still some blacks here who consider themselves criminals—but not many. Believe me, my friend, with the time and incentive that these brothers have to read, study, and think, you will find no class or category more aware, more embittered, desperatè, or dedicated to the ultimate remedy—revolution. The most dedicated, the best of our kind—you'll find them in the Folsoms, San Quentins, and Soledads. They live like there was no tomorrow. And for most of them there isn't. Somewhere along the line they sensed this. Life on the installment plan, three years of prison, three months on parole; then back to start all over again, sometimes in the same cell. Parole officers have sent brothers back to the joint for selling newspapers (the Black Panther paper). Their official reason is "Failure to Maintain Gainful Employment," etc.

. . . The holds are fast being broken. Men who read Lenin, Fanon, and Che don't riot, "they mass," "they rage," they dig graves.

Source: George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, New York: Bantam Books, 1970, pp. 30-31.

## FOLSOM PRISON, *The Folsom Prisoners Manifesto of Demands and Anti-Oppression Platform (1970)*

Prisoners at Folsom State Prison drafted these demands during their 19-day work stoppage in November of 1970.

1. *We demand* the constitutional rights of legal representation at the time of all Adult Authority hearings, and the protection from the procedures of the Adult Authority whereby they permit no procedural safeguards such as an attorney for cross-examination of witnesses, witnesses in behalf of the parolee, at parole revocation hearings.
2. *We demand* a change in medical staff and medical policy and procedure. The Folsom Prison Hospital is totally inadequate, understaffed, prejudicial in the treatment of inmates. There are numerous "mistakes" made many times, improper and erroneous medication is given by untrained personnel. The emergency procedures for serious injury are totally absent . . .
3. *We demand* adequate visiting conditions and facilities for the inmates and families of Folsom prisoners. . . .
4. *We demand* that each man presently held in the Adjustment Center be given a written notice with the Warden of Custody signature on it explaining the exact reason for his placement in the severely restrictive confines of the Adjustment Center.
5. *We demand* an immediate end to indeterminate adjustment center terms to be replaced by fixed terms with the length of time served being terminated by good conduct and according to the nature of the charges, for which men are presently being warehoused indefinitely without explanation.
6. *We demand* an end to the segregation of prisoners from the mainline population because of their political beliefs. Some of the men in the Adjustment Center are confined there solely for political reasons and their segregation from other inmates is indefinite.
7. *We demand* an end to political persecution, racial persecution, and the denial of prisoners to subscribe to political papers, books, or any other educational and current media chronicles that are forwarded through the United States Mail.
8. *We demand* an end to the persecution and punishment of prisoners who practice the constitutional right of peaceful dissent. . . .
9. *We demand* an end to the tear-gassing of prisoners who are locked in their cells, such action led to the death of Willie Powell in Soledad Prison in 1968 and of Fred Billingslea on February 25, 1970 at San Quentin Prison. It is cruel and unnecessary.

Source: Folsom Manifesto, reprinted in Eve Pell, ed., *Maximum Security: Letters From California's Prisons*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972, pp. 191-201.

10. *We demand* the passing of a minimum and maximum term bill which calls for an end to indeterminate sentences whereby a man can be warehoused indefinitely, rehabilitated or not. . . .
11. *We demand* that industries be allowed to enter the institutions and employ inmates to work eight hours a day and fit into the category of workers for scale wages. . . .
12. *We demand* that inmates be allowed to form or join Labor Unions.
13. *We demand* that inmates be granted the right to support their own families, at present thousands of welfare recipients have to divide their checks to support their imprisoned relatives who without the outside support could not even buy toilet articles or food. Men working on scale wages could support themselves and families while in prison.
14. *We demand* that correctional officers be prosecuted as a matter of law for shooting inmates, around inmates, or any act of cruel and unusual punishment where it is not a matter of life or death.
15. *We demand* that all institutions who use inmate labor be made to conform with the state and federal minimum wage laws.
16. *We demand* that all condemned prisoners, avowed revolutionaries and prisoners of war be granted political asylum in the countries under the Free World Revolutionary Solidarity Pact, such as Algeria, Russia, Cuba, Latin America, North Korea, North Vietnam, etc. . . .
17. *We demand* an end to trials being held on the premises of San Quentin Prison, or any other prison without the jury as stated in the U.S. Constitution as being picked from the country of the trial proceedings and of the peers of the accused; that being in this case, other prisoners as the selected jurors.
18. *We demand* an end to the escalating practice of physical brutality being perpetrated upon the inmates of California State prisons at San Quentin, Folsom, and Soledad Prison in particular.
19. *We demand* that such celebrated and prominent political prisoners as Reis Tijerina, Ahmad Evans, Bobby Seale, Chip Fitzgerald, Los Siete, David Harris, and the Soledad Brothers, be given political asylum outside this country. . . .
20. *We demand* appointment of three lawyers from the California Bar Association for full-time positions to provide legal assistance for inmates seeking post-conviction relief, and to act as liaison between the Administration and inmates for bringing inmate complaints to the attention of the administration.
21. *We demand* update of industry working conditions to standards as provided for under California law.
22. *We demand* establishment of inmate workers insurance plan to provide compensation for work related accidents.
23. *We demand* establishment of unionized vocational training program comparable to that of the Federal Prison System which provides for union instructors, union pay scale, and union membership upon completion of the vocational training course.
24. *We demand* annual accounting of the Inmate Welfare Fund and formulation of inmate committee to give inmates a voice as to how such funds are used.

25. *We demand* that the Adult AUTHORITY Board appointed by the Governor, be eradicated and replaced by a parole board elected by popular vote of the people. . . . where authority acts within secrecy and within vast discretion, and gives heavy weight to accusations by prison employees against inmates, inmates feel trapped . . .
26. *We strongly demand* that the State and Prison Authorities conform to recommendation #1 of the "Soledad Caucus Report," to wit,
 

"That the State Legislature create a full-time salaried board of overseers for the State prisons." . . .
27. *We demand* that prison authorities conform to the conditional requirements and needs as described in the recent released Manifesto from the Folsom Adjustment Center.
28. *We demand* an immediate end to the agitation of race relations by the prison administrations of this state.
29. *We demand* that the California Prison System furnish Folsom Prison with the services of Ethnic Counselors for the needed special services of Brown and Black population of this prison.
30. *We demand* an end to the discrimination in the judgment and quota of parole for Black and Brown people.
31. *We demand* that all prisoners be present at the time that their cells and property are being searched by the correctional officers of state prisons.

### AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE, *The Struggle for Justice: A Report on Crime and Punishment in America* (1971)

The American Friends Service Committee issued *The Struggle for Justice* in 1971 to critique the prison system and sentencing guidelines. The excerpt below is from "A Bill of Rights for Prisoners."

#### A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR PRISONERS

. . . the Bill of Rights for Prisoners includes the following:

1. Unrestricted access to the courts and to confidential legal counsel from an attorney of the individual's choosing or from a public defender. Adequate opportunity to prepare legal writs.
2. Freedom from the actuality or threat of physical abuse whether by custodial personnel or other prisoners.

Source: American Friends Service Committee, *The Struggle for Justice: A Report on Crime and Punishment in America*, New York: Hill & Wang, 1971, pp. 167-169.

3. Adequate diet and sanitation, fresh air, exercise, prompt medical and dental treatment, and prescription drugs.
4. Maintenance of relationships by frequent meetings and uncensored correspondence with members of the immediate family, personal friends, public officials, and representatives of the community. Regular opportunity for conjugal visitation by granting home furloughs.
5. Reasonable access to the press, through both interviews and written articles.
6. Freedom of voluntary religious worship and freedom to change religious affiliation.
7. Established rules of conduct available to prisoners in written form. Prohibition of excessive or disproportionate punishments. Procedural due process in any disciplinary hearing that might result in loss of good time, punitive (involuntary) transfer, or an adverse affect on parole decisions. . . .
8. Opportunity for the prisoner voluntarily to avail himself or herself of uncensored reading material and facilities especially for vocational training, counseling, and continuing education.
9. Opportunity in prison through work-release for work at prevailing wages. Eligibility for Social Security, unemployment compensation, and public assistance benefits upon release. . . .
10. A judicial proceeding for the determination of parole that incorporates full due process in the determination of sentence and parole date, including established rules of parole-board conduct. . . .
11. Full restoration of all civil rights and privileges upon release from prison. The right to vote in any election in which a prisoner would be entitled to vote if he had not been confined.
12. Unrestricted ability to petition for a redress of grievances. A separate authority with the power to correct instances of maladministration, abuse, or discrimination. Freedom from reprisals for making complaints. . . .

### ELLIOT BARKLEY, *We Are Men* (1971)

This speech was given by a 21-year-old inmate by the name of Elliot Barkley, known by his friends as L.D. He articulates his views on why he and over 1,200 fellow inmates took over the Attica State Correctional Facility in upstate New York on September 9, 1971. This speech was recorded by television cameras that had been allowed into the prison yard to film the rebels.

To the people of America

. . . WE are MEN! We are not beasts and do not intend to be beaten or driven as such. The entire prison populace has set forth to change forever the ruthless

Source: The Tom Wicker Papers. The Southern Historical Collection. Davis Memorial Library. The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Chapel Hill, NC.

brutalization and disregard for the lives of the prisoners here and throughout the United States. What has happened here is but the sound before the fury of those who are oppressed. . . . We will not compromise on any terms except those that are agreeable to us. We call upon all the conscientious citizens of America to assist us in putting an end to this situation that threatens the lives of not only us, but each and everyone of us as well . . . We have set forth demands that will bring closer to reality the demise of these prisons institutions that serve no useful purpose to the People of America, but to those who would enslave and exploit the people of America.

. . . We invite *all the people* to come here and witness this degradation, so that they can better know how to bring this degradation to an end. . . .

# 19

## Puerto Rican Activism

—CARMEN TERESA WHALEN

The Puerto Rican movement was one of the radical social movements that came of age in the 1960s and 1970s. Broadly defined, these were movements that sought civil rights, economic justice, and an end to U.S. imperialism and the war in Vietnam, as well as the elimination of bias and second-class citizenship based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Addressing the multiple and overlapping structures of inequality, these social movements also crafted identity politics based on pride, thereby challenging social constructions of inferiority. The tactics of the era were confrontational, as people took to the streets, took over buildings, and made demands of local and federal government authorities, of the military-industrial complex, and of society at large. The goals were ambitious, as “radical” refers not only to the tactics, but also to the “radical” nature of the transformations that activists sought. Satisfied with neither reform nor incremental change, radical social movements, including the Puerto Rican movement, promoted the fundamental restructuring of U.S. politics, the economy, society, and indeed power relations in their everyday manifestations.

Along with the activist energy of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the Puerto Rican movement drew inspiration from the historical legacies of Puerto Rican activism in Puerto Rico and in the United States. Puerto Rico had its own history of struggles against colonization, first against Spain and then, since 1898, against the United States. The movement to make Puerto Rico independent of the United States became particularly active in the 1950s when Pedro Albizu Campos and the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party stepped up the fight to end U.S. colonialism with a rebellion in Puerto Rico and with actions in the United States itself. Although the government seriously clamped down on the activists, these radicals served as role models for many young Puerto Ricans living on the U.S. mainland.