

## Black August

Talk by Peter Bohmer  
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I want to thank the organizers of this important event, especially the Blaq Elephant Party and Nurturing Roots.

Let us remember and learn from Black August.

I moved to San Diego in August 1970 to teach economics at San Diego State University. 50 years ago, today, there was a Chicano Moratorium march against the Vietnam War. Journalist, Ruben Salazar, was killed by an LA Sheriff. Ruben Salazar presente!

Shortly before arriving in San Diego, I read Soledad Brother, an incredible book written by George Jackson. He was facing charges of killing a guard at Soledad Prison in California in 1969 right after a grand jury found a guard innocent for murdering three black inmates. I joined the George Jackson defense committee. In letters to friends, family, his lawyer and some political comrades, inmate George Jackson brilliantly explained his growing politicization to a committed ant-capitalist revolutionary, how the aim of the criminal justice system and especially prison's purpose was to destroy rebelliousness and resistance by prisoners against a racist capitalist system that put low income Blacks at the bottom of the society hierarchy. George Jackson explained powerfully how each year when he came up for parole for a \$70 robbery, he was turned down because he hadn't capitulated and accepted systemic racism and the status quo. Let us honor George Jackson by opening the doors of the prisons and replace the criminal injustice system with one based on restorative and transformative justice. Sadly, both George and his younger brother Jonathan Jackson, were killed by prison guards. Jonathan, only 17 was killed, among others on August 7, 1970 in an audacious action to liberate his brother George. Jonathan Jackson, who had been Angela Davis's bodyguard and was carrying her weapon. For that she was tried for murder and the jury found her innocent, due in part to the global movement that supported her.

George Jackson was killed, August 21, 1971 as he was supposedly trying to escape from the yard at San Quentin. This is the origin of Black August which has been celebrated for 40 years, including in Cuba where some Black Political Prisoners, like Assata Shakur escaped to. Look up her inspiring history if you don't know it.

The memory of George and Jonathan Jackson live on. They are still with us. George Jackson is a hero to so many prisoners, e.g., among the Black Prisoners Caucus in Washington State for his courage and revolutionary actions and intellect. Tomas, a Washington State prisoner has been on a hunger strike this month in memory of Black August.

Black August which we are celebrating today is part of Jonathan and George's legacy. Another brilliant political Prisoner, Mumia Abu-Jamal who has been imprisoned for 39 years said about Black August, "The Spirit of Black August moves through centuries of Black, American Indian and multi-cultural resistance. It is an emblem of the spirit of freedom" Free Mumia!

Another political prisoner is Leonard Peltier, a leader of the American Indian Movement, who is sick and has been imprisoned in Federal Prisons since 1977. He was defending Indian land at the Pine Ridge, Reservation in South Dakota. The trials of Leonard and Mumia were totally rigged. There are many, many less well-known political prisoners, check out their displays here, and there are more prisoners who have become committed while in prison to the liberation of not only Black people but all people. Free Leonard. Free Mumia. Free All Political Prisoners!

Let us support all political prisoners by organizing and strengthening movements to support and free them. We live in an increasing repressive and authoritarian political and economic system which makes it even more important that we support our political prisoners. It will make people be willing to take more risks if they know they and their families will be supported if they are under attack.

The U.S. like most countries denies there are political prisoners and repression. Most repression has been directed against African-American, Latino and Native American organizers and social movements. Although I am white, for trying to do the right thing and standing up for justice in the U.S. and against U.S. intervention abroad, I have been arrested, and imprisoned; there was an attempted assassination against me organized by the FBI under a program called CoIntelpro. CoIntel was an attempt to divide and disrupt movements and assassinate and imprison leaders. Let us learn from our past. I have continued to be active as a teacher at Evergreen State College in political economy and in various groups such as Economics for Everyone so they failed in their attempts to scare and silence me. The FBI claimed to end CoIntelpro after it was exposed but it has continued although not with this name. Our best defense against repression is to continue to speak up, to build social movements and organizations that do not depend on one person but make all of us leaders, and to not be so afraid of the government that we are inactive or remain in small groups rather than building mass movements that can revolutionize this country to a participatory socialist one.

How do we explain the ongoing police violence, mass incarceration, the economic depression we are experiencing, the Coronavirus pandemic that has killed 850,000 people globally and almost 200,000 in the U.S.? There is a massive outbreak of Covid-19 in the prisons and immigrant detention centers. At San Quentin, 60% are infected with the Coronavirus and 25 have died from it.

Two words explain this—**racial capitalism!**

Since 1619, the U.S economic and social system has been based on the dispossession of native people from the land like land we are currently standing on, and slavery of Africans and ongoing racial oppression.

The cause of these multiple forms of oppression and exploitation is a capitalist system, based on production for profit, that exploits human labor around the world. In the U.S. it continues to mean wealth for a few, the Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates of the world, and poverty and low wage jobs or no jobs or unfulfilling jobs for the majority—where racial capitalism causes African-Americans and Latinos to be poorer, have less wealth, poorer health and housing than whites, although it also does not work for most white people. Women are paid less than men and often have two jobs, in the paid workplace and then non-paid labor in one's home.

Racial capitalism also means the role of the police and prisons are to protect the property and power of the wealthy and to arrest, and often brutalize and imprison those who do not accept this oppressive system. The purpose of the police and prisons are to repress those who rebel against racial capitalism although they sometimes rebel in ways that are not productive, that don't further economic and racial justice.

In this racist capitalist system, health care is a commodity sold for a profit, not to meet human needs. Opening the economy does not mean providing for people's needs but rather business as usual, no matter what the human cost and especially if they are Black and Brown and indigenous bodies.

It is no coincidence as income and wealth inequality has become far more unequal over the last 40 years, that the prison population has soared, over six times from 1980 to the present. As anti-poverty programs, public housing, job training, education for prisoners, public health programs have been cut back, the solution by those in power, has been lock them up and throw away the key and a possible death sentence because of the spread of the Coronavirus.

We are living in a scary period, an environmental crisis, a health crisis, an economic depression, danger of nuclear war, continued police brutality and murder and racism, the growth of white supremacists inside and outside the White House, locking up immigrants and their kids in cages, increasing numbers are African.

Let us oppose the extremely racist and murderous immigration policy of the Trump administration that divides families, puts immigrant kids in cages, that refuses asylum and causes the deaths of thousands crossing the border. Close the Northwest Detention Center. Our allies are poor and working people across borders. Solidarity across Borders!

Trump downplays the Covid-19 pandemic causing the deaths of tens of thousands. He is a racist and narcissist President who is threatening to postpone the elections as his support plummets. Trump encourages and supports right-wing armed militias who strongly support him and encourages killers like Kyle Rittenhouse four days ago in

Kenosha. Many of these armed groups are openly white supremacist although they call themselves white nationalists or just armed protectors of property.

In Portland, Trump and his authoritarian Attorney General, Richard Barr, called out federal paramilitary forces, mainly Homeland Security, to grab protesters supporting racial justice off the streets into unmarked vans and used chemical weapons on them. Fortunately, this police state tactic backfired as the protests grew and these federal stormtroopers withdrew.

We are living in a period of possibility. There is a growing understanding of the need for quality and affordable health care for all including prisoners and all immigrants. We need to organize to make this happen. Similarly, there is support that everyone should receive a basic income whether they have a job or not, often called a universal basic income; that good jobs can be created by a green new deal, ending the use of fossil fuels, and for free childcare financed by the wealthy. There is growing understanding that the U.S. shouldn't intervene in other countries, and that the Trump administration is a danger to humanity and the planet.

Thanks to the Black Lives led Movement, in current polls such as the one conducted for ABC News in mid-July of this year, two thirds of respondents said they both support Black Lives Matter, and also that Blacks and other minorities are denied equal justice in the criminal justice system. Fifty-five percent answered they see "the recent killings of unarmed Black people by police as 'a sign of broader problems' in police treatment of Blacks, rather than as isolated incidents." All of these percentages are significant increases from a few years ago. This is important and very positive but what is also necessary are social movements, and ongoing organizations and campaigns to connect this growing understanding of institutionalized racism to demands such as disarming and defunding the police.

There is also increased support for reducing the prison population because of the growing understanding of the injustice of mass incarceration, the growing consciousness of the population of the connection between U.S. racism and imprisonment, the tireless efforts of people and organizations like the people here today who are exposing what is going on inside the walls and advocating for prisoners, and of course, the Coronavirus pandemic which requires social distancing which cannot happen in prisons and the reality of cases spreading, first in Coyote Ridge and Monroe, and now in Stafford Creek, Walla Walla and other prisons and jails and detention centers including the Thurston County Jail.

Governor Inslee has released a small number of inmates. This is totally inadequate. Let us demand in the short run that the prison population be reduced by ½ and there be commutation of sentences and early release of those who have long sentences and are not a threat to others. One way to achieve a 50% reduction could be to release everyone with two years or less remaining time, everyone over 60 and those who have served long sentences and who have shown by their behavior in prison, they are very unlikely to commit violent crime if released.

Let us also demand transparency to what is going on inside WA prisons rather than the constant cover up by the Department of Correction (DOC) about the true situation inside with regards to Coronavirus and other inhuman treatment of inmates.

How will we make this happen? We need to build organizations and movements that connect the issues, e.g., defund the police and reduce the prison population to longer run goals of abolition of police and prisons. We need to center the voices of prisoners and ex-prisoners and their families, to amplify the voices and wisdom of those inside.

When we organize for health care for all or free higher education, let us always include the needs of prisoners. We need to build power through direct action, a diversity of tactics, educating the public and developing ongoing campaigns for these important reforms. Voting and lobbying is not enough. Nor is filing lawsuits.

Let us build a multi-racial movement against racial capitalism, and to transform our society!

Let us build social movements that includes prisoners and seeks to unite all people no matter what their "race", sexuality, gender, nationality for a just world that overcomes the climate crisis, poverty, racism, sexism, class exploitation, alienation and that develops humane alternatives to police and prison. The world we need and desire is not capitalist. Do what you can, small or big to turn this dream and necessity into a reality,

Let us connect Black Lives Matter to Prisoner Lives Matter.

Black Lives Matter, Prisoner Lives Matter!

George Jackson presente, Jonathan Jackson presente!  
Dare to struggle, Dare to Win

Si Se Puede,  
All Power to the People, Thank You!