"What, to a Prisoner, is the Fourth of July?": Mumia Abu-Jamal and Contemporary Narratives of Slavery

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“WHAT, TO A PRISONER, IS THE FOURTH OF JULY?”: MUMIA ABU-JAMAL AND CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES OF SLAVERY

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DEDICATION

To my extended family: Grandpa, Grandma, Luisio, Güera, Gloria, Yvette, Eddie, Purple, and Ashley

To my immediate family: Johnny, Rocky, Christy, Danny Boy, and Mom

For teaching me what is really valuable in life. Even when we had nothing, we had nothing together. You may not always know why I do what I do, but you always trust that what I do, I do for the right reasons. Your unconditional love and support is my strength.

To my babies: Anika, Gio, Rozzy, Athena, Neas, Kaleia, and Baby

For giving me reason to care

I dedicate my work to you.
“WHAT, TO A PRISONER, IS THE FOURTH OF JULY?”: MUMIA ABU-JAMAL AND CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES OF SLAVERY

by

LUIS OMAR CENICEROS, B.A.

THESIS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..........................................................................................................................v

TABLE OF CONTENTS.......................................................................................................................... vii

INTRODUCTION: “WE WANT FREEDOM”: THE BLACK PRISONER-SLAVE IN THE ERA OF THE UNITED STATES PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX ..........................................................1

CHAPTER 1: “LIVE FROM DEATH ROW”: READING THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRISON NARRATIVE AS POSTMODERN NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVE ..................................................................................................................28

CHAPTER 2: “ANTAGONISTIC INDEBTEDNESS”: (RE)MAPPING THE BLACK ATLANTIC IN POSTMODERNISM, OR THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF LATE CAPITALISM .........................................................................................................................71

CHAPTER 3: “DEATH BLOSSOMS”: CENSORSHIP, CITIZEN DEATH, AND THE UNITED STATES PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX .........................................................................................................................98

CONCLUSION: “MESSAGE TO THE MOVEMENT”: COMPOSITION IN-PROCESS AND THE MARGINS OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY ..........................................................150

NOTES .....................................................................................................................................................163

WORKS CITED .......................................................................................................................................201

VITA .........................................................................................................................................................212
INTRODUCTION:

The black problem is not just about Blacks living among Whites, but about the black man exploited, enslaved, and despised by a colonialist and capitalist society that happens to be white.

—Frantz Fanon

For African-Americans our collective conditions prior to the advent of postmodernism and perhaps more tragically expressed under current postmodern conditions has been and is characterized by continued displacement, profound alienation, and despair. —bell hooks

Yes—death done come in this here house. Done come walking in my house on the lips of my children. You what supposed to be my beginning again. You—what supposed to be my harvest.

—Lena Younger (Mama)

Oh, make me wanna holler

And throw up both my hands

Yea, it makes me wanna holler

And throw up both my hands —Marvin Gaye
“WE WANT FREEDOM”: THE BLACK PRISONER-SLAVE IN THE ERA OF THE UNITED STATES PRISON-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Introduction

Amid a firestorm of controversy, Mumia Abu-Jamal, after thirty years of incarceration, will no longer face the death penalty. During a press conference held on December 7, 2011, Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams officially stated that the Philadelphia District Attorney’s office will no longer pursue the death penalty in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Abu-Jamal’s thirty year long struggle between preserving his life and state-sanctioned death is a battle fought not only in the arena of legal trials and appeals, but also in the narration of the United States, where the master/slave dynamic of racial control forces people of color into spaces of confinement. The life and body of Abu-Jamal reads like a map tracing the contemporary perpetuation of Black enslavement and, even more importantly, tracing the self-preservation of the Black body and Black voice that challenge the boundaries of confinement and imprisonment, breathing the narrative of a people who have never escaped slavery: the narrative of affirming Life against the silencing state-sanctioned Death.

For Abu-Jamal, his incarceration is indicative of an ever-pervasive capitalist power-structure that in the past has, in the present is, and in the future will control designated groups of made marginalized masses in order that preeminent capitalist beneficiaries preserve elite status over those excluded, oppressed, and exploited masses. Within this framework, Abu-Jamal creates and characterizes his narrative as a continuum of Black enslavement. His work transcends autobiography and becomes creative expression—calling to the past and amplifying forward—a constructed narrative that mimics and mirrors constructions found in the traditional slave narrative, while incorporating contemporary considerations and aesthetics, thereby forming
a synthesis: a newer imaginatively artistic way of looking at the past in the present. Therefore, the United States prison-industrial complex doubles as metaphor, while simultaneously, a collection of literal and spatial institutions of racial control for capitalist exploitation. Although it is inaccurate to draw a direct correlation between the material conditions of (un)life aboard Atlantic slave-ships and day-to-day plantation life during the establishment of an independent United States throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth-century to the material conditions of prison life in the twentieth and twenty-first-century, nevertheless, the intentional design and symbolistic significance between Atlantic slave-trade/plantation economy and the United States prison/detention center industry reveal redesigned capitalist economic determinism. It is this revelation that premises Abu-Jamal’s creative intervention as a voice writing and orally articulating the wrongs perpetuated by moneyed ultra-rich power elites and their capitalistic structures that mechanistically function to preserve their financial interests and their power—from the past to the present into the future.

As the United States prison-industrial complex expands, and the prison program attempts to transform persons of color into non-persons, as Abu-Jamal astutely observes, a “dark, repressive trend in the business field known as ‘corrections’ is sweeping the United States, and it bodes ill both for the captives and for the communities from which they were captured” (Death Row 73). The purpose and concentration of this introduction is to establish the United States prison-industrial complex and mass incarceration as a mode of racial control that forces African-Americans into spaces of confinement. Furthermore, within the space of prison as part of United States racial and social control, African-Americans continue to create narratives of slavery; therefore, via Abu-Jamal’s evocation, contemporary African-American prison literature should be read as a slave narrative in the contemporary.
Enacting a “postmodernism of resistance,” Abu-Jamal should be read as a postmodern Neo-slave narrative, writing within and against postmodernism to challenge and dismantle the United States capitalist power-structure. From the Atlantic slave-trade to the United States prison-industrial complex, from Quobna Ottobah Cugoano to Mumia Abu-Jamal, the slave narrative exists as a critique against oppressive State powers and a collective affirmation of interiority and embodied significance. In order to combat the United States prison-industrial complex, or what could be characterized as the intersection of the Atlantic slave-trade and the Arcades, a more grotesquely perfect form of capitalism growing from out of its own head, Abu-Jamal engages in a call-and-response through a reverberation in time to call back those named and unnamed slaves, murdered and slowly murdered, into the now-time of the present—a body-count of accountability, the voices of the dead echoed in Abu-Jamal.

Writing from a specifically Black postmodern perspective, Abu-Jamal composes his multimedia slave narrative as a postmodern Neo-slave narrative. Building from the slave narratives of centuries past to more contemporary forms of slave narratives, Abu-Jamal demonstrates an intimate connection to past slave narratives, those documented and undocumented, composing his narrative through the narration of other slaves that gifted Abu-Jamal their stories, to which Abu-Jamal forms his story through a communally shared work of narrative and narrativity, an ever-participatory communal slave narrative.

As capitalism modified itself, as the Atlantic slave-trade becomes the United States prison-industrial complex, postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism has effectively changed the mappable world reflexively changing the appearance and functionality of capital, as well as, reflexively changing the perceptibility of the material world. As such, in the world of GoogleMaps omniscient omnipresent geo-locationality, colonialism through military occupation
is outmoded: there are no more new lands to conquer or peoples to enslave that have not already been discovered. In turn, the United States imperialist world-superpower installs a corrective update, upgrading itself to transnational corporate multinationals that preach the democratic rhetoric of nation, while systematically privatizing natural resources and exploiting en mass for-profit. However, within this postmodern/late capitalist sociocultural eco-political world dominant, the voices of the discontent, the angry and the agitated—the revolutionary develop within and against postmodernism and late capitalist culture. It becomes more evident to readers how Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative is modeled by the co-development of revolution and resistance within postmodernism and emerging global communities, while more precisely we can investigate the simultaneously occurring pathological progression of capitalism, revealing the systematic transition from Atlantic slave-trade to prison-industrial complex specifically, and more generally, the intensification of globalization, privatization, and corporate multinationals supplanting nations as the new dictators of world domination.

In a world where the poor are rendered powerless, and the ultra-rich, by virtue of amassing ungodly amounts of wealth, have the financial means to determine the appointments of government offices and how that poser-government should operate, the disenfranchised, the discarded, the destroyed are forced into a state of perpetual living-death. Moreover, Abu-Jamal writes from within a more corporeal space of living-death; in this, his positionality is identical to his antecedent Harriet Jacobs. Abu-Jamal embraces a specifically Black postmodern aesthetic and critical thought to conceptualize and express the experiences of Black prisoner-slaves, physically confined to a cell, imprisoned within a still greater prison of institutional injustice—enslaved by a racist capitalist power-structure that on the world-stage champions universal democracy and freedom, this falsified construct fabricated by illusionary pretense to mystify
capitalist utopia. But Jacobs and Abu-Jamal tell a different story, from out of their tombs, they voice their narrative—from out of death row, Abu-Jamal voices a multimedia postmodern Neo-slave narrative.

Inspired by the Black Power Movement, fourteen year old Abu-Jamal, in opposition to Alabama Governor and presidential candidate George Wallace, protested Wallace’s presidential rally in Philadelphia in 1968. On that day, a “faceless cop […] kicked [Abu-Jamal] straight into the Black Panther Party” (*Death Row* 151). For Abu-Jamal, his “political life began [that day]” (*Abu-Jamal, Freedom* 247). Abu-Jamal ends *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party* with a full transcript of a letter written by Panther member Afeni Shakur while awaiting her trial; Afeni’s letter from a New York jail is addressed to “Jamala, Lil Afeni, Sekwiya, and the unborn baby (babies) within [her own] womb” (*Freedom* 245). Disturbingly analogous to Sherley Anne Williams’s novel *Dessa Rose*, Afeni Shakur (part of the Panther 21 collective) was “esconced in the [New York] city jailed called the Tombs” (*Freedom* 244) with child—a pregnant mother jailed and facing the oppressive threat of remaining imprisoned for decades to come. Even before this unborn Panther progeny is issued a state-certified birth certificate, denoting citizenship and documenting qualifications imperative to hold the highest office in United States government, it has already been incarcerared. Considering the long history of socioeconomic and political inequality in the United States, Blacks are always-already in a state of imprisonment. In the case of Afeni Shakur’s unborn Black baby, it literally was always-already imprisoned in a physically constructed institution—always-already a Black prisoner-slave.

COINTELPRO, the infamous state-sanctioned and government funded FBI program that targeted persons and organizations deemed as threats or enemies of the United States, worked to
dissuade, disrupt, neutralize, and/or eliminate Black Panther Party members, potential Party members, and anyone that even remotely could be tied to the Black Panther Party. Due to the targeting of high-profile members, the “Panther 21” were “indicted on April 2, 1969, on a plethora of weapons, attempted bombing, conspiracy, and related charges” (Abu-Jamal, Freedom 164). In Abu-Jamal’s estimation, the FBI’s “primary objective was the destruction of the Black Panther Party as an independent Black radical presence in the American body politic” (Freedom 207). This is statistically evident in the files appropriated by the Citizen’s Commission to Investigate the FBI, where these files showed that about forty percent of the files were “dedicated to the surveillance of political activist,” as opposed to only “1 percent (1 percent!) [that] dealt with organized crime, primarily gambling-related. This reveals better than anything, the true nature of the ‘beast’” (Freedom 156). For Abu-Jamal, although the FBI does function as an extension of the United States government, the FBI, along with the “Justice Department, and the United States government as a whole” work for and towards a specifically capitalistic hegemonic establishment, and as a consequence of their allegiance to capitalism above all, they are “agents, neither of order, nor of law, but of capital” (Freedom 135). In order to maintain the existing capitalist order, and systematically and symptomatically the consecution of late capitalism, the cooperation of the criminal justice system and prison industry is the machination of the COINTELPRO program and the endowment of the United States capitalist power-structure.

According to Angela Y. Davis, we are currently in “the era of the prison industrial complex [wherein] mass imprisonment generates profits as it devours social wealth, and thus it tends to reproduce the very conditions that lead people to prison” (Are Prisons Obsolete? 16-17). Davis traces the burgeoning development of state and private prisons and other supplementing
institutions in California. From 1852, when the first state prison in California was built, until the end of the 1970s only nine California state prisons were built. Moreover, in the 1980s in “less than a single decade, the number of California prisons double” (Davis 13). In addition, over the decade of the 90s “twelve new prisons were opened” (Davis 13). Through the 1990s and into the new millennium, the construction of prisons would shift dramatically into the private sector. However, the growth in prison construction is not an aberration, nor is the boom of prison growth in the late twentieth-century and the twenty-first-century limited to the state of California; during the Texas governorship of George W. Bush, “the number of private prisons in Texas grew from twenty-six to forty-two” (Shock Doctrine Klein 371). 3

As the construction of private and state prisons multiplies and the prison industry expands, the correlating prison population grows exponentially to compensate the physical need to fill and occupy the constructed prisons; more nefariously, the prison population grows in order to grow the prison industry itself and generate profit. Davis generally defines the United States prison-industrial complex as resulting because “of the extent to which prison building and operation began to attract vast amounts of capital,” and thereby, attracting “corporate involvement in construction, provisions of goods and services, and use of prison labor” (12). The corporate prison industry is one of the most profitable United States industries; with corporate prison stock continuing to rise, the prison-industrial complex grows exponentially. The prison industry, however, does not function as an isolated institution, but rather, works in league with other mutually functioning institutions to both construct the formation of the prisoner and to reaffirm those prisoner formations.

The intentional production of the prisoner, and its social reaffirmation, is contingent on fracturing a collective understanding of the historical ramifications of United States institutional
slavery. In other words, by using the hammer of capitalist self-determinism to separate and diametrically oppose the “good” Blacks against the “bad” Blacks—the Blacks that champion muscular individualism against the Blacks that are erroneously depicted, commonly, as dangerous junkies, weak crack-whores, lazy welfare-queens, altogether jobless or illegitimately employed—the prison industry and other mutually functioning institutions use exceptional cases to fabricate a fallacious rule that is more anomaly than commonality. Rather than see the Black community’s problems as the legacy of slavery, segregation, and later masked or systematic segregation, these persons that more accurately represent the failures of United States democracy and capitalist doctrine, are cycled through the criminal justice system as a constant means of populating prisons. So although the slave/master relationship is no longer ultimately determined by race, the era of the prison-industrial complex is nevertheless racialized (even racist in certain instances) and determined by capitalist interests. The “link of labor and society” has and continues to be a national and international issue; from the Atlantic slave-trade to the United States prison-industrial complex, the “experience of slavery intertwined with everything else—politics, diplomacy, commerce, migration, popular cultural, the relation between the sexes, the question of labor and civilization in the future of America as a whole” (James, “Atlantic Slave-Trade” 258).

As Abu-Jamal indicates, in the third point of the Black Panther 10-Point Program, the term “white-man” was originally used before shortly thereafter being changed to read “capitalist”; the third point would read, “We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our Black community” (Freedom 98). This seemingly subtle change speaks to the concept of revolutionary internationalism, a term which will be discussed in more detail in chapter two as it relates to (re)mapping the Black Atlantic during the era of the prison-industrial complex. For
now, what is important to highlight is the conflict between revolutionary internationalism and United States nationalism as it pertains to the capitalist establishment co-opting Black nationalism to promote capitalist utopic potential and supposed inclusiveness, all while undermining the sociopolitical principles of Black nationalism; the aim, to pacify a distinctly Black movement and to allow limited and selective inclusion into the supposed endless potentiality of United States capitalist utopia. This disingenuous sentiment or “co-optation could perhaps be best seen in Richard Nixon bizarrely proclaiming ‘Black Power’ as he endorsed his notion of Black capitalism” (Abu-Jamal, 105). The capitalist power-structure’s hypocritical stance on Black capitalism and muscular individualism is the same power-structure responsible for arresting, punishing, and imprisoning a mass number of persons that demonstrate and exemplify the teachings of capitalist doctrine. If anything, the War-on-Drugs is representative of hypocritical capitalist rhetoric that contradicts its practical applications by criminal punishment.

Although this discussion is a larger one, and an important discussion to have, at this time what should be said is that the illegal drug business (not exclusively different from the legal drug business in terms of capitalist exploitation) is a pure form of capitalism: it is capitalism unbound without governmental restriction, entirely self-regulating multinational capitalism that is independent of government taxation. Yet, the War-on-Drugs, not coincidentally, is a flashpoint in the development and acceleration of the prison-industrial complex as a late capitalist construction that has spread and continues to spread across the United States.

Although the growth in the United States prison industry is spread nationally over the states, the growing prison population is overwhelmingly comprised of Blacks and Latinos. Therefore, in order to fully understand how the institution works in the formation of the prisoner,
the prison as an institution must be examined as a component of a greater schemata premised on the confinement of a particular group. Statistically speaking, according to a study published in 1990 by the Sentencing Project, of the “U.S. populations in prison and jail, and on parole and probation [...] one in four [were] black men between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine” (Davis 19). Furthermore, a second study conducted five years later “revealed that this percentage had soared to almost one in three (32.2 percent)” (Davis 18). Given the statistical evidence, it is apparent that the Black community as a collective exists within spaces of confinement: both the physical incarceration of the Black body and the social, political, and economic incarceration of the collective Black body.

In *From the Plantation to the Prison: African-American Confinement Literature*, Tara T. Green states “[confinement] describes the status of persons who are imprisoned and who are unjustly relegated to social and political status that is hostile, rendering them powerless and subject to the rules of those who have assumed a position of authority” (3). In addition, Chester J. Fontenot Jr., the series editor of *Voices of the African Diaspora*, writes in the series preface: “For Tara Green, confinement is a trope within the African-American cultural tradition that signifies the way African Americans have been culturally imprisoned […] within the private space of blackness” (ix). Green thus widens the definition of imprisonment by examining physical imprisonment in conjunction with spaces of social, political, and economic confinement.

Because of other mutually controlling spaces of confinement, spaces of confinement beyond physical incarceration such as sociopolitical and economic spaces that predetermine one’s mobility and accessibility within society, upon reintroduction into society after time served or immediately after the enactment of a criminal record, persons with criminal records are
imprisoned by discrimination in public spaces: employment, education, healthcare, housing, and other civil services—all compounded with any public stigma assigned by public perceptions to the statuses of criminal, prisoner, and ex-con. In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander claims that “[t]oday it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans” (2). Alexander equates the legal discrimination against persons recognized as criminals to the same legal discriminatory practices against African-Americans in the past.

Michelle Alexander analyzes the established subjugation of people of color as a racial caste system, which Alexander points out has never ended in America, but is “merely redesigned” (2). Racial caste is precisely defined by Alexander as “a stigmatized racial group locked into an inferior position by law and custom” (12). Alexander continues by defining and framing “mass incarceration” and the multilevel confinement of African-Americans in the United States, where the criminal justice system is a mechanism, or “gateway into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization” effectively imprisoning people behind both “actual bars in actual prisons” and “virtual bars and virtual walls” that “function nearly as effective as Jim Crow once did”; moreover, resulting from retarding mobility and denying accessibility due to “legalized discrimination and permanent social exclusion,” the criminal justice system produces and accelerates a burgeoning membership in “America’s new undercaste” (12-13). Therefore, using Alexander’s framework, the New Jim Crow, interpreted as mass incarceration, is a contemporary modification of plantation slavery, chattel slavery, lynching, and segregation. Furthermore, considering the evidence demonstrating a disproportionate number of African-Americans forced into spaces of confinement, the prison program, comprising the criminal justice system in league with prison institutions, solidifies the
formation of the prisoner and facilitates the cultural transition from a *person of color* into a *criminal*. 5 Precisely in the case of Blacks, *criminal* becomes euphemistic code for *Black*. 6

Davis refers to historian Adam Jay Hirsch’s observation of a parallel between the early American penitentiary and chattel slavery, which Davis summarizes by writing: “both institutions deployed similar forms of punishment, and prison regulations were, in fact, similar to the Slave Codes—the laws that deprived enslaved human beings of virtually all rights” (Davis 27). Davis continues by tracing an abridged historical account of Black enslavement in the United States where “race has always played a central role in constructing presumptions of criminality” (Davis 28). She then summarizes a Black history of enslavement after the abolition of slavery, through the enactment of Slave Codes, and subsequently the new Black Codes.

Davis concludes by referring to one of the most significant, and too often overlooked legal, stipulations of the United States Constitution. In the wording of the Thirteenth Amendment, “slavery and involuntary servitude were abolished ‘except as a punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted’” (28). It is because of the wording of the Thirteenth Amendment that “[m]ore African American adults are under correctional control today—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850s, a decade before the Civil War began” (Alexander 175). Moreover, like early practices of racial discrimination against African-Americans, specifically in regards to voting rights, a number of felonious criminals no longer possess the right to vote once released and never during incarceration. Alexander comments on this fact by stating that “[a]n extraordinary percentage of black men in the United States are legally barred from voting today, just as they have been throughout most of American history” (Alexander 1). It would seem more accurately that the *right* to vote has been voided, and for certain criminals even upon having satisfied one’s *debt to society*, the right to
vote is a privilege for the privileged: by “(re)naming involuntary servitude, the United States recreated rather than actually abolished slavery” (James, “Democracy and Captivity” xxiv).

As we move further into the twenty-first-century United States, the prisoner formation, therefore, is the most pronounced figure subjected to the multilevel system of confinement: a confinement that is both the physical confinement of the body and a confinement beyond the physical imprisonment of the body in the form of social, political, and economic confinement. “Confinement, then appropriately describes the status of African Americans who have endured spaces of confinement that include [...] plantations, Jim Crow societies, and prisons” (Green 4). Within the multilevel spaces of confinement, one of the most polarizing figures in recent United States history broadcasts from deep in the belly of the beast—from death row—from the “dark netherworld of prison, where humans are transformed into nonpersons, numbered beings cribbed into boxes of unlife, where the very soul is under destructive onslaught” (Abu-Jamal, Death Row 73).

Incarcerated since December 9, 1981, and sentenced to death in June of 1982 for the murder of Daniel Faulkner, a Philadelphia police officer, Abu-Jamal has used radio broadcasting and writing to document the prison experience, the prison program’s formation of the prisoner, and, most significantly, the Black prison experience and the formation of the Black prisoner as part of the greater Black experience of oppression. Without entering into a comprehensive examination of the legal proceedings of Mumia Abu-Jamal’s arrest, prosecution, trial, and sentencing, it still bears importance to mention the overshadowing dubiousness throughout the legal proceedings, and in summation make mention that the “Nobel Prize-winning organization Amnesty International reviewed the entire record and not only found chilling violations of US law, but a trial that ‘clearly failed to meet minimum international standards’” (Bisson 192-193).
With a background in journalism and public broadcast radio (working on National Public Radio and the Mutual Black Network, among others), Abu-Jamal uses his writings from within prison to broadcast the African-American experience of physical imprisonment, as well as, the state of the African-American community confined to spaces of Black subjugation as second-class citizens relegated to the bottom of the racial caste system. Abu-Jamal’s commentary on the Black experience, however, is not limited to his own individual space of confinement but inclusively positioned within the greater communal Black experience. Furthermore, as Terry Bisson suggests in Abu-Jamal’s autobiography—as told to Terry Bisson biography On a Move: The Story of Mumia Abu-Jamal, “Mumia’s story begins far from the PJs [projects]. We could go all the way back to Africa as it was being looted and stripped of its treasure, [...] Or back to the South, built brick by brick, barn by barn, by those same kidnapped Africans” (2-3). As Bisson suggest, the Black community’s historical racial designation as non-White in a racialized United States premises the story of Abu-Jamal. In other words, Abu-Jamal’s story is part of a greater African-American narrative contingently premised on the enslavement of Blacks. Abu-Jamal represents only one story within the system of mass incarceration, wherein “a wide variety of laws, institutions, and practices—ranging from racial profiling to biased sentencing policies, political disenfranchisement, and legalized employment discrimination—trap African Americans in a virtual (and literal) cage” (Alexander 179). The hardened rootedness of the Black-slave experience is so embedded in the history of the United States that any African-American experience must be experienced as part of a greater communal slave narrative.

Abu-Jamal’s We Want Freedom begins with a dedication “To the ancestors, the nameless ones who were dragged to living hells in shackles: ‘strangers in a strange land’” (xi). Choosing not to apply a “my” but rather “the” to ancestors, Abu-Jamal dispossess those nameless ones
who, regardless of dying immediately or living a relatively longer life, died unequivocally as slaves. However despite dying as slaves, in Abu-Jamal’s language and conceptualized historical interpretation, the ancestors are not even bound to a possessive pronoun.

In developing his study and (auto)biographic work on the Black Panther Party, Abu-Jamal tittles his first chapter, “The Beginnings of the Black Panther Party and the History It Sprang from”; this chapter (which begins with an epigraph sourced from Harriet Tubman) is not only directly delineating the historical development of the Black Panther Party but is simultaneously indicative of a delineation that is shaped and forged by the slave-trade; a trans-generational psychosocial confrontation with slavery. In tracing the history from which the Black Panther Party sprang, Abu-Jamal begins by confronting a history interlocked with and by slavery:

His [Equiano’s] horrific memories of the torture, brutalities, and savageries of the slave trade stand like dark sentinels in the recess of Black consciousness of what it means to be Black in America. Almost every African American knows that his or her ancestor entered the doorway to America through the stinking hold of a vessel such as that which transported Equiano. (Freedom 13)

A historical slave past is not only a psychosocial reverberation through time, but additionally a material manifestation that demonstrates the biological implications of genetic alterations that can only hint at the initial brutalities and hint at the sexual exploitation of institutional slavery—tangible, embodied instances of slave history:

This “past” is written in the many-hued faces in the average Black family, which may easily range from darkest ebony, to toffee, to café au lait, each a reflection of white rape of African women or of the tradition of concubinage […] For many
Blacks, the past is as present as one’s mirror […] It is in this sense that history lives in the minds of Black folks. (*Freedom* 27)

Because of an ever-present confrontation with a slave past (for Abu-Jamal, the “past” is never in the past—“the past is never dead. It’s not even past”), the oral and textual, the collected and uncollected histories of slaves and sociocultural formations that spring from slave narratives are part of a dialogical process of narration and narrativity.

Returning back to the final pages of *We Want Freedom*, specifically the intertextual narratology as it relates to Abu-Jamal’s inclusion of Afeni Shakur’s letter from the Tombs, we are able to read a precise point of historical collapse centered on the intersection of multiple narratives, and narrativity in-process, as narrator and reader collapse on top of one another.

Abu-Jamal, within his personal narrative of his life in the Black Panther Party, chooses to end the final chapter of his book with the letter written by imprisoned and pregnant female Panther, Afeni Shakur, to her family. How this relates to a historical collapse of ordered time and a distinctly postmodern presentation of narrative, is the final addressee(s) in Afeni Shakur’s letter—the unborn baby (babies) within her womb. Before the reader is privy, and privileged really, to read Afeni’s personal letter to her family, Abu-Jamal introduces her letter by describing how “a teenaged Panther in New York on loan from Philadelphia read it, and it made his heart weep with its beauty, its love, and its profound courage” (*Freedom* 244). What is interesting to note in Abu-Jamal’s introduction of Shakur’s letter is the vagueness of the sentence that immediately precedes Afeni Shakur’s letter; it is “a teenage Panther” that reads the letter, and only by reading *We Want Freedom*, or by having a historical contextualization of Abu-Jamal’s biography does the reader know that the “a teenage Panther in New York on loan from Philadelphia” is Abu-Jamal.
However, despite the reader knowing the identity of “a teenaged Panther,” Abu-Jamal does not firmly or outright name or place himself as that teenaged Panther whose heart weeps; this allows the open-endedness and inclusion of any teenaged Panther that could have read Afeni Shakur’s letter. What occurs by Abu-Jamal the writer/narrator removing his distinct self from this precise moment in the narrative, where a teenaged Panther reads Afeni Shakur’s letter, is that essentially the reader of We Want Freedom reads Abu-Jamal the narrator (writing from prison) reading a fictionalized self as a teenaged Panther reading jailed Afeni Shakur’s letter addressed to her unborn baby (babies), who at the time of composition is (are) jailed as well, and who in the future will be reading her letter. Ordered time dissolves, jail and prison walls disintegrate as complex narration and narrativity intertwine forming a communal fabric of storytelling centered on sociopolitical confinement and physical imprisonment.

Afeni Shakur is well aware of her participation in narration and the narrativity that follows; her letter begins with, “First let me tell you that this book [a collective autobiography of the Panther 21] was not my idea at all […] But I suppose one day you’re going to wonder about all this mess […] I just had to make sure you understand a few things” (Abu-Jamal, Freedom 244). Afeni Shakur, despite her initial reservations, accepts the role of scribe, of historian, of archivist, of (auto)biographer, and this is within her text the letter—the letter itself is a proto-postmodern Neo-slave narrative, because it frames Afeni Shakur’s autobiographical text and current state of imprisonment as the continuation of racialized power-dynamics intended to deny non-White Others a place within the United States body politic, while positioning nineteenth-century antebellum slave narrative convention firmly in the twentieth-century, and collapsing the past, present, and future (“A Letter to […] the unborn baby (babies) within my womb”) into a slave narrative in-process and part of a communal narrative of slavery.
As part of this communal fabric, with respect to Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative, Afeni Shakur’s prison letter becomes a part of Abu-Jamal’s narrative, as a duet, Abu-Jamal’s and Shakur’s voices harmonize and sing the Black prisoner-slave experience through narrative. Abu-Jamal contextualizes Shakur’s letter, and the legacies of the Black Panther Party, in the final paragraph of the chapter: “Perhaps the best of them [BPP legacies] are expressed in Afeni’s letter to her unborn child: hope, empathy, knowledge of our imperfections, knowledge of our shortcomings, the continued will to resist—and love” (Freedom 245).

The importance of Afeni Shakur’s unborn child, and its representative significance to the Black prisoner-slave experience in the era of the United States prison-industrial complex, is the identity of the unborn child—Tupac Shakur. In Tupac’s own words, “my mother was pregnant with me while she was in prison […] A month after she got outta prison she gave birth to me. So I was cultivated in prison, my embryo was in prison” (Shakur 6). Throughout Abu-Jamal’s text and commentaries, the ghost of Tupac Shakur and his intrinsic sociopolitical ramifications haunts Abu-Jamal.

Emphasizing the importance of naming, Abu-Jamal provides insight into the naming of Tupac, named after an “Amerindian warrior who fought against the Spanish colonizers of Peru, Tupac Amaru” (Freedom 244). Abu-Jamal even speculates if Tupac ever read Afeni’s letter to her unborn baby—Tupac: “I do not know if Tupac ever got around to reading it. But a teenaged Panther in New York on loan from Philadelphia read it” (244); again, to refer back to Abu-Jamal’s fictionalization of a teenaged Panther self, the sentence immediately follows Abu-Jamal’s thought on Tupac ever having read Afeni’s letter. There almost seems to be a transfer or doubling of self: Tupac, the unborn baby, becomes or doubles as Abu-Jamal—Abu-Jamal (a
Panther legacy) as author writes himself as a fictionalized self that is reading Afeni’s letter as that would be unborn baby within Afeni’s womb.

Abu-Jamal’s characterization of Afeni Shakur elevates Afeni to a Blessed Mother figuration for all unborn yet always-already confined Black prisoner-slave babies that are born into prisons. 10 Tupac Shakur is Abu-Jamal and Abu-Jamal is Tupac Shakur: both born into spaces of confinement, and both “born to let millions know of the unfairness and indignity of the life of his [their] people, and he [they] did so, with great talent and boundless passion” (Abu-Jamal, Freedom 244). Tupac and Abu-Jamal share a space within the thematically constructed womb of Black femininity and an over-layering prison/jail cell; there is a built-in, purposefully ironic in (the dramatic sense), redemptive quality in both Abu-Jamal and Tupac. Within the historical connotations of Tupac and his life, Abu-Jamal installs or identifies a self-detonating rupture of messianic redemptability unfulfilled. Ironically, the imprisoned unborn baby—Tupac Shakur—does not fulfill the promise of the Black Panther Party, but through his death, a death symbolically charged, Tupac Shakur fulfills the deterioration of the Black Panther Party—Tupac fulfills the Black Panther Party’s dream deferred.

According to Abu-Jamal, the Black Panther Party “lost its long battle for institutionalization and the primary realization of its revolutionary political objectives”; moreover, it “did not establish Black revolutionary power, due to reasons both internal and external” (Freedom 243). Abu-Jamal continues by interrogating the “Newton/Cleaver breach” or the West coast/ East coast Panther divide that resulted in the violent death of many Panthers “by the hands of their erstwhile brothers” (225). In the vacuum of familial homicide within the Black Panther Party, and the fracturing of the Party, within Black communities, the mobilization and collectivity of Blacks became supplanted by violence and muscular individualism. Abu-
Jamal quotes Geronimo ji-Jaga’s retrospective on the consequences of a Black Panther Party termination:

throughout the Black and other oppressed communities, the role models for upcoming generations became the pimps, the drug dealers, etc. […] The next result was that the gangs were being formed, coming together with gangster mentality, as opposed to the revolutionary progressive mentality. (238-239)

In the void of positive Black representation, the formation of other Black collectives attempted to fill the role left by the Black Panther Party; re-organizing efforts such as Community Resources Independent Project (CRIP) and Brotherly Love Overrides Oppression Daily (BLOOD) attributed their formations to the Black Panther Party, whose example “seemed to seep into the origins of the notorious Crips and Bloods” (Abu-Jamal, Freedom 238).

Ultimately, Black gang violence into the late twentieth-century is most notably recognized as climaxing with the deaths of celebrity rap artists Tupac Shakur and Biggy Smalls—a tragedy thematically filtered through media as a West coast versus East coast feud. Tupac’s ascension into celebrity status and violent murder best exemplifies the death of revolutionary Black Panther thought and the co-optation of Black Power aesthetics and rhetoric in order to advance capitalist interest and corporate profit at the expense of the socioeconomic realities of inequality, and the corporeal brutalities of inner-city murder.

On April 15, 2012, a hologram of deceased rap artist Tupac Shakur performed, or more accurately, played the final night of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Annual Festival in Indio, California. The video projection of a shirtless Tupac, an optical illusion comprised of innumerable single images flashed in succession, entertained the thousands in attendance. Soon thereafter with the aid of cellphone technology and instant video upload capability, the digital
concert footage was seen almost instantaneously by millions across the globe via the Internet. Tupac Shakur, who has been dead since 1996, became a Twitter trending topic and widely discussed throughout mass media. Even there, in the California desert, the postmodern condition is present. Tupac playing Coachella represents the multilevel collapsing of capitalism and mass culture, demonstrating the postmodern cultural logic of late capitalism.

Although there is no singular or absolute use of the term postmodern, for the purpose of this thesis the usage of postmodernism is drawn from Fredric Jameson’s use of postmodernism in conjunction with late capitalism. For Jameson, it is “essential” that postmodernism be grasp “not as a style but rather as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features” (Postmodernism 4). Therefore, to refer back to the Tupac hologram at Coachella, what would otherwise be perceived as differing “features,” in this example, a cellphone, a musical concert, a deceased individual, are all differing features that gravitate towards centralized capitalism; the differing features in this model then would constitute consumer culture. In keeping with the introductory premise, as this postmodern logic persist, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between each singular feature, what in the past were features that were distinct from one another and perceptibly incongruent; now however, deeper into the postmodern condition, to differentiate between seemingly differing and distinct features appears perceptibly incongruent.

For instance, cellphones have now been amalgamated into the concert experience: to not take and use a cellphone at a musical concert is incongruent with the concert experience in postmodernity. Where a cellphone has the implicit functionality of being a phone—used to make phone calls—and a musical concert has the functionality of performance and reception—a physical interaction between performer and observer—the cellphone and the musical concert no
longer function singularly as such, but rather, collapse on top of one another. The postmodern musical concert now involves the would-be recipient experiencing the live musical concert through digital technology: s/he observes the concert by looking through the digital monitor; despite being physically present at the musical concert, s/he observes the concert exactly in the same fashion as any observer watching exactly the same digital footage from exactly the same point of view as the recorder would—except replayed on another computer screen or digital device, and in a foreign place potentially a thousand miles away from the recording.  

According to Jameson, postmodernism is “what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which ‘culture’ has become a veritable ‘second nature” (Postmodernism xxi). Therefore, the Tupac hologram can be analyzed as a microcosm of where “the cultural and economic, thereby collapse back into one another” as base and superstructure (Postmodernism xxi). At a macro-level, the collapse is representative of the “age of corporate capitalism,” resulting in the governmental recognition of corporate personhood at the expense of individuals—the death of the subject (Jameson, Cultural Turn 6). The capitalist economic base influences the postmodern superstructure, whereby the “emergence of postmodernism is closely related to the emergence of this new movement of late consumer or multinational capitalism” (Jameson, Cultural Turn 20). In late capitalism, consumerism extends beyond physical products. Consumerism reflexively manufactures total consumption, and the market encompasses culture in totality as a replacement for nature.

Before moving forward and once again to refer back to the Tupac hologram, even death’s naturalness is negated and replaced by a digital second nature, and similar to the postmodern canonization and integration of Picasso and Joyce, a hologram of Tupac “now strike[s] us, on the
whole as rather ‘realistic’” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 4). The destruction of Tupac’s aura, the micro-destruction of his narrative, represents the macro-destruction of grand historical narrative. Despite Tupac’s material and natural death, because of postmodernist technology and capitalistic opportunism, Tupac exists now in “a perpetual present” (Jameson, *Cultural Turn* 20) as the flashing succession of instant images that for a postmodern audience is conceptualized as *real*. As a condition of postmodernity, the “transformation of reality into images, the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents – are both extraordinarily consonant with this process” (Jameson, *Cultural Turn* 20). Tupac has been moved from the natural state of death into perpetual instantaneity that can be manipulated, toured, marketed, and consumed by mass culture. Jameson describes this postmodern process at the macro-level:

one major theme: namely the disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social information have had […] to preserve. (Jameson, *Cultural Turn* 20)

Historical amnesia, as part of the postmodern condition, undermines the realities of social, political, and economic inequality. For the postmodern audience, a hologram of Tupac is depoliticized; his murdered Black body has now been lost in a collage of Twitter feeds, Youtube video posts, and TMZ sensationalism, and has been pacified and reduced to a socially-friendly package ready for mass consumption. The grand narrative’s historical disintegration allows for the gentrification of a United States historical past bound to an infamous history of genocide, displacement, enslavement, oppression, and exploitation, and superimposed on lands haunted by
blood and labor, a pseudo-narrative that can be conveniently consumed, and reflexively, pseudo-narrative consumption will manufacture further consumption by proxy.  

A hologram of Tupac Shakur is symptomatic of a postmodern condition, a condition wherein the prison-industrial complex can be constructed. Any messianic redemptability identified or placed on Tupac Shakur by Abu-Jamal has not only been defunct but perverted and commodified by others. In the same way chattel slavery appraised an unborn slave baby as property and commodity within a slaveocracy, Abu-Jamal’s double, and Afeni Shakur’s unborn baby, is appropriated by a capitalist cultural industry—by way of a cultural logic of late capitalism—that profits from necromancing the labor of Tupac Shakur: now Tupac Shakur’s estate is owned by Jampol Artist Management; a management company that also includes artist Michael Jackson.

Afeni’s conceptual attempts to preserve Tupac Shakur, in such projects as *Tupac: Resurrection 1971-1996* (a uniquely postmodern text in its own right), attempts to disrupt the immaculate homogeneous narrative that de-historicizes Tupac and re-historicizes the realities of racial inequality. However, others who possess the means to digitally render and tour Tupac on-demand can likewise resurrect Tupac into instant commodification. Whatever messianic redemptability Abu-Jamal identifies in Tupac has been destroyed, and whereas Afeni’s resurrection of Tupac has cult value, the digital hologram has only exhibition value as phantasmagoric shock and entertainment spectacle.  

As Sharon Patricia Holland advises, “Shakur’s movement across the boundary between living and dying is best explained by his own statement about his music”; Holland quotes Tupac: “My music is spiritual. It’s like Negro Spirituals, except for the fact that I’m not saying ‘We Shall Overcome.’ I’m saying that we are overcome” (180). Like Tupac describes being
overcome, The Black Panther Party, and its revolutionary thought, are overcome; in its wake during the Post-Civil Rights era, during a time of muscular individualism and the War-on-Drugs, the prison-industrial complex arose in an effort to both erase any significant gains made by the Civil Rights and Black revolutionary movements, as well as, establishing an industry that commodifies Black bodies and their labors for private monetary gain.

Because slavery is not bound entirely to physical enslavement, but simultaneously constructed by a more complex system involving legal, sociopolitical, and economic factors, spaces of confinement create and circulate a pool of disadvantaged African-Americans to be used as supply by the United States prison-industrial complex, cycling Blacks between spaces of confinement and spaces of physical enslavement. Prisons serve to re-segregate Blacks from societal participation and to void Black political representation in a calculated effort to reduce Blacks to the status of non-person, while isolating the Black body allowing for the punishment and exploitation of the Black body stripped of any personhood and recognition. However, Abu-Jamal, by voicing his conceptualized slave narrative, escapes sociopolitical death and the relegatory status of non-person, and because of his act of self-preservation, negates the state-sanctioned corporeal death he once faced.

Whereas Tupac Shakur is resurrected from death in a fight between a Panther mother’s preservation versus late capitalist exploitation, Abu-Jamal speaks to us from a dead-zone—from the “dark netherworld of prison”—a marginalized space re-appropriate by the Black prisoner-slave and empowered by it. Abu-Jamal, despite sociopolitical death, forces his mind and body, forcing his narrative and voice, into a national and international discourse about racial politics and social justice. Hence, the reading of Abu-Jamal’s life and body as a map tracing the contemporary perpetuation of Black enslavement is a reading of a contemporary prisoner-slave
narrative set in the capitalist clutch of the United States prison-industrial complex. Abu-Jamal’s prisoner-slave narrative is not writing the present into the past as a retro-projection, but rather is writing alongside or with the past in the present; it essentially is a singular slave narrative in a changing system of slavery. The slave narrative therefore is a communal shared narrative that varies in its expression relative to the constructions of a changing system of slavery. Abu-Jamal’s prisoner-slave narrative is not a fictionalization of the past representing the present, but rather is a dialogical compound of slave history and slave narratives being expressed in the present as a postmodern Neo-slave narrative in the contemporary.
CHAPTER 1:

Our secret language extended our understanding of what slavery meant and gave us the freedom to speak to our brothers in captivity; we polished our new words, caressed them, gave them new shape and color, a new order and tempo, until, though they were the words of the Lords of the Land, they became our words, our language. —Richard Wright

A people’s art is the genesis of their freedom. —Claudia Jones

I’ve known rivers:

I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the


My soul has grown deep like the rivers. —Langston Hughes

Chapter 1

On an episode of *Iconoclasts*, a Sundance channel profile series, writer/activist Maya Angelou and comedian Dave Chappelle were paired together, at Chappelle’s request. The series brings together individuals of note, from artist to industry professionals, lending insight into the creative process, methodological approaches towards creating works, as well as, providing a platform for individuals to frame themselves and their work in an autobiographical context. In between Angelou’s and Chappelle’s recorded conversation filmed at Angelou’s home, clips of Chappelle performing stand-up comedy are played throughout the episode. In one clip, Chappelle jokes that all though Whites are the premise of his many jokes, the White people in the audience should not feel Chappelle is speaking about them; Chappelle continues, “Don’t forget I almost had $50 Million dollars, once, but you make enough money in America they’ll pull back the curtain and introduce you to the real White people. You guys just think your White.” In between their recorded conversation, clips of Angelou sitting outside in what appears to be her porch are also played throughout the episode. In one of those clips, Angelou describes how she became mute for six years after she bravely spoke-out against her mother’s boyfriend who raped her as a child; after overhearing police inform her grandmother that this man had been soon after found dead, apparently “kicked to death”—according to Angelou, “I decided that my voice had killed the man, so I wouldn’t speak.” It was during this time that “words became very important” to Angelou.
At one point during the episode, Angelou tells Chappelle a story. She prefaces her story by mentioning that director John Singleton asked her if she would do a cameo for one of his films, to which Angelou agreed. On set, as Angelou walks out of her trailer one morning, two young men are at each other’s throats, one young man “cursing” to where Angelou describes seeing “the blue come out of his mouth.” Angelou intervenes, telling one young man, “may I speak to you for a minute”—Angelou acting-out both parts—“if this mother—”; she stops short of repeating the rest of the swearing to Chappelle. Angelou continuous her story, and in her story eventually speaks to the young man without the young man’s interruption:

Do you know how important you are? Do you know that our people slept—lay spoon-fashioned in the filthy hatches of slave-ships, in their own and in each other’s excrement, and urine, and menstrual flow, so that you can live two-hundred years later? Do you know that? Do you know that our people stood on auction blocks, so that you can live […] when’s the last time anyone told you how important you are?

The young man begins to weep, and Angelou “wiped his face with” her “hands and talked to him.” Angelou reveals to Chappelle, “I didn’t know” it was “Tupac Shakur”; Angelou continues, “Tupac’s mother wrote me a letter.” In Afeni Shakur’s letter to Angelou, Afeni informs her that Tupac called his mother right after hearing Angelou’s words. Afeni Shakur wanted to thank Angelou and suggests to Angelou, “You may have saved his life.” A voice-over of Chappelle’s voice is heard over a photographic still of Tupac Shakur, with a caption reading “[1971-1996] Tupac Shakur: A Strange & Terrible Saga,” on the cover of Rolling Stone magazine: “in that one story she painted a more human picture of him [Tupac] than the entire
media did during his career.” Storytelling becomes a mode of resistance—a counter-narrative that preserves, and yet, is transformative.

Bearing in mind the uncountable number of dead throughout the history of American slavery, most slave narratives were never voiced, never heard, and never written. The majority of slave narratives are private, personally buried with the dead, others, only known by a limited and privileged few. For postmodern prisoner-slaves, their narratives are scribbled somewhere on yellow legal pads, stuffed under mattresses, or held even closer in tattoos that tell a story—the body as text—or fragmented and scattered in letters sent home to loved ones. The socio-political importance of slave narratives, in general, is not only that they be written, transcribed, or noted, with ethical consideration, but that they be voiced and that others listen—responding to the call of that narrative. Writing is a communal project: it is narrative and narrativity. Narratives of slavery are always text while context; they exist within a social milieu that is both place and time. Therefore, constructing a slave narrative is multi-participatory; it is based on oral tradition of passing stories one to another, from one generation to another. Orality that voices those that came before, building atop their narrative filtered through an advancing creative interpretation. Narrative and narrativity is intertextuality fully realized; it is not the death of the author, but the re-birth, the regeneration of the author in the reader that becomes an author renewed, contributing to a communal fabric of storytelling. Illustrated in the complex interlaced narration and narrativity around Abu-Jamal’s presentation of Afeni Shakur’s letter from the Tombs, slave narratives are construed in concert as shared Black experience.

Within a “virtual renaissance” of “African American fiction” in the 1960s “emerged a large and diverse body of fiction about American slaves and slavery, beginning with Margret Walker’s Jubilee in 1966” (Rushdy 3). Walker begins Jubilee with a dedication to her “four
children that they may know something of their heritage,” among thanking other family members. Walker continues by dedicating the book “to the memory of my grandmothers: my maternal great-grandmother, Margaret Duggans Ware Brown, whose story this is; my maternal grandmother, Elvira Ware Dozier, who told me this story” (“Dedication”). Walker becomes archivist and author, fictionalizing a precisely trans-generational narrative of slavery she creatively interprets and writes as her novel *Jubilee*. Walker shares a congruous concern with Afeni Shakur about collecting and writing stories of Black oppression, so that their children may know. Their consideration is not merely for their own understanding, but for posterity, so that a continuum of trans-generational (in the case of Walker, literally familial) storytelling preserves the memories of slaves, those named and unnamed—however difficult—to help move a slave past towards universal Black liberation and social justice. Walker’s *Jubilee* is a testament to this process: so that her children may know, it is the story of Margaret Duggans Ware Brown, told to Elvira Ware Dozier, told to Margaret Walker, being told to the reader. *Jubilee* is a paragon of narrative and narrativity, articulating trans-generational engagement with slave history and the continued struggle for freedom and Black advancement.

Although *Jubilee* is categorized as fiction, *Jubilee* and other contemporary narratives of slavery should not be viewed as dislocated from lived slave experience; moreover, they are part of a communal slave narrative expressed through many voices and in many forms, and furthermore, the slave narrative should not be limited to those that have been officially recognized as having their positions, albeit marginal for the most part, within the State approved historical record, which conflates slavery into a few decades capped by the end of the Civil War. *Jubilee* might be more conveniently shelved as historical fiction at the commercial book store, but it is impossible to divorce and segregate the absolute historical fact away from
fictionalizations: is Linda Brent not Harriet Jacobs? Furthermore, one cannot delineate where Brown’s, Dozier’s, or Walker’s contribution to the story in *Jubilee* begins and ends. It is collaborative.

Of course this presents complications as to how to ethically read Abu-Jamal’s more contemporary narrative. According to Joy James, John Edgar Wideman in his introduction to *Live from Death Row*, “cautions the reader and seeks to protect the imprisoned author by demystifying the ‘reading’ of former Black Panther Abu-Jamal as spectacle and entertainment” (James xxx). Wideman claims that the neoslave narratives, informed by the traditional slave narrative, work “themselves out in a bifurcated either/or world. The action of the story concerns moving from one world to another. [...] it accepts and maintains the categories (black/white, for instance) of the status quo” (Wideman xxx). In other words, it maintains a division between the master and slave, and places the slave’s narrative as aberration, as an anomaly, as a curiosity or the exception to the dominant slave system of oppression.

*Dessa Rose* by Sherley Anne Williams expresses the conflict between competing Slave/Master narratives. The very reading described by Wideman in the introduction to *Live from Death Row*—a master reading of slave narrative, which Wideman cautions against—is a central theme in the first section of *Dessa Rose*. According to Ashraf Rushdy, “Nehemiah (Nemi) attempts to master Dessa in his reading of her character and his writing of her history” (139). This type of reading attempts to supplant and fracture the shared communal narrative of Black enslavement and confinement, seeking to exploit her narrative, in this instance, precisely for literary fame and capital gain. Rushdy writes, “[r]eadings here is an act of control, having nothing to do with community or dialogue but only with assuming mastery over others producing documents that help the state maintain the mastery” (139). Rushdy notes an important
interaction between Dessa, who is imprisoned in her jail cell, and the planation slaves just outside the jail walls, yet likewise confined within the status of slave.

As Rushdy claims, “Dessa communicates with those who rescue her and help her escape by signing in a call-and-response rhythm from her jail cell” (140); moreover, when “Dessa sings, ‘her voice blended with’ others’ in ‘communion’” (140). The theme Rushy points to is not only important, because it describes a “kind of surviving by orality” (140), but because it invites us to read the slave narrative as a single shared communal slave narrative, and because of this, the section gains greater significance.

While imprisoned awaiting her execution, Dessa begins to recognize her position as being within the shared communal slave narrative of enslavement and confinement. Because of its great significance, the section should be quoted at length:

A warbled call soared briefly above the dawn noise; sometimes this signaled the beginning of a song, one voice calling, another voice answering it, some other voices restating the original idea, others taking up one or another line as refrain. […] she recognized many of the tunes. […] She came to recognize some of the voices, […] On impulse, she moved to the window, her chain rattling behind her, […] She could see nothing […] but sang anyway […] Other voices joined in, some taking up the refrain, […] others continuing the call; her voice blended with theirs in momentary communion. (Williams 64)

This scene in *Dessa Rose* expresses the multilevel confinement of African-Americans in a racialized United States then and now. Being physically imprisoned and being forced into spaces of social, political, and economic confinement, African-Americans continue to endure the legacy of slavery through modifying systems of structural oppression. Despite oppressive forms
of confinement, the slaves are, nevertheless, able to communicate and form a communion, unified in a shared narrative of enslavement and confinement through the act of call-and-response. The African-American call-and-response represents an intersection between aesthetics and politics. Shouts, cries, and work songs, doubled as artistic expression and coded message amongst slaves, a form of communal communication. Just as education was a communal project, call-and-response through song re-appropriated the master’s language to create communal channels for communication, exclusive to Blacks, in order to dismantle the system from within by providing instruction on survival and resistance to other slaves through the use of voice.

_Surviving by orality_, Abu-Jamal’s prisoner-slave narrative is an amplified call in-process, awaiting the response of other voices, awaiting a mass revolutionary movement towards universal justice. The material conditions of Abu-Jamal’s incarceration dictate that imprisonment is court ordered, and only through a reversal or negation of said court order will Abu-Jamal’s material conditions change. Despite this fact, Abu-Jamal does not limit his writings to legal documents and the appeals process. Rather, Abu-Jamal’s writing is freedom: “To those growing many, I thank you for reading _Live from Death Row_. You have made my repressive isolation more than worthwhile. In those darkest of days, under a death warrant with a date to die, your simple act of reading this forbidden book fed my soul” (xxi). Increasingly, contemporary slave narratives incorporate fictional elements to contextualize slavery, and more so, rely on narrativity to reshape the historical, oral or textual, accounts of slavery through creative imagination as a means available to any Black storyteller.

Around the same time a “faceless cop […] kicked [Abu-Jamal] straight into the Black Panther Party” (_Death Row_ 151), Neo-slave narratives emerged out of the 1960s in association
“with the civil rights and Black Power movements” (Rushdy 3). According to Rushdy, who coined the term, Neo-slave narratives are “[c]ontemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative” (3). Neo-slave narratives act as a retro-projection of the contemporary time within which the author is writing the novel, presenting an analogous reading of the traditional slave narrative.

As stated by Rushdy, the “Black Power intellectuals [...] opened up new discussions regarding the relationship of art to society [...] and the function of the new discourse on slavery in a time of emergent revolutionary black nationalism” (4). Although writers emerging from a cultural re-imagining of Black identity in the second-half of the twentieth-century are reading the past into the present by writing works set in the past (nineteenth-century), an analogous reading between the two fails to fully realize that the Black-slave narrative from the past is not like the contemporary Black narrative of oppression, but rather, is the very same narrative of continued oppression—a shared communal narrative of enslavement and confinement that is trans-generational.

Building on the literary definitions of the neo-slave narratives, Arlene R. Keizer, in her book *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery*, creates her own categorization of contemporary works of fiction primarily focused on slavery. Keizer refers to Bernard Bell, whom she credits with coining the term “neoslave narratives” in reference to fictions that are “residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom” (Keizer 2). According to Keizer, where Bell’s neoslave narrative is limited by its emphasis on escaping bondage and achieving freedom, Rushdy is limited by qualifications of the first-person literary device and explicit reference to nineteenth-century slavery. Keizer widens the scope of contemporary depictions of slavery in what she has “designated [as] ‘contemporary narratives of
slavery” (5). Keizer categorizes the contemporary narratives of slavery “into three major categories: (1) the historical novel of slavery [...] (2) works set in the present which explicitly connect African American/Afro-Caribbean life in the present with U.S./Caribbean slavery [...] (3) hybrid works in which scenes from the past are juxtaposed with scenes set in the present” (2). Unlike Bell and Rushdy, Keizer’s interpretation of contemporary slave narratives is more inclusive, and most importantly to a reading of the Black-slave narrative as being a shared communal narrative of enslavement and confinement, is not limited to literate first-person slave testimonials.

In her introduction to The New Abolitionist: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings, Joy James defines her use of the term (Neo)Slave narrative, which she claims “emerge[s] from the combative discourse of the captive as well as the controlling discourse of the ‘master’ state” (xxii). Like Keizer, James categorizes (Neo)Slave narratives into three sub-categories: “those of the ‘master-state’; those of the non-incarcerated abolitionist and advocate; and those of the ‘prisoner-slave’” (xxii). For James, the (Neo)Slave narrative is all-inclusive, yet distinct in how and where the narrative functions relative to slavery, that is, distinctively different as a source and different in the view points from within the whole structure of slavery. Although James develops her concept of the (Neo)Slave narrative as being all-inclusive, the slave narrative James recognizes is not a communal or a shared slave narrative of enslavement and confinement—not only because the conflicting master-state (Neo)Slave narrative perpetuates and sustains the enslavement and oppression of the prisoner-slave (Neo)Slave narrative, but also because there is no inherit continuity among the slave narratives. Each of the three categories designated by James participates in the slave system differently, and thus they do not occupy a shared space of imprisonment and confinement.
During a period when Neo-slave narratives were addressing a “new discourse on slavery in a time of emergent revolutionary black nationalism” (Rushdy 4), Wesley Cook adopted his new Swahili name—Mumia. Like the Neo-slave narratives, Mumia’s reengagement with his African past mirrors a reengagement with the ever-present communal slave narrative seen in the reimaging of slavery in the Neo-slave narratives. Although Abu-Jamal’s prison narrative is neither a novel nor set in the nineteenth-century, his prison narrative does adopt the conventions of the antebellum slave narrative; however, Abu-Jamal is not limited by those conventions. Furthermore, although Keizer’s definition of contemporary narratives of slavery refers to works of fiction, Abu-Jamal’s prison narrative consolidates the three criteria she proposes in her definition. For Abu-Jamal, the communal Black body is imprisoned and forced into spaces of social, political, and economic confinement. Moreover, Abu-Jamal, as a member of the prison population, represents the exploited masses enslaved by the United States prison-industrial complex. Therefore, Abu-Jamal frames his prison narrative as the continuation of historical slavery, and because life in the contemporary mode of enslavement explicitly connects to past modes of racial control and enslavement in the United States, Abu-Jamal’s *Live from Death Row* does not necessarily juxtapose scenes from the past with the present, but rather calls the past into the present to create what James would consider to be one form of (Neo)Slave narrative, the prisoner-slave narrative. Abu-Jamal occupies a double space of prisoner-slave, connoting a slave’s traditional history, while also connoting a contemporary re-incarceration, both signifying capitalist exploitation and racial control.

Finally, A. Timothy Spaulding’s study, *Re-forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the Postmodern Slave Narrative*, offers a cross-section between Rushdy’s and Keizer’s conceptualization of fictional genre; the novels included by Spaulding could be categorized as
Neo-slave narrative and/or contemporary narratives of slavery, respectively. According to Spaulding, “African American writers re-form traditional historical representations of slavery from a contemporary perspective” by “creating characters that defy the conventions of time and space […], by using formal devices that subvert the conventions of narrative realism […], or by mining genres that many regard as escapist” (7). Spaulding emphasizes the importance of challenging the official historical record, which is exclusive or limited; as such, the postmodern slave narrative “is designed to intrude upon history as a means to re-form it” (4). Like Rushdy and Keizer, Spaulding’s postmodern slave narrative categorization is premised on works that are fiction, as opposed to James, whose categorization, (Neo)Slave narrative, is concerned with works that are nonfiction.

Within this postmodern context, during the period of late capitalism, Abu-Jamal adopts and utilizes postmodern stylistic and thematic conventions to present his prisoner-slave narrative. Spaulding’s thesis should not be limited to work of fiction, and moreover, key elements Spaulding finds in the fictional works of postmodern slave narratives are just as significant in the nonfiction works of Abu-Jamal. For example, in “their critique of traditional history, the postmodern slave narrative engages in the dismantling of Enlightenment conceptions of history and identity and the totalizing grand narrative of Western cultural superiority” (Spaulding 3). In the same spirit as postmodern slave narratives, Abu-Jamal invades history by subverting the traditionally held official, or state-sponsored, History that has and continues to oppress persons of color globally.

As part of the cultural logic of late capitalism, historical amnesia depoliticizes individuals en mass, effectively leading to the death of the subject in particular, and effacing any sociopolitical accountability embedded in a historical legacy of oppression and exploitation in
general. In terms of postmodernism in Abu-Jamal, it “has a strong ethical basis rooted in the demand for, the need for, justice” (Fox 8). Symptomatic of postmodernism, in general, is an inability to conceive and locate, or the rejection of, a grand historical narrative; however, as Robert Elliot Fox suggest, there is a specifically Black postmodernism:

If Euro-American postmodernism works against historicism, its Afro-American counterpart necessarily works in the direction of a different historical sense, one that not only puts black back into the total historical view, but which also (again necessarily) reexplores blackness in terms of itself. (8)

Fox continues by asserting that the marginalized artists, as part of a postmodern aesthetic, are able to “take up Artaud’s cry, ‘No more masterpieces!’”—however, in a repurposed sense, in that the rejection of masterpieces is not a judgment on perceived elitist excellence but a dismantling of the “canonized cultural icons of the self-designated master class” (9). Abu-Jamal’s postmodern form and aesthetic is clearly a distinctly Black postmodernism as Fox argues.

Writing in clearly a Black postmodern mode—in what bell hooks terms postmodern blackness—and in the fashion Spaulding characterizes as re-forming history through a re-configuration of narrative and disregard for historical ordered time, Abu-Jamal, as a prisoner-slave victimized by governmental repression and capitalist exploitation, expresses his slave narrative that, although is autobiographical and akin to traditional eighteenth and nineteenth-century slave narratives, incorporates postmodern literary elements to construct a postmodern Neo-slave narrative, reforming not only a historical slave past but reforming his own prisoner-slave narrative.
Despite a postmodern aesthetic present in *Live from Death Row*, which grows considerably stronger in Abu-Jamal’s following book—*Death Blossoms: Reflections from a Prisoner of Conscience*, his first collected narrative, nevertheless, maintains a foundational thematic exposition of slavery as per eighteenth-century, and more so, nineteenth-century slave narratives. Whether consciously, unconsciously, or a combination of the two, *Live from Death Row* manifests scenes that parallel the scenes found in traditional slave narratives, as well as, a parallel between literary conventions that traditional slave narratives are noted for demonstrating.

According to H. Bruce Franklin, “a Black convict tradition of song emerged directly from slavery to become a powerful cultural force [...] Afro-American culture has come to shape both the form and the content of contemporary American prison literature” (234). As Franklin asserts, the contemporary prison narrative is rooted in slavery. As such, the contemporary African-American prison narrative expresses a slave narrative in-process, a slave narrative in the contemporary—a particular strand in the greater communal slave narrative. Moreover, considering the Black-slave experience discursively forges Black identity in the United States, and in turn, the Black-slave experience discursively forges the United States identity, the “slave narrative [...] is truly American. In fact, it was the first genre the United States contributed to the written literature of the world” (Franklin 5).

In *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*, Franklin specifically examines *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*. Because the two aforementioned slave narratives are framed as fugitive slave narratives, the Black slave must overcome multiple levels of confinement that both threaten the body of the slave physically, and through legal ramifications and racial pseudo-scientific conditioning, threaten the personhood of the slave by
disrupting the integrity of the slave’s own interiority. In other words, fugitive slave narrative implies that slavery is not bound entirely to physical enslavement, but simultaneously, slavery is a construct of a more complex system that involves legal and sociopolitical factors. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, specifically, evidences the unification of corporeal enslavement and consented ratification of law by the United States with designs to legitimize pervasive enslavement, whether or not a slave-owner has immediate physical control over a slave: to enslave the body beyond the body.

The concern of the traditional slave narrative with preserving the Black body and self-affirming personhood within the confines of a hostile and predatory racist nation and its master-narrative is not a facet belonging solely to what is categorized as the traditional slave narrative. Because the slave narrative is a single fluid communally shared narrative of enslavement, the concerns of Black preservation and validation are jointly the concerns of contemporary African-Americans whose rootedness is grounded in the Black-slave experience, embedded in the history and formation of the United States.

Harriet Jacobs’s aforementioned nineteenth-century slave narrative—*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*—is an antecedent to Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative; a direct parallel between both authors is evident when considering their spatial confinement or corporeal physical imprisonment within a greater ideational and institutional socio-civic imprisonment. The multilevel states of confinement described by Tara T. Green, both physical and theoretical confinement, are foundational concepts to both Jacobs’s and Abu-Jamal’s slave narratives; their methodology in negotiating their own physical imprisonment and slave-status within an overarching schemata of exploitation and capitalist ideology is
transformed into literature and literary device. Slave narrative becomes *an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy*.¹⁹

According to Jean Fagan Yellin, “Jacobs’s achievement was the transformation of herself into a literary subject in and through the creation of her narrator, Linda Brent” (xx); Jacobs is not Linda Brent, and yet Linda Brent is Harriet Jacobs. So although Jacobs may utilize a fictive approach in constructing her personal narrative, Jacobs’s narrative is not fiction. In letters to Amy Post, Jacobs “thrashed out the conflict she felt about making her life public,” cautious of her having to reveal in her story “that she had not been chaste” (Yellin xxvi). In addition, Jacobs “preferred the endless interruptions” of having to care for the children of others to “revealing her project to her employers,” specifically stating, “I have not the Courage to meet the criticism and ridicule of Educated people” (Yellin xxix). Ultimately, in and “through her creation of Linda Brent […] Jacobs articulates her struggle to assert her womanhood and projects a new kind of female hero” (Yellin xxi). Even in the case of Jacobs’s autobiographical and traditional slave narrative, creativity and authenticity are not mutually exclusive or diametrically opposed.

In a 1996 interview, Abu-Jamal tells Allen Houglan that the “reality is that my book [*Live from Death Row*] is a toned-down, stripped, barebones, objective version of reality […] of what I’ve seen, what I’ve smelt, the bodies […] If I wrote pure stream of consciousness, no publisher would publish it, and any reader would say it’s fiction” (*Death Blossoms* 149). In the case of Abu-Jamal, as author and narrator, Abu-Jamal must also take into consideration the perceived authenticity of narrative. Abu-Jamal, however, does not forfeit artistic composition or fictive narrative storytelling: incorporating literary tropes and creative devices devalues nothing about Abu-Jamal’s slave narrative and in no way undermines the authenticity of his prison
experience and sociopolitical commentary and critique of perpetual trans-generational enslavement by the United States power-structure.

For Jacobs however, her slave narrative, and “the tensions between its traditional forms and its untraditional content, have characterized the style of Incidents as genteel”; moreover, because of its perceived “incongruous mode of expression for a former slave,” some therefore “have questioned the authenticity of the text” (Yellin xxx). As such, “best-selling author Harriet Beecher Stowe” sent for verification of Jacobs’s narrative, and if proven true, Stowe “herself would use it in her forthcoming Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin” (Yellin xxvii). In this instance, there is an absence of a communal shared narrative bi-constructed through narrative and narrativity; rather, Stowe, an author of fiction, is resistant to Jacobs’s story, and in effect, initiates an audit of Jacobs’s narrative in order to verify its authenticity, but not with the intent of publishing or helping to publish Jacobs’s narrative, instead with the intent of Stowe appropriating Jacobs’s narrative into her own fiction. The lack of communal narrative building is especially problematic in William Styron’s The Confessions of Nat Turner. In regards to Incidents, it was “deemed a fiction, and as a fiction of no worth because it did not tell a true (slave narrative) tale” (Smith 195). According to Stephanie A. Smith, even into the twentieth-century, in the 1960s as Jacobs was being recovered, “for autobiography and for slave narratives, problems of revision and transmission only muddy already muddy water,” and “despite semiotics and postmodernism, most readers still believe or expect that the published text” satisfy those beliefs and expectations of being “true or real” (194). Smith rejects this problematic thinking, “because the demand that a text, any text, be entirely true to experience is an illogical demand. Representation is mediation. No representation can ever completely capture experience” (Smith 194-195).
Oppositional forces against Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative attempt to discredit, if not all together censor, Abu-Jamal as a legitimate voice. This usually takes the base and ignorant form of character assassination: Abu-Jamal’s authenticity is attacked by reducing Abu-Jamal to a *cop-killer* that is unreliable and thusly cannot be trusted. Of course this is inaccurate and contradicted by physical evidence and basic rules of physics, as well as, a Kafka-esque judicial process. Nevertheless, like Jacobs, the establishment resists Abu-Jamal’s slave narrative. It is only through resourcefulness, ingenuity, and innovation that Abu-Jamal will eventually have his postmodern Neo-slave narrative published. In the same way Jacobs “uses her garret cell as a war room” (Yellin xxxix), Abu-Jamal uses his death row prison cell to validate his voice and amplify the voices of those silenced by an oppressive capitalist power-structure.

Abu-Jamal’s position as slave narrator is unique, and in terms of postmodern aestheticism, he is self-aware of writing as a prisoner-slave in a real-time narrative of enslavement, in that way a meta-slave-narrative. Whereas traditional slave narratives are a single narrative collected as a book, usually written from a position of relative freedom, or an expounding additional commentary on a former state of physical enslavement, Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative is in-process, a slave narrative diary an audience reads as a work in-development. Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative is not a line segment, bookended by socially convenient endings reassuring a distancing readership public—an ending that indirectly doubles as projected absolution and an expedient pardon for the United States; rather, Abu-Jamal’s slave narrative in-process is an infinite line, forever running across a slave past anchored in the Middle Passage—a boundless abyss—an infinite line projecting into a dystopic future of continuous capitalist domination, a compression of slave past, present, and future.
without end. There is no Hollywood ending. This slave narrative ends when the global capitalist power-structure that has perpetuated enslavement for hundreds of years is defeated. Abu-Jamal’s slave narrative is a multimedia postmodern Neo-slave narrative that appropriates any and all means to articulate and voice a challenge against the capitalist enslavement of those victimized masses that were and are being broken to build global capitalist imperialism.

Because of enveloping enslavement and oppression, because of multilevel states of confinement, Jacobs, like Abu-Jamal, must construct her narrative from deep within the belly of the beast. Despite being a so-to-speak free slave, Jacobs, nevertheless, “wrote secretly and at night” (Yellin xxvii). Even outside her garret, Jacobs appropriates shadow, the same shadow of night she appropriates and is empowered by while evading Dr. Norcom/Dr. Flint. And like Jacobs’s disembodied/embodiment spectrality she appropriates to achieve her liberation, Jacobs uses anonymity to send “apprentice pieces to the newspapers” such as “Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune under the heading ‘Letter from a Fugitive Slave’” (Yellin xxviii). Jacobs would continue to “secretly” write “more letters for publication” (Yellin xxix). After being met with resistance from the establishment, and direct rejection by Stowe, Jacobs, through the continued darkness of night motif and secrecy of anonymity, writes herself into being by voicing her narrative in the fictive letters from her artistic construct—a fugitive slave—and then proceeds to send her work to newspaper sources for publication. After finally having her narrative published, Jacobs would eventually take a grassroots approach to expanding the reach of her voice, physically travelling to Philadelphia to make “contact with local abolitionist” and “sold fifty copies herself” (Yellin xxxiv). However, this was not self-promotion or vanity; rather, it was advocacy: Jacobs would re-appropriate her “limited celebrity” to advance “relief work” projects with the contraband and the freedmen, as well as, using the “public press to raise money
for her work and to report back to the reformers” (Yellin xxxv). Differing worlds over a century apart, and still Jacobs and Abu-Jamal mirror one another; from Jacobs’s garret to Abu-Jamal’s prison cell, each working within and against the establishment to give voice to the voiceless.

Although Jacobs’s slave narrative cannot be categorized as postmodern, it is nevertheless an antecedent to Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative. Jacobs as narrator is self-aware through her literary creation Linda Brent, as Yellin notes. Furthermore, “Jacobs asserts her authorship in the subtitle” (Yellin xxxvi), emphasizing that she herself is voicing her own narrative independent from concessions to the official verification of her account by the establishment. Like Abu-Jamal, characterizing himself as “Mu,” and in instances altering the names of inmates, Jacobs’s slave narrative is nevertheless truth. Jacobs can then creatively construct her narrative as a counter-narrative to the establishment by undermining or dismantling literary and social conventions. *Incidents* then becomes a self-aware text, examining its position within literary genre and then rupturing expectations to move beyond the situated comfort of popular fiction and then parlaying readership expectations and mistaken predispositions into the abrasive discomfort of historical materialism—into the testimonial truthfulness of experiencing slavery. Jacobs even deconstructs the standard form of the slave narrative, as defined by “influential scholars as John Blassingame,” which is “supposed to follow the slave from captivity to enlightenment to (manly) resistance and finally escape” (Smith 195). Furthermore, Jacobs’s contemporaries did not recognize *Incidents* as an authentic slave narrative. In fact, according to Yellin, “many critics mistook Jacobs’s narrative for fiction,” associating certain passages with “a popular genre, the seduction novel” (xli). However, Linda Brent is a self-aware creation, and counters expectations by subverting the seduction novel script that couples “unsanctioned female sexual activity with self-destruction and death,” by presenting this proposed coupling “as a
mistaken tactic in the struggle for freedom” (Yellin xli). Likewise, for Abu-Jamal, death is equivalent to absolute censorship, and liberation is a fight against death or a fight to overcome death—to be a disruptive voice even in death. In undermining and subverting the popular seduction novel prescript, Jacobs provides a pathway towards liberation.

Furthermore, the “angle of vision in Incidents is revolutionary,” because this narrative is a lived experience by a Black female slave that levels a critical attack against the institution of slavery, as opposed to captivity narratives, which were “still popular in Jacobs’s time” and presented “a white female protagonist who meekly submits […] her capture by Native Americans” (Yellin xxxvi). Jacobs is relentless, and rather than glorify her captivity as divine calculus, Jacobs challenges Christians as complacent in the enslavement of Black masses, or worst still, as willing collaborators to the physical brutalities of institutional slavery. Jacobs not only subverts literary tropes, or genre considerations, but manages to reverse more general gender positionality: Jacobs deconstructs the “metaphor of ‘the madwoman in the attic’ […] who inhabits the parlor in popular nineteenth-century fiction” and reconstructs a “completely sane” woman in the attic whose goals “are not destruction and self-destruction, but freedom and a home” (Yellin xliii).

For Jacobs, the “struggle for freedom is not only recurrent, it is ubiquitous” (Yellin xxxvii); in Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative, the struggle for freedom moves beyond his own fight against injustice, and subsequent imprisonment, and moves towards a more universal fight against injustice and global capitalist oppression. Jacobs identifies a trans-generational struggle for freedom up until her own struggle and then anticipates continued and future Black struggles for liberation, anticipating Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative. Moreover, “Jacobs’s Linda Brent locates herself firmly within a social matrix […] Her recurrent
efforts to free herself and her children are shown in the context of the attempts of successive
generations of her family to free their children” (Yellin xxxviii). By framing her narrative as an
“ongoing struggle for freedom by an entire black community” (Yellin xxxix), Jacobs complicates
the individualistic interpretation of slave narratives, to where achieving one’s freedom does not
necessitate the freedom of others. Jacobs disrupts any standard story-arcs a readership is
expecting, or a readership’s predisposition to assigning American idealism to stories of
individual independence and self-deliverance; Jacobs’s slave narrative challenges standard
assumptions about slavery as it pertains to an individual overcoming his/her own adverse
situation. Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative is also never ultimately determined by
his escape or potential release from imprisonment, but rather is determined by his position as an
always-already Black prisoner-slave, the progeny of the Middle Passage; the histories of all
Black slaves that were forced into deplorable conditions, raped and mutilated—enslaved—are
inescapable and inseparable from Abu-Jamal’s positionality forever bound to the horrors of the
transatlantic slave-trade and institutional slavery.

For both Jacobs and Abu-Jamal, the histories of their ancestors sculpt and inform their
own histories within the context of Black life. Jacobs, therefore, emphasizes “prayer meetings
and folk medicine, recounting tales and snatches of songs, and describing festivities of the John
Kuners—New World celebrants of a transplanted African ceremony” (Yellin xxxviii). Abu-
Jamal emphasizes contemporary revolutionary struggles, precisely the Black Panther Party and
MOVE organization, and more generally other antiestablishment revolutionary movements, re-
identifying a specifically Black cultural tradition amid a developing postmodern Blackness in the
era of mass consumer society—a consuming postmodern mass media world of emerging hyper-
reality. Jacobs describes an elementary example of what in contemporary times is framed by
Fedric Jameson as postmodern fragmentation, and further describes redirecting fragmentation into a synthesis reformed by a series of fragmented languages, customs, rituals—fragmented identities—into a newer more comprehensive and inclusionary Black identity.

Jacobs not only characterizes herself but in addition Dr. Norcom as Dr. Flint; and through “the incorporation of the letters and the wanted poster he composed to catch her,” Jacobs enacts “a sophisticated version of a power reversal in which the slave controls the master” (Yellin xxxvi). Even within the fictive story of Linda Brent, within the text of *Incidents*, there is a struggle between opposing narratives, saturated in sociopolitical tension. Linda Brent’s struggle for freedom, and her demonstration and reestablishment of interiority, speak against capitalistic reification and commodity fetishism that is foundational to Dr. Flint’s perspective and ideology as evident in his wanted advertisement for his missing (runaway) property. Brent transcends and dismantles Dr. Flint’s monetary determination that attempts to confine Brent within property valuation set at three-hundred dollars. Jacobs, therefore, creates a fictive account of her lived experience in order to transform history into allegory. Jacobs creates a slave narrative within a slave narrative. Therefore, *Incidents* is never absolutely defined by Jacobs’s achieved relative freedom in her everyday life. It becomes timeless—a perpetual enslavement and a recurrent struggle for freedom that is representational rather than an exclusive particularization. By characterizing Linda Brent, *Incidents* becomes a representation that others can project themselves and their own experiences of slavery onto; Jacobs gives voice to the voiceless. The end of *Incidents* is the beginning—its genesis; it is not completion but provocation, an artistic instrument towards achieving freedom for all.

As is the case in Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative, Abu-Jamal’s slave narrative is never absolutely defined by Abu-Jamal’s potential release from death row. Abu-
Jamal’s imprisonment is a microcosm demonstrating macro-level structures of racialized and institutional injustice—a program of continued oppression and domination by an elitist power-structure. Abu-Jamal’s enslavement is a continuum expressed in literary form over a collection of works, a perpetual slave narrative in-composition—a slave narrative that carries the concerns of Jacobs’s: though Jacobs tells her reader, “my story ends with freedom,” and that her and her children “are as free from the powers of slaveholders as are the white people of the north; and though that, according to my [Jacobs’s] ideas, is not saying a great deal […] The dream of my life is not yet realized” (Jacobs 370). A perpetual dream deferred. From Jacobs nineteenth-century “living grave” (Jacobs 303) to Abu-Jamal’s twentieth/twenty-first-century “morgue-like holding pens” (Abu-Jamal, *Death Blossoms* 40), a perpetual dream deferred is more accurately a nightmare masquerading as capitalist utopia—the elusive and speculative promise of paradise later in this life or the next. *But does it explode?*

From Jacobs’s nineteenth-century “living grave” to Abu-Jamal’s twentieth/twenty-first-century “morgue-like holding pens,” their slave narratives double as a struggle for personal liberation, as well as, a representational work that comments on and resists the material conditions of anti-democratic oppression and capitalist exploitation. Specifically in the case of Jacobs and other slaves that resist their enslavement, *Incidents* “establishes a longer framework for their rebelliousness […] by commenting on pertinent historical events such as the Nat Turner insurrection and the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law” (Yellin xxxvii). The slave experience is no aberration, no anomaly, no accident, but rather is a precise program of destruction and dehumanization, not singularly in theory, but materialized in practice. Jacobs counters by deconstructing contemporaneous historical events and reconstructing them through the lens of a people’s perspective; in other words, by offering a counter-perspective on history as history is
polished, conditioned, and canonized, becoming a part of the official history of the establishment, written from the top down. Therefore, Jacobs immediately recovers Nat Turner, re-appropriating the threatening characterization of Nat Turner in order to re-present Turner as a supernatural revolutionary force and polemic instantiation of slave autonomy and manifest rebellion. Although technology will take a quantum leap in the late twentieth/twenty-first-century, Jacobs’s sociopolitical commentary in *Incidents*, nevertheless, addresses relatively current events such as Nat Turner’s insurrection and the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. In postmodernism, digital technology becomes a vehicle for Abu-Jamal, despite restrictive and suppressed space, to present his own polemical slave narrative audio-clips in digital format almost instantaneously accessible to the public; a bottom up perspective on history as history is happening.

Although Jacobs is not privy to the instantaneity of postmodern technology, by dissolving a distinct dividing line between historical events and creative nonfiction, Jacobs has created a proto-postmodern Neo-slave narrative. Similar to Margret Walker historicizing her grandmothers in Walker’s historical novel *Jubilee* through familial trans-generational narrative and narrativity, Jacobs fictionalizes her own history and the histories of her family. As Yellin notes, *Incidents*’s “Preface, while claiming the truthfulness of her tale, reports that she has written pseudonymously and hidden the identities of people and places” (xxxvi). *Incidents* then is a meta-textual narrative that is processing conditions specific or problematic to a (former) slave creatively developing a slave narrative, while taking into account practical obstacles concerning writing, publishing, and distributing a slave narrative. In fact, by creating Linda Brent, Jacobs demonstrates agency without sacrificing authenticity to the slave experience or truthfulness. Jacobs is creating literature, using art as a mode of resistance and liberation. As a
writer, Jacobs, in one specific instance, writes her “middle-aged narrator” Linda Brent as herself a meta-commentator on slavery and social convention by shifting “to the present tense” and assessing “a radical alternative to the sexual ideology that apparently informs her confession” (Yellin xlii); the line Yellin cites from *Incidents* is as follows: “Still, in looking back calmly, on the events of my life, I feel, that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others” (Yellin xlii). The narrator Linda Brent interjects into her own narrative to advise the reader on how to read Linda Brent’s actions or to meta-textually state the intended affect Linda Brent’s confession should elicit.

The most daring and experimental instance in Jacobs’s slave narrative occurs in Chapter XIX: “The Children Sold.” When considering Stowe’s rebuff and skepticism about Jacobs’s narrative authenticity, and more generally when considering the verification process and secondary corroboration of slave narratives, usually by White established individuals, that authenticates traditional slave narratives as a true account, Jacobs, nevertheless, incorporates the supernatural into her slave narrative. Jacobs is then the antecedent to what José David Saldívar examines as “(postmodern) magic realism and the politics of possibility” (526); moreover, like postmodern narratives of the twentieth-century, they and *Incidents* as well “can be seen as entertaining a more active relationship to resistance and the politics of the possible for they construct a speculative history that is simply their substitute for the making of the real kind” (Saldívar 534). Jacobs rejects the official privileged record that attempts to discredit or question Jacobs’s narrative authenticity by including, and meta-textually commentating on, a supernatural occurrences in her narrative: “And now I will tell you something that happened to me; though you will perhaps, think it illustrates the superstition of slaves” (Jacobs 254). The supernatural
elements that determine Spaulding’s definition of postmodern slave narratives are rooted in and traced to Jacobs’s nineteenth-century narrative:

I sat in my usual place on the floor near the window, where I could hear much that was said in the streets without being seen […] I sat there thinking of my children, when I heard a low strain of music. A band […] playing “Home, Sweet Home.” I listened till the sounds did not seem like music, but like the moaning of children […] A streak of moonlight was on the floor before me, and in the midst of it appeared the forms of my two children. They vanished; but I had seen them distinctly. Some will call it a dream, others a vision. (Jacobs 254)

Jacobs assumes the perspective of a ghost that “could hear […] without being seen,” and with this perspective, the supernatural becomes possible. This scene becomes representational of artistic agency and personal autonomy; Jacobs thinks her children into being, just as she thought Linda Brent into being and subsequently crafts Harriet Jacobs, herself, into a writer and sociopolitical activist by way of creativity and artistic empowerment.

Furthermore, Jacobs’s children are made manifest by the mixture of moonlight and a soundscape transforming from music to the moans of children. Jacobs highlights an intertextual happening between Howard J. Payne’s “Home, Sweet Home,” and Linda Brent, effectively creating a soundtrack that, not only provides an audio referent for this scene, but appropriates popular song (culture) in order to draw a readership’s association between popular culture and the material reality of African diaspora and Black displacement, commenting on the programmed annihilation of slave families and their home. Jacobs binds the supernatural and the popular; and Jacobs chooses to reveal this supernatural moment even if some readers “will, perhaps, think it illustrates the superstition of slaves” (Jacobs 254). Jacobs moves beyond the controlling
authoritiveness of official record, and makes manifest a world she ultimately validates; this supernatural event, in fact, did occur to Linda Brent, because Jacobs has written it so. It is this power to create worlds that translates to agency and revolutionary activation in material reality. It is Jacobs’s art, her creative articulation of lived experience, and the experiences of others—“My grandmother told me that woman’s history” (Jacobs 270)—that is the genesis of freedom, not only for Jacobs, but for those named and unnamed slaves, for those freed but never free former slaves, and for an emerging nexus of Black Americans. Although Jacobs and her narrative, more so than any, lend themselves to drawing a direct link as antecedent to Abu-Jamal, his postmodern Neo-slave narrative still draws heavily from the earliest slave narratives.

Fundamental to early slave narratives, like Sarter’s “Essays on Slavery” (1774), Coker’s A Dialogue Between a Virginian and African Minister (1810), and Forten’s Letters from a Man of Color (1813) that “blend personal experience with political polemic, lending political arguments the emotional weight of autobiography” (Gould 14), interrogating supposedly, universally ratified Constitutional dictum versus lived experiences that contradict and discredit those supposed preset universals, is fundamental to Live from Death Row and is a major rhetorical tool used extensively by Abu-Jamal; specifically in this narrative, Abu-Jamal presents excerpts of laws, statutes, rulings, appeals, and legal interpretations in order to demonstrate the truly arbitrary nature of civic and criminal United States law. Most alarmingly, and indicative of a shape-shifting oppressive United States regime, is the Dred Scott v. Sanford ruling; for Abu-Jamal, the implications of Dred Scott are ever-present:

Taney’s Court, in Scott, left intact the power of the slaver by denying constitutional rights to Africans, even those born in the United States. Rehnquist’s Court, in McCleskey, leaves intact the power of the state to further
cheapen black life. One hundred and thirty-three years after Scott, and still unequal in life, as in death. (32-33)

As a jailhouse lawyer, and in a contemporary instantiation of an elemental trajectory found in traditional eighteenth and nineteenth-century slave narratives, Abu-Jamal further develops his legal education (Constitutional and basic civil law knowledge is a BPP tenet). Abu-Jamal, similar to illiterate plantation era slave narrators, must learn to read and write the language used by the power-structure—in this case, the language of the power-structure is legal terminology and legal interpretation.

Correctional institutions, however, ultimately control the access to legal text and practical legal logistical necessities. In one of the more iconic scenes in the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Mr. Auld reprimands his wife upon discovering Mrs. Auld had been teaching Douglass how to read, and “spell words of three or four letters” (45). Master Auld’s justification for depriving Douglass all elementary knowledge of language was “that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read” (45). However, Master Auld’s denial of Douglass’s literacy is not simply an act of self-preservation on the part of a law-abiding Auld, but emphatically more so, is an act or demonstration of masterly power over his slave: “A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master […] learning would spoil the best nigger in the world” (45). Master Auld’s adherence to written law is doubly an adherence to a coded more universal law maintaining master/slave relational dynamics—to preserve Blacks in the state of slave.

Almost one hundred and fifty years later, Abu-Jamal’s narrative describes how an inmate “argued forcefully with prison administrators for permission to buy a nonimpact, non-metallic, battery-operated typewriter,” and as per the continual subjugation of the Black prisoner-slave,
the request was denied as a security precaution (*Death Row* 7). The institutional denial of means to read and write, that likewise occurs in eighteenth and nineteenth-century slave narratives as in *Live from Death Row*, captures within its invalid justification, the true nature of imperial capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century, and late capitalism in the twentieth-century and beyond.

The supposed security risk claim used to deny a typewriter request, is challenged by Abu-Jamal who spotlights the hypocritical allowance of television sets in prison. Abu-Jamal refers to the “thirteenth-inch piece of glass” that could be appropriated from any television, and ultimately concludes with a precisely postmodern critique, a critical analysis which is not only indicative of prisoner-slave pacification specifically, but a comprehensive program of mass conditioning that sedates global anti-capitalist revolution: “one’s energies may be expended freely on entertainment, but a tool essential for one’s liberation through judicial process is deemed a security risk” (7). Deprived of the means to liberate oneself from oppression, the traditional slave narrator is no different than the Black prisoner-slave in the era of the United States prison-industrial complex: “How are people corrected while imprisoned if their education is outlawed? Who profits (other than the prison establishment itself) from stupid prisoners?” (*Death Row* 54). This is indicative of capitalist design: from denying and castigating slaves for pursuing education to contemporary forms of stealth segregation, the strategic underfunding of education funnels low-income children away from higher education and towards military service or a prison sentence.

As part of multilevel forms of confinement such as social, political, and economic confinement, the prisoner-slave does not suffer in isolation or in a vacuum, but rather, existentially envelops the families of those victimized by the prison industry. Genealogically,
the “profound thematic resonance between slave narratives and sentimental fictions,” where the 
“protagonists of both experiences the hardships that come with the absence of family ties” 
(Weinstein 116), is echoed in Live from Death Row; observed in a number of scenes throughout 
eighteenth and nineteenth-century slave narratives, and twentieth/twenty-first-century narratives 
of slavery, the physical, emotionally wrenching, and sentimentalized tearing apart of family, and 
the subsequent separation and dislocation, is thematically regenerated in Life from Death Row, 
specifically in “The Visit.”

“Tiny,” Abu-Jamal’s daughter, on her first visit to “this man-made hell” is “stopped, 
stunned” by the reinforced glass barrier, separating father and daughter, and in “milliseconds 
[her] sadness and shock shifted into fury as her petite fingers curled into tight fists, which banged 
and pummeled the Plexiglas barrier,” screaming, “Break it! Break it!” as Abu-Jamal’s “eyes 
filled to the brim” (7). Even five years later, Abu-Jamal remembers “like it was an hour ago,” 
lamenting, “her hot tears […] They haunt me” (7). In traditional slave narratives or 
contemporary narratives of slavery set in the nineteenth-century, the barrier separating families is 
a sociopolitical and legal divisiveness (or in the case of Kindred, a rip in the fabric of time), in 
the narrative of Abu-Jamal, the barrier is also a literally dense yet transparent barrier, and 
extensively, the divider is still sociopolitical and legal—materialized as prison walls. In a 
modern world, dislocating families could be done through physical relocation, in a postmodern 
increasingly hyper-real world of globalization, the dislocating of families is done more 
efficiently through a corruptible criminal justice system and venal United States legislation.

Probably the most important traditional slave narrative feature, especially in antebellum 
slave narratives for the abolitionist movement, is evidential or testimonial presentations of 
physical brutalities. Abolitionists’ reliance on exposing the inhumane material conditions of
slavery is not without its problems though; certain abolitionist meetings consequently “put limits on black expression in public” by reducing slaves to entirely bodily beings with minimal interiority, as slaves were asked to stage “their bodies for public consumption,” even being asked to expose “their backs as texts that ‘proved’ their stories” (Gould 20). With that being said, the Thirteenth Amendment, and a coinciding galvanized public the byproduct of it, nevertheless, are due in large part to scenes of physical brutality—scenes depicting public exhibitions of torture, castrations, amputations, rapes—throughout slave narratives.

Abu-Jamal too utilizes this literary convention as he describes Bobby Brightwell’s “230 pounds […] well-muscled, superior conditioned frame” being systematically reduced to a “listless, sickly, […] 150 pounds, a body bent on atrophy”—the result of beatings and being forced into relatively more deplorable strip cells that include nothing “except a mattress drenched in urine” (44-45); and Manny, an inmate forced to take a medically prescribed “toxic chemical cocktail” causing seizures that become progressively worse (49); and William Henry Hance, who on “April 31, 1994, at 10 P.M.” was electrocuted by the state of Georgia despite being “both retarded and mentally ill” (98). State-sanctioned violence is exemplified in “Relatives decry ‘camp hell’,” which begins with a quote from Dostoyevsky’s *The House of the Dead*; here scenes from Pennsylvania prison, Camp Hill, are framed as retaliation for the Attica rebellion.

This “campaign of torture, theft, terror, and degradation,” also includes a more subtle psychological form of brutality: one inmate amidst the riot and destruction of inmate property, notices a guard wearing the inmate’s “wedding band on his pinkie” (63). The correctional officer commandeering an inmate’s wedding band harkens back to the oppressively paternal controlling of a slave’s union in marriage, a slave’s reproductive choosing, and even the
controlling of their romantic inclinations; the episode signals a convergence between sentimental literacy device and abolitionist evidential or testimonial exposé on oppressive material conditions.

Although *Live from Death Row* is intrinsically informed by traditional slave narrative conventions and literary devices, Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative transposes and reconstitutes a revolutionary adaptation of traditional literary presentations of slave narrative. Corresponding to Spaulding’s postmodern slave narratives, which “use elements of the fantastic to occupy the past, the present, and in some cases, the future simultaneously” (5), Abu-Jamal circumvents the official State record of history by presenting his mostly autobiographical narrative in an unconventional non-linear (Black) postmodern style.

Premised on the logic of chattel slavery, the “absence of know genealogies can be taken as a defining feature and subject of most slave narratives […] which is why so many of these narratives begin with the words […] ‘I was born’” (Levine 106). The most radical cogitation that firmly differentiates Abu-Jamal’s narrative from the traditional slave narrative and positions itself as postmodern text is the antithetical beginning of *Live from Death Row*: “Don’t tell me about the valley of the shadow of death. I live there” (xv). Before Wideman’s introduction, before page one of the prisoner-slave narrative, the reader is confronted by Abu-Jamal—living in death. Subverting the reader’s expectations about autobiographic slave narratives, (usually written from a position of relative freedom), Abu-Jamal is already dead. Abu-Jamal disrupts ordered time and undermines the customary, “I was born,” foreshadowing the implicated conclusion of his particular slave narrative—not freedom but death. Abu-Jamal’s slave narrative does not end with relative freedom but with death: “I am en route to the Police Administration Building, presumably on the way to die” (165). Abu-Jamal is the representative slave narrative
of the unjustly branded fugitive slave captured and sent to die. Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-
slave narrative is the slave story told, not from a position of relative achieved freedom, but told
in chronologically fragmented sketches, voiced by the dead: live from death row.

How Abu-Jamal’s speaking from a position of death empowers and mobilizes his voice
will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three, specifically in conjunction with his more
impressionistic and experimental postmodern text *Death Blossoms*. However, as this relates to
contemporary renditions and fictionalized constructions of slave narrative, Abu-Jamal, in
constructing literary text, uses death as a means to amplify his message and recuperate his
subjectivity and agency. Teetering between life and death, Abu-Jamal becomes a
representational voice, through artistic expression, for the marginalized masses that face socio-
civic, political, economic, and corporeal death.

Structurally, the “Preface,” dated December 1994, is followed (after Wideman’s
introduction) by “Teetering on the Brink between Life and Death” (3). After having established
his death-state at the beginning of the narrative with his opening words, Abu-Jamal in this
section represents his death, that is, represents moving from life into death. The section,
symbolically, is taken from the *Yale Law Journal* (January 1991); teetering on the brink, life for
Abu-Jamal can only exist within law—in an official State record. At this point in the narrative,
Abu-Jamal is allowed to live only to the extent of the law recognizing and acknowledging him.
Because Abu-Jamal has already spoken to the reader from the valley of the shadow of death, the
reader has foreknowledge of where Abu-Jamal will eventually be when the teetering
culminates—the following section, dated November 1994, “Descent into Hell” reaffirms this
non-linear route. Once in this “man-made hell” (22), the following section, dated November
1994 as well, is “The Visit,” where Abu-Jamal—the voice in dead space—becomes haunted by
his daughter’s tears. What haunts the living-dead? As Abu-Jamal’s catalogue and authored archive increases, it is the post-Civil Rights generation, the boys and girls fed by the Black Panther Party’s free breakfast program, the hip-hop/rap generation, those “children of this generation—born into sobering poverty amid shimmering opulence” (143): the specter of Tupac Shakur.

Dated June 1992, the section “The Lost Generation?” concludes with one of the most passionate, catalyzing pronouncements by Abu-Jamal that encapsulates his postmodern Neo-slave narrative and cogently articulates the communal fabric of narration and narrativity—a process of communicating (orally or textually), interpreting, and re-communicating narrative—a trans-generational process of storytelling and retelling:

This is not the lost generation. They are the children of the L.A. rebellion, the children of the MOVE bombing, the children of the Black Panthers, and the grandchildren of Malcolm; far from lost, they are probably the most aware generation since Nat Turner’s; they are not so much lost as they are mislaid, discarded by this increasingly racist system that undermines their inherent worth. They are all potential revolutionaries, with the historic power to transform our dull realities. If they are lost, find them. (144)

Evoking the names of the dead—Malcolm X and Nat Turner (a death row inmate in his own right), conjuring images of the dead MOVE children murdered by military-grade explosives used by a Philadelphia Police Department helicopter—Abu-Jamal juxtaposes the dead with the hip-hop/rap generation, tied to the slave past, but deaf to the call. Ultimately, the hip-hop/rap generation embodies death in the form of gang violence, most notably, the shooting and murder of Panther progeny, Tupac Shakur.
The discarded generation, lost within the gang violence that formed in the wake of the Black Panther Party’s termination and its internal divide (resulting in a number of familial homicides), shifts into an assemblage of haunting poltergeists: the restless dead that reflect the continued ever-present legacy of slavery; they too searching for an understanding or reconciliation of slavery. Navigating through the trauma is not without turbulence, apprehension, or fearlessness. As Toni Morrison asserts, “[c]ertain kinds of trauma visited on peoples are so deep, so cruel, […] only writers can translate such trauma and turn sorrow into meaning sharpening the moral imagination” (“Peril” 4). Abu-Jamal certainly is able to do so, not only through his writing, but through literally voicing his narrative. For Morrison, more specifically, her character Beloved is the traumatic slave past reengagement that, like the disposition or temperament of Beloved, can vary from docile to disorderly.

Morrison’s novel *Beloved*, based “on the true story of Margaret Gardner […] who killed her own child rather than allow her to be sold” (Smith 174), is a text both considered a postmodern slave narrative by Spaulding due to Morrison’s use of “non-mimetic genres and devices such as gothic tropes like the haunted house” (5), and considered a contemporary narrative of slavery by Keizer due to Morrison’s concern “with the formation of black subjectivity, both individual and communal” (22-23). Keizer suggests that, rather than only interpret Sethe’s infanticide as a personal or individual pathology, the novel should widen the interpretation to a “systematic analysis of U.S. slavery and communal, as well as individual, responses to it” (23). Morrison, navigating through trans-generational traumatic experience, problematizes the process of narration and narrativity.

Morrison gives great insight into the narrativity process that reforms a new contextualized slave narrative, intertextually responding to another’s slave narrative, and further
expressing a communal slave narrative of storytelling: “I did not do much research on Margaret Garner other than the obvious stuff, because I wanted to invent her life, which is a way of saying I wanted to be accessible to anything the characters had to say about it” (Smith 174). Morrison, in developing her own contemporary narrative of slavery, chooses to bypass the official recorded historical account, wherein Margaret Gardner is tried for being a fugitive slave, as opposed to being tried for murder—again the cheapened perception of Black life by the State; Morrison instead responses by creating an entire world where “the only person who could judge [Gardner/Sethe] would be the daughter she killed” (Smith 174). Within the story, Morrison continues to penetrate the problematized aspects of expressing a traumatic experience through narration and receiving/interpreting the experienced trauma through symbiosis, accentuated by the cryptic lines, “It was not a story to pass on” and “This is not a story to pass on” (Beloved 275). Furthermore, “American Africanism makes it possible to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless” (Morrison, Playing in the Dark 7).

Fragmented by necessity, Morrison’s Beloved moves outside ordered time, and where Abu-Jamal titles his fragmented narrative sketches, the chapters in Beloved are title-less, without numbers even—the text becomes, allegorically, Sethe’s murdered child’s headstone. Identical to Abu-Jamal voicing his narrative from death, Beloved is empowered by the supernatural and deathliness. Morrison’s novel represents Sethe’s narrative and Beloved’s narrativity, which ultimately becomes her narrative; the coda being that like her headstone, the text, is titled “Beloved.” Beloved, only a child when she was murdered, returns from the grave as the living-dead to participate in the narrativity process. Beloved maturates as she receives more of Sethe’s narrative, thereby allowing Beloved to participate through narrativity:
It became a way to feed her [...] Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost [...] But, as she began telling about the earrings, she found herself wanting to, liking it. Perhaps it was Beloved’s distance from the events itself, or her thirst for hearing it. (Morrison 58)

For Sethe, Beloved is the slave past and the future embodied in a woman-child.

Towards the end of “Part Two” in Beloved, Morrison echoes the same concerning threat and anxiety triggered by past loss or potential loss: for Abu-Jamal, it is the supposed “lost generation,” those with “a fundamental streak of fatalism about the promise of tomorrow” (Death Row 142), for Morrison, it is Beloved voicing her chapter in a state of limbo affixed to the indeterminacy of water and juxtaposed to other amorphous liquids—milk and blood. Beloved comes to represent the destructiveness of slavery, yet in her case, returns out of the water from the dead to symbolize the slave past that informs slave narrative, and simultaneously, represents the future that interprets and reconstitutes their own contextualized slave narrative. Beloved comes full-circle: the lost generation has found themselves through narrativity; therefore, this was not a story to pass on, and this is not a story to pass on—it is Beloved—this is her own expressed slave narrative within a communal fabric of storytelling and narrative.

Metonymically, loss and water is a fundamental association in contextualizing physical loss of life during the Atlantic slave-trade, depicted in literary works such as Zong! and Feeding the Ghosts, and in terms of examining Black identity, the loss or indeterminacy of an African ancestry in texts such as Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom and Middle Passage. Again in a like design as Morrison, problematizing the ambivalent symbolism of water to frame
sociocultural pathology as it pertains to the destructiveness of slavery, Caryl Phillips illustrates loss through the trope of being lost at sea, and theoretically, being lost through the endlessness of water.

In the prologue to Caryl Phillips’s *Crossing the River*, a father reflects on having sold his children into slavery, and for “two hundred and fifty years” he has “listened to the many-tongued chorus. And occasionally among the sundry restless voices” the father has “discovered” the voices of his sold children (1). Likewise, *Live from Death Row* explores the problematic nature of being annihilated and effaced by water, vanished by its vastness.

“**Nightraiders Meet Rage**” (October 1989) tells of a morning conversation between “Timmy” and “Mu,” who “rapped music, a common love”; Abu-Jamal noting, “I enjoyed his melodious tenor crooning” (38). However, by nightfall, “men were handcuffed, seized, dragged outside, and thrown into cages, naked, beaten, and blooded” in retaliation for outside protests concerning the beating of cuffed prisoners (39). After several days, “with A block in shambles, as lockdown continued […] the cages were being hosed down, traces of blood washed into drains to feed the Juniata River, washed away” (40). In this instance, water effaces the institutional cruelty and humiliation that victimizes the inmates; lost is dignity and the personhood of the living-dead. Echoed in a reverberation through time, the most egregiously noted instance of effacing the traces of murderous accountability are affixed to the 1781 Zong Massacre, but even then, the memory of these jettisoned slave—the abstract equivalent to insurance bonds—transcends capitalist commodity determinism and becomes the basis of contemporary artistic expression, and a flashpoint that historicizes just one instance among countless instances of capitalist pathology and its inherent corruptibility. The jettison and murder of slaves, with the intention of recuperating insurance, are facilitated by the absolute effacement of water.
There is, however, an implicit duality in water: it hurts and helps, it drowns the countless unnamed slaves, and yet, provides a means of mobility for escape. It also elementally unifies humanity. “A Toxic Shock” (May 1989), evinces the essence of water and humanity. A toxic pollutant in the local water source, affecting the water system that feeds into the prison and the surrounding residence, causes the water in the prison to be shutdown. Abu-Jamal, a follower of John Africa, ruminates, “water […] how sweet,” and continues by making the statement that, despite “the legal illusions erected by the system to divide and separate life, we the caged share air, water, and hope with you, the not-yet-caged. We share the same breath” (Death Row 51). In making this statement, Abu-Jamal uses “we the caged” and the “not-yet-caged” to capsulize humanity: although this is an indirect attack on the criminal justice machine and corrections hegemony, (incarceration being an inevitable state), because Abu-Jamal clearly frames his postmodern Neo-slave narrative as being narrated from a dead-zone, being caged and death become interchangeble, “we the caged” and “the not-yet-caged” could be read as “we the dead” and the “not-yet-dead”; death is the equalizer, and like shared water, all share the same breath, and more compellingly, all share the same last breath.

For Abu-Jamal, water becomes a universalizing principle of transcendence, which corresponds to Caryl Phillips’s Crossing the River, a contemporary narrative of slavery as well. Gail Low claims that “Crossing the River offers a chorus of voices from across generations; its character portraits are individual and yet also representative” (123). Like water, where there “are no paths […] No signpost. [And] no return” (Phillips 1-2): the narrative of slavery is fluid. So fluid is the narrative of slavery that it is a single narrative—a shared communal slave narrative of enslavement and confinement. Therefore, contemporary African-American prison literature is a slave narrative in the contemporary, and as part of the shared communal slave narrative, cannot
be separated from the traditional slave narrative and should be read as a strand in a greater narrative of African-American enslavement and confinement: “The many-tongued chorus” (Phillips 235). Call-and-response then becomes a trans-generational omni-temporal/atemporal chorus of voices. African fragmentation, and more generally postmodern fragmentation, transforms into collective subjectivity, a communal engagement with slave history and a shout against systems of oppression, exploitation, inequality, and injustice.

In the final section of *Live from Death Row*, the only section throughout the narrative without a date, entitled “Philly Daze: An Impressionistic Memoir,” Abu-Jamal echoes the same conceptualization of slavery as memory—as a fluid, omni-temporal/atemporal, all-time/timeless, narrative of African-American enslavement and confinement—as does Phillips in the prologue and epilogue of *Crossing the River*:

The “I love you” echoes like feedback, booming like a thousand voices, and faces join the calming cacophony: wife, mother, children, old faces from down south, older faces from—Africa? Faces, loving, warm, and dark, rushing, racing, roaring past. Consciousness returns to find me cuffed, my breath sweet with the heavy metallic taste of blood, in darkness. [...] I recall my father’s old face with wonder at its clarity, considering his death twenty years before. I am en route to the Police Administrations Building, presumably on the way to die. (165)

This flash-memoir at the end of *Live from Death Row* anticipates the strong postmodern presentation of *Death Blossoms*. *Live from Death Row*, Abu-Jamal’s first collected slave narrative, ends not with freedom but with Abu-Jamal on his way to death; as such, the continuation of his slave experience is premised on death, adopting a more postmodern stylistic aesthetic to expresses *Death Blossoms*. As Abu-Jamal inches closer to death, deeper into living-
death, Abu-Jamal enters disordered time, to where *Death Blossoms*’s anti-form becomes its form—the continuation of his conclusion to *Live from Death Row*.

Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative becomes fully realized as the narrative moves from a dated entry in the *Yale Law Journal* to a dateless impressionistic memoir by its end. Postmodern fragmentation is materialized in the out-of-body experience had by Abu-Jamal:

“I look down and see a man slumped on the curb, his head resting on his chest, his face downcast. ‘Damn! That’s me!’ A jolt of recognition ripples through me” (164). And as he sees his fragmented self being brutally beaten by three cops, the voice of his daughter interrupts the scene, and her and Abu-Jamal talk-over the scene:

“Daddy?”

“Yes, Babygirl?”

“Why are those men beating you like that?”

“It’s okay, Babygirl. I’m okay […] Daddy’s fine—see? I don’t even feel it!”

(164)

Like his narrative that uses a specifically Black postmodernism and postmodern literary devices, Abu-Jamal’s fragmentation, his out-of-body split, allows him to subvert the physically damage, and more meta-textually, allows his narrative to break-out beyond the confines of a master-narrative stranglehold.

Then, his “chubby-cheeked child’s face softly melts into the features of a broad-nosed, bald, gold-toothed, and grizzled old man”—his father, which then gives way to “a thousand voices […] the calming cacophony: wife, mother, children, old faces from down south, older faces from—Africa?” (165). Trans-generational narration and narrativity is personified in Abu-Jamal’s fluid movement through time and physical space in his impressionistic memoir. Mumia
Abu-Jamal, like so many imprisoned African-Americans, is part of the “many-tongued chorus,” calling and responding to those sold and lost over “two hundred and fifty years” (Phillips 236), and counting, of Black slavery and oppression. There are no paths in slavery, no signpost, and there is no return. Forever the Black experience will be an experience of slavery. And like the “many-tongued chorus,” the shared communal slave narrative is sung by the voices forced into spaces of confinement, imprisoned and enslaved.
CHAPTER 2:

Hitherto, ever form of society has been based, as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes. But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence. —Karl Marx

No more dikes, no more bulwarks. The hour of the barbarian is at hand. The modern barbarian. The American hour. Violence, excess, waste, mercantilism, bluff, conformism, stupidity, vulgarity, disorder. —Aimé Césaire

In short, capitalism is killing our children. —Manning Marable
Chapter 2

In the summer of 2013, United States President Barack Obama visited Robben Island as part of his South Africa tour. The notorious island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for eighteen years is a haunted instantiation, symbolic of governmentally instituted racism and violent economic determinism. The prison on Robben Island—its story—is not an anecdotal glimpse into a receding past wrought with torture and exploitation belonging to colonialism and empires that were; rather, Robben Island stands as an ever-present reminder of state-sanctioned racism, the illusionary nature of democracy, and the legacy of capitalism’s global stranglehold that was, is, and continues to be. Barack Obama, the first Black president of the United States and whose election supposedly introduced a seismic paradigm shift into a post-racial United States sociopolitical landscape, nevertheless, was met with protest before his appearance at the University of Johannesburg on June 29, 2013.

According to reports, the protestors, consisting of “students, members of the Young Communist League, Azanian People’s Organization, and the South African Communist Party,” were declaring “their disapproval of [Obama’s] use of drone strikes, the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, and the U.S. economic blockade against Cuba” (Wende and Jarrett). In order to disband the hundreds of protesters, police “fired rubber bullets and a stun grenade” while walking “up the street pushing protesters away with shot guns” (Zaheer Cassim). Two protesters are specifically quoted by USA Today’s Zaheer Cassim: twenty-four year old Bilaal Qibr was quoted as saying, “We can’t protest anymore. Personally, I feel like this is an extension of the
U.S.”; Nomagugu Hloma, a nineteen year old student, believes “He’s here for our African resources [...] Hands off our gold, oil, diamonds, and land.” Students were also joined in protest by groups such as the Muslim Lawyers Association, and South Africa’s biggest trade union—the Congress of South African Trade Union, or COSATU. For the United States, apartheid South Africa was its burked mirror-image, dissimulated in the falsehood of capitalist exceptionalism in the United States. However, apartheid and its homogeneous legacies are not anomalous; they are not peculiar institutions unique only to South Africa in the late twentieth-century, but a recurring reflection of the Atlantic slave-trade into the late twentieth-century and beyond, in both South Africa and the United States.

In 1993, almost exactly twenty years before President Obama’s visit to Robben Island, Mumia Abu-Jamal composed, “What, to a Prisoner, is the Fourth of July.” Appearing in Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative—Live from Death Row—more precisely in “Part Three: Musing, Memories, and Prophecies,” this fragment includes and begins with Frederic Douglass’s interrogatory address from July 5, 1852, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” Abu-Jamal integrates Douglass’s “fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke” (Douglass, “Fourth of July” 126) to set against rhetorical implications evoked in the very act of celebrating a day of independence for Americans. 141 years from Douglass’s address, Abu-Jamal catechizes a 1993 Fourth of July ceremony in Philadelphia.

Incorporating the residual idealization of democracy and independence, catching the shine of a halo’s glow, the Liberty Medal ceremony is meant to represent the continued adherence and responsibility to freedom and independence. Where this becomes a point of contention for Abu-Jamal is where the Liberty Medal awardees include “the widely unpopular” South African state President F. W. de Klerk (Death Row 138). Although the award was shared
with Nelson Mandela, Philadelphians protested the inclusion of de Klerk. As such, the “choice of Liberty Medalists was made not by the people but by corporate Philadelphia—big business” (Abu-Jamal, *Death Row* 138). Twenty years before the protests against President Barack Obama at the University of Johannesburg, Abu-Jamal prophetically anticipates future capitalist exploits: “When, or if, the African majority takes power in South Africa, U.S. big business wants friends there. If one reads the names of corporate sponsors of the award, it sounds like roll call of the Chamber of Commerce” (*Death Row* 138). Despite Nelson Mandela voicing Douglass’s emotive reprimand of the United States, bringing into question supposed US democracy in theory versus US unfreedoms in practice, liberty, nevertheless, remains illusionary. The irony of Douglass forcing the United States, with its glorified ideology and rhetoric, to reconcile the foundational principles of United States democracy with the material conditions of the kidnapped, the enslaved, and the exploited masses, nevertheless, goes unnoticed, eclipsed by corporate sponsored spectacle.

Using Paul Gilroy’s theoretical conceptualization of the Black Atlantic as a foundation, the development of the United States prison-industrial complex can be analyzed relative to an imperialistic continuum of Black exploitation and capitalist geo-political, transnational implications. Reading the United States prison-industrial complex as a postmodern late capitalist construction is derived from Gilroy’s conceptualization of the Black Atlantic; specifically important to my work is Gilroy’s proposed “chronotopes,” or the “image of ships in motion across the space between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise […] the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion” (4). Furthermore, Gilroy assigns great significance to ships as “the living means” by which the “Atlantic world” becomes conjoined among its various points, and ships, therefore,
“need to be thought of as cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of the triangular trade” (16-17). Gilroy’s analysis of the material ship as a site and vehicle for cultural and political eventuation and migration evinces the ambulatory complexion of the Black Atlantic despite delineated national borders throughout the Black Atlantic.

The emphasis Gilroy places on ships as cultural and political units at the micro-level is comparably emphasized by Dylan Rodríguez in “Forced Passages.” At the micro level, Rodríguez emphasizes the physical and operational structure of individual prisons in the same manner that Gilroy analyzes each ship as a cultural and political unit. Rodríguez’s micro-analysis focuses on the “spatial dominion at the localized site of the prison,” as opposed to what he labels as “macro-scale categories” such as “the prison system and the prison-industrial complex” (35). Rodríguez’s argument is premised on the institutionalized spaces of both the transatlantic slave-ship and the localized prison site: he argues that a “radical genealogy of the prison regime must engage in historical conversation with the massive human departure of the transatlantic Middle Passage” (42). Accordingly, the Middle Passage operates as “a pedagogical and punitive practice” that reconfigures Africans through the use of violence and captivity and positions them into subhuman categories, establishing an “incipient global ordering” (Rodríguez 45). Finally, one of the more important issues Rodríguez points to is the effectiveness of the Middle Passage, or “an epochal precursor to the carceral technologies of the landlocked U.S. prison,” in not only “re-mapping enslaved black bodies but re-mapping the geographic and oceanic world” (46). Despite functioning as a conduit for the forced displacement, oppression, and brutality of innumerous persons, the Atlantic slave-ship, nevertheless, diversified an emerging re-contextualized Black Atlantic/Black world as Gilroy avers.
As Peter Linebaugh observes, “the ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record” (Gilroy 13). Beyond the practical considerations associated with ships as mobile vehicles for transatlantic communication into the twentieth-century, as technological communication advanced, Black Atlantic Pan-Africanism would expanded into a revolutionary global struggle against capitalist oppression. To articulate the Black Panther Party’s philosophical doctrine that situates African-American oppression within a greater contextualized capitalist oppressiveness encountered throughout the globe, Abu-Jamal uses the phrase *revolutionary internationalism*; this phrase, then, conveys how the transatlantic ship’s technological communicative process has advanced from Pan-Africanist transatlantic triangulation, as Gilroy and C.L.R. James describe, into an international pan-revolutionary movement against oppression.

Abu-Jamal specifically lists Franz Fanon, Mao Tse-Tung, Che Guevara, and Kwame Nkrumah as having influenced “The Party, and its top leaders” (*Freedom* 105). Revolutionary internationalism not only “meant supporting liberation movements in their struggle against the US imperialist,” examples being the “Pilots for Panthers” program, and Eldridge Cleaver’s “Letter to My Black Brothers in Vietnam,” which attempted to persuade Black United States soldiers to join the Vietnamese and “start killing the racist pigs” in military positions of command (Abu-Jamal, *Freedom* 106-107), but revolutionary internationalism also “meant being part of a worldwide movement against US imperialism, white supremacy, colonialism, and corrupting capitalism” (*Freedom* 113). As capitalism moves through imperialism (or a stage of high capitalism) into late capitalism and ever-expanding globalization—where rigid national boundaries of domination have given way to abstracted multinational monetary interest and transnational world banking systems, revolutionary internationalism is able to anticipate, and
however complex, is able to co- and counter-develop with and against postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism.

As it pertains to the Black Atlantic, revolutionary internationalism also provided Panthers avoiding criminal prosecution refuge abroad in anti-imperialist countries that geographically formed the material Black Atlantic—specifically Cuba and Algeria. Because neither “political nor economic structures of domination are simply co-extensive with national borders” (Gilroy7), United States capitalism is not relegated to the physical geographic limits of delineated nationhood. As a condition of late capitalism, evolving from high capitalism/imperialism, physical landmarks are no longer adequate in determining imperial domination, whether the physical homeland of empire or colonized land under the control of empire. According to Eric Hobsbawn, the “age of empires is dead” (13). However, this is not to suggest that imperialism is negated; rather, this phenomenon is indicative of superpower nation-states being dissolved, and superimposed over its disappearance, are transnational supra-legal corporate multinationals—in effect, multi-eco-political imperialism, for “globalization by its nature produces unbalance and asymmetric growth” (Hobsbawn 45). Rather than incite the nationalistic fervor of the oppressed, corporate multinationals readily integrate a few privileged elitist from within the oppressed nation, ripened for corruption, to become the watchdogs of corporate interests, so as to ensure the continued exploitation of labor and theft of natural resources—natural resources belonging to the oppressed nations.

Abu-Jamal refers to a Black Panther Party term that has an overlapping context with revolutionary internationalism: conceived from Huey Newton’s analysis of the United States, which in summation states that United States “imperialism precluded nationhood,” therefore “independent nations could not exist,” the term *intercommunalism* suggests “the interaction of
global communities” in “solidarity with the world’s people” engaged in struggle against imperialism and capitalism around the world (Freedom 232). Revolutionary internationalism and intercommunalism, although include Civil Rights claims to alleviate Black oppression domestically within United States democracy, their revolutionary aim, as described by Abu-Jamal, sought to move beyond the limits of United States civil concessions—or “reformist window-dressing” that yield little change or any significant revolutionary transformation (Abu-Jamal, Freedom 109). Rather, the objective is a totalizing challenge to the global capitalist power-structure: “We felt as if we were part of the peasant armies of Vietnam, the degraded Black miners of South Africa, the Fedayeen in Palestine, the students storming in the streets of Paris, and the dispossessed of Latin America” (Freedom 113-114). The essence of Black Atlantic anti-slavery Pan-Africanism is transformed into an anti-capitalist globalizing pan-revolutionary movement across a multitude of unified anti-imperialist locations.

One such location, additionally providing protection for Panther’s abroad, is the official Black Panther Party international headquarters in Algeria—“a symbol of an independent Afro-America [and] a representative for the growing Black Liberation movement” (Freedom 114). Abu-Jamal characterizes the Black Panther Party as a “Malcolmist party” (Freedom 66); its development would come to parallel the personal trajectory of Malcolm X—Malik El-Shabazz. Beginning as strict Black nationalists, assembled as a check against police-state brutality in the form of its early incarnations as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the Black Panther Party would ultimately drop the “Self-Defense” portion, become radically proactive, and embrace “revolutionary cultism” as opposed to simply “cultural nationalism” (Freedom 232). Revolutionary internationalism and intercommunalism would be the belated manifestation of Malcolm X’s late work and thought.
On July 17, 1964, Malcolm X submitted a memorandum addressed to the delegates attending the Organization of Afro-American Unity Conference in Cairo, Egypt, wherein Malcolm X states, “We intend to ‘internationalize’ [our freedom struggle] by placing it at the level of human rights” (“An Appeal” 76). Post-World War II, soon after the establishment of the Geneva Convention of 1949, internationalizing the Black freedom struggle to the level of human rights can be largely credited to Paul Robeson—a pioneer spokesman—who appropriated emerging postmodern medium to publicly criticize and challenge the United States capitalist power-structure; a power-structure, years later, to which Malcolm X would continue to struggle against. Additionally, Malcolm X worries that the African people may have ejected European colonizers only to be recolonized by “American dollarism”—warning Africa, “Don’t let American racism be ‘legalized’ by American dollarism” (“An Appeal” 75). This is more than an astute observation concerning Africa/United States political relations; what Malcolm X identifies is the historically institutionalized interdependency and co-evolution of race and capital—of slavery and capitalism. With profundity, Malcolm X unmasks the conspiratory transition from colonization and empire to what will become globalizing world markets, transitioning from the Atlantic slave-trade to outsourcing, privatization of foreign national resources, and the exploitation of labored colored bodies without and within the demarcated United States borders.

Almost fifty years before United States President Barack Obama will be met by protesters in South Africa, Malcolm X, in a letter from Ghana dated May 11, 1964, exposes United States hypocritical foreign and domestic policy, accusing the United States of being the same nation that “spits in the faces of blacks in America” (terrorizing Blacks with police dogs in order to deter Blacks away from integration) as being the very same nation of people “seen throughout Africa, bowing, grinning, and smiling in an effort to ‘integrate’ with the Africans—
they want to ‘integrate’ into Africa’s wealth and beauty” (“Letters From Abroad” 62). By deregulating world markets and allowing multinational conglomerates access to any nation’s resources via privatization, neo-colonialism is hyper-realized in late capitalism; therefore, we see the “mighty” move away from overt blood towards cunning and magic in the form of spectacle and ceremony in order to aggrandize puppet-governments that pose as the leaders of independent foreign nations. 27

In this cunning form of capitalism—the fox rather than the wolf 28—“foreign capital is used for exploitation” rather than the development of Third World nations, and consequently, investment “under neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor counties of the world” (Nkrumah x). Abu-Jamal’s “What, to the Prisoner, is the Fourth of July” not only questions repressive State powers that would imprison Mandela but questions capitalist ideological State powers that imprison foreign nations in economic debt and domestic currency deflation, while simultaneously those very same capitalist powers raid domestic gross products that would negate debt and elevate the overall social and political conditions of those imprisoned foreign nations. Instead however, Western capitalist interests implant overpowering banks, privatize domestic resources originally belonging to foreign nations, and use exploitable colored bodies to cultivate and refine resources at a profit that is further quantified by corporations operating beyond legalized regulations, or simply by creating a quasi-political racket that conveniently overlooks violations, or in worst cases still, by instituting oversight committees that are ultimately on the payroll of multinational corporations.

Black Panther Party terminology and philosophical doctrine, relative to the progressiveness of late capitalism, eventually become hyper-realized and thus complicated. 29 What revolutionary internationalism and intercommunalism will eventually come to represent is
the “experience of decentering,” which empowers as it articulates “an experience of
demarginalization, in which new forms of collective subjectivity and imagined community have
been mobilized by various political and cultural activities” (Mercer 270). Unfortunately, in a
more contemporary and immediate chronology, postmodern fragmentation persists to the point
of disintegration. However, during the 1960s and 1970s, indeterminacy allows for “the
rearticulation of Black as political rather than racial category among Asian, Caribbean, and
African peoples,” thus creating “a new form of symbolic unity out of the signifiers of racial
difference” (Mercer 271). As a byproduct of the Atlantic slave-trade, Pan-Africanism developed
despite practical multi-lingo discrepancies among, initially the various African nations and even
discrepancies among particular languages belonging to various tribes within these nations, and
post-Middle Passage, discrepancies among the multi-linguistic disconnect among the slaves
spread across plantations in the United States, North and South America, and Caribbean colonies
(belonging to multiple European nations). At the height of revolutionary movements in the
1960s and 1970s, a united global revolution against imperialism and capitalist oppression, at
least for a moment, becomes possible through decentering and collective subjectivity.

By sharing in Black as a racial determinant and then moving beyond those limits to
participating in Black as political movement, the fight against racism becomes a fight against
capitalist oppression: “It’s all racism. It’s all part of the vicious racist system that the Western
powers have used to continue to degrade and exploit and oppress the people in Africa and Asia
and Latin America during recent centuries” (Malcolm X, “Linking the Problem” 218). 30 Where
Panther doctrine—revolutionary internationalism and intercommunalism—becomes especially
dangerous to the United States capitalist power-structure is where White begins to be
recalculated within the traditionally stringent White-capitalist United States hegemony.
Abu-Jamal is correct in highlighting the significance of the Black Panther Party amending their 10-Point Plan to reflect a more perspicacious evaluation of White by substituting “white-man” for (asexual) “capitalist.” 31 Furthermore, Abu-Jamal notes how the FBI, or the agents of capital, were filled with “alarm” by Fred Hampton working “with Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Asians, even poor white greasers—anybody, everybody—to build revolution” (Freedom 121). The essence of revolutionary internationalism and intercommunalism mirrors the philosophical evolution of Malcolm X, more precisely, post-Nation of Islam Malcolm X, and more so El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (or the late work and thought of Malcolm X).

Prior to this, the United States White-capitalist power-structure utilized Nation of Islam rhetoric, and Malcolm X’s speeches (speaking on behalf of Elijah Muhammad) to perpetuate fear-mongering sensationalism intended to reinforce diametrically opposed concepts of separatist Black Nationalism and American fundamentalism. However, as Malcolm X began to internationalize the African-American struggle against oppression, traditional Black Nationalism became a liability, not only in terms of excluding potential revolutionary alliances across race, but in addition because Black Nationalism could be and was appropriated by the power-structure to reinforce preconditioned attitudes towards African-Americans. In other words, Black Nationalism, as conceptualized by the Nation of Islam, operates within White nationalist prescripts. When Malcolm X abandons a limited myopic view constructed by and within the ideological power-structure is when Malcolm X is able to fight the system beyond the systemic programming that—for its own benefit—allows Blacks to participate at a predefined and limited capacity only insofar as it maintains a capitalist power-structure dichotomy constructed by a racially charged calculus. A predetermined calculus premised on racial to racist logic can only function with universally agreed applications of White and (versus) Black or non-White.
Challenges to White precepts within a White-capitalist power-structure threaten the functionality and power of the entire system.

Despite concerted vilifications and misconstrued depictions, Malcolm X was anything but a Black nationalist isolationist; moreover, there is a revolutionary cosmopolitanism in the late work and philosophy of Malcolm X—the foundational principles for the Black Panther Party (revolutionary internationalism and intercommunalism), and principles further articulated by George Jackson. The chapter “Mecca” in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* is a pronounced expression of cosmopolitan aesthetic. Although Malcolm X ultimately credits Allah (the Oneness of Allah) for having “removed the ‘white’ from their minds, the ‘white’ from their behavior, and the ‘white’ from their attitudes” (347), his transatlantic voyage and Hajj to Mecca is a testament to Malcolm X’s whole life as “a chronology of—changes” (346). On United Arab Airlines flight from Frankfurt to Cairo, Malcolm X describes the passengers as being “all complexions,” and it is then that the “feeling hit [Malcolm X] that there really wasn’t any color problem here. The effect was as though I had just stepped out of prison” (328). The simile Malcolm X uses to express being freed from the confines of United States racism (or even the inherent racial inescapabilty ever-present within the United Sates, whatever the severity) becomes quite literal upon reflecting on the history of United States prisons and jails: race and the United States prison are inseparable.

It is not until Malcolm X travels outside the United States does he begin to “reappraise the ‘white man’”; moreover, when Malcolm X begins “to perceive that ‘white man,’ as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily” (340), he further complicates and thereby challenges the actuality versus performativity of race, specifically the inaccuracy and fallacious use of skin complexion as an absolute determinate in a global struggle against oppression.  

32
Malcolm X’s revolutionary cosmopolitanism can be read in an episode described by Malcolm X on one of his trips to Ghana: after being asked by the Algerian ambassador where Black Nationalism as an objective victory would leave him—an African revolutionary militant, and “to all appearances he was a white man”—Malcolm X is forced “to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of his Black Nationalism definitions” (“Black Nationalism” 212). With consideration for “revolutionaries in Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania,” Malcolm X realizes how he “was alienating people who were true revolutionaries, dedicated to overturning the system of exploitation that exists on this earth by any means necessary” (“Black Nationalism” 212). Revolutionary cosmopolitanism, revolutionary internationalism, and intercommunalism will reach a highpoint in their trajectory, at their apex, expressed through the revolutionary voice of George Jackson, and quickly thereafter, amputated by the state-sanctioned and plotted assassination of Jackson and the arrested development initiated by the counter-revolutionary movement of the United States capitalist power-structure via neo-conservative policies derived from unapologetic Friedmanites (Ronald Reagan and Margret Thatcher) that will be set in motion by razing the philosophical essence of a post-racialized global revolutionary vanguard found in Malcolm X and Malcolmist thinkers.

According to C.L.R. James, George Jackson’s prison letters are “the most remarkable political documents that have appeared inside or outside the United States since the death of Lenin” (“George Jackson” 267). The prison space is as much a political space as it is a creative space as we continue to see after George Jackson in Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative. The prison site is a battleground between the State apparatus and inmates that re-appropriate state-public space to voice personal sentiment and establish a collective revolutionary subjectivity that challenges oppressive State powers within a prison space that is
determined to re-racialize revolution—hyper-racialize a United States public through the systemic incubation of racist compartmentalization, and the strategic allowance of contraband trading to preserve capitalism pathology and conditioning within prisons and jails.

Despite the nullification of inmate civil liberties, that is to say, the so-called right to vote may be negated and participation in the political process cancelled, but the right to purchase and participate in consumer capitalism is encouraged and glorified within prison—however, “guided by theoretical, that is to say, intellectual development, the generation to which Jackson belonged has arrived at the profound conclusion that the only way of life possible to them is the complete intellectual, physical, moral commitment to the revolutionary struggle against capitalism” (“George Jackson” 268). Jackson makes the observation that it was not until Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X began emphasizing Vietnam and poli-economics, transitioning away from idealism into historical materialism, that they were then murdered.

Michel Foucault’s, Catherine von Bulow’s, and Daniel Defert’s assessment of the State’s masked assassination of George Jackson suggests that Jackson’s perceived role as a revolutionary leader galvanized a counter-offensive against revolution, as such, “it was crucial to physically eliminate” Jackson and “destroy the public image” of him as well (149). Of course, in order to quell a revolutionary backlash against the State, the prison administration and United States officials dispersed misinformation and status quo propaganda throughout various media sources and publications in order to depict Jackson as a postmodern runaway slave, vindicating Jackson’s murder as incidental or even necessary with respect to the preservation of order.

After the assassination of George Jackson, prisoners sharing a cellblock with Jackson were able to leak a statement to the public addressing their murdered comrade:
We, the twenty-seven united black, brown, and white prison-slaves of the maximum security cellblock of San Quentin penitentiary, are the victims of an assassination conspiracy, exactly like the one which ended the life of our comrade G.L. Jackson, assassinated on August 21. (Foucault et al. 151)

The assassination of George Jackson was not an isolated incident of State aggression, but a continuum of government perpetuated violence against revolutionary thinkers. The chapter “The Empire Strikes Back: COINTELPRO” in We Want Freedom examines the FBI program (operating between 1956 through 1971). Among the incalculable targets of COINTELPRO, Fred Hampton, like George Jackson, would ultimately be murdered by the Repressive State Apparatus. The FBI program, designed by its architect J. Edgar Hoover, was especially focused on dismantling revolutionary thought in an “effort to undermine the Communist Party USA,” yet, “COINTELPRO mushroomed into a wide ranging series of assaults against progressive and Black nationalist leaders and organizations” (Marable, Black America 128); however, in Abu-Jamal’s estimation, what “angered [Hoover] further was the Party’s growing influence, not over ‘ghetto residents’ but white youth in the nation’s educational institutions” (Freedom 118).

COINTELPRO represents the systemic counter-revolutionary aim of a capitalist State power; in essence, “the FBI functioned as political and race police—agents for the preservation of white supremacy” (Abu-Jamal, Freedom 122). With hopes of preserving White-capitalist Ideological State Apparatuses, the repressive State powers countered by sabotaging Black advancement through PSYOPS (psychological operations) and strategic assassinations, even post-COINTELPRO, to the extent of using military-grade explosives and paramilitary police action to bomb the residential Philadelphia home of the MOVE organization on May 13, 1985.
Regardless of any official end to COINTELPRO, the FBI under the Reagan administration “began to terrorize individual Blacks in a brazenly open manner” using “COINTELPRO-type actions against Black activist” (Marble, *Black America* 129). While the FBI concentrated domestically on acting as an extension of White-capitalist State power to renege on any advancements afforded to minority movements up until the 1980s, the CIA/Contras drug-cartel under the “Reagan Right” (Webb 9) would essentially found the corporate blueprint for multinational capitalist interests masquerading as military operatives to firstly, destroy anti-capitalist threats, and secondly, to generate profit for private interests. 33

Neo-conservative Ronald Reagan on October 27, 1986 would sign a “bill authorizing the CIA to spend $100 Million on the Contras” (Webb 321). However, financial support for the Contras was not limited to legalized United States tax dollars; the Reagan administration and the CIA assisted in extralegal means of generating finances to support anticommunist Contras, more specifically, “flying weapons down and cocaine and marijuana back, landing in at least one instance at Homestead Air Force Base in Florida” (Webb 14). The CIA/Contras arms and drug-cartel would then subcontract stateside local drug dealers to push crack-cocaine into Black and colored (almost always poor) communities, while syphoning profits to support anticommunist Nicaraguan militants that “engaged in kidnappings, extortion, and robbery to fund its operations,” as well as the “bombing of Nicaraguan civilian airliners and airliner hijackings” (Webb 47). It is absolutely no coincidence that the prison construction boom in the 1980s is related to the business model set forth by the CIA/Contras drug-cartel—whose target consumer was poor colored communities throughout the United States.

As David Theo Goldberg affirms, it “has been well documented that more was and is being spent on prisons than on building universities”; moreover, the “prison response was
especially pertinent in the wake of the explosion in use of crack cocaine in the mid-1980s, predominately among black and brown men” (213). The United States White-capitalist power-structure is able to mount a counter attack against revolutionary internationalism in terms of offering military and financial support to overthrow the Sandinista government, but likewise, it is able to covertly dismantle Civil Rights and Black Power achievements, specifically circumventing *Brown v Board of Education* by trafficking cocaine and marijuana into the United States and establishing consumer markets in poverty-stricken low-income areas, thus perpetuating accelerated prison construction while inversely defunding (higher) education to facilitate an expansive colored prison population as it deprives them of educational opportunities.

Goldberg continues by observing that defunding education “promotes crimes […] the political economy of prisons reproduces a spiraling prison population” (217). The eco-politics of prison construction is determinable in regards to the evolution of the United States military-industrial complex; in fact, as “military bases closed, prisons began to proliferate in precisely those areas economically most affected by military motivate slippage” (Goldberg 212). The transition from capitalist imperialism to post-imperialism neo-colonialism in late capitalism can be traced in the movement away from traditional military warfare into post-911 abstracted cybernetic War-on-Terror in conjunction with the superimposition of the prison-industrial complex over the military-industrial complex. This is not to say the United States defense budget is downsized significantly, but rather, like the prison-industrial complex eventually, the defense budget is financing private corporations and multinational capitalist interest. The CIA/Contras paramilitary drug-cartel has morphed into Halliburton, Lockheed Martin, and Blackwater—profit-first service industry, arms dealing, and the execution of overthrowing governments that counter or threaten the White-capitalist power-structure.
As we move deeper into postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism, fragmentation is devolving to the point of disintegration: individual consciousness is now trapped in an ahistorical perpetual present, a vicarious sentient being symbiotically attached to celebrity culture pseudo-emotive responsiveness. At a macro-level, postmodern late capitalism ushered in the era of the post-nation-state. The United States has been reduced to a façade, an affront for private capitalist interests to preserve or expropriate resources and exploitable labor throughout the world to increase profit margins to ungodly heights. The War-on-Terror could only be engaged during postmodernity or during the stage of late capitalism.

The Bush administration, inbred with special interest groups and their corporate sponsorship, “has defined the parameters of the War on Terror […] to maximize its profitability and sustainability as a market—from the definition of the enemy to the rules of engagement to the ever-expanding scale of battle” (Klein, *Shock Doctrine* 379). Naomi Klein refers to the wide-scale privatization of the United States government and infrastructure as “Bush’s New Deal” that exclusively benefits “corporate America, a straight-up transfer of hundreds of billions of public dollars a year into private hands” (*Shock Doctrine* 376). The post-nation-state era has minimized the United States military to an auxiliary position (mall security whose primary objective has been reduced to protecting capital assets and market availability) at the behest of private for-profit corporations that monetarily influence political policy concerning war (among other monetary infringements on the democratic process), and soon thereafter, managing and operating the wars as a supra-national conglomerate (outside military legal liability or jurisdiction) and directly tied to those same corporations advocating for war from its inception. Furthermore, these “private companies put pressure on their own government to ensure that the troops stationed in these countries are assigned to protecting their interests” (Fanon, *Wretched
60). The United States government, in reality, is merely a liaison or broker between the unbeknownst public and various profit-first war-mongering corporations.

As a result, there is “a kind of McMilitary experience in which deploying abroad resembled a heavily armed and perilous package vacation” (Klein, *Shock Doctrine* 368). The *McMilitary experience* is symptomatic of capitalist pathological modes of operation, as well as its bilaterally produced cultural logic, in the same way that the prison-industrial complex is reflective of this same capitalist pathology. The prison-industrial complex, then, can be interpreted as the abused step-daughter of capitalist utopia projections of *McDisneyization*.35

Although this pathology is accelerated in late capitalism and postmodernity, its impetus is found in the Atlantic slave-trade, found in high capitalism/imperialism and modernity. Returning to Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*, more precisely, Gilroy’s assertion that the Atlantic slave-trade initiated Western modernity, that is to say “the intimate association of modernity and slavery as a fundamental conceptual issues” (53), as well as to refer back to C.L.R. James who states, it “was the capital gained from the slave which fertilized what became the industrial revolution (“Slave-Trade” 237), my contention is that the United States prison-industrial complex is the slave-trade reconstructed in postmodernity, a phenomenon which signals the effective end of the Atlantic as a recognizable physical, historical, and material space, replaced by an abstracted transit route in cyberspace.

Furthermore, according to C.L.R. James, “the resources which initiated and established this epoch-making change in human life resulted from the Atlantic slave-trade and the enslavement of Africans in the America” (“Slave-Trade” 237). In the same way early American industry is tied to the African slave-trade, prisons are directly tied to labor. Even as the new United States republic was being established, more precisely Jacksonian America, the “purpose
of the prison was to segregate the working class from the criminal element so as to make certain that lawlessness did not pervade the lower ranks” (Rothman 111). In other words, in order to maintain exploited wage laborers from radicalizing. The entertainment (cultural) industry in the twentieth-century and beyond will assume this role more efficiently, “for each of them is a model of the huge economic machinery which has always sustained the masses, whether at work or at leisure—which is akin to work” (Horkheimer and Adorno 127).

The point of contact and intercourse between the modern prison and American slavery can be pinpointed to the convict lease program, a precursor to the late 1900s and early 2000s race towards prison privatization. Despite the supposed freedom of emancipated slaves, the “convict lease system and the county chain gang,” nevertheless, defined “southern criminal justice as a means of controlling black labor” (Davis, “Super-Max” 67). Controlling the workforce and confining those in it to a disadvantageous station, Reagan in the 1980s effectively handicapped the workforce by way of anti-union government policies while, ironically enough, expanding the workforce to include the slave-labor of imprisoned inmates. One such campaign that wrapped itself in a self-righteous banner of “reform” and “rehabilitative work” was the “factories with fences” program that would hire (coerce more accurately) prisoners “to work at manufacturing jobs” on location, and consequently, businesses owning the means of production “would produce commodities at lower than normal wage rates” (Marable, Black America 127). The slave-labor force is restricted by fences, while the produced commodities are mobile and sociable.

The myth-building premised on prison rehabilitation and reform can be positioned under the corrections hegemony umbrella. The corrections hegemony includes state education that has come to mirror prisons themselves in terms of day-to-day institutionalizing operation, and the state education structure mirrors a corporate for-profit business model, as opposed to non-profit
public service (more so when considering nationwide corruption, embezzlement, and fraud across many United States public school districts). The United States public education system is now a premeditated investment program to produce perdurable prison populations.

The corrections hegemony paramnesia, especially in postmodernism, adduces the falsehood that prisons represent the continued history of benevolent public service. This self-perpetuating myth is why Factories with Fences will become Federal Prison Industries, Inc. (or UNICOR) whose mission statement is “to protect society and reduce crime by preparing inmates for successful reentry through job training” (UNICOR website). For the time being, let us put aside the daunting discrimination convicted felons must face at every stage of the job application process after release; for now, let us concentrate on the imprisoned slave-labor within so-to-speak factories with fences: the Federal Prison Industries (FPI) 2012 “year-in-review” summary shows that the FPI employs 13,369 inmates at a pay rate between 23 cents to $1.15 per hour throughout 81 factories nationwide (Clothing & Textiles, Fleet &Training Site Solutions, Electronics & Plastics, Industrial Products, Office Furniture, Recycling Activities, Collection Centers, and Services). In 2012, as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act, the mandatory minimum wage was $7.25 per hour (of course, service industry heads are, nevertheless, able to circumvent those supposed standards); therefore, at the highest pay-grade of $1.15 per hour per inmate, an inmate is paid about one-sixth of minimum wage! Subsequently, 2012 Net Sales equaled $606 Million dollars, and the distribution of revenue reads as such: “77% toward purchase of materials/supplies from private sector vendors, 20% for staff salaries, 3% for inmate pay—100% returned to the private sector” (Unicor website).

Nonetheless, any accomplished charlatan or capitalist predator will use misdirection, in this instance, casuistry guised as the corrections hegemony:
FPI is, first and foremost, a correctional program. The whole impetus behind FPI is not about business, but instead about inmate release preparation […] The production of items and provision of services are merely by-products of those efforts. (Unicor website)

Black labor-force exploitation in the United States begins with the African slave-trade, and its genealogy can now be found in late twentieth and early twenty-first-century supposed corrections programs like Factories with Fences and Federal Prison Industries Inc. (among other programs) that attempt to corroborate slave-labor as a patronizing necessity—much in the same way slaveocracy rhetoric professed the notion that slavery civilized African savages (savages somehow meant to benefit from decades of torture, rape, and mutilation).

What is unique to the postmodern late capitalist condition, relative to a continuum of American slavery via the United States prison-industrial complex, is the introduction of the private prison, for as Marx states, “Use-values must therefore never be looked upon as the real aim of the capitalist; neither must the profit on any single transaction. The restless never-ending process of profit-making alone is what he aims at” (Capital 98). The postmodern prisoner-slave is then forced to occupy a double space of exploited labor and commodity.

The private prison, which increasingly incudes immigrant detention centers, varies in degree as to involvement of private interests: in some instances, private companies build the prison and lease it to the government, others “are built and run by corporations quick to see an opportunity to establish themselves” in a “new field of enterprise,” while still other prisons remain owned by the government but subcontract the day-to-day operation of the prison to private companies (Morris 226). With that said, the number of privately built and privately run for-profit prisons has risen meteorically in a now thriving market and thereby thriving industry.
At a rate of four times the expansion of public prisons, private prison companies in the 1990s have “constructed approximately one hundred jails and prisons in which 50,000 inmates are incarcerated” (Davis, “Super-Max” 69). With the government paying “private companies a fee for each inmate,” an inevitable problem surfaces as “private companies have a stake in retaining prisoners as long as possible and in keeping their facilities filled” (69). The United States criminal justice system has been auctioned-off to private interests, and corollary to the Citizens United decision, the democratic process becomes a glorified bidding-war among moneyed special interests financially investing in future returns. Friedman free market capitalism has usurped the United States, and the post-nation-state is being fully realized.

Indicative of the postmodern post-nation-state world is that “of the top hundred economies, fifty-one are multinationals and only forty-nine are countries” (Klein, No Logo 340). The process of becoming a post-nation-state is exactly identical to restructuring companies as “hollow corporations” (Klein, No Logo xvii). As Naomi Klein concludes, the hollow corporation is a result of “a single idea—that corporations should produce brands, not products” (No Logo xvii); moreover, the George W. Bush administration “systematically” hollowed out the United States government, “handing over to the private sector many of the most essential functions of government, from protecting borders to responding to disasters to collecting intelligence” (xix). In this same vein, the modality of systematically selling the government over to private corporate interests has to all intents and purposes sold the judicial, criminal justice, and prison systems to the highest bidder.

The slave auction block has now gone digital. Exploitation of a prisoner-slave is no longer restricted to the bodily labor of the prisoner-slaver or the material commodities produced through slave-labor; rather, synchronized with postmodern late capitalist pathology, the prisoner-
slave is representative of future commodity—finance capital simultaneously imprisoned in the corporeal now *while* imprisoned in a projected speculative future. The slave auction block has transformed into the New York Stock Exchange, where prospected slaver owners can buy and sell digitally signified chattel that is readily moveable in cyberspace:

the buyer lays out money in order that, as a seller, he may recover money. By the purchase of his commodity he throws money into circulation, in order to withdraw it again by the sale of the same commodity. He lets the money go, but only with the sly intention of getting it back again. The money, therefore, is not spent, it is merely advanced. (Marx, *Capital* 95)

From the comfort of their home, digital plantation owners can buy stock in GEO Group (GEO) or Corrections Corporation of America (CXW), two of the largest private prison corporations.

A fundamental concept to establishing the United States prison-industrial complex as a postmodern construction is Ritzer’s and Liska’s discussion concerning the importance of the credit card, which “is clearly a revolutionary new means of consumption that has, in turn, revolutionized consumption in general” (105). In the past what would seem completely unrelated, credit cards and mass imprisonment, in the postmodern cultural logic of late capitalism are symptomatological, the two having congruous functionality in relation to globalization, consumer culture, and corporate capitalism. Conducive to reading the prison-industrial complex as a postmodern construction, we need to apply Jameson’s theories concerning finance capital, which he defines as the highest stage of capital:

Now this free-floating capital […] will begin to live its life in a new context; no longer in the factories and the spaces of extraction and production, but on the floor of the stock market […] finance capital is not only a kind of “highest stage”,

95
but the highest and last stage of every moment of capital itself, as in its cycles it exhausts its returns in the new nation and international capitalist zone, and seeks to die and be reborn in some “higher” incarnation. (Cultural Turn 142)

In the same way that the Atlantic slave-trade is the manifestation of capitalism and bilaterally representative of modernity, the prison-industrial complex is the manifestation of the highest/last stage of capital and bilaterally representative of postmodernity.

The United States prison-industrial complex, an updated formation of the Atlantic slave-trade reconstructed in postmodernity and travelled in cyberspace through the routes of finance capital, financial speculation, and the stock market, operates more efficiently than its predecessor by minimizing variables and maximizing profit. Fundamentally, this process is the selling of abstraction with the intent to produce material labor and capital in order for it to be sold into the market.

In postmodern United States consumer culture, technology strives to produce newer models at the fastest rate possible. For the prison-industrial complex, as a postmodern construction of the Atlantic slave-trade, rapidity is efficiency. In order to maximize profit generated from institutional slavery and slave exploitation, the criminal justice system improves on the slave-ship’s inefficient months long operation transporting slaves. Conviction rates transport prisoner-slaves in a more rapid and efficient manner. As African-Americans are continuously forced into spaces of social, political, and economic confinement, the continuous prisoner flow guarantees that court dockets remain booked—acting as a postmodern constructed slave-ship log—and considering the fallibility and inequality throughout the United States criminal justice system, guarantees that prisoner-slaves are continuously filling prisons and detention centers.
What follows then is an analysis of the highest stage of capital—finance capital, where the “operation is no longer on the commodity, but on money, and in which its impulse now lies in the investment of money in commodity production, not for its own sake, but to increase the return of [money]” (Jameson, *Cultural Turn* 152). The prison population represents that initial money, financial capital that is the product of taxpayer public funding, then once the enterprise is operating, it in turn encourages private investment by would-be share or stock holders, during which time the prison population is being outsourced, generating slave-labor and commodities for private corporations (and private military contractors and subcontractors) to exploit and sell at significantly inflated prices (resulting in almost absolute profit for independent corporations) to the public who will invest money back into the prison-industrial complex through taxes or private funds and/or purchase the goods produced by prisoner-slave labor, and so on and so on.

Projected stock worth in the future—speculation derived from calculating the need for and growth of prisons, jails, and detention centers, in effect opens a new avenue for exploitation by extracting an abstracted value per prisoner-slave in the future. Like the Tupac Shakur hologram re-cyclical exploitation on-demand, the exchange-value of a prisoner-slave implies both “a stripping away of the ‘exceptional’ quality of things in their transit from use values to exchange values, but […] an apocalyptic stripping away of the exceptional quality of persons in their transit from humanness to money” (Baucom 67). This capitalist induced living-dead state reflexively determines sociopolitical and civic forms of death. Abu-Jamal, a Black prisoner-slave writing from death row, (dis)embodies the ethereal and the corporeal, the *visible-invisible body*—both life and death. 37
Indeed, censorship is the offspring of a power relation, for the powerful have an intrinsic interest in silencing the expressions of discontent by the powerless […] the ultimate form of censorship—death! —Abu-Jamal

Don’t you know
They’re talkin bout a revolution
It sounds like a whisper —Tracy Chapman

Here in morgue-like holding pens of Pennsylvania’s penitentiaries, “life” literally sentences one to imprisonment for the length of one’s natural lifespan, with no possibility of parole. “Life” is thus but a grim metaphor for death, for only death releases one from its shackles. “Life,” it might be said, is merely slow death. —Abu-Jamal
Chapter 3

On Halloween 2010, the American Movie Classics channel debuted the television series *The Walking Dead* based on the Image Comics series. *The Walking Dead’s* success is not entirely due to novelty, however unique or ingenuous its creative direction may be; rather its success could be attributed to a US American cultural obsession with the living-dead. From the *Resident Evil* franchise, which originated in a video game format and was used as the source material for the *Resident Evil* movie series, to the reimaging of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*—as Seth Graham-Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, the living-dead have once again grasped the collective brains of American culture. The United States rekindling its love affair with zombies is a contemporary resurfacing of an ever-present and necessary psychosocial love affair between the United States’ democratic definitions and the sociopolitical walking dead, who, in their living-dead state, not only define democracy by what they are not and what they are limited from being, but as living-dead bodies they can be economically exploited by United States capitalism, serving a dual function of discursively forging the United States identity while sustaining the United States capitalist market economy.

The living-dead do not only imaginatively exist in created post-apocalyptic worlds, nor is the figure of the zombie exploitable solely on an imaginary plane; the living-dead also comprise marginalized persons who have been exploited for as long as United States democracy has been signed into existence. Built by the marginalized living-dead, the United States continues to produce a living-dead populace that is denied social and political recognition, which expels the living-dead populace from United States democracy, and once forced into dead space,
democracy’s discarded living-dead bodies are exploited by profiteering capitalist; bilaterally however, capitalism is empowered and embodied by politically recognized corporate personhood. The contrariety between United States recognized corporate personhood and United States non-recognized human personhood is found in the systemic operation of the United States capitalist market operating in conjunction with the criminal justice system and the state/federal corrections and detention system, constituting what is referred to as the prison-industrial complex.

As a way of preserving White dominant culture in the United States, the prison-industrial complex functions as a psychosocial racial control mechanism. By forcing persons of color into prisons and immigrant detention centers, White dominant culture reduces people of color into non-persons—the social and political walking dead—forced into spaces where they can be stripped of and denied representation in mass numbers; through this figurative collective assassination, and in certain instances literal assassination, the mass walking dead are silenced, leaving voiceless predominantly non-White bodies to be punished and exploited by capitalist industry. The focus of this chapter is first, to read prisons and immigrant detention centers as dead space, where predominantly non-White, non-normative persons are forced to become the dead United States citizenry, and second, to read prisoner-slave narratives as a marginal space where the dead can talk back, where the dead pronounce their voice, and where the dead challenge and critique White dominant culture and capitalism in the United States.

In “Isolation,” the third episode of The Walking Dead in season four, after a fatal virus has disseminated amongst the group who have appropriated a prison compound; ironically enough, a prison compound is a place providing security and life in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. However, even then, those infected with the deadly virus are moved into Cellblock A—
quarantined in death row. Even in the post-apocalyptic zombified American South, death row remains a space for those *teetering on the brink between life and death*.

Upon receiving the PEN Oakland Censorship Award in 1999, along with awardee Gary Webb, Mumia Abu-Jamal accepted the award “in the spirit in which *Live from Death Row* was written, on behalf of the damned and the oppressed” (Abu-Jamal, *Censored* 126). However, as retaliation for the publication of *Life from Death Row*, Pennsylvania officials charged Abu-Jamal “with violating rules against operating a business or profession—the profession of Journalism” (*Censored* 126). Not coincidentally, forced labor extracted from incarcerated bodies can generated profit for business and private sector professionals, with government subsidies to assist no less, and yet, incarcerated individual bodies are reprimanded for creatively articulating their prison experience in publication form.

Abu-Jamal notes during his hearing for said violation that the hearing examiner rejected Abu-Jamal’s claim to having his First Amendment rights violated; in her estimation, Abu-Jamal’s violation “had nothing to do with rights” (*Censored* 127). An issue of importance, with symbolic significance, is the manner in which the prison official, who convicted and sentenced Abu-Jamal to “thirty days in the hole,” spelled *rights* as “r-i-t-e-s” (*Censored* 127). Abu-Jamal interprets this as more than a typo or spelling error: “See, for them, and indeed for most folks in America, the First Amendment is a rite […] a relic […] to which we give the empty ritual of lip service” (*Censored* 127); for Abu-Jamal, *Life from Death Row* “challenged that lie, and proved that a right ain’t a right if one can be punished for exercising it” (*Censored* 127). The mass incarcerated populace should labor in silence, represent finance capital without question, and acquiesce to oppressive State powers—but, Abu-Jamal challenges this lie and helps to amplify the voice of the systematically silenced voiceless, for “there was not silence but the cacophony of
chaos—the rage of people entombed in a torture chamber, and the bellows of madness” (Censored 127). Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative continued to evolve into *Death Blossoms: Reflections from a Prisoner of Conscience*, where the reader is thrust into the psychic mindscape of a Black prisoner-slave’s interiority; vexed and volatile, *Death Blossoms* is an a-local narrative traveling beyond the mappable world, or rather, is a narrative traversed across that space—*teetering on the brink between life and death*—that every slave is forced into by ever-evolving multifaceted slaveocracies.

In a 1996 interview, Abu-Jamal tells Allen Hougland that the “reality is that my book [*Live from Death Row*] is a toned-down, stripped, barebones, objective version of reality […] of what I’ve seen, what I’ve smelt, the bodies […] If I wrote pure stream of consciousness, no publisher would publish it, and any reader would say it’s fiction” (*Death Blossoms* 149). Although Abu-Jamal’s follow-up to *Live from Death Row* is not exclusively stream of conscience, *Death Blossoms* embraces a more creative postmodern presentation.

Abu-Jamal’s dedication “To those who come before/To those who are to come/I dedicate this shield,” suggests that *Death Blossoms*’s creative thematization begins where the most experimental sketch in *Live from Death Row* ends; more precisely, the final sketch at the end of his first postmodern Neo-slave narrative—“Philly Daze”—showcases Abu-Jamal’s narrative as trans-temporal, as well as, expressly showcasing Abu-Jamal’s bi-local disembodied embodiment, and ultimately ends with Abu-Jamal “en route […] presumably on the way to die” (*Death Row* 165). This final entry in *Live from Death Row* is date-less, seemingly a moment that is perpetually (re)lived by Abu-Jamal—the night of his arrest.

Where the traditional slave narrative ends from the narrator’s achieved or positioned state of relative freedom, *Live from Death Row* concludes with Abu-Jamal on his way to die—towards
a state of enslaved slow death. What the reader discovers in *Death Blossoms* is that Abu-Jamal is in Phase II, which is death row within death row as determined by the state officially setting a date for execution. With a date to die, Abu-Jamal comes to embody living-death, and to his credit and devotion to revolution, readers are allowed a glimpse into the netherworld buried beneath citadels fortifying United States capitalism and racist ideologies.

*Death Blossoms* begins with “A Write-up for Writing,” which is the detailed account Abu-Jamal refers to in his PEN award acceptance speech. Abu-Jamal declares that “[c]learly, what the government wants is not just death, but silence. A ‘correct’ inmate is a silent one” (*Death Blossoms* 1). A graphic print of Mumia Abu-Jamal’s signature cuts across pages 2 and 3, defiantly signing the opening section of *Death Blossoms*, which potentially will illicit the same reactionary reprimand, and thereby consequently—another write-up for writing. Abu-Jamal concludes by proclaiming as much: “—but I’ve kept right on writing. You keep right on reading!” (*Death Blossoms* 3). We become coconspirators: 38 by reading Abu-Jamal’s words that are equated to contraband by prison administration officials, the reader enters into intellectual conspiracy alongside Abu-Jamal. The payment is thus made, but not in coin, the reader pays with a part of oneself, and Abu-Jamal is ready to traffic the reader momentarily into the turbulent psychic hellscape—in through the consciousness of a Black prisoner-slave. *Death Blossoms* then becomes a challenge against pseudo-scientific and/or Christian claims presuming that Black slaves are sentient at best but, without question, lack interiority—*Death Blossoms* is an exercise in establishing interiority within a greater collective subjectivity.

*Death Blossoms* does not adhere to a strict structural presentation and rarely is it circumscribed to specific dates; however, this is not to suggest formlessness, but rather, that the structure of Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative is not based on chronological
storytelling or even plot-driving narrative. *Death Blossoms* utilizes short essays, vignettes, sketches, poetry (“Miracles” and “Untitled”), and—unique to the postmodern Neo-slave narrative—graphics that become artistic instillations embedded throughout the text, not so much as supplementary photographs or drawings to lend visual aids, but more so, as artistic pieces that, although provide supplementary support, are artistic pieces in themselves and help contextualize additional commentaries on theme and concept. *Death Blossoms* is a postmodern Neo-slave narrative, because the form is as much the narrative as the narrative storytelling of Abu-Jamal is slave narrative. *Death Blossoms* incorporates postmodern storytelling by utilizing postmodern presentational aesthetics and mix-media.

Abu-Jamal is even able to move beyond the prison walls, presenting “Men of the Cloth” as a playwright: “The scene: a man, middle-aged bearded, booted and blue-jeaned is called to the back door by the leader of a small group from a nearby church” (*Death Blossoms* 69). The “scene” continues as the preacher man, in fine clothes and hair “pomaded,” refuses to kneel in the mud on the earth with the man with “rough” and “uncombed” hair in a T-shirt (*Death Blossoms* 69). On display is the interplay between narrative and narrativity as Pam Africa “tells the true tale of a meeting,” which Abu-Jamal then re-articulates and presents in play-form within his postmodern Neo-slave narrative.

Genre-meshing is one aspect, but in addition, and like Jean-Michel Basquiat’s language based visual art, Abu-Jamal interweaves graphic and text to present an aesthetically postmodern Neo-slave narrative. The comic book, for instance, is a precisely postmodern text. As Greg Hayman and Henry John Pratt examine in “What Are Comics?,” one definition of the comic is the *pictorial narrative definition*. According to Hayman and Pratt, comics are differentiated
from illustrated novels, because the image in an illustrated novel “has the effect of breaking up the textual narrative” (421); whereas, the comic is premised on the “notion of juxtaposition”:

In comics, the visual images are distinct, (paradigmatically) side-by-side, and laid out in a way such that they could conceivably be seen all at once […] The process of closure in comics is unique to them […] panels are placed next to each other in a way that is spatial, not temporal. (423)


“Isn’t It Odd?”—a reflection on Christendom, underlines Jesus Christ as a “prisoner of Roman power, an inmate on the empire’s death row” (Death Blossoms 39). Abu-Jamal questions the sincerity of Christians that worship a “tortured, humiliated, beaten, and crucified” prisoner, while simultaneously supporting a system advocating the state-sanctioned executions of “imprisoned citizens” (Death Blossoms 39). The title “Isn’t It Odd?” is printed in bold black lettering that is equal in tone to a drawing by D. Klein that works as a graphic insert composing about the bottom quarter of the page: the drawing of a crown-of-thorns has a direct symbolic relation to Christ’s crucifixion, but at another level, the crown-of-thorns, in terms of this composition specifically, symbolizes the contradictory, yet intertwined, nature of Christendom that Abu-Jamal scrutinizes in his reflection. The sharp uniform thorns shoot-out in short straight directions, while the thorn branch is a singular arabesque knot in a looping motion set at a horizontal axis.
“Holiday Thoughts” is one of only two entries that feature a black page with white lettering. The contrast between light and dark reinforces Abu-Jamal’s thoughts on the Christmas season, or “a time of utter hypocrisy,” as celebrated in the West versus the material reality of “many millions mired in poverty” (*Death Blossoms* 110). The page is laid-out in an asymmetrical composition with a slightly diagonal line dividing a photograph on the left and text on the right. The photograph is of a seemingly malnourished youth, a frail frame being supported by a doorway wall and weighed-down by a lantern in one hand. The backlight from the outside of the doorway shadows and obscures the youth’s face, suggesting that this youth is any and all of “those many millions mired in poverty.” Because of its slight slant, the subtle diagonal of the opposing doorway wall—which doubles as a divider between photo and text—empresses an unsettling feeling that makes the eye and the reader unsettled and dis-comfortable. Abu-Jamal’s words juxtapose the portrayed frail framed and faceless youth against the millions that fill the “tills of the merchants”: “The faceless millions sing of cheer and charity, but I, who sit among the hopeless and the living dead, among those who populate your prisons and dungeons of death, see neither cheer nor charity, but rather falseness, gaudiness, and empty flash” (110). Like the living-dead state of Abu-Jamal’s imprisonment, within a capitalist ideological and eco-political world dominant, poverty is itself a living-dead state that determines social status, political power, and more fundamentally, the everyday health of one’s body.

Capitalism, as an American cultural dominant, is the premise of Abu-Jamal’s mini-essay “Material Life.” Behind the first paragraph, a phantom image of a United States quarter is positioned as an artistic commentary on a central theme throughout *Death Blossoms*: the blood, cunning, and magic of American Christianity masking material reality in the wake of capitalist greed and exploitation. The United States quarter hovers at the top-left corner, magnified to
about double its actual physical size; however, what is most significant is what is absent and what is superimposed on the phantom image. In the United States—“in the cradle of global capital power”—Abu-Jamal states, “America exists in a virtual sea of materialism. Here, one sees material excess in the midst of utter poverty” (*Death Blossoms* 32). These are the first two sentences in the first paragraph, wherein the background the magnified image of the quarter is placed; this placement could be read as a caption to the artistic presentation of the imaged quarter. Significantly, what is absent, or cropped, is the word *Liberty* arched across the top of a minted quarter; while the magnification forces the page to crop *Liberty*, the magnification emphasizes the phrase *In God We Trust*, which then rivals the opposing textual paragraph. The title “Material Life” is a rectangular black-box with white lettering, superimposed over the eyes of the relief George Washington profile. What the first US president sees, what we see is a virtual “sea of materialism.” Playing-off of optics, “one sees material excess in the midst of utter poverty” (32 emphasis added). Like the representative figurehead of George Washington, material life is superimposed over our sight—we only see capitalism’s materialistic excess and remain blind to the material conditions of utter poverty.

There are more emphatic and overt artistic graphic displays. The graphic composition of “Imprisonment” positions the title IMPRISONMENT, in bold all capital letters of identical dimension, flanked by black rectangular blocks on either side of the title running horizontally just below the center-line. Floating vertically upward, in varied tone and dimensional lettering, the words “Justice,” “Brotherhood,” “Liberation,” “Freedom of Spirit,” and “We reach beyond” stretch and bend across the open space of the page and away from the comparatively grounded Imprisonment block (*Death Blossoms* 43).
One of the more suggestive text/graphic presentations can be viewed in “Human Beings.” Here, Abu-Jamal humanizes “guards” and “cops” as part of the labor-force despite working directly for the oppressive United States criminal justice system: “doing their job simply because they need the money […] they need money to pay rent, put bread on the table, provide an education for their children” (Death Blossoms 76). At the bottom of the page, a pair of handcuffs; one cuff open—but not broken, instead, the cuff is unlocked by key. This photograph lays below the text, positioned as a visual afterthought to Abu-Jamal reminding the reader that “the system is not a true reality, but an idea which can be fought and dismantled […] We must transform the system” (Death Blossoms 76). The piece moves from painting workers to the system as pawns in a false reality and concludes by using an oblique we as needing to transform this vicious system of oppression; the unlocked, via key, cuff is a suggestive image provoking a more absolute annihilation of the system.

Other graphics are simply allegory running parallel to Abu-Jamal’s narrative. Abu-Jamal turns to memoir in “The Search”; divided into four sections chronicling Abu-Jamal’s spiritual search for “answers to basic questions—What is Life? Who is God? Why?” (Death Blossoms 11). Each section represents an episode in Abu-Jamal’s life encounters with religion: “Mama’s Baptist church” and “Dad’s Episcopalianism” (14), Judaism, Catholicism, and Islam (Black Nationalism). From where the title “The Search” is positioned, an archer-figure splits the letters “e” and “a” in “Search” to introduce the figure upon reading the title; as the eye moves left to right, the composition forces the eye movement to perceive the subsequent four archer-figures as a single archer in motion, leaping across the page-beak border onto the following page. As the reader continues, the following sections fashion religious iconography to mark each section. On the last page of “The Search,” the archer-figure returns, in a two-part movement at
the bottom-right corner bleeding into what could be described as the following panel—in this case, the following entry, “Thoughts on the Divine.” This reflection is then conceptually buttressed by an image of a circular spiral—or archery target. Like the crown-of-thorns drawing, the circular spiral works on several levels. Abu-Jamal closes his reflection, in bold lettering, “GOD IS ONE” (27). The circular spiral represents a targeted point of destination upon searching, and in addition, represents the oneness of God, in terms of interpreting the natural world as composed of spirals, as opposed to an increasingly postmodern spatiality of rigid geometrically sound de-naturalized urban cityscapes.

The conflict between nature and postmodern second nature is a central theme in “The Spider.” Abu-Jamal’s narrativity constructs a modern parable through the use of “Ancient African and West Indian folklore” within his narrative (Death Blossoms 78). In other words, Abu-Jamal contemporizes a “famous Ghanian tale,” while the traditional referent is transposed to a contemporary super-max prison (77). Despite spatial alienation as the result of prison architecture—despite postmodernity de-naturalizing space—a spider spins her web within a death row prison cell: Norman called, “in a deep stage-whisper,” to “Mu,” in a “voice heavy and strangely conspiratorial,” and tells Mu about a “mama spider” that was making her home in Norman’s cell—“out of her own body!” (Death Blossoms 77-78). Abu-Jamal discerns the ubiquitous predominance of nature even within spatially constructed de-naturalizing uniformity: “With a quiet, unwitting bravado that defied the State’s most stringent efforts to quarantine [Norman], spiders had moved in and built webs in the dark corner under his sink” (77). In an interlude, Abu-Jamal tells the tale of Anansi, wherein the “spider whispers, ‘It is I, Anansi’” to an antelope (78). Like with the antelope, Anansi (Nature) does not forget Norman, and in “a concrete tomb erected to smother men to death, she was a tiny marvelous reflection of life […]
Nature amid the unnatural” (78-80). “The Spider” could be considered the most interactive graphic display in *Death Blossoms*.

Similar to the archer-figure bleeding into the following page, a graphic of a spider (about proportionate scale to any small spider) is just off the final sentences of the page at the page’s bottom right corner. The tiny spider graphic then becomes a subjective long shot bleeding into the subsequent page—which when turned—becomes a subjective extreme close-up as the exact graphic is magnified to a double-page spread. We then become Norman “who spent hours watching” (77). We take on his perspective, catch sight of a tiny spider, and then proceed to move-in closer to admire Anansi as she spins a home out of her own body from her “miraculous silken thread” (77). As Abu-Jamal closes with the sentence “Nature amid the unnatural,” a picture of a leaf overlaps the page break, and thus breaking the border between “The Spider” and “The Fall.” Not only does the picture visually pop by breaking the border, it locks the two entries together, informing one another. “The Fall” then describes how the “earth like an old woman, prepares for death” as all “the markers of death gather around her like a storm” (*Death Blossoms* 81); however, beneath that “fallowed earth lies a mighty heart athrob with life; that life lives within life, and goes forever on” (81). In the same way Anansi as nature challenges postmodern second nature, Abu-Jamal must challenge state-sanctioned death by reaffirming life within a space of slow death.

Abu-Jamal prolongs life through symbiotic simulation: the content and presentation of *Death Blossoms* is an exercise in meditation. *Death Blossoms* simulates prolonging life by slowing down living by way of art as device. The reader must meditate on Abu-Jamal’s reflections and is forced to look deeper and engage this postmodern Neo-slave narrative at a more cerebral level; it holds us, making it uncomfortable for the reader expecting a plot-driven
narrative with a satisfactory conclusion—not with Abu-Jamal’s *Death Blossoms*. Abu-Jamal upsets any predisposed expectations an audience—more comfortable with a story of escape—would have about slave narratives. The past is the present, as Abu-Jamal re-articulates slavery and disturbs a United States post-racial mind-set that is comfortably situated in the twenty-first-century, psychosocially far removed from the increasingly de-historicized United States (American) involvement in the Atlantic slave-trade and institutional slavery.

The mini-essay “Christian? Christ-like?” confronts Christian religious ideology in theory and its sociocultural and political ideology in practice as applied to the Atlantic slave-trade; essentially, Christianity “became cultural shorthand for the status quo, the existing system of naked, raced-based oppression” (*Death Blossoms* 45). Abu-Jamal initiates by citing an excerpt from *Statues at Large of Virginia, Act III* (1667), concerning the question of a slave’s status after baptism; ultimately, the judgment follows “that baptism does not alter the conditions of the person as to his bondage or freedom” (44). The rhetorical use of Christianity allowed the establishment to defer a slave’s freedom and inclusionary status until the glorified afterlife. This sociocultural perception is not exclusive to early colonial America, but rather, in contemporary United States, in the name of Christ “they go on fighting wars of avarice, campaigns of greed, legalized land-theft, and regulated robbery (52). The cultural logic, as determined by the slave-trade, and thereby plantation slaveocracies, therefore validates the exchange of appraisable colored non-persons as commodities within a capitalist system of oppression. It is a cultural logic of capitalism that superimposes abstract Christian ideology to mask the material realities of abject abuse and exploitation. Generally, there is a sociocultural predisposition to mystify capital, to the extent that *The Market* necessitates divine preordain power and purity. The free
market signifies unadulterated purity and infinite predetermination. In other words, one should bow to capital and passively await its grace, should one be worthy enough to receive it.

According to Jacques Derrida, “the origin of exchange-value is the birth of capital. Of mysticism and the secret” (184). More generally, Derrida states that “Humanity is but a collection or series of ghosts” (172). Derrida makes this statement in accord with a discussion on a “history of ghosts,” wherein Marx uses Feuerbach’s “ordinary theology” and “speculative theology” to explain it (183). Derrida reconciles these two specific theorized types of theologies to conceptualize what he terms sensuous-non-sensuous. Derrida continues by describing how ghosts are thereby produced through the “incarnation of spirit” (158). Where Derrida complicates this sociocultural phenomenon is by advancing Marx’s theoretical framework and illustrations of exchange-value and commodity mysticism.

With abstract equivalency and exchange-value facilitating social relations between the labor of individuals and those that control the labor of others, and more importantly, facilitating the social relationship between products and the values assigned to those products, a “commodity is therefore a mysterious thing” (Marx, Capital 43). Because of the social relationality of exchange-value, as Marx determines, use-value, at best, increasingly becomes incidental. If we think about the New York Stock Exchange, materially there is no practical use-value for any stock—rather the stock is the representation of money or future monies that are trans-temporal and immaterial. This is hyper-realized in postmodernity; however, these basic principles are based on commodities altering the perceivable material and natural world.

The example used first by Marx then advanced by Derrida is of the wooden table that “continues to be that common every-day thing, wood”; however, because social relations and exchange-value, “so soon as [the wooden table] steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into
something transcendent” (Marx, *Capital* 42). With this in mind, Derrida suggests to see what is not seen; in other words, while seeing the table as a wooden table derived from nature with the use-value of being a table to be used, one must simultaneously see that this wooden table has an inseparable abstract form within and without the materiality of the would-be-used wooden table: “So as to prepare us to see this invisibility, to see without seeing, thus to think the body without body of this invisible-visibility—the ghost is already taking shape” (Derrida 187). Social relations then dictate that, socio-culturally, the commodity is the abstracting exchange-value corporealized in a state of materialized de-materialization. 42

Returning to Derrida’s notion that “Humanity is but a collection or series of ghosts,” I would proposition that some are more ghostlike than others, when considering commodity’s ghostlike visible-invisibility—or abstracted corporeality. The theorized ghost image evokes a literal and consequently gruesome response when applying Derrida’s framework to the commodity sale of Africans throughout and across the Atlantic and African/African-Americans within United States instituted slavery. Derrida’s framework reveals this phenomenon when applied to a reading of Harriet Jacobs’s nineteenth-century slave narrative.

In Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Dr. Flint posts “the following advertisement” in search of his runaway slave Linda Brent (Harriet Jacobs):

$300 Reward! Five feet four inches high. Dark eyes, and black hair inclined to curl; but it can be made straight […] All persons are forbidden under penalty of law to harbor or employ said slave. $150 will be given to whoever takes her in the state, and $300 if taken out of the state and delivered to me, or lodged in jail. (242) 43
Contextually, this instance demonstrates what in postmodernity is the eventual collapse of private and public space on top one another as the result of private advertising on public space—“posted at every corner, and in every public place for miles round” (242); but more directly correlated to Derrida’s concept of commodity’s visible-invisibility, Jacobs is the abstract equivalent to three-hundred US dollars—*the ghost is already taking shape*.

Obviously, there are practical reasons for Dr. Flint to physically describe Jacobs, but this is symptomatic of capitalist sociocultural logic and is only the affirmation of the reification and commodification of Jacobs, so that within this one advertisement, Jacobs is compressed into a body with abstracted exchange-value. Jacobs is sensuous-non-sensuous—both a dark eyed girl and, depending on where her five-foot-four frame is hiding, the exchange-value of one-hundred and fifty US dollars or three-hundred US dollars. For Dr. Flint, this is a property issue, as well as, an interstate commerce issue.

Whereas the wooden table, “the ordinary, sensuous thing is transfigured, it becomes someone, it assumes a figure” (Derrida 188), the process is inverted for African/African-American slaves, who even though have a figure, have reification and commodification forced onto them, forcing them into non-person status. There is direct similitude between the spectral wooden table and Jacobs’s daughter: upon learning that Mr. Sands has sent Ellen away, Mrs. Flint “pronounced” to Mrs. Sand’s sister that it was “just as much stealing as it would be for him to come and take a piece of furniture out of her parlor […] the children were her property” (Jacobs 295). Social relations within this slaveocracy determine the perception with which Mrs. Flint (among most, more generally) perceives a Black child to be the abstract equivalent to antebellum parlor furniture. Mrs. Flint only sees the embodied spectrality of *her* property’s exchange-value.
In opposition to this divisive capitalist sociocultural logic, Jacobs parries an argument that substantiates the exploited, labored, and brutalized bodies of slaves charged against the ideological promise of United Stats democracy and utopic capitalism. The death of Jacobs’s father is a critical point, early in her narrative, that informs her critique of bodily reductionism versus embodied significance found throughout her narrative. Jacobs rejects the master-class’s capitalist sociocultural and political logic within which a slave’s labored body is simultaneously commodity with the abstracted equivalency to property. Jacobs continually emphasizes death, using it as a counter-argument to dismantle abstract equivalent notions that perceive persons relative to price and property exchange-value alone.

Jacobs describes burying “a dear little friend,” and hearing her little friend’s “mother sob” as Jacobs “turns away from the grave” (137). Soon thereafter, Jacobs is told by her grandmother that Jacobs’s father has died. Despite thinking she “should be allowed” to visit her “father’s house the next morning,” Jacobs is instead “ordered to go for flowers” so that her “mistress’s house might be decorated for an evening party” (137). At the crux of this incident is the chasm between the privileged master-class and the Black slave-class, where the privileged class is ignorant to the irony of ordering Jacobs to collect flowers—not for ritualistic and intimate honoring of the dead—but rather, for vainglorious socialite convention. The sardonic irony, however, is not lost on Jacobs: “I spent the day gathering flowers and weaving them into festoons, while the dead body of my father was lying within a mile of me. What cared my owners for that? he was merely a piece of property” (137). To the capitalist master-class, Jacobs’s father is worth only what his slave-labor can produce and his net-worth after purchasable exchange.
Contrary to this capitalist logic, and anticipating Abu-Jamal’s efforts, Jacobs recuperates the dead to challenge the capitalist system of oppression, re-appropriating dead space to revitalize slaves both dead and those living-dead. Jacobs supplants her master’s evening party by, however delayed, performing in the burial ritual of her father: “The next day I followed his remains to a humble grave beside that of my dear mother. There were those who knew my father’s worth, and respected his memory” (137). Jacobs revaluates her father but counter to the capitalist logic of commodity/capital monetary exchange-value; Jacobs instead injects memory in re-historicizing her father, and in respect to memory that exists outside of price-points and market determination, Jacobs makes exclusive, private, and intimate her father’s worth known only by those select few and not based on more general social relations that calculate exchange-value to determine abstract equivalency.

Negotiating living-dead space is, nevertheless, a struggle for Jacobs. Considering extenuating circumstance the consequence of slavery and its “poisonous fangs,” Jacobs “could never forget” that her infant son “was a slave” (201); as such, Jacobs admits that she had “wished that he might die in infancy” (201). The living-dead space Jacobs occupies and re-appropriates can, in addition, leave her vulnerable to a rejection of life and movement towards embracing death: “I now prayed for his life […] Alas, what a mockery it is for a slave mother to try to pray back her dying child to life! Death is better than slavery” (201). Ultimately, her son, Benny, is nursed back to health only to enter legal complications concerning inherent property rights. Even though Jacobs is “sad” to think she “had no name to give” her child, her decision as to what name to give her child then becomes a prototypical instantiation of what in postmodernity inflated into corporate-sponsorship and mass corporate branding. Naming then becomes a property legal issue, which could have criminal consequences depending on who has legal claim
to her child. Fundamentally, naming, like postmodern mass branding, is instantaneously abstract equivalency, not only from a one-to-one exchange-value determination, but by virtue of naming, a slave-child becomes abstract equivalent to its associated master’s name—or brand. However, even abstract equivalency can be ruptured from within by those that are perceived through a lens of capitalist logic as commodity—as having visible-invisibility.

Jacobs’s use of the paranormal and supernatural in the background of her narrative, not only bolsters gothic elements to heighten her narrative of “the poor captive in her dungeon” (286), but it is precisely her use of death and revenance that converts commodity mysticism into phantasmic haunting. For example, Mr. Litch, an especially sadistic planter, whose last words were, “I am going to hell; bury my money with me” (182), is a slave-master that is an institution onto himself. Mr. Litch had wealth enough to operate above the law, having his own “jail and whipping post on his grounds” (181). Jacobs goes on to describe the “interment” of two slaves Mr. Litch clubbed to death as that of a “dog’s burial”; moreover, murder “was so common on his plantation that he feared to be alone after nightfall. He might have believed in ghosts” (182). A character like Mr. Litch that has fetishized money, so much so, that he would seek to have capitalist mysticism follow him into hell, must be the very same character that fetishizes the commodified Black body of the slaves he tortures; as such, “[v]arious were the punishments resorted to” (181). However, once Mr. Litch no longer possesses power over corporeal labored bodies, Mr. Litch becomes threatened by Black slave disembodiment. Despite being an institution onto himself, Mr. Litch, and his capitalist logic which perceives Black slaves as commodity with inherent exchange-value, is disorientated by the specters of slaves he has murdered: the ghosts that haunt Mr. Litch are the revenants of those murdered slaves, disrupting the comfortable social relationality of the capitalist market.
In parallel effect, Jacobs specifically attacks utopic notions of slavery—capitalism—notably in “Fear of Insurrection”: “Not far from this time Nat Turner’s insurrection broke out; and the news threw our town into great commotion. Strange that they should be alarmed, when their slaves were so ‘contented and happy’! But so it was” (202). Throughout Jacobs’s narrative, dead slave bodies provide a constant challenge to utopic interpretations of slavery and capitalism; but one figure becomes hyper-phantasmic turning commodity mysticism into revolutionary agency—Nat Turner. Black slaves are in a complex position; in that, they occupy a double-placement as commodity while labor. As Derrida explains, the commodity—the sensuous-non-sensuous “Thing”—is the “contradiction of automatic autonomy, mechanical freedom, technical life […] a stiff and mechanical doll whose dance obeys the technical rigidity of a program” (192); so although capitalist sociocultural logic has produced commodity mysticism by way of exchange-value, that mystical commodity is nevertheless an “automaton” that “mimes the living. The thing is neither dead nor alive, it is dead and alive at the same time” (192). The capitalist slaveocracy, therefore, has no obligation to respect or acknowledge the sovereignty of a commodified automaton that is devoid of interiority, because the slavish “artifactual body” is in a state of living-death and must always obey the “technical rigidity of a program” (192). However, in the case of Nat Turner, when that already phantasmatized commodity exercises agency and attempts to discomfit the establishment, that phantasmatized commodity becomes a terrorizing poltergeist.

Turner turns commodity mysticism against itself in the form of abstract terror. The darkness then becomes especially threatening while Turner escapes capture; it is not until the “capture of Turner” that the “wrath of the slaveholders was somewhat appeased” (207). When the power-structure regains control over Turner’s Black body, its ability to subject Turner to
physical mutilation as punishment \textsuperscript{46} serves as a collective catharsis \textsuperscript{47} to mollify collective anxieties and reestablish the capitalistic sociocultural norm. Dr. Flint characterizes these capitalistic sociocultural anxieties when Jacobs exercises her agency; Jacobs, like the figure of Turner, re-appropriates darkness and is able to gain mobility by accessing margins. Even before Jacobs’s enters her “prison,” alone in her “cell, where no eye but God’s could see her” (286), Jacobs gains accessibility by effectively de-materializing—appropriating spectrality—despite remaining bodily: “For there to be a ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstracted than ever” (Derrida 157). Using visible-invisibility, Jacobs becomes a ghost-figure that possesses person and space—disembodied embodiment.

Concealment and the night are important practical and elemental tropes throughout Jacobs’s narrative. For example, Jacobs and her grandmother visit Benjamin in jail at “midnight” in “disguise” (152); in “The Flight,” Jacobs escapes at “half past twelve” and describes the night as “so intensely dark” that the “darkness bewildered” her (240). Even though Jacobs is initially bewildered by intense darkness, she becomes more amerced in darkness and is aided by it. As Jacobs moves from one hiding place to another, using the local swamps at one point, she even adopts the marginal space of \textit{gender-bending} by cross-dressing herself in “sailor’s clothes” and performing a “rickety” sailor walk (259). As a Black female slave, over-sexualized in the eyes of her slave-master Dr. Flint, Jacobs finds relief from any threat to her female slave body, even if just momentarily, by defusing the psychosocial hyper-sexualization of Black female slaves to the point that the “father” of her “children came so near that” she “brushed against his arm; but he had no idea who” she was (261). Jacobs avails herself of night, darkness, and the margins of normativity to enact mobility.
Jacobs’s dematerialization and manipulation of spatiality facilitates a spectral gaze: “in order to inhabit even where one is not, to haunt all places at the same time, to be atopic (mad and non-localizable) not only is it necessary to see from behind the visor, to see without being seen by whoever makes himself or herself seen (me, us), it is also necessary to speak. And to hear voices” (Derrida 168-169). Spectrality becomes advantageous for Jacobs; her non-localization conjuring trickery deceives Dr. Flint as it preserves bodily wellbeing and creates corporeal liberation: “in order to make him believe that I was in New York, I resolved to write him a letter dated from that place” (279); another letter “that fell into his hands, was dated from Canada” (296). Jacobs’s spatial multiplicity and spectrality directly “enabled” her “to slip down into the storeroom more frequently” where she “could stand upright, and mover her libs more freely” now that Dr. Flint “seldom spoke” of her, due to Dr. Flint’s inability to physically locate and re-enslave Jacobs (296).

Resulting from this additional freedom through mobility, Jacobs is able to arrange a night meeting with her daughter Ellen, before Ellen is sent away. Like the importance Jacobs places on her father’s memory, Jacobs had “a great desire” that Ellen “should look upon her” so that Ellen “might take” Jacobs’s “image with her in her memory” (292). In order to spare Ellen from seeing the “wretched hiding-place” and having to be brought to Jacobs’s “dungeon,” Jacobs arranges to meet in the increasingly available storeroom (292). After having “slipped through a trap-door,” Jacobs expresses wanting “to see her and talk with her, that she might remember” Jacobs (293). It is in the darkness of night, and in the secrecy of intimate knowledge that Ellen is capable of seeing the apparition of her mother—a specter—a bodily abstraction. In effect, Jacobs is a supernatural specter, and because of Ellen’s innate connection to her mother, Ellen
has intimate and privileged knowledge about Jacobs’s secret; therefore, Ellen, within this space, can converse with the dead—with the bodily apparition of Jacobs, a slave.

This becomes a dilemma with regards to visible-invisibility; the reason for this is that Jacobs’s elusiveness must always be cautious of her slave-status as laboring commodity. In other words, Jacobs must remain a shadow and not allow her re-appropriation of visible-invisibility to revert back to commodity exchange-value or monetary based abstract equivalency. It is a crisis for Jacobs who seeks to be a reverent image in the memory of Ellen without surrendering her concealment and re-endangering her body as she evades re-enslavement: “I took her in my arms and told her I was a slave, and that was the reason she must never say she had seen me” (294). Because Jacobs is a slave—a sensuous-non-sensuous commodity—her exchange-value, her visible-invisibility, must not be re-seen by the master-class of the capitalist power-structure. With that consideration, Jacobs must remain physically confined to a “garret” of “only nine feet long and seven wide” with no “admission for either light or air” (262).

However physically constrained, Jacobs retains agency and affirms a delocalized and theoretical mobility. As Michelle Burnham asserts, Jacobs’s “‘loophole of retreat’ thus provides a strategic site for concealment even as it masks its own location” (149); Burnham continues: “This spatial loophole becomes […] a means of escape from slavery […] her manipulation of textual loopholes in dominate discourse allows her narrative to escape” (149). Notwithstanding a “wretched hiding-place” with “no room to toss and turn” (Jacobs 270-271), Jacobs’s “loophole operation allows for sites and performances of resistance within any discursive structure” (Burnham 149). Analogously, the “morgue-like holding pens” become a site and performance of resistance for Abu-Jamal (Death Blossoms 40).
Abu-Jamal, in “Books and the State,” refers to Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*—a novel about “a futuristic society in which books are banned,” and “*subversives*—people who read books […] keep books hidden in attics, in basements, and behind false walls” (*Death Blossoms* 4). As an exclamation, the text is bookended by a graphic formed out of Heinrich Heine’s name and his quotation, “WHEN THEY BURN BOOKS, IT WON’T BE LONG BEFORE THEY BEGIN TO BURN PEOPLE” (5). The graphic, one can deduce, is a swastika divided in half (the other half off the page). There is a direct symbolic relation between a swastika and fascism, so much so, the reader mentally completes the symbolic image—this is contingent on making the connection between the fascist State and censorship. Abu-Jamal makes the reader an active reader, a participatory reader that recognizes fascism through imaged induced recall, which recognizes fascism in State-willed censorship. Two separate highlighted sets of words (black background with white lettering, as opposed to black lettering on white page) are conjoined by Abu-Jamal as an emphatic statement of resistance—“the State” and “You cannot kill a book”—as if to directly promulgate that the fascist State cannot kill a book, and in a more conceptual reading, the word *book*, relative to Heine’s quotation, doubles as *person*.

In other words, the oppressive State cannot kill a personal narrative. Abu-Jamal empowers *Death Blossoms* by having the final words in this section read, “You cannot kill a book,” as a dis-temporal epitaph to his impending state-sanctioned execution and death. Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative, therefore, transcends death, distorting space-time considerations by speaking from a dislocating position of life-death. Abu-Jamal ruptures capitalist abstract equivalency and market exchange-value mysticism by introducing sensuous subversive books as having a super-sensuous-non-sensuous form that represents revolutionary personal narratives of resistance. Jacobs then, literally and theoretically, represents the
subversive books—“hidden in attics, in basements, and behind false walls” (*Death Blossoms* 4). Jacobs dematerializes into a disembodied voice that speaks in the shadows, through walls and cracks. Jacobs becomes a specter that haunts place and is empowered by displacing her abused and commodified enslaved body. Re-appropriating visible-invisibility, Jacobs is a whisper that is both a-local and trans-local—both nowhere and anywhere; this circum-advantageous dynamic grants Jacobs accessibility to privileged communications and surveillant optical perspective. Jacobs, while hiding in an upstairs room in the unnamed mistress’s home, could “lie perfectly concealed, and command a view of the street through which Dr. Flint passed to his office” (246). Where earlier in the narrative Dr. Flint espies and stalks Jacobs’s enslaved female body, now, Jacobs assumes oversight of Dr. Flint’s movement.

After fashioning a loophole, “about an inch long and an inch broad,” Jacobs is able to access privileged communications: “Southerners have the habit of stopping and talking in the streets, and I heard many conversations not intended to meet my ears” (264-265). Jacobs, in a sense, is also characterized as a benevolent specter intervening and guarding the wellbeing of her children, to where an intuitive kismet between Jacobs and her children endures: “I heard the merry laugh of children, and presently two sweet little faces were looking up at me, as though they knew I was there” (264). This familial transcendence is best exemplified in the relationship between Jacobs and Aunt Nancy.

Earlier in the narrative, at the unnamed mistress’s house, Betty tends to and helps to conceal Jacobs, at one point concealing her in a “shallow bed” beneath a “plank in the floor” in the kitchen (Jacobs 249). However, Aunt Nancy, because of a very specific trauma and assault on her reproductive system and feminine identification, develops into a surrogate mother to Jacobs in what contextually could be read as a double-space of womb and tomb—her living-dead
garret that represents slow death by physical decrepitude, while simultaneously, representing a birth-way to the promise of a new life free from slavery. Chapter XXVIII is titled “Aunt Nancy” and is the only chapter precisely named after a character. Jacobs provides readers with the narrative backstory of Aunt Nancy. As a direct causal link between Aunt Nancy being forced to sleep at the entry floor of Mrs. Flint’s door, in order to serve Mrs. Flint during her pregnancy and subsequently to care for Mrs. Flint’s baby afterwards, Aunt Nancy gave “premature birth to six children” (299); moreover, “toiling all day, and being deprived of rest at night, completely broke down her constitution” (299). Dr. Flint even “declared it impossible” that Aunt Nancy “could ever become the mother of a living child” (299). In fact, as Jacobs informs, Aunt Nancy “afterward had two feeble babies” both dying shortly after birth: “I well remember her patient sorrow as she held the last dead baby in her arms” (299). Aunt Nancy’s stillbirths and born-dying babies are generally emblematic of slavery’s assault on labored Black female bodies, but more specifically to Jacobs’s narrative, are emblematic of Jacobs’s status as an always-already living-dead slave.

Jacobs represents a redemptive opportunity for Aunt Nancy to undermine de-naturalizing slavery, which “completely broke down her constitution,” by literally nourishing Jacobs with sustenance, and more conceptually, swaddling Jacobs as she provides encouragement towards a new-life beyond enslavement: “When my friends tried to discourage me from running away, she always encouraged me […] she sent word never to yield” (299). Jacobs comes to double Aunt Nancy’s “last dead baby in her arms”—the specter of her dead children, and because of Aunt Nancy’s traumatic experience encountering death with all eight of her miscarriages and stillbirths, Aunt Nancy, like Ellen, is able to converse with apparitional Jacobs, entombed in the very structure of the places Jacobs haunts.
So that Jacobs could gauge Dr. Flint’s reaction to her letters dated from New York, Jacobs “told” her “plan to aunt Nancy” as Jacobs “whispered it to her through a crack, and she whispered back” (280); “to haunt all places […] not only is it necessary to see from behind the visor […] it is also necessary to speak. And to hear voices” (Derrida 168-169). Jacobs is the maturating specter of Aunt Nancy’s could-have-been legacy that Aunt Nancy was forcefully deprived of ever having. Therefore, Aunt Nancy’s line, “I could die happy if I could only see you and the children free,” lends itself to a more metaphysical reading; Aunt Nancy, “old” with “not long to live,” nestles Jacobs amongst “the children”—Jacobs’s children specifically, and more generally, all current and future slave children. Jacobs, while “shut up” in her “dark cell,” would often “kneel down to listen to her words of consolation, whispered through a crack” (299); however, Aunt Nancy would become “very ill”—Jacobs meanwhile had been in her “cell six years” (300). In Jacobs’s estimation, Aunt Nancy “had been slowly murdered,” and when Jacobs heard uncle Philip state that Aunt Nancy had died, Jacobs’s “little cell seemed whirling round” (301). Jacobs then rebukes Mrs. Flint’s melodramatic performance, at the funeral service, by proclaiming a counter-narrative, a “chapter of wrongs and sufferings,” to challenge the supposedly benevolent “patriarchal institution” of slavery:

We could have told them a different story […] We could also have told them of a poor, blighted young creature, shut up in a living grave for years […] All this, and much more, I thought of, as I sat at my loophole, waiting for the family to return from the grave; sometimes weeping, sometimes falling asleep dreaming strange dreams of the dead and the living. (302-303)

It is in this very space described by Jacobs almost two-hundred years ago, “shut-up in a living grave for years […] dreaming strange dreams of the dead and the living,” that Abu-Jamal’s
Death Blossoms exists—articulating a revolutionary counter-narrative to challenge the undisputed discourse prevailing the promise and utopic idealization of capitalism in all its forms from institutional American slavery to the United States prison-industrial complex.

Using Sharon Patricia Holland’s concept of “raising the dead” as a framework, the voices from beyond the grave become audible, communicating their story from dead space. Unlike the common model of the margin, which situates margins outside and away from the nation-state, Holland places “this marginal space on the inside, not as an entity from without but as an entity from within—a nation” and formulates a “theory of marginalized existence that more adequately describes the devastating experience of being ‘outside’ [US] culture” (5). It is through this marginal space that “writers, artist, and critics […] are raising the dead, allowing them to speak and providing them with the agency of physical bodies in order to tell the story of a death-in-life” (Holland 4). In the case of colored prisoners, the marginalized space of death is not only a creative trope to discuss living-deadness, but in their case, the marginalized dead space is quite literally a physical construct, and theoretically it is “outside” United States citizenship, societal heteronormativity, and the body politic, but exactly as Holland proposes, the prison ideology and corrections hegemony are “inside,” because they are important apparatuses and a discursive necessity when establishing sociopolitical positionality and when (re)constructing citizenship and personhood.

Like Jacobs, who raises the dead by devoting an entire chapter and its title to an especially necromantical character in Aunt Nancy, Abu-Jamal echoes Jacobs’s devastation and sentiment in “Mother-loss.” In similar expressions, for Jacobs, “the death of this kind relative was an inexpressible sorrow” (Jacobs 301), while for Abu-Jamal, with his mother having died while he “was imprisoned, it was like a lightning bolt to the soul” (Death Blossoms 90). Abu-
Jamal’s mother, who he describes as having “[d]eep rivers of loving strength” flowing through her, had died of emphysema—“her sweet presence, her wise counsel, was gone forever” (90). Although Jacobs’s confinement was physically self-imposed, theoretically, Jacobs and Abu-Jamal are nevertheless imprisoned by overarching oppressive State powers; Jacobs must remain concealed in order “to avoid the tortures that would be inflicted on her if she ventured to come out and look on the face of her departed friend” (Jacobs 303). Abu-Jamal laments being imprisoned and thereby deprived of the opportunity to grieve the loss of his mother in ritual practice: “To know one’s mother dead, yet remain imprisoned! To imagine her lifeless form while held in shackles! To crush the hope of ever again embracing she who birthed me!” (90); this closing paragraph resounds a collapsing explodent of living-dead space: Abu-Jamal efficaciously compresses death and imprisonment to where neither can conceptually escape the other. 48

However, despite Abu-Jamal expressing his frustration at losing his mother while imprisoned, and not having physical accessibility to his dead mother, Abu-Jamal, nevertheless, raises the dead exactly how Jacobs raises Aunt Nancy from the dead. Abu-Jamal inserts a haunting image of his mother in “Mother-loss.” The image is especially haunting because of its presentation in stippling (similar to pointillism) form; meaning, Abu-Jamal’s mother’s image is either a photograph converted to stippling form or a portrait-rendition in stippling form. Because stippling is a technique that uses dots to compose a larger image, the effect visually is that Abu-Jamal’s mother appears apparitional—in a state of de-materialized materialization. The image of Abu-Jamal’s mother inserted into his reflection re-enlivens her, as it memorializes her, forever a part of Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative.
The imaged presentation of apparitional graphics is also found in “Salt of the Earth.” Using a drawing by Fritz Eichenberg (depicting the feet of Christ nailed to the cross), Abu-Jamal begins by citing the Bible (Mt. 5: 10-13): “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake […] Ye are the salt of the earth” (Death Blossoms 62). Abu-Jamal then continues by stating that the earth has “been the exclusive property of those in power, whilst the meek have inherited the grave” (63). The drawing by Eichenberg is used twice, once to preface the aforementioned quotation attributed to Jesus of Nazareth and the second time is used in Abu-Jamal’s section of “Salt of the Earth.” Although it is the exact same image in both instances, its presentation is significantly altered.

One image is in regular print, framed by the name Fritz Eichenberg (left side), “SALT” (bottom, in bold print), and the first verses of Mt. 5 (right side), while the other image is positioned behind text and is ashen, turning the bold black of the printed image into ashen vapidness—as opposed to the first image emphasizing flesh and luridness to where the black is perceivably the darkest blood-red, in fact. The two images are in the same location on each page but on opposing pages, showcasing the sensuous-non-sensuous nature of Christ—by “the phenomenal form of a quasi-incarnation, then Christ is the most spectral of specters […] Jesus is at once the greatest and the most ‘incomprehensible of ghosts’” (Derrida 180). Unlike the first image, the spectral image is boundless, de-framed from the text that once held it.

Abu-Jamal further interrogates the “proposition that America is a Christian nation” by tabulating and accounting the atrocities perpetrated by America, both at home and abroad, in order to seize “properties on the pretext of that magical word ‘security’” (Death Blossoms 63). Abu-Jamal’s line of logical argumentation concludes with a powerful indictment on the true nature of the US Christian nation-state:
For those faceless, nameless, black, brown, and yellow millions who have been savaged by America, it might even appear that the course of its history has been guided by some demonic orientation. Instead of Christ, perhaps Dracula should be substituted for this nation’s guiding god—for has it not sucked the blood of the planet’s other peoples for two centuries? Does it not do so now? (64)

Abu-Jamal refuses to submit to the supposed foregone conclusion that aligns and affixes the philosophical teachings of Jesus Christ to United States imperialism and expansionism—in short, capitalism, which, as Abu-Jamal controverts, is better described as vampirism than manifest destiny blessed by a supposed benevolent God.

In “God-talk on Phase II,” Abu-Jamal further complicates God by framing a Socratic dialogue of sorts between “Mu” and “Scott.” Abu-Jamal, sets the scene by beginning with “ON DEATH’S BRINK, men begin to see things they’ve perhaps never seen before” (Death Blossoms 101). On Phase II, “sounds from the six death warrant cells are muffled,” as “[m]en on the ‘Faze’ spend their precious hours […] talking and learning about each other, their depths, their heights, their human uniqueness” (101-102). It is “midnight,” Abu-Jamal writes, when Mu and Scott are discussing black-holes, outer space, Einstein, Hawking, sci-fi movies and fiction, mother earth, “Mama—God” (104). There is a resurfacing of night conversations between the living-dead, as is found in Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl; the trope of voices speaking from out of a cell or living grave is identical in both Jacobs’s slave narrative and Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative, and to key-off a phrase used by Rushdy, these slaves survive by orality; despite being on Phase II with death warrants signed, the call-and-response of prisoner-slaves Mu and Scott bilaterally reaffirm one another, and the “men talk on—hour after hour, late into the night, early into morn. Days, hours away from a date with death, they finally see each
other. They see the miracles of life, the miracles of each other” (106). Essentially, through call-and-response from different cells, these prisoner-slaves are surviving by orality, edifying one another by recognizing the embodied significance of each other, and recognizing individual interiority and personhood in a shared collective subjectivity.

What immediately follows then is the following section which is “Meditations on the Cross,” not by Abu-Jamal, but by “Rufus, a slave” (Death Blossoms 107). Abu-Jamal’s inclusion of Rufus’s poem demonstrates a continuous communal slave narrative, where within Abu-Jamal’s Death Blossoms, Abu-Jamal can raise the dead, by providing a place in his narrative for the voice of Rufus to re-articulate his own meditation on slavery. Within Death Blossoms, the dead can speak, and with regards to structure, Abu-Jamal brilliantly blends his voice into Rufus’s voice: the final line in “God-talk on Phase II” is, “They see the miracles of life, the miracles of each other,” which is followed by the first words in “Meditations on the Cross,” which are, “Lawd, Lawd, I look at you and see” (106-107). The two lines run together, because the title of the poem is set six lines into the poem, so that the title spreads horizontally across the poem, visually structured as a cross, and thus creating an uninterrupted flow from Abu-Jamal’s words within a contemporary death row prison cell to the words of Rufus, a slave. The many-tongued chorus is a vehicle for the voices of Abu-Jamal and Rufus to speak together against the oppressive capitalist State 49—the dead rise together.

The poem then doubles as “God-talk on Phase II”; Rufus contemplates God by speaking to Christ on the cross, and although Rufus remarks an initial difference between himself and “a man on a cross who don’t look like” him, Rufus ultimately concludes, “I Love You,/ ‘cause you went through the same/ hell as we still do” (Death Blossoms 107-109). Rufus and Abu-Jamal are both victimized by an imperialist power-structure that arbitrarily determines participation in the
collective citizenry, wherein the undesirable are marginalized and silenced, and because of their always-already prescribed subversiveness, their labored and/or raced bodies are de-representable and evicted from utopic notions of democracy and citizenship.

The death of recognized democratic personhood, which negates individual political endowment, preserves grouped exploitable bodies without conceding democratic representation for all. The public becomes transfixed by the rhetoric of United States democracy as their collective and individual voices are disarmed through social and political policy that renders the United States citizenry motionless, democratically dead. This categorization where citizenship is constructed by public psychosocial attitudes towards death is defined by Russ Castronovo as “necro citizenship,” occurring in the “shadowy space of a public sphere where people’s bodies and identities are transmogrified” (xi). In order for United States democracy to be constructed, in order for United States normativity to be standardized, the United States constituency and body politic must be constructed in relation to those deemed and designated as non-normative, as being in discordance with the political body figuration, and as democratically undesirable and unworthy of participating in the democratic process.

According to Castronovo, the United States citizenry adopts an ideology of citizenship that mirrors ideological assumptions about death, so that cultural representations of death in United States society construct, reinforce, and facilitate necro ideology, creating an ideological approach to citizenship “that prefers the immobile and abstract identity of state citizen over the dynamic condition of materially specific historical subjects” (7). In other words, to ensure that the nation-state not be disrupted, necro ideology encourages a citizenry to be inactive and glorifies passivity throughout the democratic process.
This phenomenon is premised on producing socially and politically dead citizens, while positioning them in relation to historically dead citizens. Castronovo theorizes, “[s]tate and citizen are mediated by necrophilic conjunctions of aversion and desire: fear of the dissolution of death of the state creates the longing for an inactive, forever tranquil citizenry; meanwhile, the continued stable existence of government requires historically dead subjects” (8). As a byproduct of necro ideology, death not only serves manipulative governmental necessity but motivates a seemingly logical reaction to necro ideology; the socio-politically dead perceive death as a means towards achieving freedom from their corporeal constraints—constraints that are intrinsic and bound to the exploitable and abused bodies they are defined by.

Castronovo asserts that the reactionary logic to necro ideology can be found in nineteenth-century literature concerning slavery, where a “conceptual idiom” perceives “freedom as a disembodied proposition” (34). Perpetuating necro ideology ensures that citizenship involves forfeiting independent subjectivity and political agency, in favor of a collective covenant with the nation-state. As such, death and abstract citizenship—that is generally constructed rhetorically—emphasizes a conceptual definition of citizenship, as opposed to individually embodied citizenship. Therefore, the “[n]ational vocabulary is more comfortable with freedom as fictional proposition than material embodiment” (Castronovo 47). In nineteenth-century slave narratives, freedom is conditioned by disembodiment and is achievable by way of death. Citizenship is bi-constructed along with abstract notions of freedom, with death serving as an intermediary. Castronovo describes this relationship as follows:

Citizenship is saturated with necrophilic longing: the birth of the political individual signals the death of a “species being.” Freedom enforces the reduction
of human subjectivity to formal personhood; citizenship streamlines the subject to an efficient mechanism of the nation-state. (54)

Perpetuating abstract notions of freedom, while encouraging political passivity, results in negating the politically charged material bodies of Blacks.

In order to combat making freedom necessarily an exercise in death and disembodiment, Castronovo suggests thinking against freedom; to “think against freedom is to refuse the depoliticization that is at the heart of naturalized national rights. To think against freedom is to remember the very bodies alienated and abused by slavery” (61). The struggle between necro citizenship and participatory citizenship is a struggle between the abstract utopian constructions of citizenship and the act of recuperating Black bodies that demand individual recognition and representation.

Black and colored bodies have historically been positioned as Other in relation to White normative constructions of the nation-state, and as a result, racially charged non-White bodies attract the focus of White psychosocial projections that reflect White anxieties about Black bodies. Similar to archetypical characters like “the Wolf, the Devil, the Wicked Genie, Evil, and the Savage [that] are always represented by Blacks and Indians” (Fanon 124-125), the contemporary prisoner formation—a contemporary manifestation of an archetypical legacy which has merged Criminal and Black into one persona—the Black Criminal, part of the dominant master’s collective unconscious and informed by the master’s narrative, which is always constructed by it antithesis, draws a dividing line between the free (encoding Whiteness and mastery) and the imprisoned (encoding Blackness and slavery).

In the contemporary, the Wolf, Devil, Wicked Genie, Evil, and the Savage are transposed and translated into Criminal, while maintaining an encoding of Blackness. Furthermore, because
“of the persistent power of racism, ‘criminal’ and ‘evildoers’ are, in the collective imagination, fantasized as people of color” (Davis 16). Because criminal and evildoer represent violating rule and law, the United States corrections hegemony de-racializes the race coded label of criminal and evildoer. In other words, prison and detention centers not only serve to warehouse non-Whites, but by virtue of its operation, become a marker by which non-normativity or deviancy can be measured.

A prison then can be read as a space wherein the non-White Other is comfortably situated away from the dominate White heteronormative nation-state: a space where persons deviating from White normativity are segregated from persons complying with societal normativity, and a space where (literally labeled) deviants can be justifiably exploited as both a means of perpetuating White heteronormativity and a means to further marginalize non-White Otherness. Because United States society has been indoctrinated with an ideology that maintains inmates housed in correctional facilities are dysfunctional and are a threat to United States societal convention—ignoring unique individual circumstances pertaining to each prisoner’s background and case, and conceding the equal portioning of universal justice among all United States citizens as a given—United States society readily consents to the removal and abjectification of those designated as deviating from White heteronormativity.

Through disguised proclamations advocating for the correction of deviant behavior, mass incarceration is publicly perceived as aracial, and most importantly to a hegemonic establishment, is publicly perceived as a marker of civilization and order; law, order, and civilization then are exponentially related to the quantity of persons imprisoned, and disrelated from the quality of the judicial process and the quality of inmate treatment once incarcerated. Prisons become a space where non-Whites, who because of the dominant White structure will
always-already be deviating from White normativity, can be re-charged as threatening Other, re-situated as non-citizen, re-enslaved, and re-exploited by the prison industry, where they are expelled from having political representation—from being part of the United States body politic—in theory, democratically dead as they become the walking dead United States citizenry.

Where general necro citizenship involves ideological indoctrination, a more immediate or instantaneous shift from citizen to necro citizen occurs when an individual is forced into the positional designation of slave. The very term *slave* denotes social subordination and authoritative inequality. According to Orlando Patterson, the authority power-line between master and slave is not singularly determined by the slave’s absolute submission to a master’s authority, but rather, the master “needed both the recognition and the support of the nonslave members of his community for his assumption of sovereign power over another person” (35). Crucial to hegemonic establishment, the consent of a third party outside the master/slave dynamic is necessary in constructing a venue where a master exploiting a slave as labor/commodity can become an exercise in nation-state building, and by extension, an exercise in the de-reification of citizen.

During the period of the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century, the prison-industrial complex has positioned prisoners under the designation of slave. As prisoners serve a double-functionality as both labor and commodity, the prison population as a whole exponentially generates profit and industry growth, under the guise of corrections. Identical to justifications for African/African-American enslavement in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century United States, where Christian correctional efforts to curb prescribed Black hedonism and savagery mitigated the consent of nonslave and nonslave holding members of the community to recognize, support, and validate the authority of slave-owners and reinforce
hegemony, the United States corrections hegemony mitigates the consent of the public to justify any treatment during the correctional process of those designated as criminals.

Referring back to Patterson’s analysis of slavery and social death—law, in and of itself, has no authority, but instead “the major sources of law, and law’s authority, is tradition” (36). Due to the fact that in White dominate superstructures non-Whites will always-already be deviants, the traditional perceptions of Black, and those racialized as Others, will always equate non-White to non-normative, and therefore, the traditional mode of operation follows that the non-White is in need of correction. The recognized authority of the corrections hegemony needs only to code Blackness with a euphemistic encoding—the Criminal, in order to create a façade of color-blindness.

By translating Black into criminal, the symbolic currency is no longer politicized, and the criminal is then at the mercy and will of a corrections apparatus that is falsely constructed as being devoid or ignorant of racial biases or even completely free from having the slightest racial consideration all together. Patterson precisely identifies this operational procedure in the formation of master/slave relations:

Herein lies the source of authority. Those who exercise power, if they are able to transform it into a “right,” a norm, a usual part of the order of things, must first control (or at least be in a position to manipulate) appropriate symbolic instruments. They may do so by exploiting already existing symbols, or they may create new ones relevant to their needs. (37)

With always-already non-Whites failing to achieve the standard sociopolitical grade, and in failing to do so counter the normative presupposed script, the appropriate symbolic instruments Patterson mentions are psychosocially embedded in society’s constructions of Whiteness: what is
right is Whiteness, and what is wrong is non-Whiteness. With law and order representing the norm, non-normative must therefore imply unlawfulness and disorder, and in violation of such conceptualizations, must signal the expatriation of those deviating from the nation-state building project. Prisons and detention centers then become a dead space where the socially and politically discarded can be removed from democratic nation building, while the remainder—a colored body—is used as fodder to bolster capitalist industry.

In order for living-dead bodies to exist, they must be rendered politically dead. For the nation-state to achieve this figurative assassination, those desired dead must be denied political recognition by the nation-state. Although the nation-state glorifies abstract citizenship and enshrines national inclusion in utopian terms, rights and thereby the recognition of citizenship, is “a social as oppose to an ideal reality” (Darby 84). With respect to master/slave dynamics, Derrick Darby states “that if slaves’ moral powers are not acknowledged and they are otherwise without recognition and cannot reckon on action, then they are without rights” (168). Accordingly, natural, pre-social, and especially legal rights are social and political constructs, and thereby are at the discrentional determination of the nation-state’s governmental operating system.

In the case of the criminal justice system and its subsequent enforcement apparatus, the de-recognition of rights works under the corrections hegemony that contrives to asphyxiate the individual right-holder, while the societal consensus holds to the pretense that corrections implies nation-state building or preservation. Necrophilic ideology ensures the dichotomous positioning of vibrant democratically recognized nation-builders and anemic democratically de-recognized necro citizens. Within a representative democracy, elected representatives ideally should govern and perform as an extension of the collective who vote representatives into power.
Ideally, a bilateral process of recognition between citizen and representative should eventuate. However, because nation-state operational goals seek to disenfranchise, marginalize, and figuratively assassinate those who are more easily positionable as socially and politically dead, the criminal justice system precipitates the mass transition from recognized citizenship into de-recognized necro citizenship.

As Darby suggests, any recognition of rights must be conditional on the nation-state’s determination that rights should be afforded to its citizens. By affixing the sociopolitical recognition of rights to citizenship, the nation-state has no obligation to inherently human or natural rights, but only an obligation to recognize the rights of citizens. Therefore, the nation-state need only to determine one’s citizenship in order to appraise one’s rights: deny a citizen representation and recognition, and the citizen dies, and determine a citizen to be dead, and the citizen’s rights die too.

In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, the author Michelle Alexander equates the legal discrimination of persons who are recognized as criminals to the same practices of legal discrimination against African-Americans in the past. Considering the evidence demonstrating the disproportionate number of African-Americans forced into spaces of confinement, the program of the criminal justice system, in league with the institution of prison, solidifies prisoner formations and facilitates the transition from a *person of color* into a *criminal*. Precisely in the case of Blacks, *Criminal* becomes a euphemism for *Black*.

As a result of the mass incarceration program, the United States now “has the highest rate of incarceration in the world […] even surpassing those in highly repressive regimes like Russia, China, and Iran” (Alexander 6). Mass incarceration guarantees the everlasting sociopolitical death of non-Whites. While in prison, inmates are denied democratic representation, and
subsequently resulting from a denial of representation, a loss of rights and recognition. Among
the fifty states using democratic elections to decide local, state, and federal offices, only Maine
and Vermont allow inmates to exercise United States’ supposed “right” to vote.

Physical incarceration is not the only apparatus used to deny criminals representation;
after release, even “after the term of punishment expires, some states deny the right to vote for a
period ranging from a number of years to the rest of one’s life” (Alexander 53). The denial of
representation reflects the privileging of representation; by categorizing some individuals as non-
representable, and in effect non-citizen, the criminal justice system highlights the stratification
between inclusionary normativity and democratic deadness. The bifurcation of national identity
institutes oppositional bi-citizen functionality: one national identity assumes the position of
nation-building architect and body politic member, while the other national identity burdens the
position of nation-building laborer and dismemberment from the body politic.

Ex-offender exclusion extends beyond denial of political representation as well, and into
the jurisdiction of civic and social discrimination:

Myriad laws, rules, and regulations operate to discriminate against ex-offenders
and effectively prevent their reintegration into the mainstream society and
economy. These restrictions amount to a form of “civic death” and send the
unequivocal message that “they” are no longer part of “us.” (Alexander 139)

But despite being exiled and marginalized, persons cycled through the criminal justice and
correction/detention system can be reanimated in the world of the living, where the living-dead
citizenry are farcically spellbound and zombified by puppeteering nation-state politico hands.
Despite “felon disenfranchisement laws” (Alexander 188) that deny imprisoned convict
populations representation and political agency, systemic manipulation still allows for puppet-
representation. Alexander describes this administered prevarication—a process not dissimilar from the *three-fifths clause*:

> Under the usual residence rule, the Census Bureau counts imprisoned individuals as residents of the jurisdiction in which they are incarcerated. Because most new prison construction occurs in predominantly white, rural areas, white communities benefit from inflated population totals at the expense of the urban, overwhelmingly minority communities from which the prisoners come. (188)

The denial of representation, recognition, and rights negates individual corporeality by reducing individuals to abject bodies; the reality of bodily sovereignty and subjectivity is degraded to an abhorrent processing corpse vacant of interiority. Embodied significance surrenders to bodily reductionism.

Granting that the “body as the major target of penal repression [has] disappeared” (Foucault 8) in regards to public torture and punishment, this modification on penal repression is not indicative of nation-state benevolence, but rather, is more accurately indicative of product preservation. Regardless, the fact remains that “it is the conviction itself that marks the offender with the unequivocally negative sign” (Foucault 9). For the Black and non-White alike, the body is doubly marked. The nation-state mark of disproval is superimposed over the always-already deviant colored body. Because of this double-branding, the “body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property” (Foucault 11). The punishable colored body provides an indirect attack on personhood: once personhood is shattered, denoting a convicted body as punishable, corrections ideology is expected and authorized to have sovereignty and control over the convicted body.
Dylan Rodríguez uses the term “forced passages” to describe a modal continuum from the Middle Passage to the “current carceral formation” (35). According to Rodríguez’s observation, the “death space of the slave ship, and the genocidal epoch of the Middle Passage, confined and produced bodies that were ambivalently situated between the categories of labor value, social death, and biological death” (47). The sociopolitical devaluation of colored bodies elevates the valuation of those same colored bodies—inflate their capital currency. Paradoxically, the sociopolitical deadening of colored bodies enlivens the economic capital currency of colored bodies. Michel Foucault expounds on this bodily functionality:

> political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection […] the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (25)

As slave/wage labor, the raced and imprisoned body is invaluable to capitalist industry vitality.

Capitalism and United States policies which deny representation and detain labored bodies are exemplified in United States attitudes towards immigration, and in how the United States legal system and correctional system regulate and punish immigration. Citizenship in this case is very much bound to United States xenophobic perceptions of the immigrant workforce. United States sociopolitical policy, public perception, and political rhetoric conflate the War-on-Terror and immigration legislative issues under the same umbrella that categorizes any foreign threat as a threat to the sovereignty of United States identity, citizenship, and heteronormativity.
Because of this ideological conflation, the “U.S. war on terror provided elected officials with a useful cover for efforts to forestall the consolidation of an ethnic power bloc amid the demographic growth of Latino groups in the United States” (Camacho 17). Although the booming construction of immigrant detention centers reflects the politics of racial control, the prison/detention industry is not limited to politico manipulation, but as a symptom of the cultural logic of late capitalism, the prison/detention industry reflects United States capitalism at the expense of exploited and labored bodies. According to Abu-Jamal, “NAFTA is a political creation of U.S. and multinational capital, and thus designed to provide corporate interests with a larger pool for production, which Mexico obviously offers, with lower wages” (Censored 252). Capitalism and globalization (most notably NAFTA) ensure that a constant flow of eligible Latin American immigrants will continually fill prisons and detention centers with exploitable non-White bodies that, despite their eligibility to be exploitable labor, are not politically recognized as being eligible to participate in the United States democratic process.

By impeding the pathway to citizenship for immigrants, the United States capitalist market economy and prison-industrial complex perpetuate apt conditions for the exploitation of sociopolitical non-persons; the walking dead migration are even forced to arrogate the characterization of zombie apocalypse thematics, akin to nativist xenophobic attitudes. As part of the Repressive State Apparatus, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) workplace-raids destroy the labor force, because INS enforcement “not only criminalizes immigrant workers—making poverty and the search for opportunity a punishable crime—but it also defends and supports worker exploitation” (Su 247). Similar to the zombie mythos, immigrants are imagined as an invading and infectious over-populating mass of un-humanity devouring the brain, the mind, and the psyche of the victimized few. 50 As part of United States capitalist
industry, in conjunction with the collective United States imagination, “[i]mmigrant workers are treated as mere machines to enable corporate profit rather than as human beings with basic rights and protections. They are targeted for the ‘crime’ of poverty and suffer incarceration for the ‘crime’ of working” (Su 255). Workers’ labor and their produced commodities can then be extracted while disallowing entrance into United States citizenship utopia.

The nation-state not only deprives immigrants of representation, recognition, and rights, but specifically in the case of Latin American immigrants, Latin America as a culture, as a people, is being erased from the cultural and historical realities of United States identity by the vaunted nation-state Ideological State Apparatus. 51 The United States, having learned from the social, political, and economic advancement of many Blacks, through a preemptive strike, is proactively attempting to racially control the deteriorating White heteronormative United States identity to protect it from all Others. One reason as to why Blacks have been able to recuperate socio-politically dead bodies from a slave past and present is by acknowledging their Black bodies and talking back to the White nation-state; they then are able to challenge and critique White dominant culture and capitalism in the United States.

Before concluding, it bears importance to once again examine ways in which those forced into the margins of sociopolitical dead space can counter the positionality of necro citizenship. With Castronovo’s advocation to think against freedom in mind, the living-dead necro citizenry can disrupt and challenge the dominant White heteronormative discourse by reaffirming personhood, acknowledging the colored body, and using a counterclaim to scrutinize the rhetoric of United States democratic utopia versus the reality of practiced United States racialized antidemocratic dystopia.
From marginalized dead space, the dead then can speak, rupturing restrictive temporal constraints and forcing ruptures throughout the living’s canonically official United States historical fabric. To challenge the dominant White heteronormative nation-state, the imprisoned living-dead are “writing from no-man’s land” with the intent “to acquire voice through writing in a way that liberates the spirit and frees the soul” (Henderson 21). Through the use of writing, prisoners bring themselves into being by re-recognizing their discarded personhood and interiority. Carol E. Henderson suggests that writing is a process of re-embodying both a material and discursive Black body:

Writers must reclaim that [disempowered body] discursively in order to facilitate a counter-discourse that reconceptualizes the meanings of literal and figurative bodies within certain predetermined social structures. It is the gap between these two categories that allows for the possibility of speaking a counter-discourse of the body—a body disfigured by the toxins of racism. (13)

To rupture the dominant discourse is to recuperate and re-embody the historical and material colored body that demands democratic representation, recognition, and rights.

Writing from no-man’s land is not limited to works set within the contemporary prison-industrial complex, but very much present in works set within the historical precursor to the United States prison-industrial complex—eighteenth and nineteenth-century instituted American slavery. The rejection of African and African-American slaves by United States democracy voided any claim to representation, recognition, and rights for Blacks, forcing Blacks into the dead space of non-person. The nineteenth-century African-American slave narrative, a narrative set in the dead space of slavery, is a text that raises the dead in order to challenge institutional slavery and its insidious partnership with United States capitalism. Castronovo points to a
poignant scene in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs that demonstrates the interplay between literal life and death and the living-dead duality slaves occupied discursively.

As Harriet Jacobs approaches the slave graveyard while “twilight was coming on” and “[n]othing broke the death-like stillness […] it seemed to [Jacobs] so sacred” (Jacobs 233). At the graveyard, a “black stump, at the head of mother’s grave, was all that remained of a tree father had planted,” and as she “passed the wreck of the old meeting house, where, before, Nat Turner’s time, the slaves had been allowed to meet for worship,” she seemed to “hear [her] father’s voice come from it, bidding [her] not to tarry till [she] reached freedom or the grave” (Jacobs 234). For Castronovo, Jacobs “never accepts necrophilic politics that idealize disconnection and disembodiment” (193), and the voice of Jacobs’s father “speaks of communal context and historical actors such as Turner; the dead do not always retreat from the sociopolitical world” (196). Although Jacobs counters idealized disembodiment, I would add to Castronovo’s reading that Jacobs’s father’s voice is empowered because of disembodiment in this instance: by no longer existing in the context of a Black slave body, Jacobs’s father is not confined to the designated role of exploitable body. A Black slave body can only been seen by a capitalist master society as an exploitable body with capital currency and solely monetary value. The slaveocracy loses its right to claim Jacobs’s father, because he is not a body that can be legally claimed as property, and being bodiless, he can perform no labor, thereby evading the marker of Black labored body, and thusly, is empowered by his invisibility.

In reference to Holland and raising the dead, the marginalized space in Jacobs’s slave narrative is literally dead space—a graveyard—and not coincidentally, the socio-politically dead or living-dead non-persons are empowered by this literal space of death. It is here in the graveyard that the dead can speak. The historicity implicitly embedded in graveyards, as social
and cultural constructs, ruptures temporality allowing the dead to voice themselves and voice their challenge to a thriving US democracy afforded only to the privileged few and afforded to financial systems that flourish because of the sociopolitical death and exploitation of colored bodies.

In closing, I would like to re-asseverate a contemporary parallel to the nineteenth-century slave narrative—the contemporary prisoner-slave narrative expressed as postmodern Neo-slave narrative. Again, one such example is Mumia Abu-Jamal, a contemporary author who raises the dead by writing himself into being and historicizes a slave past to contextualize his prisoner-slave narrative as a postmodern Neo-slave narrative that critiques and challenges United States capitalism and White heteronormativity. Analogous to nineteenth-century slave narratives, Abu-Jamal’s literature and recordings re-manifest the brutalized communal Black body by forcing it into the light of United States sociopolitical consciousness, as a psychosocial counter-attack to necro ideological constructs.

For Abu-Jamal, “Night of Power” records a significant night—a night that Abu-Jamal “will never forget” and “that shook” him (Death Blossoms 29). To Abu-Jamal, on “death row’s Phase II with a date to die” (29), this Night of Power represents an epiphanistic self-affirmation. As in Jacobs’s slave narrative, the symbolism of darkness is a central theme to convey re-appropriation and empowerment. The first page of “Night of Power” is the second of only two black pages with white lettering found anywhere in Death Blossoms; the black page emphatically emphasizes the pictured lightning bolt that appears to enlighten the text of the first page. It begins with Abu-Jamal highlighting the importance of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan and the Night of Power, which is believed to be the “night that the Qu’ran was delivered to the Prophet Mohammed,” and on “this night, prayers are granted ‘for everything that matters’” (28).
Wherein postmodernism there is a negation of nature, Abu-Jamal, within a cellblock lit “twenty-four hours a day” by denaturalizing artificial light, describes the “forces of nature” counter-negating the denaturalizing prison construction (29). “Lightning stabbed the earth,” Abu-Jamal observes, “so powerful were the bolts that the lights in the block—indeed the whole jail—flickered out […] it was completely dark” (29).

Darkness is a means of escape and mobility for Jacobs, and although Abu-Jamal may not have gained mobility, through darkness, Abu-Jamal nevertheless gains accessibility to a new knowledge that, however does not result in physical mobility, does result in escapability—not from physical imprisonment, but escape from having to surrender his voice and personhood; that is to say, not having to die in silence: “Then it dawned on me, like bright writing etched in my brain […] ‘Here is true power, my son. See how easily it overwhelms man’s power’” (31); as “darkness reigned” in the “magnificent wake” of the storm, “man’s lights bowed their mechanical heads to the power it had unleashed” (30). On this Night of Power, Abu-Jamal escapes into the darkness, away from twenty-four hour artificial light, away from twenty-four hour surveillance by the State. Abu-Jamal blends into the night, dematerialized, he becomes the “raw, primeval power,” and testifies, “I felt renewed” as nature’s “power prevailed over the man-made”; Abu-Jamal continues, “I felt, that night, that I would prevail, I would overcome the State’s efforts to silence and kill me” (31). Out of the marginalized space of living-death, Abu-Jamal overcomes censorship—execution and forced silence—and through disembodied transference into darkness and the power of nature, Abu-Jamal revitalizes his imprisoned and enslaved body, brought into being by validating interiority through narrative.

_Death Blossoms_ is not readily accessible—contrary to twenty-first-century micro-compressed information disseminated through emerging social media. _Death Blossoms_ is an
existential meditation; it is meant to be experienced—not consumed. *Death Blossoms* ruptures any convenient notions that seek to de-historicize American slavery as some fading distant past, irrelevant to a *post-racial* United States. Rather, *Death Blossoms* is an especially spectral postmodern Neo-slave narrative that talks back from living-dead space to challenge global capitalist exploitation and oppression.

In further developing the conceptual essence of *Death Blossoms*, Abu-Jamal reaches beyond, revitalizing revolutionary internationalism by redirecting postmodern fragmentation and re-appropriating spectral visible-invisibility. “Zapatista Dreams,” featured in the collection *All Things Censored* (2000), emblematizes a revitalization of revolutionary internationalism. Within his own postmodern Neo-slave narrative, Abu-Jamal reprints and voices the opening remarks from the First International Meeting for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, or the “Encuntro”; because of its precise articulation of redirected postmodern fragmentation and re-appropriated visible-invisibility, this section will be quoted at length:

>We are the Zapatista National Liberation Army […] Below, in the cities and plantations, we did not exist […] We were silenced. We were faceless. We were nameless. We had no future. We did not exist […] We were ciphers in the accounts of big capital […] Here, in the mountains […] our dead live on […] They speak to us of their death, and we hear them. Coffins speak and tell us another story that comes from yesterday and points toward tomorrow. The mountains spoke to us, the Macehualob, the common and ordinary people […] Because we want no more death and trickery, because we want no more forgetting. The mountains told us to take up arms so we would have a voice. It told us to cover our faces so we would have a face. It told us to forget our names
so we could be named. It told us to protect our past so we would have a future

[…]. The tomorrow that is harvest in the past. (Censored 267-268)

Abu-Jamal, very curiously, introduces the reprinted Zapatista remarks with “Please share it with us,” as if he is in direct conversation with the speaker from ZNLA, as opposed to directly addressing the reader; here is found a disruption of space/time temporality and physical localization. As in “Night of Power,” Abu-Jamal is in a moment of disembodied transference, sharing in the “raw, primeval power” of the Zapatista’s anti-capitalist manifesto (Death Blossoms 30). The mountains, like Anansi the Spider, and the coffins, like Jacobs, speak “and tell us another story”—speaking from the margins of living-dead space a counter-narrative to challenge the capitalist power-structure that enslaves and oppresses—a “Call to Action,” and like them, Abu-Jamal poses the questions “to fight for freedom or be fettered, to struggle for liberty or be satisfied with slavery, to side with life or death” and advocates to “[s]pread the word of life far and wide” (121).
CONCLUSION:

They’re not rights. They’re privileges of the powerful and the rich. For the powerless and the poor, they are chimeras that vanish once one reaches out to claim them as something real or substantial. Don’t expect the big networks or megachains of “Big Mac” media to tell you.

Even in a free democracy, the State always attempts to control dialogue—to decide for its own interest the limits of allowable discourse. In order to be heard, one must have wealth, power, influence, rank […] Where are the voices of the poor, the excluded, the powerless? —Abu-Jamal
"MESSAGE TO THE MOVEMENT": COMPOSITION IN-PROCESS AND THE MARGINS OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

Conclusion

On March 2, 2014, the film adaptation of Solomon Northup’s *12 Years a Slave* won the Academy Award for *Best Picture*. The film, based on Northup’s 1853 slave narrative, has grossed over fifty-five million dollars domestically for Fox Searchlight, a subsidiary of the Fox Corporation. Director Steve McQueen dedicated the award to “all the people who have endured slavery, and the twenty-one million people who still suffer slavery today.”

The Academy Awards ceremony—*the Oscars*—embodies the ascendency of celebrity culture, dressed in the phantasmagoria of happiness, where the beautiful and the wealthy are placed and presented on a lofty pedestal as mass culture, watching through a multitude of multimedia screens around the world, vicariously become emotionally invested in the suspenseful live-action drama between Oscar winners and Oscar losers. However, within the margins, within the spaces not occupied by commercials selling the fantastic or trapped in the ironic performance of multi-millionaires *chipping-in* cash to pay a working-class pizza deliveryman, within the margins of Hollywood glitter and glamour, Solomon Northup reemerges from the grave, from the past, for *those are his words*.  

Despite $80,000 dollar Academy Awards gift-bags ($20,000 of which is credited to laser hair removal and hair transplants) from high-end companies, despite the—one would hope unintentionally—ironic mockery of millionaires flashing money in collective to pay a working-class tip-earner, at a time when the chasm between the ultra-rich power elites continues to devastate the working-class poor, despite the masquerade of utopic capitalistic paradise dancing intertwined with phantasmagoric happiness—despite all this, a slave’s narrative and the shared
narrativity of his words penetrate the falsified dreamscape of utopic celebrity otherworlds, speaking to the material reality of those still living in poverty and debt—the material conditions of those still enslaved.

In 2012, Zuccotti Park Press released “Message to the Movement” by Abu-Jamal as part of the Occupied Media Pamphlet Series, which includes works by Noam Chomsky and Stuart Leonard. Almost fifteen years after the release of Live from Death Row, Abu-Jamal’s “Message to the Movement” is the continued call-and-response through a reverberation in time, and like Zapatista doctrine, the tomorrow that is harvested in the past. With respect to a reemerging revolutionary internationalism, “Message to the Movement” is a bilingual text, beginning with an open thank-you letter to the Occupy Movement, more specifically, addressed “Dear Brothers & Sisters, Compañeros y Compañeras, to all those who rebel” (1). Although globalization reflects transnational capitalist exploitation, as we have seen by (re)mapping the Black Atlantic in postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism, revolutionary internationalism reemerges as a collective resistance movement, cross-pollinating languages into a global revolutionary discourse aided by advancements in technology and developing media. We see the continuation of Malcolm X’s globetrotting revolutionary cosmopolitanism in the promise of the Occupy Movement, among other revolutionary movements, rising from out of marginal spaces across the globe to challenge injustice and oppression.

In almost identical fashion to Death Blossoms, form is an important aspect in the narrative construction and presentation of “Message to the Movement.” Abu-Jamal begins by calling into the past, specifically stating, “I would reach back to one of my elders, Malcolm X, who learned from his elders” (2). “Message to the Movement” is then structured as a call-and-response between Abu-Jamal and an unspecified Occupy Movement member. Each pamphlet
section is marked by that unspecified Occupy Movement member’s question or statement, to which Abu-Jamal responds.

When the Occupy Movement member is confused about the term *imperialism*, Abu-Jamal describes the United States as an “imperial power that runs around the world, governing others in the name of democracy, or terrorism, or Christianity,—or chicken nuggets” (5). Here, imperialism encompasses McDisneyization as a cultural dominant, implying that whether it is a United States military base, a McDonald’s or any commercial super brand, imperialism persists as multinational corporations continue to raid natural resources and enslave exploitable labor throughout the world.

By appropriating modern technology like a telephone and increasingly postmodern technology like digital space, Abu-Jamal literally and figuratively voices his postmodern Neo-slave narrative, challenging the global capitalist power-structure. Whereas traditional eighteenth and nineteenth-century slave narratives were published by former slaves after having physically escaped slavery and having moved into a position of relatively more freedom, unique to the postmodern Neo-slave narrative, Abu-Jamal’s slave narrative is in-process, as opposed to after-the-fact. We have access to an audible real-time slave narrative in-process.

While still held captive by a capitalist power-structure, Abu-Jamal voices his narrative of enslavement; using the identical methodology as the character Dessa Rose, Abu-Jamal uses call-and-response in order to survive by orality. It is within the margins of the telecommunication industry that Abu-Jamal literally uses audio call-and-response to compose his narrative. By using the prison phone system, Abu-Jamal calls out to the respondent (most notably, Noelle Hanrahen and Prison Radio) who then records and documents Abu-Jamal’s slave narrative. Because of modern/postmodern telecommunication technology—however segmented due to the
limited allowance of phone minutes and arbitrary phone privileges—there is accessibility to Abu-Jamal’s compositional process.

In 2000, Seven Stories Press published *All Things Censored*, which “Includes Compact Disc with Banned Radio Commentaries”; Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative is a multimedia slave narrative, which could only be possible with the technological advancement of the late modern/postmodern era. The many-tongued chorus becomes actualized in *All Things Censored* compact disc/book package. However, as Noelle Hanrahan informs, the title for *All Things Censored* is in reference to National Public Radio firing Abu-Jamal on “the eve of Mumia’s first broadcast” as an NPR commentator (26). Under pressure from Bob Dole and “the National Fraternal Order of Police’s intense lobbying campaign,” in 1994, the “ten unique and irreplaceable commentaries written and read by Mumia” were banned from airing and were sequestered “under lock and key in NPR’s vaults” (Hanrahan 26). This brazen display of power and unequivocal censorship results from the incestuous collapsing of money and media. As Prison Radio reports, on October 21, 2014, “Pennsylvania Governor Corbett signed into law the ‘Revictimization Relief Act’—a bill that was “fast tracked through the legislature with the specific intent to silence prisoners and prevent Mumia Abu-Jamal from speaking from prison.” Abu-Jamal’s voice is not only literally heard and collected in streaming audio files, but Abu-Jamal’s voice is heard in literature—heard in several collected works of literature he has authored. Because the State *cannot kill a book*, politico panders attempt to silence the voices of the oppressed that are *surviving by orality*.

As marginalized voices become muted, disempowered by moneyed elites and corporate media outlets, distorted by the overwhelming noise of frivolous celebrity culture gossip and sensationalism, an increasingly necro populace is relegated to comatose specters in a mechanized
reality, disconnected from the actual material conditions the media refuses to acknowledge. This phenomenon produces a form of social and civic death. As such, a mini essay in *Death Blossoms*, “Objectivity and the Media,” addresses this concern.

A synchronizing graphic relative to Abu-Jamal’s words is a drawing by Frances Jetter of a featureless face—dark and distorted—dressed in prison stripes laid out horizontally with a syringe, placed at a disruptive diagonal that counters the vertical pattern of the prison stripes, superimposed over the chest of the distressed individual. This drawing is shown in groups of four of the same image that are positioned at the bottom of every other page. Because of the group of drawings appearing every other page, the movement of the artistic composition comes to mimic the twenty-four hour news cycle ticker that runs across the bottom of the television screen.

However, rather than reading news flashes about the marriage of British monarchs, or the marriage (conglomeration) of self-sustaining name brand celebrities to one another, the news ticker in Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative is the drawing of a distorted featureless face being executed in perpetual instantiation—an infinitively repetitious conveyer belt of state-sanctioned death. This spectral ever-dying figure is a news flash challenging corporate propagandist that compress the material world into a celebrity induced coma—a dreamscape of superficial materialistic euphoria advertising the potential or vicarious inclusion in the phantasmagoric happiness of pantheonic celebrity elitism.

According to Abu-Jamal, “[o]bjectivity in journalism is an illusion […] today the media is big business. The major media organizations are not just controlled by it—they are part of it” (*Death Blossoms* 96-97). Moreover, Abu-Jamal indirectly articulates the phenomenon that is the McDisneyization of the media: “The newscaster was announcing that ABC had just been
acquired by Disney Corporation. I laughed […] thinking to myself that it won’t be long before they have Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck on the evening news” (98). Nevertheless, despite the predominance of the McDisneyization of the media, and the censorship powers of politicians and lobbyist groups that are funded by corporate financiers, resistance is still possible through ruptures triggered by appropriating the margins of media and using capitalist industry and technology against itself, or by altogether re-appropriating the very marginal space the seemingly voiceless are force into.

However, appropriating the margins of media and using capitalist industry and technology against itself is not exclusive to the late twentieth-century and twenty-first-century hyper-technological period: expropriating the margins to compose narrative is a fundamental element in the Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, an American Slave. Within capitalist industry, specifically shipbuilding and transatlantic trade, Douglass develops an idea how he “might learn to write” by “being in Durgin and Bailey’s ship-yard” (53); studying the ship carpenters labelling timber, Douglass “immediately commenced copying them,” as well as, utilizing trickery to coerce “a good many lessons in writing” (53). Douglass provides a purview to his methodological approach towards developing his reading and writing skills and overall compositional technique, in order to later chronicle his narrative, specifically stating that during “this time, my copy-book was a board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk. With these, I learned mainly how to write” (53). Re-appropriating the chalk used to construct vehicles of transatlantic trade, Douglass engages in prototypical instances of street-art by writing himself through process on an emerging urban landscape: a board fence, brick wall, and pavement. The emerging industrial cityscape becomes a spatial platform for Douglass to express his writing into being. 56
While developing his writing skills, Douglass proceeds to directly write himself into the literary spaces of master-class dominance: “I used to spend the time in writing in spaces left in Master Thomas’s copy-book, copying what he had written. I continued to do this until I could write a hand similar to that of Master Thomas. Thus, after a long, tedious effort for years, I finally succeeded in learning how to write” (*Narrative* 54). To return to Holland’s conceptualization of margins as being within the power-structure, the space Douglass is writing in is precisely the margins of Master Thomas’s copybook—this action symbolically foreshadows Douglass writing himself into the text of American history and its rhetorical assumptions about democracy for all; Douglass defies and challenges these assumptions in “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?,” and like the cunning and magic of the Academy Awards ceremony being usurped by McQueen’s recognition of those who have endured and continue to suffer slavery, and John Ridley acknowledging Northup as the prime author, Douglass usurps an Independence Day celebration: “The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn” (“Fourth of July” 124). Douglass’s dissenting voice is facilitated by his spatial and literary re-appropriation of marginal space, simultaneously using existing tools in innovative modes to acquire and refine reading/writing skills and begin the process of composing his narrative.

In another instance of innovation and re-appropriation, identical to the methodological creativity of Henry “Box” Brown, Harriet Jacobs demonstrates how marginal space within a capitalist power-structure can be re-appropriated to challenge or undermine the Repressive State Apparatus. In order to punish Jacobs by proxy and extract information as to her whereabouts, Jacobs’s “brother William, and the good aunt who had served in [Dr. Flint’s] family twenty
years,” and her “little Benny, and Ellen […] were thrust into jail” (Jacobs 246-247). Jacobs, like Henry “Box” Brown, turns capitalist industry against itself.

Jacobs helps to organize the purchase of her brother and two children through a dummy speculator that offers Dr. Flint “nine hundred dollars” for her family; the transaction effectively frees her family from jail. However, before being released from the living-dead space of jail, William and Benny demonstrate the same spatial re-appropriation as Douglass demonstrates in his slave narrative:

“Aunt Nancy, I want to show you something.” He led her to the door and showed her a long row of marks, saying, “Uncle Will taught me to count. I have made a mark for every day I have been here, and it is sixty days. It is a long time;” (Jacobs 252)

Within the marginal socio-civic space of jail, within the marginal spatiality of the physical jail cell, William teaches Benny how to count, re-appropriating repressive and oppressive socio-civic space and confining physical spatiality in order to transform a jail into a classroom and participate in the forbidden education of slaves. Engraved in a jail-cell wall, Benny’s education is not only arithmetic, as was aforementioned, in Benny’s logical structuring, learning to count leads him to the revelation that “[i]t’s wrong for him [the speculator] to take grandmother’s children” (Jacobs 252). In this marginal space—a living-dead space—William educates Benny and provides him the impetus to challenge slaveocracy ideological constructs.

Benny and Douglass altering the surrounding spatiality, the physical landscape of public brick walls and jail cells, is not only a tangible re-appropriation of public space but an incorporeal alteration to a broadening public sphere. More generally, technological advancement and accessibility modify cultural development. This could even be traced back to the nineteenth-
century where the “antebellum public sphere came to be shaped by the explosion of print culture during the era” (Bruce Jr. 35). New media and the development of technology expanded the public sphere allowing for an emerging culture to provide space for otherwise marginalized persons to participate in dialogue, while dialogically positioning “excluded voices, including those of women and African Americans, into the political order” (Bruce Jr. 35). By expanding the public sphere and through emerging cultural change, former slaves can then dialogically influence already established discourse, and ultimately determine the trajectory of a more general American discourse to include voices of those otherwise excluded persons.

These emerging cultural considerations not only influenced the public sphere, but more specifically to the “abolitionist lecture circuit,” it became an “important development shaping the style and content of the antebellum slave narrative. Most slave narrators made their names as speakers before they became writers” (Gould 19). Once again in reference to what Rushdy phrases as surviving by orality, the slave narrative and oral tradition are intimately interdependent, and considering the accelerated rate in which technology and new media are developing during the era of postmodernism, the oral tradition embedded in slave narratives endures even into the twenty-first-century. In the same way the abolitionist lecture circuit helped shape the “style and content” of traditional slave narratives, telecommunications and audio/video recordings provide a multitude of ways by which the postmodern Neo-slave narrative can be expressed, preserved, and delivered.

With that in mind, Fredric Jameson poses an important question: “We have seen that there is a way in which postmodernism replicates or reproduces – reinforces – the logic of consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether there is also a way in which it resists that logic” (Cultural Turn 20). Before examining Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave
narrative with respect to Jameson’s question about postmodernism and consumer capitalism resistance, we can begin with institutional American slavery, a more distinct era of imperialism/capitalism, and see developing technology, emerging cultural change, and then new media generate a literal and transcendent stage as a site and counter-rhetorical devise to resist capitalist sociocultural logic.

We can even see Derrida’s conceptualization of sensuous-non-sensuous and visible-invisibility in how the Black slave body was a site for exploitable labor while simultaneously a site for textual narrative testimony. As Philip Gould notes, abolitionist meetings “put limits on black expression in public and literally staged [black] bodies for public consumption” as ex-slaves “bared their backs as texts that ‘proved’ their stories” (20). However, despite any negative aspects concerning the problematic nature of public consumption with regards to commodification, there is a specific case where the abused slave body—a sensuous-non-sensuous body—is wrestled back from capitalist exchange-value abstraction and corporeal abjectivity by that very same slave who then presents his body as a super sensuous-non-sensuous textual narrative.

William Grimes, the author of Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave, planned to “will his flogged body to the nation” with the intention that his skin “might be taken off and made into parchment” so that it will “bind the constitution of glorious, happy, and free America” (Levine 104). In this “arresting image” of Grimes’s abused slave body becoming one with the theoretical framing of individual rights and recognition in the American Constitution, according to Robert S. Levine, Grimes’s “scarred skin becomes a text of revolutionary resistance that tells the story of violation but also the possibilities of a regenerated America” (104). This precisely conceptualizes a profound instance of sensuous-non-sensuous and the re-appropriation of visible-
invisibility. Grimes’s specifically scarred skin is hyper-sensualized because of the brutalized reality of slavery in-practice; and yet simultaneously, that almost topographic scarring becomes a map delineating the travel of institutional American slavery towards a “glorious, happy, and free America,” as Grimes’s projected into a promising future—Grimes himself, a visible-invisible specter, becomes both that scarred and violated slave body, while simultaneously that glorious, happy, and free tomorrow.

As we move into the twenty-first-century, deeper into late capitalism, into the era of the United States prison-industrial complex, into postmodernism, we find a definitive answer to Jameson’s question by reviewing how Abu-Jamal has constructed a multimedia slave narrative—a postmodern Neo-slave narrative—by precisely appropriating technological advancements within a hyper-realized postmodern cultural dominant. However, Abu-Jamal never surrenders to consumer capitalism; instead, Abu-Jamal navigates the margins of late capitalist consumer cultural, a whisper in the white noise of distorted realities—realities promoting glorified avarice and self-aggrandizing pseudo-celebrity egoism. You can hear him, hidden in the shadows, a voice calling from out of nowhere to be anywhere—a specter.

And as corporations fabricate ready-made mannequins to be dressed in pre-fitted focus-group tested name-brand attire, as gatekeepers to increasingly ephemeral dreamhouses of the collective, celebrity fabricants parade in the phantasmagoria of happiness, singing formulaically derived auto-tuned hit singles to be consumed by the masses. Yet, in the margins of mainstream celebrity culture conceit, in the margins of Apple’s iTunes digital superstore, Abu-Jamal’s postmodern Neo-slave narrative exists, as a free-to-download library. Despite a capitalist corporate stranglehold on media, Abu-Jamal voices a counter-narrative exposing the material realities in the wake of capitalist destruction, providing a voice, amplified by the millions who
have suffered and continue to suffer slavery for over five-hundred years, a voice for resistance and revolution, a voice for the seemingly voiceless, a voice for the poor, the excluded, the powerless: “Don’t expect the media networks to tell you, for they can’t, because of the incestuousness between the media and the government, and big business, which they both serve. I can. Even if I must do so from the valley of the shadow of death, I will. From death row, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal” (Death Row xviii).
NOTES

Introduction. “We Want Freedom”:

The Black Prisoner-Slave in the Era of the United States Prison-Industrial Complex

1. “It is important for postmodern thinkers and theorist to constitute themselves as an audience for such work. To do this they must assert power and privilege within the space of critical writing to open up the field so that it will be more inclusive. To change the exclusionary practice of postmodern critical discourse is to enact a postmodernism of resistance” (hooks, “Postmodern Blackness” 630).

2. The United States Supreme Court decided the landmark case *Citizens United vs Federal Election Commission* in 2010. This ruling, in effect, gives corporations personhood, preserving for them First Amendment rights. As a consequence, campaign financing is further deregulated to the point that corporations can fund candidates without financial limits, giving corporate funded candidates accessibility to limitless resources, as opposed to candidates without capitalist financiers. It is important to note that unions are also protected under the *Citizens United* ruling. However, this is problematic considering union-busting efforts by neo-conservatives in the 1980s, most notably the Reagan/Bush administrations, and in a global context, Margret Thatcher. Even then, unions in the United States were/are not immune to infiltrations by pseudo-capitalist mobsters and mafiosos. In 2014, *McCutcheon vs Federal Election Commission* negated aggregate limits on individual financial contributions to the extent that individuals can donate money without limit, and without limits to districts within which the originating contributor votes for his/her elected representative. This, in effect, allows affluent
individuals to decide a multitude of elections by funneling money to candidates for any office in any district or state; basically, a minority of moneyed individuals are at an advantage and can determine the assembly of government across the United States by flooding local, city, state, and federal elections with limitless funds. Eventually, this will devolve into complete spectacle—the illusion of choice, deciding between corporate candidate one versus corporate candidate two. Money will be flooded to already gerrymandered districts, making the election process not only insignificant but farcical: a mockery of universal democracy that romanticizes one person one vote parity, when in reality, one ultra-rich proprietor of a stable of puppet candidates determines incalculable local, city, state, and federal elections between supposed representatives—representatives of corporate financial interests and certainly not representatives of the working- and underclass peoples of America. More indicative of self-correcting capitalist transprocesses, *Citizens United* and *McCutcheon* are not twenty-first-century inventions; rather, they are continuations of what, in the nineteenth-century, José Martí identified as *Bossism*. In a letter to *Señor Director de la Opinión Nacional, dated* October 29, 1881, José Martí portrays the financial abuses by “el boss odioso; el cabecilla de partido; el que prepara las elecciones, las tuerce, las aprovecha, las da a sus amigos, las niega a sus enemigos, las vende a sus adversarios; el que domina los cuerpos electorales.” Because of Bossism’s interrelationship with money, those with financial means maintain the ability to produce political outcome relative to the financial influences’ inclination; because of this advantageous enterprise, among wealthy elitist to ensure their continual capitalistic expansion, the political process of electing officials who serve as an extension of the people becomes irrelevant—if not altogether obsolete: *the Pepsi Challenge en mass*. 
3. Since the competent and compassionate Cater administration, every United States president from the Republican Party preceded their presidency by holding powerful government offices in California or Texas, respectively. Considering the Electoral College, and the amount of electors per California and Texas, it should be no surprise that the prison industry boom began in California, which was then quickly followed by Texas. Both Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush won California as well as Texas; it was until Bill Clinton’s election that a Democrat presidential nominee won California again, and since then, Al Gore, John Kerry, and Barack Obama have all won California—effectively making California a blue state. With projections showing by 2020 Latinos and Blacks will be the majority in Texas, the conservative rightwing of the United States will no longer be prequalified for the thirty-eight electoral votes allocated to Texas. Geographically, the Pacific-northwest, West Coast, and eventually the Southwest United States together will become an electoral power-bloc of blue states. With California and Texas alone, a Democrat presidential nominee would already have over one-third of the required two-hundred and seventy vote electorate. As such, Arizona has followed suite in drafting and ratifying legislation based on xenophobic anxieties about immigration and racist/classist attitudes towards immigration, and more generally, the working-class non-White poor in order to preserve an already deteriorating White heteronormative State—even to the extent of drafting homophobic legislation, such as SB1062, to deny civil liberties and rights to LGBT communities.

4. Statistically, these two elementary categories can overlap, when considering the massive number of African slaves trafficked to Central America and South America, and more generally, when considering the United States as a contact-zone of intercultural and transracial
infusion. In other words, Black and Latino prison population statistical categorizations are not absolute or mutually exclusive from one another.

5. In chapter three, this phenomenon will be discussed in greater detail relative to a deteriorating White heteronormative State, where in a super-surveillant Post 9/11 United States we can discern a dangerous and irresponsible compression of the War-on-Terror (the Patriot Act) and immigration legislation, policy and reform (SB1070 and SB2281).

6. In other words, as was the case immediately after the Civil War into Reconstruction, Pig Laws or vagrant laws allowed for legislation that punished newly freed slaves who were not employed (documented as having employment, that is) as slave-wage labor. By the end of 1865, every “southern state except Arkansas and Tennessee had passed laws […] outlawing vagrancy” (Blackmon 53). The letter-of-the-law therefore encouraged the continuation of slavery by euphemistically replacing newly freed Black slaves (now possessing ownership of their own labor) with vagrant. Almost exactly equal to twenty-first-century immigration legislation in Arizona, Blacks were forced to “enter into labor contracts” (Blackmon 53), and moreover, were required to carry said documentation or be subject to arrest by not doing so. Even with the act of owning slaves becoming legally taboo, the law, nevertheless, facilitated coerced slave-wage labor by default, or forced labor through the convict-lease program, under the euphemistic manipulation of vagrant versus freed-Black and under the pretense that punishing a vagrant is disassociated from punishing Blacks; when in reality, Pig Laws were designed specifically to control an emergent independent Black labor-force after the dissolution of institutional chattel slavery. For a more thorough study in regards to the forced labor of Blacks after the Civil War and the Thirteenth Amendment, read Douglas A. Blackmon’s *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*. 

166
7. In the mid-1970s, Abu-Jamal would be hired by Wynn Moore, a program director for Philadelphia’s talk-radio station WWDB-FM. Abu-Jamal would eventually become news director of WHAT-AM and hosted the simulcast of the Philadelphia People United to Serve/Save Humanity’s national convention. As an independent reporter, Abu-Jamal’s credits include pieces for Mutual Black Network, National Public Radio, and the Associated Press. However, Abu-Jamal comments on a problematic trend he surmises: “Black radio acts as an unofficial feeder system to white radio and TV careers. It’s a farm club, where talents are tested, whitenized, and then packaged for general market consumption […] I was on this track” (*Death Row* 159).

Moreover, Abu-Jamal reveals, in *All Things Censored*, that upon being hired by White radio, he became William Wellington Cole after station managers asked him to change his name because it was “a bit too ethnic” (106). Abu-Jamal, nevertheless, negotiates the margins to continue to bring Black content to the airways: “I used my white voice, but I kept my black soul” (107). “‘Death Blossom’: Censorship, Citizen Death, and the United States Prison-Industrial Complex” and “‘Message to the Movement’: Composition In-Process and the Margins of Mainstream Media and Technology” deal more specifically with Abu-Jamal, censorship, margins and the media.

8. Chapter one will cover in more detail narration and narrativity. With respect to autobiographies, even they in instances are participatory communal projects. *On a Move* is self-referential as Bisson notes a self-awareness of recording the stories told to him by Abu-Jamal and retelling them in a fictionalized storytelling mode. It is the same communal project between Malcolm X and Alex Haley, where within the text Haley’s own narrative is woven within, while simultaneously working as a framing device for Malcolm X’s life-story. *On a Move*, however, highlights a more self-conscious (racial) self-awareness about its creative process and genre
categorization, at one point Bisson musing upon the fact that he is “a white writer? And a science fiction writer at that?” (Bisson 210). *On a Move*’s “Afterward” becomes a meta-text on narratology—Bisson expressing insecurities and complications with regards to his share of narrativity: “It’s generally either hubris or foolishness when one writer writes another writer’s life. My only excuse is that I was asked” (210); “It’s a good story,” Bisson continues, “I’m pleased to have been given a stab at telling it” (210). Narrative and narrativity transcend space and time. In this case, they specifically transcend physical barriers between inmate and visitor, as Abu-Jamal “sketched out the story for” Bisson “in the tiny visiting chamber on death row, through the glass” (213).

9. William Faulkner

10. In “A Woman’s Party,” chapter seven of *We Want Freedom*, Abu-Jamal confronts sexism, and more generally, gender dynamics within the Black Panther Party. He begins the chapter with an epigraph by Fankye Malika Adams: “Women ran the BPP pretty much. I don’t know how it got to be a male’s party or thought of as being a male’s party” (157). Abu-Jamal assesses that much of the “macho and misogynist attitudes that much of the popular press” focuses on the BPP comes from Hugh Pearson’s *The Shadow of the Panther*, which Abu-Jamal discredits by quoting Errol A. Henderson who “deemed Pearson’s work ‘flawed’ and ‘biased journalism’,” as well as, Reginald Major who called Pearson’s work “stealth history” (160). Abu-Jamal is not naïve, however, making the point that sexism and misogyny did exist but were never instituted practices in the BPP. Addressing the existence of sexism specifically, Abu-Jamal acknowledges that it did exist, but “sexism did not exist in a vacuum. As a prominent feature of the dominant social order, how could it not exist in a social, political formation that was drawn from that order, albeit from that order’s subaltern strata?” (165). This is a similar
argument made by bell hooks in “Malcolm X: The Longed-for Feminist Manhood,” where bell hooks states that “Black nationalist liberation rhetoric clearly placed black women in a subordinate role. It’s important to note here that Malcolm did not invent this rhetoric. It was part and parcel of the conservative ideology” (185). Furthermore, in “Memories,” a subsection in the chapter that becomes a mini-memoir, meshing genres within Abu-Jamal’s academic scholarship, Abu-Jamal describes reciting, like a “mantra of resistance,” the “names of our sisters” who had been imprisoned by “the pigs”—“Ericka Huggins, Angela Davis, Afeni Shakur, Joan Bird…” (Freedom 182). Abu-Jamal concludes the chapter by writing that “women were far more than mere appendages of male ego and power, they were valued and respected comrades” (184).

11. In Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” there is made a significant distinction in terms of the accuracy of a reproduction: “In even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject” (253). Therefore, even in the case of a Tupac Shakur hologram that is micro-data calculated (and that is thus virtually a perfect reproduction of imaged-performance), the projected hologram of Tupac Shakur is not—nor ever will be—Tupac Shakur. However, as we move deeper into postmodernism, and nature gives way to hyper-reality, the masses of conditioned minds begin to lose the ability to differentiate between nature and a hyper-real second nature.

12. Within a postmodern context, this is the work of art in the age of digital reproduction, where the “stripping of the veil from the object, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose ‘sense for sameness in the world’ has so increased that, by means of
reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique” (Benjamin 255-265). Within the postmodern condition, not even material death can delineate an end-point to capitalist exploitation. The cultural logic of late capitalism allows for the infinite recycling of exploitable bodies, regardless of whether they are material bodies formed by blood, by tissue, by flesh—or bodies produced by technological manipulation and illusionary optics.

13. Rather than allowing Tupac Shakur, the artist, the ability to speak for himself, rather than empower his voice that is rooted in the content of his artistic work, the cult of the music star/music industry can depoliticize his person and annihilate his voice by superimposing superficial spectacle and entertainment over any dystopic messages in Shakur’s work that would present a counter narrative to the supposed promise and harmony of the capitalist project.

14. A trajectory of this phenomenon is traced back to early photography by Benjamin; it is here in “the cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones, the cult value of the image finds its last refuge […] But as the human being withdraws from the photographic image, exhibition value for the first time shows its superiority to cult value” (258). The valuation of the dead (the cult value drawn from being dead) can now be proliferated (as mass exhibition value) by profiteering manipulation that showcases the dead across the mass consumer market.

Chapter One. “Live from Death Row”:

Reading the Contemporary African-American Prison Narrative as Postmodern Neo-Slave Narrative

15. “We stole words from the grudging lips of the Lords of the Land, who did not want us to know too many of them or their meaning. And we charged this meager horde of stolen sounds
with all the emotions and longing we had; we proceeded to build our language in inflections of voice, through tonal variety, by hurried speech, in honeyed drawls, by rolling our eyes, by flourishing our hands, by assigning to common, simple words new meanings, meanings which enabled us to speak of revolt in the actual presence of the Lords of the Land without their being aware! Our secret language extended our understanding of what slavery meant and gave us the freedom to speak to our brothers in captivity; we polished our new words, caressed them, gave them new shape and color, a new order and tempo, until, though they were the words of the Lords of the Land, they became our words, our language” (Wright 40).


I’ve known rivers:

I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the Flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

17. The film being alluded to is John Singleton’s Poetic Justice (1993), starring Tupac Shakur and Janet Jackson.

18. According to Stephanie A. Smith, at “the turn of the nineteenth century the slave narrative’s value, too, came into question […] Plantation life became a memory, and for a time the horrors of race slavery were replaced, at least in popular culture, by racist misrepresentations such as Birth of a Nation or Gone with the Wind” (190).

19. “What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has nothing but eyes if he is a painter, or ears if he is a musician, or a lyre at every level of his heart if he is a poet, or nothing but muscles if he is a boxer? Quite the contrary, he is at the same time a political being, constantly aware of what goes on in the world, whether it be harrowing, bitter, or sweet, and he cannot help being shaped by it. How would it be possible not to take an interest in other people, and to withdraw into an ivory tower from participation in their existence? No, painting is not interior decoration. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy.” —Pablo Picasso

20. “Harlem” by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

**Chapter Two. “Antagonistic Indebtedness”:**

(Re)Mapping the Black Atlantic in Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism

21. “This concluding chapter tries to integrate the spatial focus on the diaspora idea that has dominated earlier sections of this book with the diaspora temporality and historicity, memory and narrativity that are the articulating principles of the black political countercultures that grew inside modernity in a distinctive relationship of antagonistic indebtedness” (Gilroy 191).

22. Governmentally instituted racism and violent economic determinism are not exclusive to South Africa institutions in isolation. In fact, CIA officer “Donald C. Rickard by name […] had tipped off the Special Branch” in 1962 as to the precise vehicle Mandela would be driving, posing as the vehicle’s chauffeur (Blum 216). In 1990, *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* reported that then senior CIA operative, Paul Eckel, “within hours of Mandela’s
arrest,” stated that the capture of Mandela “is one of our greatest coups” (Blum 216). In addition to the United States being dependent upon South Africa for uranium reserves, in order to manufacture and produce weapons of mass destruction, the United States perceived Mandela’s African National Congress “as being part of the legendary International Communist Conspiracy” (Blum 215). Economic determinism dictates that the CIA, on behalf of the capitalist power-structure, eliminate Mandela; to the point—the US/CIA is without doubt culpable for the capture and imprisonment of Nelson Mandela, no matter the hypocritical ceremony and pomp conjured by United States officials twenty-eight years-plus after the fact.

23. It is important to note, that Che Guevara, most notably among the aforementioned BPP influences, did in fact oversee La Cabaña prison, which imprisoned those, in post-revolution Cuba, that were convicted of war crimes or considered dissenters, deserters, or more generally, counterrevolutionary agents of capitalist interests. For supporters of the revolution, the two tribunal process reflected the Nuremberg Trials and was advocated as such, but for those that opposed the revolution, Che Guevara is perceived and caricaturized as the “Butcher of La Cabaña”—despite a two tribunal process, which separately tried civilians in one and military war criminals from the Batista regime in another, and despite a general Cuban public—many of whom were victimized by the Batista dictatorship—that demanded justice. Nevertheless, after conviction and sentence, if determined so, war criminals were in fact executed. For Guevara, “revolutionary justice is a true justice. When we pronounce a death sentence, we are right to do so.” Guevara’s vigilance against traitors, dissenters, and counterrevolutionary agents was partly developed as a result of his time spent in Guatemala. Specifically, while living in Guatemala in the early 1950s, Che Guevara witnessed the United States overthrow the Guatemalan government of democratic, popular elected President Jacob Arbenz. United Sates President,
Dwight D. Eisenhower, and three other men “were to be instrumental in the fall of Arbenz: John Foster Dulles, his brother Allen, and General Bendell Smith” (Gleijeses 235); in short, the CIA, acting as agents of capital and in order to destroy Arbenz’s land reform programs, mobilized and organized the designed execution of terroristic tactics to destabilized the Arbenz government and replace it with the military dictatorship of Castillo Armas. In 1973, this exact program will be reinstated by the CIA to overthrow the democratically elected Salvador Allende government in Chile, and install the military dictator Augusto Pinochet—a free market capitalist and Friedmanite. Even as recent as 2002, the United States and CIA, in a failed attempt, organized a (media) coup to overthrow the democratically elected Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. In Guatemala, Operation PBSUCCESS was spearheaded by board members from the multinational United Fruit—also known as the Green Octopus—board members that simultaneously doubled as the United States Secretary of State (John Foster Dulles) and the CIA Director (Allen Dulles). The incestuous relationship between capital and government is the dissolution of the nation-state and the usurpation of multinational corporations. The imperialist banner is no longer a national flag but a conglomeration of corporate brand logos.

24. On May 2, 2013, Assata Shakur, the godmother and aunt of Tupac Shakur, became the first woman to be included in the FBI’s most-wanted terrorist list. Assata Shakur, or Joanne Deborah Chesimard, allegedly murdered New Jersey trooper Werner Foester in a gunfight between state troopers and Black Liberation Army members. Shakur was ultimately found guilty in 1977 of first degree murder, assault and battery of a police officer, assault with a dangerous weapon, assault with intent to kill, illegal possession of a weapon, and armed robbery. Shakur would escape prison in 1979, resurfacing in Cuba in 1984. This has been and continues to be a contentious issue. Shakur maintains her innocence, while relentlessly continuing to advocate
revolution. The circumstances surrounding Shakur’s case are disturbingly similar to Leonard Peltier’s case; Peltier, an American Indian Movement member, was sentenced in 1977 for the execution of two FBI agents during a standoff at South Dakota’s Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Moreover, one interesting aspect is the way in which the State negotiates their depiction of Shakur in the media versus in the official records. In the official record of the case, Shakur is depicted as extremely masculine, even more so when we consider hyper-macho attitudes that are a part of US gun culture and its fixation with guns as a phallic prosthetic or prop within the social psyche of the United States. Shakur, in effect, transposes the trooper’s masculinity as she allegedly takes the trooper’s own gun and shoots him twice in the head, execution-style. Yet, in the FBI’s most-wanted terrorist profile under “Remarks,” where other classified terrorist are either depicted more conceptually in terms of terrorist association/affiliation, by occupation, and/or ethic generalities such as “beard-wearing,” Shakur is re-feminized in the one and only sentence: “she may wear her hair in a variety of styles and dress in African tribal clothing” (FBI website). Where for men their ranks, actions, and occupations are their identification, for the first female to be listed by the FBI as one of the most-wanted terrorists, it is her hair style and (African) dress that are Shakur’s identification. Even a female classified as a terrorist cannot escape being reduced to hair and clothing. Not only is Shakur’s description vague and useless, but, considering Shakur is the very first woman to be listed among the FBI’s most-wanted terrorists, some forty years after the fact, this speaks to the over-determined use of the term terrorist in general, and more specifically, how her listing has more to do with spectacle or political posturing rather than with legitimate anti-terrorist efforts. When White gun-owning males are responsible for mass shootings that they pre-confess to in social media, it is not even a gun issue but rather a mental-health issue; when a Black anti-capitalist revolutionary allegedly
shoots one law enforcement officer with the officer’s own gun during a gun fight, it becomes a terrorism issue. This suspiciously looks like political pandering and unnecessary fear-mongering by the FBI and not a forewarning against eminent threats to national security. Staged terrorism and manufactured spectacle are not unusual for the FBI. In 2008, the FBI produced a fictive drama set against an implicit rivalry between the impoverished Black community of Newburgh, New York versus the wealthy White community of Riverdale, New York. *Reality TV* at its finest—orchestrated spontaneity, the illusion of real-life: lights, cameras, action! The State sponsored media machine prints the headlines and broadcasts newsflashes of terror-plot foiled by the best and brightest undercover FBI agents. This is fiction—unabashed lies sold to the kept-ignorant public to mass consume and ensure the continued unquestionable loyalty to the United States. If anything, the FBI are terrorists, recruiting (entrapping) four poverty-stricken, jobless, and desperate Blacks by offering them $250,000 dollars to commit acts of terror. Imagine offering those same Black individuals $250,000 dollars to perform works that would help the community: *which action would they have taken?* This is no case of terrorism, but a revolting and unethical social experiment to determine the depths of desperation the poor have been forced to occupy. The FBI should be embarrassed and ashamed by their pettiness and held criminally responsible for conspiring to commit slow murder and preying on the weak and disadvantaged; twenty-five years in prison for each of the Newburgh Four (James Cromitie, David Williams, Onta Williams, and Laguerre Payen) so that the FBI can stage an elaborate reality TV moment meant to satisfy their conceit and over-determined budget and over-determined selves. An act for the cameras, the playbill posters mass media and the reviews are transferred from the Entertainment and Arts section to the bold print headline of page one. Terrorism is an art form.
25. Per the documentary film *Stealing Africa* (part of the *Why Poverty?* series), the African country Zambia has the largest copper reserves in Africa, and yet, even with copper prices in the world market having quadrupled from 2001 to 2008, Zambia is one of the twenty poorest countries in the world. 69% of Zambia’s population lives below the poverty-line, 80% living on less than two dollars a day. Through capitalist farce, the illogical is made logical: How is it that a country that is a world leader in the production of a commodity in such high demand, a commodity with increasing value, be simultaneously one of the poorest countries in the world?—Capitalism! As a result of predatory lending, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund forced massive debt upon Zambia and, in order to collect on inflated debt, the World Bank and IMF intimidated, coerced, and bamboozled Zambia into privatizing their own copper mines in 2000. Acting as an agent of capital, Zambia’s corrupt President Chiluba, who would later be found guilty of conspiracy to defraud for misappropriating government funds, sold the largest copper reserves in Africa for a one-time payment of $627 Million dollars; over the next ten years, the Zambian copper mines would generate $29 Billion dollars of revenue. The multinational Glencore International would benefit the most from stealing Africa. Through illegal price transferring, disregarding arm’s length provisions, and manipulating tax-havens, Glencore is able to avoid significant profit-taxes by laundering monies through Glencore subsidiaries around the world, more specifically filtering monies through tax-haven Ruschlikon, Switzerland, a town that benefits from banking and sheltering the financial excesses of Glencore and its CEO Ivan Glasenberg; meanwhile in Zambia, the Mopani Copper Mines owned by Glencore generate billions of dollars, while poisoning the environment with sulfur dioxide and destroying vegetation with byproduced acid rain. However, findings from Zambia’s Environmental Management Agency and the World Health Organization have been absconded
by private interests and are withheld from an inquiring public demanding transparency. For the
year 2006, Zambian copper mines generated $3 Billion dollars of revenue, and yet Zambia only
received $50 Million in tax-revenue, despite the cost of electricity to operate the copper mines
per year being $150 Million dollars; therefore, what little profit-tax multinational corporations
paid, it only amounted to one-third of the electric-bill expensed to Zambia to operate said copper
mines. Glencore was founded in 1974, by American businessman Marc Rich; at that time,
Glencore International was Marc Rich Co. AG. In 1983, Rich would be indicted on charges
pertaining to one the most serious US tax fraud cases, and during discovery, investigators found
that Rich was selling arms to then designated hostile enemy nation Iran from 1979-1981. To
avoid arrest and extradition, Rich would flee to Switzerland and renounce his US citizenship. In
1983, Rich would be listed among the FBI’s most-wanted fugitives. While Rich avoided
extradition under the protection of the Swiss government, future Glencore GEO Ivan Glasenberg
was working as a trader in Johannesburg, South Africa, mainly trading oil to the controlling
regime in apartheid South Africa before and during the United Nations’ supposed embargo
against South Africa. As a fugitive from the law on FBI’s most-wanted list, Marc Rich made $2
Billion dollars selling oil to apartheid South Africa. Eventually, Rich would hire Jack Quinn,
former White House counsel to President Bill J. Clinton, in order to secure a Presidential Pardon;
in that same vein, Denise Rich, the wife of Marc Rich, donated more than $1 Million dollars to
the US Democrat party and an undisclosed amount to the Clinton Presidential Library. Marc
Rich, despite selling arms to US military opposition, ultimately received a Presidential Pardon in
2001, along with partner “Pinky” Green; only his corporation would not be absolved. Rich
would then be forced to remove himself from Mark Rich Co. AG/Glencore International, sell is
capital interests in 20th Century Fox, and pay over $150 Million dollars—an insignificant fine
that is more circus than justice. In May 2011, Glencore International would have one of the largest Initial Public Offerings (IPO), raising over $10 Billion dollars, netting $8.8 Billion for CEO Glesenberg; Glencore’s public offerings include shareholders the Church of England and the Norwegian government. In 2012, former England Prime Minister Tony Blair would help facilitate the $80 Billion dollar merger between Glencore and superpower multinational Xstrata.

This is the post-nation-state, where national governments and their (highest) officials are capitalist marionettes with rosy cheeks and jagged walks, clumsily giving the appearance of autonomy—automatic autonomy—the spectacle of democracy: only capital moves these hollow head and marble eyed happy little puppets. Marc Rich renounces his US citizenship and yet through capital investment is resurrected into a US socio-civic afterlife through rewarded citizenship; but in contrast, the United States will not even provide a legitimate pathway to citizenship for alienated refugee masses that have and are escaping deplorable material conditions throughout Latin America—conditions that were initially created by Western imperialism, accelerated by United States eco-political foreign policy, and razed by CIA intervention, destabilizing democracy in the Americas in order to preserve capitalism in the face of then emerging socialist amelioration. Moreover, a disenfranchised and misguided US citizen sends fifty dollars to an incapable pseudo-terror-cell, and spends life in prison; Marc Rich arms the military of Iran in exchange for cheap oil and receives a Presidential Pardon. There is the Law for the Rich, and then there is the law for the rest of us. Injustice—the trillion dollar Iraq War was established on the false pretense, false alarm of a threatened use of weapons of mass destruction, fabricated and perpetuated by the Bush administration and the conservative rightwing media machine. Trillions of dollars pocketed by corporatist and multinations, while the United States educational system, literacy initiatives, and community resources are
intentionally defunded and cut. A trillion dollar war based on government lies, costing the lives of over 12,000 US casualties and over 100,000 wounded US service men/women, as well as Iraqi casualties of war and Iraqi civilians that total near 200,000 deaths—and yet, the Bush administration has never been held criminally responsible, let alone liable for their actions in allegiance to capitalism above all else. There is the Law for the Rich, and then there is the law for the rest of us.

26. With “deep conviction,” Paul Robeson expressed his belief “that for all mankind a socialist society represents an advance to a higher stage of life—that it is a form of society which is economically, socially, culturally, and ethically superior to a system based upon production for private profit” (Robeson 47). Post-World War II, in a Cold War landscape of paranoia and patriotism, Robeson was at the center of controversy for his political views and “warm feelings of friendship for the peoples of that land [Soviet Union]” (46). As the relatively new medium television transitioned into commercial television, and thus an emerging postmodern world, increasingly so with a correlating increase in televisions per household, Robeson redirects his celebrity and appropriates television to internationalize the violent oppression and discrimination against Blacks in the United States and abroad, at a time soon after the horrific revelations of systematic State programmed atrocities perpetuated by fascist Nazi Germany, among others. In Here I Stand, Robeson, more specifically in the chapter “Our Right to Travel,” recalls the first Pan-African Congress in 1919 and the “founder and architecture of the Pan-African movement,” W.E.B. Du Bois (80). What is especially upsetting to Robeson is the US State Department denying Du Bois a passport and barring Du Bois from attending Ghana’s independence celebration—an invitation extended by Ghana, a regular attendee of the Pan-African Congress. It is through Robeson’s own travels “back and forth to many other lands” that his “outlook on
world affairs was formed” (40). Like Du Bois, Robeson was denied the right to travel by the US State Department, which revoked Robeson’s passport in 1950, “in view of appellant’s frank admission” of being “extremely active politically in behalf of independence of the colonial people of Africa” (72). Robeson’s thesis on the right to travel for Blacks, positions the denial or revocation of travel as, in effect, censorship (travelling abroad, speaking against the illusionary democratic benevolence of the United States was disallowed), and conversely, positions the exercise of travel as liberation: “From the days of chattel slavery until today, the concept of travel has been inseparably linked in the minds of our people with the concept of freedom” (75).

“Message to the Movement’: Composition In-Process and the Margins of Mainstream Media and Technology” will examine the ways in which Abu-Jamal, despite being physically confined with absolute revocation of travel, is nevertheless able to circumvent censorship and physical immobility, and like Robeson’s appropriation of emerging media, is able to challenge the capitalist power-structure and demand liberation via the postmodern technological mobility of message.

27. “The mighty seek to secure their position with blood (police), with cunning (fashion), with magic (pomp)” (Benjamin 133).

28. “South Africa is like a vicious wolf, openly hostile towards black humanity. But America is cunning like a fox, friendly and smiling, but even more vicious and deadly than the wolf” (Malcolm X, “Appeal to Africa” 75).

29. In other words, postmodern fragmentation is a phenomenon hyper-realized through emerging global communities of resistance against late capitalism; however, this phenomenon also complicates collective revolutionary efforts when the medium silences the message. For example, Arab Spring as a revolutionary movement becomes an aside to the commercial appeal
of Twitter, and this revolution is then reduced to a marketing campaign as the Twitter brand
grabs the headlines, presenting an opportunity to once again commodify revolution. The
revolution loses its meaning, distorted by miscontextualization: the demands of the people and
what ignited revolution become trivial if not all together unknown, because what is important, is
that Twitter™ is at the front, back, and center of newscasts and corporate media talking-heads
can then parlay the conversation into how they themselves use Twitter in just the same fashion as
idolized celebrities so too use Twitter, further fabricating a false intimacy between the ascended
and the disremembered. This phenomenon is a commonality: the iconic Korda photograph of
Che Guevara becomes a mass produced image and supersedes Che Guevara the revolutionary
with respect to historical materialism; not unlike the way in which anti-establishment punk rock
in the 1970s and fatalistic grunge in the 1990s were commodified and packaged for runway
fashion shows, or more recently, not unlike the way the Candle Building (11 Spring Street in
New York), a street art cult spot, was converted into SoHo multimillion dollar luxury apartments
that eventually became owned by Rupert Murdoch’s son, an heir to the giant News Corporation.
Jay Z, who is an unabashed capitalist that preaches elitism, muscular individualism (emphasizing
misogyny), and egoism to the extent that he rechristens himself/his brand as Roc-A-Fella
(Rockefeller), which also cannibalistically feeds-off and feeds-into the cult of Scarface/Tony
Montana—a clearly capitalistic narrative emblematic of capitalist idolatry—he, Jay Z the
capitalist, wears a Che Guevara t-shirt, coincidentally during photo-ops of course, on his tourist
trip to Cuba. This is indicative of tourists that vocation in revolution, and when it is no longer
profitable or attractive, or no longer frivolously entertaining, they can safely return to re-
inscribing capitalist doctrine on their forehead. Moreover, in 2013, racial profiling cases
involving the luxury department store Barneys New York gained national attention. Two Black
youths, Trayon Christian and Kayla Phillips, in two separate incidents were confronted and question by city law enforcement officers, or more precisely in the case of Christian, he was arrested by NYPD detectives and detained in a local jail. Law enforcement officers became alarmed by the two African-American youths buying high-end items: a name-brand belt and a name-brand handbag. Despite Black community outrage, and their insistence that Jay Z end his affiliation with Barneys, thereby cancelling his holiday collection where initially only some of the proceeds would fund scholarships established by Jay Z, after a private made-public self-commentated deliberation through media, Jay Z refused and continued his collaboration with Barneys. According to Forbes, Jay Z, in 2014, has a net-worth of $520 Million dollars.

Specifically in regards to Jay Z’s/Barneys’s holiday collection, The Huffington Post’s Julee Wilson reports that, “after tallying the profits […] the total exceeded $1 Million,” which is therefore about 0.2% of Jay-Z’s net-worth in 2014. The collection included “$1,000 cotton shirts, $700 python baseball caps and more absurdities” (Wilson). Rather than commandeer the national news feeds to make a definitive statement against State induced racial profiling and discrimination by the market and its State police, Jay Z, under the false pretense of charity, continued his allegiance to the market over the people in order to generate about 0% of his net-worth to fund his scholarships. Furthermore, scholarship donations are always tax deductible and thereby affect a considerable percentage of adjusted gross income, or AGI. For Jay Z, it is worth more to remain silent and preserve his brand-identity than it is to terminate his lucrative relationship with Barneys specifically, and more generally, jeopardize his ascendency into capitalist paradise. About three years prior, Jay Z also attempted to capitalize on the Occupy Movement by selling commodified Occupy Wall Street t-shirts; however, after it was revealed that absolutely no funds would be shared with any protester or groups of protesters, and after
ensuing backlash and criticism, the Rocawear website deleted the sale-item and discontinued its sale. At best, Jay Z’s 2013 tourist vacation to Cuba, complete with local dress that de-historicizes Che Guevara into a condense and malleable silent image that is so revolutionary-chic, is class-diving in the same vain the affluent and privileged masses rushed to CBGB’s, flocked to Jean-Michel Basquiat’s studio, and now sing the praises of Pussy Riot: spectacle and projected vainglorious self-worship. The cult of personality by proxy. At worst, considering the relative ease with which Jay Z received permission to visit Cuba, under the pretense of cultural exchange, this more accurately could be described as stealth invasion—the cultural industry mobilized. The Dolls/Automatons of the Arcades at the gates of the phantasmagoria of happiness are now traveling salesmen/women that no longer are stationary greeters at the gates but have now become private jet-setting ambassadors for capitalist utopic ascendency.

30. It is important to note that Africa, Asia, and Latin America, spanning over four continents, each have unique circumstances and histories that even within each nation or region the geo-political conditions are never universally identical in every instance of each’s constitution. But with that said, as Malcolm X suggests, degradation and exploitation is facilitated by Western powers, globally constructing capitalist structures that are generally premised on racism. So although the specificity may differ among Africa, Asia, and Latin America, increasingly more evident in postmodern globalizing world markets, capitalism is inseparable from the exploitation and oppression of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In retrospect, Malcolm X’s words are not only astute but even prophetic, not only commentating on then contemporary United States designed coups around the world, both those that succeeded and those that failed, but in addition, anticipated the continuous US/CIA financial, paramilitary, logistical, technological, extralegal, and terroristic interventions across the globe—in the name of
capitalism—to eco-poli-form geographical delineations in order to map a monopolized world, no matter the injustices pervaded; per William Blum: (China 1945-51); France (1947); Marshal Islands (1946-58); Italy (1947-1970s); Philippines (1945-53); Korea (1945-53); Albania (1949-53); Eastern Europe (1948-56); Germany (1950s); Iran (1953); Guatemala (1953-1990); Costa Rica (mid-1950s, 1970-71); Middle East (1956-58); Indonesia (1957-58); Haiti (1959); Western Europe (1950s-1960s); British Guiana/Guyana (1953-64); Iraq (1958-63); Soviet Union (1940s-1960s); Vietnam (1945-73); Cambodia (1955-73); Laos (1957-73); Thailand (1965-73); Ecuador (1960-1963); Congo/Zaire (1960-65, 1977-78); France/Algeria (1960s); Brazil (1961-64); Peru (1965); Dominican Republic (1963-65); Cuba (1959-present); Indonesia (1965); Ghana (1966); Uruguay (1969-72); Chile (1964-73); Greece (1967-74); South Africa (1960s-1980s); Bolivia (1964-75); Australia (1972-75); Iraq (1972-75); Portugal (1974-76); East Timor (1975-99); Angola (1975-1980); Jamaica (1976); Honduras (1980s); Nicaragua (1978-90); Philippines (1970s-1990s); Seychelles (1979-81); South Yemen (1979-84); South Korea (1980); Chad (1981-82); Grenada (1979-83); Suriname (1982-84); Libya (1981-89); Fiji (1987); Panama (1989); Afghanistan (1979-92); El Salvador (1980-92); Haiti (1987-94); Bulgaria (1990-91); Albania (1991-92); Somalia (1993); Iraq (1990s); Peru (1990s-present); Mexico (1990s-present); Columbia (1990s-present); Yugoslavia (1995-99); and in general more recently, private for-profit enterprises disguised as United States democratic intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the failed (media) coup by the CIA and the US State Department to overthrow the democratically elected Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 2002 and the preemptive imprisonments and torture of Leftist union leader and future democratically elected Evo Morales in Bolivia (2005), who challenged the corporate privatization of Bolivia’s water supply—privatization that disgustingly helped introduced policies that made illegal the collection of rain water by Bolivians. On
February 24, 1965, three days after the assassination of Malcolm X, Che Guevara delivered a speech at the Second Economic Seminar of Afro-Asian Solidarity. Guevara, an Argentinian representing Cuba at this conference, attended and spoke at the conference held in Algeria, stating that a “common aspiration unites us in our march toward the future: the defeat of imperialism” (Guevara 301). “Ever since monopoly capital took over the world,” Guevara continues, “it has kept the greater part of humanity in poverty” (302). What is essential to Guevara is the “duty” and “necessity” of the “practice of proletarian internationalism […] for the peoples struggling for a better future” (302). What Abu-Jamal emphasizes in revolutionary internationalism is the progression advancing Robeson and Malcolm X “internationalizing” the Black freedom struggle, and what Guevara phrases as the “practice of proletarian internationalism” against monopolizing capital world domination.

31. “We want an end to the robbery by the capitalist of our Black Community. [*in the original text, the term ‘white man’ was used; it was changed shortly thereafter to ‘capitalist’]” (Abu-Jamal, Freedom 98).

32. The performativity of White, in relation to a capitalistic Repressive State Apparatus is displayed in a scene in Harriet Jacobs’s nineteenth-century slave narrative Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Jacobs describes in “Christmas Festivities,” her first Christmas in her “den” (269). Jacobs, the “imprisoned mother” of Benny and Ellen, “could not have the privilege of witnessing their surprise and joy” upon seeing their “stockings filled” (267). With the problematize nature and hypocrisy of slaveholders celebrating Christmas as a backdrop, on “this occasion,” Jacobs “was warned to keep extremely quiet, because two guest had been invited” (268); one, “the town constable and the other was a free colored man, who tried to pass himself for white” (268-269). Within the same sentence, Jacobs creates and identifies a direct causal link between the free
colored man trying to “pass himself off for white” and one “who was always ready to do any mean work for the sake of currying favor with white people” (269). Acting as an agent of capital, “this colored man had spent many nights hunting for” Jacobs (269). “How I despise him,” Jacobs even exclaims. In this instance, complexion is secondary; this despised colored man “had the blood of a slave father in his veins, but for the sake of passing himself off for white, he was ready to kiss the slaveholders’ feet” (269). So to be White, regardless of color/complexion, is to be an agent of a capitalistic Repressive State Apparatus; to perform White is to act in accordance with the racist capitalistic power-structure, precisely in this case, nineteenth-century slaveocracies. “As for the constable,” Jacobs determines, “he wore no false colors” and “was superior to his company inasmuch as he did not pretend to be what he was not” (269).

33. Gary Webb was a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist who officially committed suicide on December 10, 2004 (two separate cranial shotgun wounds).

34. Through the looking glass—the US/Mexico border—the United States attempts to de-familiarize itself from the uncanny. Mexico, the post-nation-state now fully realized, stares back: privatization of nation and destruction of democracy—capitalism—the devourer of worlds. From 2006 to 2012, during the sexennial period of President Felipe Calderón, it “is estimated that over 80,000 people were killed by drug-related violence” in Mexico—by “comparison, the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile, some 40,000 people died” (Hernández 306-307). From 2000 to 2013, “[n]o fewer than 88 journalist” have been murdered in Mexico, while “18 others disappeared during the same period” (World Press Freedom Index 2014). The disappeared are silenced and mass graves house the muted. Mexico is capitalism unbound! Mexico is capitalism in its most perfect form: capitalism unregulated—unchained—to where the
death of the subject is complete. Whereas Havana, Cuba, before the Revolution, was a model of corruption and excess, acting as a brothel for the United States, Havana nevertheless, was subject to governmental powers and under the imperialistic control of the United States; in the case of Mexico however, the process is completed and the nation-state has been supplanted. The Mexican government is now an appendage to big business—a globalized multi-billion dollar business—that is the illegal drug trade and its subsidiaries to include but not limited to banking/money laundering, protection, extortion, kidnapping, fixed assassination, in general, terrorism. Not coincidentally, this process begins with the Mexican government, assisted by the United States, razing the land in order to defeat any revolutionary elements that would counter capitalist totality. Mexico’s “mafocracy” could not have created its “empire without the help of illustrious businessmen, bankers, military chiefs, police officers, and politicians, including former presidents of the Republic and their relatives […] All are united around one single goal: money and power” (Hernández 22). In the 1970s, Mexico’s “dirty war” against “left-wing opposition groups […] such as the Revolutionary Armed Movement, the People’s Armed Revolutionary Front, and the Peasant’s Brigade Against Injustice” ensured that any and all anti-capitalist movements would have no presence in an emerging globalizing late capitalist economy of Mexico (Hernández 28). According to the relentless Anabel Hernández, the “biggest narco of them all was CIA”—Barry Seal/Adler Berriman Seal (71); it was the United States/CIA that brokered the corporate merger between the Medellín Cartel (Columbia) and the Guadalajara Cartel (Mexico) by—not only allowing but—assisting Seal to move literally tons of cocaine, most notably through the Mena, Arkansas airport from 1981 to 1985, during the governorship of future US President Bill J. Clinton. As a result of “its anti-communist mission in Latin America” and having been denied “resources by Congress,” the “unscrupulous CIA fell into the arms of the
narcotic traffickers” (Hernández 70). Furthermore, in “exchange for an open door for its drug
shipments, the Medellín Cartel gave cash to the Contras,” as did the Guadalajara Cartel, as well
as, providing the CIA and DFS (Dirección Federal de Seguridad) with a ranch, “belonging to
Rafael Caro Quintero in Veracruz,” to act as a paramilitary home-base for Nicaraguan Contras
and their CIA handlers (Hernández 73). Moreover, it should be no surprise that Columbia and
Mexico have been and continue to be the United States’ biggest allies in the Latin American
region. This is capitalism—bloody! In Columbia, the villainous drug baron José Vicente
Castaño Gil, El Profe, ascended the corporate ladder, beginning as “a founding leader of the
now-dissolved, far-right paramilitary group, Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia […] notorious
for drug trafficking, extortion, robbery, kidnapping, and terrorism” (Hernández 172). In Mexico,
“the rules governing the relation between drug traffickers and government changed forever
during the [Vicente] Fox administration: the public officials became employees of the drug
traffickers, and their armed wing” (Hernández 195). This is capitalism! In the United States, the
entertainment (cultural) industry and the dreamhouses of the collective superimpose the
phantasmagoria of happiness and utopic notions of celebrity inclusion over the material realities
of the poor, the disenfranchised, the indebted, the silenced; advertisements present snapshots of
smiling, carefree and youthful, faces, while tabloid and entertainment news sources sell
objectified celebrity bodies for mass consumption and gossip. In Mexico, monopolized
television media sources fabricate a manifestation of fantastical otherworlds populated by
supermodels, scandalizing extramarital affairs, estate disputes, and Pygmalion retreaded
imitations of imitations, while on the streets beyond the television glow, bloated severed heads
blotched in surfacing bloodspots, vacant eyes rolled to a side, become capitalist advertising
gimmicks—the phantasmagoria of unhappiness—decapitated bodies, limp and unresponsive,
stained, become the postmodern sandwich-man, a mascot, a kinetic billboard for the capitalist indoctrinated mantra: *gold or lead*. This is capitalism—whether it is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or the Mafiocracy of Mexico, capitalism is capitalism.

35. Serving as a substitute pseudo-narrative—emblematic of the postmodern condition and consumer culture, “McDisneyization,” a term conceived by George Ritzer and Allan Liska to describe post-tourism, is a “modern grand narrative viewing the world as growing increasingly efficient, calculable, predictable, and dominated by controlling non-human technologies” (97). Ritzer and Liska use Disney World as a model to explain all-pervasive consumer culture, expressed in an artificial world premised on consumption. Whereas in the past working-class families would save money in order to vacation, in post-tourism, money is saved in order to have shopping money to spend while on vacation; consequently, the “shopping has become the vacation” (Ritzer and Liska 104). In the case of Disney World, a substitute to a real historical world and historical narrative, shopping and consuming Disney World is fused into a single experience. Vacationing to Disney World implies consuming the world of Disney by purchasing Disney memorabilia, such as, books, recordings, movies, clothing, and other Disney goods; this becomes the Disney experience: to experience Disney is to consume it. The consumption of Disney World facilitates the consumption of differing elements within consumer culture. In other words, analogous to the earlier example of Coachella and Tupac, differing elements are amalgamated under the brand of Disney, so that a t-shirt, a book, a movie—all differing elements with differing functionalities—are to a postmodern logic, not only relatable but essentially one element one brand, in this case Disney. A macrocosm of this effect is where Ritzer’s and Liska’s term best applies. Like the fusion of differing elements into one, Disney World and McDonald’s come together within the postmodern construction of the mega-mall, where both Disney World
and McDonald’s, logically two unrelated entities—imagination and fast food—are combined within a mega-mall structure, a place designed for mass consumption and efficiently maximized shopping.

36. What follows will be a lengthy quote, but Jameson’s theorization of finance capital is paramount and the linchpin to my argument, so my theories are built on his theory concerning finance capital: “the results of the cybernetic ‘revolution’, the intensification of communication technology to the point at which capital transfers today abolishes space and time and can be virtually instantaneously effectuated from one national zone to another. The results of these lighting-like movements of immense quantities of money around the globe are incalculable […] indeed mass cultural production and consumption themselves – at one with globalization and the new technology – are as profoundly economic as the other productive areas of late capitalism, and as fully integrated into the latter’s generalized commodity system” (Cultural Turn 144).

Therefore, in the same way finance capital is abstraction and no longer relative to space and time consideration, prisoner-slave formations are instantaneous and a-local; meaning, the transformation from person to non-person is instantaneous, as oppose to the Atlantic slave-trade that was premised on capturing Africans and over the course of months at sea would transform Africans into non-person. Moreover, because of globalization or multinational capitalism, in a postmodern context, the natural world has transformed into the theoretical or cyber world, and cyberspace is now material space—now the real world. In the same way the works of Picasso and Joyce, and the hologram of Tupac (a dead rapper) are realistic in postmodernity, the cyberspace of abstraction and finance capital is realistic, and subsequently, the historical material world is unrealistic, now dead. The modern slave-ship technology is outdated, like a VCR, car-phones, Polaroid cameras—and those items just listed are relatively contemporary, so
the slave-ship in that respect is prehistoric, and more importantly to late capitalism, is no longer practical or efficient. Ultimately, “[g]lobalization is rather a kind of cyberspace in which money capital has reached its ultimate dematerialization, as messages which pass instantaneously from one nodal point to another across the former globe, the former material world” (Jameson, Cultural Turn 154). In summation, the Atlantic slave-trade is extinct, because the material and historical Atlantic is unreal in postmodernity; what is real now is cyberspace, which reflects the cyber transformation of mass enslavement that is historically distorted in a high-speed abstraction of history’s former material reality.

37. Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx will be featured more prevalently in the following chapter. My inspiration to use Derrida’s aforementioned work is due entirely to Naomi C. Reed: in “The Specter of Wall Street: ‘Bartleby, the Scrivener’ and the Language of Commodities,” Reed uses Derrida’s concept of “sensuous non-sensuous” where both “spirit and body—or something in between the two—the specter […] corresponds in Marx’s analysis to exchange-value” (254). This reconciles the initially contradictory descriptions of Bartleby as simultaneously being ghostlike and cadaverous: “Bartleby is both an apparition and a gentlemanly cadaver” (250). According to Reed, Bartleby is attempting to remove himself from “circulation” and its implied alienation by escaping “these relations of equivalence” (257)—to “disrupt the apparently smooth running of a logic of abstract equivalence” (266). Where I build from her work is by emphasizing Bartleby’s prison experience, his social vagrancy in addition to finance capital and speculation. I conclude by stating that the lawyer narrator’s recognition of his own body is triggered by the physical touch of Bartleby’s material corpse. The lawyer narrator understands his body by mapping the bodily sensation he feels from touching Bartleby’s corpse—a sensation spreading throughout his arms, spine, and feet. Bartleby’s body both
reflects the projected capitalistic logic of abstracted capital finance and exploitable laboring body, as well as, indicated by the story’s conclusion, reflects bodily individuality for Bartleby that ruptures the constructed psychosocial and ideological implications of the cultural logic of late capitalism. Bartleby’s corporeal corpse exposes the exploitative second nature of capitalism, and like other dead or dying bodies, has the potential to disrupt and rupture capitalist systems of oppression.

Chapter Three. “Death Blossoms”:

Censorship, Citizen Death, and the United States Prison-Industrial Complex

38. “If my writing is now a crime, then we are now coconspirators, for you are reading it. When my right to write is denied, what of your ‘right’ to read? For this arrogant, silly government, death is not enough. Silence!” (Abu-Jamal, Censored 123).

39. “the mighty seek to secure their position with blood (police), with cunning (fashion), with magic (pomp)” (Benjamin, Arcades 133).

40. “bleeding” refers to sequential paneling where the compositional movement in a panel visually guides the eye into the subsequent panel to convey a more direct causal relationship between the two panels.

41. By virtue of spirit and body dynamics, and conceding that humans exist simultaneously in bodily materiality and in intangible essentiality, theoretical abstraction can then be corporealized. In other words, there is a sociocultural predisposition to perceive the body as inspirted. Derrida alludes to transubstantiation: “‘I am thy Fathers Spirit,’ it is even a visible-invisible body, sensuous-non-sensuous, and always under the tough institutional or
cultural protection of some artifact: the helmet or the ideolgem or the fetish under armor” (Derrida 158).

42. “Once ideas or thoughts are detached from their substratum, one engenders some ghost by giving them a body. Not by returning to the living body from which ideas and thoughts have been torn loose, but by incarnating the latter in another artifactual body, a prosthetic body, a ghost of spirit, one might say a ghost of the ghost” (Derrida 157-158). This is eerily precise to the aforediscussed spectral Tupac Shakur hologram. The artistic creativity of Shakur is negated, despite being originally his words sung by his voice; in reality, his words are now a recorded voice-box data file physically detached from the phantasmagoric hologram—a fetishized and commodified “borrowed body”—a body that is neither “perceptible nor invisible, but remains flesh, in a body without nature, in an a-physical body” (158). This is the perpetual life-death cycle of commodified labor commodified.

43. Not only can it be interpreted that the jail is used as a mechanism for racist State control, but additionally, this advertisement subtly comments on what Kobena Mercer frames as Black hair politics: the line describing Jacobs’s “black hair” as being “inclined to curl; but it can be made straight” could be read as a coded warning to Jacobs and any other deemed deviant slave that the system’s oppressive power will ultimately break and forcibly conform any and all slaves to its will.

44. In other words, with a contemporary spin, McDonald’s products individually have an exchange-value relative to a set-price, but collectively, all McDonald’s products have a brand (or name) association to the over-reaching mysticism of the McDonald’s brand—it becomes a higher-state of exchange-value. I recommend Naomi Klein’s No Logo for an excellent read on
how commodity is moving more towards the abstract (or the utopic ideal) and further away from entirely monetary-value equivalency.

45. Mr. Litch could be read as an example of the prototypical privatization of government. Litch, due to his great wealth, establishes his own institutions of law and order that supersede due-process. In 2014, elected government officials can now purchase stock in private prisons and immigrant detention centers.

46. “After the Nat Turner rebellion of 1831, 17 slaves were lynched; other slaves were beheaded and their skulls were positioned on polls on the public roads; and Turner himself was hanged, his body given to surgeons for dissection, and souvenir purses were sewn from his dried skin” (Marable, Capitalism 116).

47. “we have to call on the notion of collective catharsis. In every society, in every community, there exists, must exist, a channel, an outlet whereby the energy accumulated in the form of aggressiveness can be released” (Fanon 124).

48. Abu-Jamal accomplishes this by juxtaposing key words or phrases against each other within each sentence of his closing paragraph: “mother dead” versus “imprisonment;” “her lifeless form” versus “in shackles;” and finally, “crush the hope” versus “embracing she” (90). These key words and phrases inform and repel each other, creating a distortion that then collides and separates living and dying in perpetual flux. Death is equal to imprisonment, yet Abu-Jamal’s imprisonment is repelled by his inaccessible dead mother; his mother’s lifeless form is in a state of inanimation, as would be Abu-Jamal’s shackled body, so despite both sharing in restricted (in)animation, these very similar states are nevertheless isolated from one another, and thus serve as a blockade that makes both restricted animated forms inaccessible to one another.

49. see Chapter 1: Caryl Phillips
50. In the same way horror movies are principally set in remote locations, on the outskirts, away from the metropole, in the post-apocalyptic future—always distant from comfortability—Otherness and labor are forced into marginal dead space, away from White-Market comfort. Resembling fictional zombies, non-Whites and immigrants are depicted as demanding brains—demanding the mind or the psychosocial consciousness belonging to the White democratically privileged, when more accurately the marginalized masses simply demand the White heteronormative state to acknowledge the presence, contributions, and essentialism of all, but the United States refuses, fearfully alleging that they have come for our intellectual works, our jobs, our money, our citizenship, our liberty, our freedom, our identity.

51. As a counter-offensive by the Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses, Arizona introduced S.B.1070 (2010) in order to enact and ratify a de-facto police-state specifically designed to target non-White persons, arbitrarily determining a person’s legal status and citizenship based on racial profiling. However, this is not limited to Arizona; several copycat states such as Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina, and Utah have attempted to pass identical legislation. Not long after, H.B.2281 dissolved all ethnic studies programs in Arizona schools, under the guise of installing a safeguard to ban teaching the overthrow of the United States government. Among the many banned, or boxed, books is Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The United States RSA and ISA conflate, through false equivalence, alleviating oppression as the overthrow of government; ironically they are not completely inaccurate: the US capitalist State is after all foundationally cultivated by slavery and the continued exploitation and oppression of its subjects.

52. Prisoner-slave narratives disrupt democratic exclusivity that, like the thematic zombie resistance community surviving the zombie apocalypse, attempts to form hidden and sheltered
enclaves of White purity and privilege. The persistent fear of losing one’s integrity and normalcy—the fear of “turning” that is thematized in zombie mythos—can currently be witnessed in dominant White heteronormativity attempting, through government legislation and policy, to reestablish itself and further marginalize labor and non-White/non-heteronormative peoples. The United States fears the rhetorically conceptualized oncoming apocalypse, or End-Times, fearful of the end to an already deteriorating White heteronormative power-structure: non-White and non-heteronormative persons have been forced into dead spaces with hopes to quarantine epidemical Otherness and exterminate the contagion. So long as Otherness and labor are not fully integrated into the United States official identity, so long as Otherness is deprived of representation, recognition, and rights, so long as Otherness is deadness, the implicit meaning is that Whiteness, United States democracy, and the Market are still intact and privileged. Until the prison-industrial complex no longer operates as the systemic arm of corporate personhood intent on perpetual capitalist exploitation, and United States democracy is afforded to all, the living-dead will remain buried in dead space—until the dead can rise and force the United States to endow the dead with much deserved and overdue representation, recognition, and rights.

Conclusion: “Message to the Movement”:
Composition In-Process and the Margins of Mainstream Media and Technology

53. We see the continuation of the Black Atlantic in Steve McQueen, a Black man born in London, being nominated for an Academy Award for directing the American film adaptation of an African-American’s slave narrative. Here, narrative and narrativity extend into the visual
arts. *Hunger*, a film based on IRA member Bobby Sands and his hunger strike while incarcerated as a political prisoner in Northern Ireland, was also directed by Steve McQueen.

54. John Ridley also won the Academy Award for *Best Adapted Screenplay*, and proceeded to thank Solomon Northup, saying, “all the praise goes to Solomon Northup. Those are his words. That is his life.”

55. The accompanying compact disc not only includes Abu-Jamal’s voice, but also the voices of artist, activist, intellectuals, and scholars such as “Adrienne Rich, Assata Shakur, Martin Sheen, Alice Walker, Cornel West, John Edgar Wideman, Howard Zinn, Sister Helen Prejean, and others.”

56. In this instance, Douglass is the antecedent to Jean-Michel Basquiat in terms of appropriating the urban cityscape to write oneself into being. Under the pseudonym SAMO, Basquiat’s early campaigns became dis-temporal yet spatial call-and-response: SAMO (*same old shit*), using a distinctly postmodern art technique of appropriation, re-purposed the streets and buildings to present multiple-choice graffiti—a call, which then invites the spectator to become participatory and an active responder. It becomes live art always in-process. While consumer advertising subjects the passive spectator linearly, SAMO’s multiple-choice graffiti evokes thinking, calling a thinking conscientious participant to pause and counter an increasingly alienating postmodern hyper-reality of perpetual motion to nowhere—cycling atop a conveyer belt of laboring and consuming. According to Franklin Sirmans, Basquiat’s *Per Capita* “delivers much of the information that would consume his work […] the marriage of text and image, abstraction and figuration […] Calling out injustice and calling names, Basquiat’s paintings were full-frontal attacks on power structures and systems of racism” (95).
“Then there was the ingenuity and sacrifice displayed by Henry ‘Box’ Brown, who acquired his nickname as a result of having himself surreptitiously shipped out of the South in a box three feet long by two feet wide!” (Bruce Jr. 41).
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VITA

A native El Pasoan, Luis Omar Ceniceros has also lived in Fort Worth, Texas and Las Vegas, Nevada, but he will always consider El Paso his home. He also makes it a point to make mention that he has been, is, and always will be Straight Edge, even if no one asked to know.

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