The Road to Hell

The True Story of George Jackson,
Stephen Bingham, and the San Quentin Massacre

Paul Liberatore

The Atlantic Monthly Press

Introduction

On August 21, 1971, George Jackson, convict, black revolutionary, and author of *Soledad Brother*, a best-selling collection of prison letters, was shot and killed by a tower guard at California's San Quentin Prison as he ran toward a twenty-foot-high wall with a pistol in his hand.

He was gunned down on the eve of his trial for the murder of a prison guard in the celebrated Soledad Brothers case, in which the twenty-nine-year-old Jackson and two other black prisoners were accused of murdering a correctional officer.

Those in the New Left movement, black and white, were convinced that Jackson had been set up and assassinated by the government and its law enforcement agents.

But George Jackson did not die alone on that hot Saturday afternoon in 1971. He left behind a cellblock that had been transformed into a charnel house. Five other men had been slain that day, three white guards and two white inmates, their throats cut, two of them shot through the head. Three other guards were wounded but survived the slaughter, which remains the bloodiest day in California prison history.

A young white lawyer, Stephen Bingham, was the last outsider to see Jackson alive. He and Jackson were alone in a prison visiting room moments before the violence.

Accused of passing Jackson the gun that he used to set off the bloodshed, Stephen Bingham disappeared that night. His friends hid him and later helped him leave the country. With their support and assistance, he would live in Europe as a fugitive for the next thirteen years.

For a time, Bingham was the object of an intense FBI manhunt. But the investigation proved to be fruitless. Eventually, the Bureau would cease looking for Bingham.

Back at home, his friends in the movement went on with their lives and careers. Americans in general were uncomfortable dwelling on the unpleasantness of that painful era, when the country had been torn by the Vietnam War, the civil rights and black militant movements, the counter-cultural revolution.

Then something unexpected happened that brought it all up again. In 1984, seemingly emerging from out of the ether, Stephen Bingham, graying, fortysomething, surfaced at a press conference at a black church in San Francisco, saying he had come back to face trial and clear his name.

Suddenly, one of the most painful episodes in the history of the New Left was back in the news. Law enforcement officers had to dust off the old evidence, prosecutors prepare to try a case that was more than a decade old and that most Americans had forgotten.

Bingham's friends from his movement days were forced, some of them reluctantly, to revive the dormant activism of their youth and rally again, perhaps one last time, around one of their own.

Bingham's lawyers and supporters would present his trial as a symbol of the entire sixties movement. The acquittal of this earnest activist lawyer, they contended, would also vindicate everyone who had ever marched against the Vietnam War or supported the Black Panthers or worn long hair and argued with their parents over sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll.

The Bingham case also revived interest in George Jackson, a writer and intellectual who had been largely forgotten as one of the most dynamic figures of his time.

This book comes out on the eve of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Jackson's death. What really happened on August 21, 1971, has been an unanswered question for nearly a quarter century. I covered the Bingham trial for the *San Francisco Chronicle*; afterward, I set out to find the missing answers. I had access to new sources and information on both sides of the case, including previously secret FBI reports, investigations, surveillance, and wiretaps of the Black Panthers and other radical groups.

What emerges from this effort are the stories of two extraordinary young men from disparate backgrounds, one black and one white, who, by fate and circumstance and the march of events, came together one terrible day at San Quentin Prison, a day that would go down in infamy as the most

The Road to Hell

I

A Revolutionary Hero

George Jackson and Stephen Bingham. You'd be hard-pressed to find two people more different. George grew up black and working class. When he was killed at age twenty-nine, he had spent his entire adult life in prison for a seventy-dollar service station robbery committed when he was eighteen.

In contrast, Stephen Bingham was white and upper crust, blue-blooded, reared in wealth and privilege, the youngest child of a prominent New England family, a product of Yale and the University of California's Boalt Hall law school.

But beyond their obvious differences, George and Steve were alike in many ways. They were both trying to gain the approval and respect of difficult, judgmental fathers who insisted on intruding into their lives. They both had overly protective, emotionally fragile mothers. They shared the same revolutionary politics, the same communist world view, the same hatred of American racism at home and imperialism abroad. They had the same heroes in Fidel and Che and Lenin and Mao. They were the same age, brothers in a radical youth movement that believed it could change the world through violent revolution.

Steve idolized George. In a clandestine interview he gave to the *New York Times* when he was a fugitive, he called him "a revolutionary hero." I felt the same way about him. A lot of people in our generation did. George was extraordinary, a genius. Huey Newton, egomaniac that he was, praised George as "the greatest writer of us all."

Huey was right. *Soledad Brother* is a piece of work that has stood the test of time, as passionate and compelling now as it was when it arose like

an anguished cry from the depths of Soledad and San Quentin, "a striking poem of love and combat," as Jean Genet so eloquently put it.

Steve had great admiration for all that George had managed to accomplish, despite his situation. At the time they met at San Quentin in 1971, George had already been locked up for more than ten years, seven of them in solitary confinement. The simple injustice of the sentence outraged Steve Bingham and the other young radicals like him who rallied behind George in the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee.

Steve couldn't get over the inner strength and discipline it must have taken for George to accomplish the things he did in prison. Here was a young black man who educated himself in his five foot by eight foot cell, refused to cave in to the racist prison system, and was respected by other convicts as a teacher and revolutionary leader.

Soledad Brother became an overnight international best-seller after it was published by Bantam in 1970. One day George Jackson was an anonymous black convict; the next he was being called the most powerful and eloquent writer since Malcolm X, the successor to Richard Wright.

George's life ended in a pool of blood in a prison yard at San Quentin, but it began on September 23, 1941, when he was born on the West Side of Chicago, the second of five children of Lester and Georgia Jackson. Unlike most of the black convicts he would later meet who came from broken families, usually with an absent father and the mother raising children alone, George grew up with both parents in a stable home.

George's father, Lester, hadn't been so lucky himself, which may have been why he tried so hard to do better by his own kids. Lester and his older brothers raised themselves after their mother abandoned them on a street corner in East St. Louis during the Depression. As a young man, Lester went to work for the Civilian Conservation Corps, a work program that was part of FDR's New Deal. Along the way, he was able to acquire a basic education, and he eventually landed a secure government job with the Chicago post office.

An austere man with a preacher's no-nonsense sensibility, Lester didn't drink, smoke, or chase women. He never owned more than two pairs of shoes at one time in his life, George once noted. He'd work sixteen-hour days at the P.O., then he'd come home, eat, bathe, and go to bed.

As was the case with so many men who came of age in those times, Lester was undemonstrative at home, as if he were somehow resentful of

his growing family responsibilities. And he had a handful in George, who must have dumbfounded him with his intelligence and precocity. Consequently, Lester had a hard time showing the love and affection he felt for his firstborn son. In fact, George would tell you, Lester could be outright sullen and cold. George couldn't remember one display of genuine affection or sensitivity from Lester the whole time he was growing up. No ballgames, no picnics, no father-son fishing trips. Nothing.

George decided that his father was so dour because he lived his life in a state of shock, that he and the other black men of that generation had been so spiritually damaged, so beaten down by the racist system that they actually believed that their lot was the best they could ever hope for. Post–World War II prosperity was a welcome and unexpected end to a long cycle of hardship in America, yet it made men like Lester turn numb and angry.

"How do you think I felt when I saw you come home each day a little more depressed than the day before?" George once wrote to Lester in a letter from prison. "How do you think I felt when I looked in your face and saw the clouds forming, when I saw you look around and see your best efforts go for nothing—nothing. I can count the times on my hands that you managed to work up a smile."

To hear George tell it, he never felt that he could crawl up on Dad's lap or throw his arms around his waist when he came through the door after work. "How do you console a man who is unapproachable?" George once asked, not realizing that he and his father would be closer, in the end, than most fathers and sons.

George was named after his mother, Georgia. She was, in George's words, "a country girl from Harrisburg, Illinois," as off the wall and feisty as her husband was somber. George once referred to her, affectionately, as "a mild hysteric."

"My mother loves to talk," George said once. "She also will say what she is thinking without considering the effect it may have on the listener."

She was so overprotective while George was growing up that he believed that she would have pushed him back inside her womb if that had been possible. He predicted that the contradictions and conflicts his mother planted in him would follow him to his grave; he would be right about that.

George's parents' first home, a three-bedroom apartment above a tavern, was on Lake Street, a working-class residential and factory district

on the West Side, one of the oldest sections of the Windy City. This was once the home of some of Chicago's wealthiest families, as evidenced by the aging mansions, some of them with ballrooms and coach houses, that lined Washington Street.

In the forties, the West Side was a neighborhood in transition, with working-class blacks from the South Side moving in while the more upwardly mobile white families were in the inexorable process of abandoning the inner city for suburbs like Oak Park and Berwyn.

Ever the circumspect mother, Georgia wouldn't let George or his older sister, Delora, play out in the street, which was busy and much too dangerous, she felt. Whenever they were permitted outside, it was only into the confines of a small fenced-in area on the roof of their building.

George's lifelong fascination with superheroes must have begun on that rooftop. A rambunctious child, he suffered terribly from the prison-yard-like confinement of his fenced-in playground. Once, while pretending to be Superman, he tied a tablecloth around his neck, climbed over the fence, and stood, teetering, on the ledge of the roof, convinced that he could fly off to vanquish the forces of evil.

"Against my sister's tears [I] would have leaped to my death, down among the garbage barrels, had she not grabbed me, tablecloth and all, and kicked my little ass," George recalled in *Soledad Brother.*

Living in that neighborhood, segregated and restricted as he was, George had never seen a white person, except maybe in magazines, until his first day of public school. It would be a traumatic experience for him. Approaching a white boy in the schoolyard as if he were a curiosity in a petting zoo, George reached up and ran his hand over his classmate's straight hair. Then he scratched at his white cheek to see if he were somehow black underneath.

The white boy responded the way white people have against blacks for hundreds of years: with violence. He picked up a baseball bat lying in the yard and hit George on the head with it, knocking him unconscious.

"They found me crumpled in a heap outside the schoolyard fence," George said in his book.

You can imagine the effect this had on George's already flighty and fearful mother. Although the Jacksons could scarcely afford private school for their children, Georgia promptly enrolled George and Delora in St. Malachy Catholic Mission School, the only black parochial school on the West Side.

George attended St. Malachy for ten years, from kindergarten through junior high. In addition to getting a pretty good education, George also learned firsthand about institutionalized racism, about de facto segregation and separate but unequal facilities for black students.

"St. Malachy's was really two schools," George said. "There was another school across the street that was more private than ours."

That would be St. Patrick Academy, which was all white and upper class. Like St. Malachy, St. Patrick was run by the Sisters of Mercy, but that was the only thing the two schools had in common.

Black kids played on the sidewalks and in an alley behind the school. The white students had the run of a big grass-and-tree-studded playground surrounded by an eight-foot wrought-iron fence.

"We weren't allowed to go near that playground," recalled Father Kenneth Brigham, who graduated from St. Malachy in 1949 and went on to become a black parish priest. "We were kept out of it. We could go to the gate and that was it. The white kids were driven to school in their parents' cars. We'd see the white boys coming to school in their little short pants. We knew what was happening. It was degrading."

During those early Chicago years, Lester and Georgia had two more children, daughters Frances and Penelope. Now there were six of them in the little walkup, which was becoming unbearably overcrowded. The Jacksons were eventually able to move into a larger place, but it was in the rear of a building, behind a garage, with few windows and practically no light. Georgia trusted this neighborhood even less than the old one.

"My mother never, never allowed me to go out of the house or the small yard except to get something from one of the supermarkets or stores and return immediately," George once wrote. "There was only one door. It was in the kitchen and always well guarded."

To remove her son from harm's way, as she put it, Georgia shipped George out of the city every summer, sending him to stay with her grandmother and aunt in rural southern Illinois.

"The trips to the country were good for me in spite of the motive," George wrote in the short autobiography he included in *Soledad Brother.* "I was the only man-child and I was the only one to get special protection from my mother. I learned how to shoot rifles, shotguns, pistols. I learned to identify some of the food plants that grow wild in most areas of the U.S And I could leave the house, the yard, the town, without having to sneak out a window. I had use of any type of rifle or pistol on those trips down

state and everyone owned a weapon . . . I confess with some guilt that I liked to shoot small animals, birds, rabbits, squirrels, anything that offered itself as a target. I was a little skinny guy. The scourge of the woods."

To escape the dark apartment, George and his family moved into the Troop Street projects. In 1958, several years after the Jacksons would move on, Troop Street would be the scene of some of the city's worst black rebellions. The projects were not a wholesome environment for a sheltered kid like George, tasting freedom for the first time. He hung out in the stairwells with other angry kids like himself, stopped going to school regularly, and was picked up several times by the police on suspicion of shoplifting and other petty crimes.

"My troubles began when we were in the projects," George said. "We almost put the block's businessmen into bankruptcy. My mother and father will never admit it now, I'm sure, but I was hungry and so were we all."

When George's brother, Jonathan, was born, George bonded with the child instantly. George, in his rebellion, would often disappear from home for several days, only to return to the family, ostensibly to see his baby brother.

"Jonathan, my new comrade, just a baby then, was the only reason I would come home at all," George wrote in *Soledad Brother*. "A brother to help me plunder the white world, a father to be proud of the deed."

But of course neither of George's parents was proud of their son's deeds in the projects, the muggings and the thievery.

"My father, he was always mortified," George said. "My mama would fall all over me."

In an effort to get George and the rest of the children away from the bad influences in the projects, Lester managed a job transfer from the post office and moved out to California, to South Central Los Angeles, where he already had some relatives.

Lester bought a '49 Hudson, loaded George into it, and the two of them drove across country together. Georgia and the rest of the family would come out later, after he and George got settled.

On their first day in L.A., while Lester was off visiting relatives, George got behind the wheel of his father's Hudson. Barely able to reach the pedals, he took it for a joyride, ending up smashing the old car through the plate glass window of a neighborhood barbershop. Welcome to L.A. George's inauspicious beginning would be a portent of things to come.

2

The Saints of the Earth

While most sixties radicals came from middle-class families, Steve Bingham had all the advantages of an upper-crust, liberal-intellectual upbringing in Connecticut. The Binghams, however, weren't your conventional New England gentry. While certainly well bred, Steve comes from a family line that includes a zealot, a quirky adventurer and politician, and a socialist idealist.

Steve's great-great-grandfather, Hiram Bingham Sr., may have set the tone. He was a Congregationalist minister who earned a place in history by founding the Protestant Mission Church in Hawaii in 1820. A powerful and influential figure in Hawaii, Hiram Senior referred to himself as "one of the saints of the earth," although many of his peers considered him a pious hypocrite. In his novel *Hawaii,* James Michener used Bingham as the model for his character Abner Hale, a stringy-haired Calvinist who went around knocking over the native religious idols with a club, crying, "Abomination, abomination."

Steve's grandfather, Hiram Bingham III, did not continue his namesake's fundamentalism. He had the good sense to marry Alfreda Mitchell, an heiress to the Tiffany fortune.

Hiram III took to the life of the idle rich as if he had been born to it, using his wife's money to bankroll his exploits as a twentieth-century explorer and adventurer. The Indiana Jones of his day, Hiram III became famous as the discoverer of the lost Incan citadel of Machu Picchu in Peru.

In the twenties, the dashing Hiram parlayed his celebrity into a political career as conservative old-fashioned Republican, first as Con-

4

Freedom Summer

Steve immersed himself in campus life at Yale. A political science major, he joined the Yale Young Democratic Club and supported John F. Kennedy for president in 1960. He wrote for the *Yale Daily News,* eventually becoming its executive editor, served as campus coordinator of the National Student Association, and belonged to the Yale Political Forum, a campus debate group. On top of all that, he ran varsity cross-country. He was so involved in student activities that his parents couldn't imagine when he found the time to study.

Following his father's example, his first two summer vacations were spent working as a rodman and chainman surveying for Bechtel Corporation's Alberta to San Francisco gas pipeline.

In 1962, through his grandfather Hiram's connections, he landed a summer job as an intern on the *Dover Daily Reporter* in Dover, Ohio. He covered the courts. City editor Harry Jockey remembered him as a nice enough young guy who arrived in town in a renovated hearse and lived in the back of it all summer.

The following year, anxious to get out of the shadow of his father and do something socially and politically significant on his own, Steve found his cause in the nascent civil rights movement, joining the newly formed Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and covering its activities for the *Daily News.* In his articles, Steve praised SNCC's voter registration drives in the South and its tutorial projects and community programs in black neighborhoods. He wrote in an editorial, "Until the black people of Mississippi and the rest of the South—and North—are free, we shall not be free."

Steve was further inspired by Allard Lowenstein, a young attorney and Yale grad who spoke on campus about civil rights, daring students to abandon their comfortable Ivy League existence and lay their bodies on the line for the movement in the South.

Through Yale chaplain William Sloane Coffin, Steve met Bob Moses, one of SNCC's founders, a young black New Yorker with a master's degree in philosophy from Harvard. It was a turning point for him. Moses, already a legend in the movement, would be responsible for getting Steve involved in the black struggle in Mississippi.

At the end of the summer of 1963, Steve was chosen as a legislative intern for Representative Robert Giambo, a Democratic congressman from Connecticut, and worked for a month in his office. After that, he made his first foray into the South with SNCC.

In Clarksdale, Mississippi, Steve worked in the press office for SNCC's "freedom ballot" campaign, a mock election to see if blacks would vote if they could.

Late one night, as Steve, Bob Moses, and Allard Lowenstein were driving back to their hotel in Clarksdale, they were pulled over by the police for a trumped-up traffic violation and promptly arrested for violating a midnight curfew. They spent the night in jail.

Steve was impressed by what he would later describe as Moses's "quiet confidence" and "personal courage" in the face of racist taunts from the police, qualities that he would try to emulate throughout his life.

"Bob starts from a position that he is living on borrowed time," Steve wrote in a 1965 article. "He has brushed with death on countless occasions . . . He has not, nor will he ever, overcome his fears when he is in the South but he has mastered them to a remarkable degree."

Steve was in Mississippi for only ten days, but the experience moved him.

"For me, the blinders fell off when I went to Mississippi," he said.

During the 1964 school year, Steve became the unofficial student recruiter in the Northeast for the Mississippi Summer Project, a full-blown voter registration drive. Called "Freedom Summer," it would involve a thousand white volunteers, most of them college students, under the direction of SNCC's black field force.

In his role as recruiter, Steve arranged for speakers to come to campus, including Martin Luther King Jr., and went around to other Ivy League schools, signing students up for Freedom Summer. In June, he and several

hundred other student volunteers attended orientation sessions at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. Bob Moses was the director.

The mood wasn't exactly upbeat. Two weeks into the session, horrified students heard on the news that three civil rights workers—James Chaney, a black, and Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, two whites from the North—were missing in Mississippi and presumed dead.

While looking for them, searchers came upon the mutilated and badly decomposed bodies of two black Alcorn A&M students, Charles Moore and Henry Dee, both nineteen, in the Mississippi River between Natchez and Vicksburg. They had been hacked in half. Their upper bodies were never found. Two white men, one a Ku Klux Klansman, were charged with the murders.

A month later, the rotting remains of Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney were uncovered in an earthen dam near Philadelphia, Miss.

Although he considered himself something of a journalist, Steve blamed the perpetuation of violence and racism in the South on "the obedient news media." Until the deaths of Goodman and Schwerner, who were white, "no northern newspaper, no official in Washington, no one on the outside was concerned with what was going on in Mississippi," Steve wrote in his article. "At least their parents can always know that those lives were not lost in vain."

Moses had an odd way of dealing with this nightmare. One evening two weeks into the orientation session, he stood in front of the students and told them, in no uncertain terms, that some of them would very likely be coming home in coffins. That is if they were lucky enough to find their bodies at all.

Steve swallowed hard. He was scared out of his mind. The nonviolence techniques they had been taught at the Ohio training session seemed now like an anemic defense against Klansmen who thought nothing of hacking up troublemaking civil rights workers from up north.

"We were told we must accept nonviolence as a tactic if we were to go to Mississippi," Steve said. "We were told that we must work effectively while at the same time being very, very scared."

It didn't ease Steve's fears any when SNCC staff members took turns telling horror stories about cross burnings, lynchings, mutilations, castrations, church bombings.

"We were told of the murders which had occurred in the recent past,

of which the press had taken no cognizance, of murderers who roamed at large, untouched by law," Steve said.

At one point, a volunteer stood up and asked if it would help the cause if white students were killed in Mississippi. The answer was yes. The movement could use some white martyrs.

"We began to see ourselves as possible sacrifices, horrible but perhaps necessary," Steve wrote. "There was, sad to say, a strong feeling that only by the death of white northerners would the nation ever wake up to the horrors of Mississippi."

All in all, Steve was not a happy camper. Maybe he was just looking for reasons not to follow through, but he hated the group psychology he detected in the sessions. It bothered him when everyone rose and sang "We Shall Overcome" after they had recovered from the shock of Bob Moses's speech. And he was beginning to see Moses in a less flattering light.

"Many went to Mississippi, therefore, espousing what Bob Moses espoused, hating what the staff hated, believing what others believed because others believed it," he said. "I discovered that no one was weighing risk against need in personal terms. When discussing the realism of death in Mississippi, one did not speak about his own death, but about someone else's."

But Steve wasn't the only one thinking about his own death. The day before the training session ended, he and several of his fellow volunteers stayed up all night, talking until dawn, getting it all out, grappling with their decision.

A young woman said it looked to her like a third of her group could be wiped out in Mississippi. That was too high a price to pay, she said, then left.

A guy with a wife and baby, though, seemed to express the majority's feelings when he told the group, "I'm ready to die. I can think of few things in this world that are worth dying for, but this is one of them."

Steve didn't argue with that. He decided to take his chances for the cause, as did most of the other students. At the end of the session, Steve was told that his group would not be going to Mississippi in the first wave of volunteers. SNCC wanted to see how the state reacted to the initial groups before it sent in all of its troops.

During the delay, he flew to Washington, D.C., with about twenty other civil rights workers. They spent two days making the rounds of senators and congressmen, who generally greeted them coolly.

It was ice cold at the Justice Department, where the assistant attorney general for civil rights, John Doar, was asked by the students what the U.S. government would be doing to protect them in Mississippi. Absolutely nothing, Doar said flatly. There would be no protection by the Justice Department or the FBI. This should have come as no surprise to anyone, since the FBI was the personal province of J. Edgar Hoover, who had called Martin Luther King Jr. "the most notorious liar in the country."

On the plane trip back to Ohio, Steve had a chance to speak with Bayard Rustin, a moderate black socialist who had been one of the organizers of the March on Washington. Rustin was somewhat encouraging, telling Steve that he and the other volunteers should think of themselves as white pioneers in what had been a Negro movement.

Consequently, though, he was concerned that blacks might be hostile to them, thinking of these eager whites as wannabes and dilettantes. He was also worried that the white students, in their attempts to belong, to be worthy, might follow black leadership without question, creating a kind of reverse discrimination.

In any event, Rustin said, no one should even think about going into the South as a civil rights worker without a total intellectual and moral commitment. This was of little comfort to Steve, whose commitment was still shaky.

"What makes this argument tenuous at best and sacrificial at worst is that as the summer got under way, no one had any idea how many people were going to be killed," he said.

With that thought in mind, Steve got off a Greyhound bus in Mileston, Mississippi, a cotton town on the edge of the Delta in the northwestern part of the state. It was over one hundred degrees and steamy from humidity. Steve was twenty-two years old, gangly, bookish in his black horn-rimmed glasses. He felt awkward and out of place. His cushy Connecticut childhood and Ivy League education had not prepared him for this.

He had the opportunity to live with a black family, but chose instead to stay with several other white students in an abandoned house that had been built in the thirties by the New Deal. It was in a black neighborhood. The streets weren't paved. Hardly more than a shack, the place had no indoor plumbing, no telephone, and no electricity.

Contrary to Rustin's fears, blacks in the movement were unfailingly gracious to Steve and the other civil rights workers, sometimes embarrassingly so, Steve thought, going to great lengths to make them feel comfortable. Steve couldn't help notice, though, that while they preached nonviolence, the blacks in the movement were prepared in the event more serious measures were called for. Every household Steve saw was well stocked with firearms. Whenever he and the other whites would drive up to a black house at night, they always honked the horn first so the people inside didn't get the wrong idea about the white folks coming up the driveway.

Steve and the other volunteers in Mileston were divided into three groups. One set up freedom schools, another a community center. The ten volunteers in Steve's group were assigned to voter registration.

Each morning, Steve would get up at dawn, wash in cold water at the pump out back, fry up a batch of pancakes on a kerosene stove, then head off with the others in a couple of cars to canvass carefully selected areas in Holmes County.

Steve still had an edge of cynicism. He sarcastically called his work "carrying the word." And he was put off by the condescending respect he was shown ("Yassuh, Mr. Bingham") whenever he knocked on a door. Still, he went from house to house, giving his front porch spiel to black housewives whose husbands were out working in the cotton and soybean fields.

As soon as Steve would mention registering to vote, the women would inevitably tense up and politely tell him to come back when their husbands were home. As Steve trudged around, alone, without much to show for his trouble, sheriff's deputies and carloads of whites cruised by constantly. At night, students' cars were chased on the highways by rednecks in pickups. Volunteers were threatened and harassed on the streets. Steve was discouraged and scared.

Then, on the morning of July 23, 1964, Steve went out canvassing in Durant, a railroad town near Mileston. As he made his rounds, he noticed that he was being followed by a couple of white men in pickup trucks. He wrote their license numbers down on a sheet of paper on his clipboard.

He had been talking to a woman through her screen door for about twenty minutes when a pair of young white men drove slowly past in a blue '64 Ford Fairlane. They turned at the end of the street and disappeared around the corner, only to come around the block again and park in front of the house.

The woman slammed her door, leaving Steve standing there on the porch. He started down the walk and pushed out the front gate, but he didn't get far. One of the rednecks got out of the car and went right up into Steve's face, throwing a wild punch.

Steve collapsed on the ground in the nonviolent position he had been taught in Ohio as the redneck flailed away at him with his fists and feet. In a few moments, the fellow in the car yelled that he'd seen the mayor driving around earlier and that they'd better get out of there.

The redneck got a few more licks in, then jumped in the car and sped off. Remarkably, Steve wasn't hurt. He picked himself up and had the presence of mind to jot down the Ford's license number before the car squealed around the corner.

With the help of some of the people in the neighborhood, Steve was able to identify his attacker as William Henry Hatchcock, a local who lived out on Highway 51. At the Durant town hall, Steve signed an affidavit naming Hatchcock as his assailant. The town marshal had no choice but to arrest Hatchcock for assault and battery. He was quickly released on a hundred-dollar bond.

Three days later, in Lexington, Mississippi, the Holmes County seat, Steve filed a signed statement giving his version of the incident. FBI special agents Horace P. Beckwith and George Darley Keith signed the document as witnesses, although they clearly viewed young Stephen Bingham with contempt.

The agents sent their own report to their superiors, calling particular attention to the fact that Steve declined to have his body photographed because he had suffered no visible injuries. "Observations of Stephen Bingham's physical condition failed to reveal any lacerations, discolorations or any other marks or bumps caused by a beating he claimed he received from William Henry Hatchcock," they noted in their report.

Hatchcock's trial was held in Mayor's Court in Durant, which was in reality the municipal office. It was hands down the biggest show in town that day. The room was packed with white faces. The only black in the courtroom was a fellow civil rights worker who came with Steve.

The mayor served as judge and prosecutor, the regular prosecutor being out of town. He read Steve's affidavit aloud and proceeded to question Steve briefly about it. He never asked a single question of Hatchcock, who had pleaded not guilty. Abruptly, the mayor banged his gavel, found Hatchcock guilty, and fined him sixty dollars. Hatchcock said he would appeal. Just like that, it was over.

"I ran to my waiting car and left town at about a hundred miles an hour, fearing that part of the crowd in the courtroom would follow," Steve said.

* * *

Steve hadn't told his father about his civil rights work in Mississippi.

"When he went to Mississippi, it was a surprise to me," Alfred Bingham told me once. "I hadn't known of his interest. Three civil rights workers had been killed. I was afraid that there would be many more."

Concerned about Steve's safety, Alfred decided to get in touch with what he described as a "strange contact" he'd made in college. At Yale, Alfred had been close friends with Thomas P. Brady, who would go on to become a segregationist leader and member of the Mississippi Supreme Court.

"When my son was in Mississippi, I wrote to Brady, recalling our friendship in college," Alfred said. "I thought he might be helpful, but he didn't want to see me in connection with this issue." Undaunted, Alfred went to Mississippi in the early summer of 1964 to see what he could find out about the potential for violence in the state.

"When I was in Mississippi, I barged into a talk that Brady was giving to the White Citizens Council," Alfred told me. "In his introduction to the Citizens Council, Brady said he was as much afraid of the KKK as he was of the civil rights workers. He was afraid of violence, that men would be killed and women would be raped. My impression was that a lot of people were going to be killed. After that, I went to Washington."

In Washington, Alfred spoke to Connecticut senator Thomas Joseph Dodd about his fears for his son's life in Mississippi. Dodd then passed the word to Mississippi senator William O. Eastland.

Alfred didn't expect his efforts to come to anything, but he was mistaken. The Binghams weren't unknown in Washington. Alfred had connections in the Johnson administration and, at the time, Steve's uncle Jonathan was running for Congress in an election that he would later win. Senator Eastland called the governor of Mississippi and, within twenty-four hours, two Mississippi state troopers were sent to stand guard over Stephen Bingham.

Steve was naturally devastated by this move, humiliated in front of his peers. The guards were quickly withdrawn, but the damage had been done. Steve felt that the blacks in particular were looking at him now as a rich boy whose daddy ran to protect him at the first sign of trouble.

Fellow civil rights worker Mario Savio, who would that very fall vault to fame as the leader of the Free Speech Movement at the University of California at Berkeley, tried to put the best face possible on the situation. At

least the episode had sent a message to the racists that they weren't dealing with people who were isolated and powerless. In a sense, every volunteer was safer because of what had happened, Savio said. But Steve was inconsolable.

"Steve felt I had interfered and embarrassed him," Alfred told me. "He had an inaccurate notion of what my part had been. I was responsible, but it wasn't my idea. I had not sought special protection for my son. But he always felt that I had interfered improperly and, as a result, he had been excluded from the influence with black leaders that he'd had before."

Fifteen people were murdered during Freedom Summer. All but Goodman and Schwerner were black. The deaths attracted little attention outside the South. On the positive side, forty thousand blacks were registered in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party and thirty integrated freedom schools were established. But could Freedom Summer be considered a success?

In his book *Coming Apart,* historian William L. O'Neill wrote that Freedom Summer "gravely wounded the nonviolent movement. Militant blacks turned against it . . . The strain of repaying hate with love was greater than many could bear. To walk unarmed in the valley of death was an unnatural act for Americans."

Like the militant blacks who would soon take over SNCC and the leadership of the black movement in the country, Steve was "totally disillusioned with nonviolence" at the end of Freedom Summer, according to his father. Rather than return to Connecticut once Freedom Summer was over, Steve took a six-week course at the University of Mississippi to make up for a class he had missed at Yale.

"It was the first time I had contact with white Mississippi," he recalled at his murder trial. "The streets were paved, the grass was green. People lived the way I had grown up."

That November, he graduated from Yale with honors. But instead of attending law school at Yale, as his father had, he went off to the University of California's Boalt Hall in Berkeley, as far from Connecticut, the Bingham family legacy, and his father as he could get.

5

Mr. Steve

After his experiences in Mississippi, law seemed like a natural career for Steve. Not that he particularly cared about following in his father's footsteps, but because he was more and more interested in exploring the use of the law to further the civil rights movement and other social justice causes.

Although he had graduated from Yale with honors, Steve had never been a brilliant student. Panicked about flunking out of law school his first year, which he had been told would be the toughest, he cut back on outside activities and political activism and devoted himself to studying.

Meanwhile, with the campus teeming with students fired up from a summer of civil rights demonstrations, Steve's buddy from Mississippi, Mario Savio, a twenty-one-year-old philosophy major, climbed up on the roof of a police car and became the leader of the Free Speech Movement.

Steve supported the movement, but he was very much on the fringe. He was buried in books. And he was in love, with Gretchen Spreckels, a sunny blond Cal student who was a great-granddaughter of sugar baron Claus Spreckels. In San Francisco, the Spreckels name is as prominent as the Bingham name is in Connecticut, but Gretchen was quick to point out that she was hardly a princess.

"We weren't THE Spreckels," she said. "We were on the side of the family that had so many to divide the money among that there really wasn't very much for anyone."

Gretchen had been active in civil rights work in the Bay Area and wanted to know all about Steve's experience in Mississippi. They had much in common and seemed a perfect match. After Steve completed his first

in fatigues engaged in military maneuvers with triple-mounted machine guns, carbines, and assault rifles.

Tackwood reported that Panther militants were moving onto the Santa Cruz campus so they could meet in an environment free of police surveillance. Blake, he said, was housing them in campus dormitories and in apartments near the university.

It isn't clear if Tackwood tipped law enforcement to the first attempt to break George out of prison, but there are strong indications that he did. Still, agents made no move to arrest Carr or curtail his activities. They really had nothing on him except for some hearsay from Tackwood, which wasn't enough. They would have to wait for something to happen before they could make a move on Carr.

14

The Marin County Shootout

If ever there was a radical romance with star power it was the passionate love affair between George Jackson and Angela Davis. They were so attractive that people in the movement often remarked to one another what an incredible child the two of them could produce for the revolution.

"I think we were predisposed to love each other," George once said.

George first heard about Angela, a beautiful black UCLA professor, when she was fired by the university for proudly proclaiming her membership in the Communist Party USA.

Sensing that he had a soul mate, he had his family contact her on his behalf. This was before he was accused in the Soledad killing and before he was famous for *Soledad Brother*. She didn't respond. But later, after his case became a cause célèbre, she came to a Soledad Brothers court hearing in Salinas.

"She was right across the barricade in the courtroom," George recalled in a 1971 interview with journalist Alice Yarish. "My sister Frances introduced me. Of course I loved her, and from that point on, my job was to make her love me."

George didn't have to work very hard at that. Angela fell passionately in love with him the moment she laid eyes on him.

"Something in you has managed to smash through the fortress I long ago erected around my soul," she wrote to him in a letter. "I wonder what it is? I'm very glad. I love you."

Then she told George about a dream she had of them as lovers in combat.

"The night after I saw you in court, for the first time in months, I dreamt," she wrote. "We were together, fighting pigs, winning. We were learning to know each other."

Angela and George weren't just physically attracted to each other. They were also attuned politically and philosophically, particularly regarding the use of revolutionary violence. While Fay was resisting George on the necessity of revolutionary war, Angela was learning to embrace his position on the subject. She was mad as hell after what the system had just done to her.

"Frustration, aggressions, cannot be repressed indefinitely," she wrote to George. "Eventual explosion must be expected. And we, Black Women, have much more than our share of them . . . We aim our bullets in the wrong direction, and moreover don't even understand the weapon. For the Black Female, the solution is not to become less aggressive, not to lay down the gun, but to learn how to set the sights correctly, aim accurately, squeeze rather than jerk, and not be overcome by the damage. We have to learn how to rejoice when pig's blood is spilled.

"Above all," she continued, "we do not want to repeat past errors . . . Concerning nonviolence: the specter of Sharpeville, South Africa—thousands machine-gunned, kneeling in the streets, protesting apartheid, nonviolently. Nonviolence is a philosophy of suicide."

Angela had been a gun owner since 1968, when she bought a .380 Browning semiautomatic pistol. She would give the weapon to George's younger brother, seventeen-year-old Jonathan.

Sensitive, smart, with a shyness that was disarming, Jonathan was twelve years younger than George. As is so often the case with younger brothers, Jonathan looked up to George, tried to be like him, and couldn't understand why George, everything Jonathan hoped to be, had been imprisoned for most of his life and was now facing death in the San Quentin gas chamber.

George could see that Jonathan was confused living at home with their parents, Lester and Georgia. George had been writing to Jonathan, trying to provide some brotherly guidance, knowing that Jonathan was suffering through the same problems with his parents that George had experienced growing up.

"Jon, no one can crawl into your mind and help you out," he wrote. "I'm your brother and I'm with you, come what may, and against anything or anybody in the universe that is against you."

While George had been a defiant, delinquent youth, Jonathan was always well behaved, respectful of his parents and his teachers. He was a good student and had never been in trouble with the law.

"I never had to lay a hand on him," Lester Jackson said of his younger son. "He worked on body-building equipment, was six feet, and weighed 185 pounds. He had many friends, black, white, brown."

Trying to spare Jonathan the kind of sheltered childhood that George and his sisters had in Catholic school in Chicago, Lester stood up to Georgia for one of the few times in his life and insisted that Jonathan attend public school with all the other children in the neighborhood.

Jonathan went to Blair High School in Pasadena, near the Jackson family home. He was an extraordinary student who didn't escape the attention of Blair's principal, Sam Schwartz.

"I was very fond of him," Schwartz said in an interview in the *Pasadena Star News*. "Everything I knew about him was positive. He played basketball on the junior varsity. He had an IQ of 117. He was a smart kid."

One of his teachers described him as "intelligent, articulate, and at times capable of much good humor."

But after George was charged with the Soledad murder, Jonathan changed. He became more serious. He seemed troubled all the time. All he could think about was George, George, George.

"He was so obsessed," his teacher recalled. "His obsession, which determined his view of the country, was the plight of an imprisoned brother he could not really have known."

A girlfriend, one of Jonathan's classmates, described him as "desperate," "articulate," "really intense."

At Blair, Jonathan started an underground newspaper, naming it *Iskra* (the Spark), after Lenin's famous revolutionary sheet. In it, he wrote, "A person that was close to me once said that my life was too wrapped up in my brother's case and that I wasn't cheerful enough for her. It's true. I don't laugh very much anymore. I have but one question to ask all of you people that think like you, what would you do if it was your brother?"

He sounded a lot like George when he went on to say, "This is the era of the pig and has been for 190 years. Ever since the second Continental Congress, the American system has been ripping off the people under the protective cloak of so-called 'law and order.' The imperialistic dogs have not only coerced their own people into servitude to capitalism (for who

really cannot be coerced with death?), but have rammed it down the throats of almost all of the people on earth. The voracious monster can be stopped if the people rise up and crush it."

From his perspective in the real world, Jonathan could see that revolution did not appear to be imminent, a reality that George was often blind to. "The majority of the people in this country are too involved with themselves to be concerned with the struggle," Jonathan wrote. "In some ways these people are worse than the genuine right-wing reactionaries. The reactionaries can be dealt with effectively. But what do you do with a person who refuses to open his eyes and observe the repression that is going on all around him? You either have to educate him in the ways and means of the revolution or deal with him. There can be no middle ground."

After George met Angela, he assigned Jonathan to be her bodyguard, even though Jonathan was just a boy, not even out of high school. Since being fired by UCLA, Angela had become a controversial figure with a high profile, a target for any right-wing kook or government thug who came along. Plus, she was a cash cow who needed protecting.

"Angela brought in a tremendous amount of money for us before my book materialized," George told journalist Alice Yarish. "She was our strongest contributor. So I sent my brother to help her and keep the pigs from killing her. As soon as the black community produces a bright, left-wing leader, they kill them. I asked my brother to go with her and keep her alive."

Angela gave Jonathan the .380-caliber Browning she'd purchased two years before.

"It has a 13-round clip," Jonathan wrote to George. "I keep one in the barrel, 14 shots. Save me a cell on murderer's row there, I could have 14 murder charges any day now."

On June 22, 1970, Angela and Jonathan and the rest of the Jackson family attended the opening of the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee headquarters in San Jose at the comfortable suburban home of a wealthy white woman named Joan Hammer.

One of George's earliest and most devoted supporters, Joan Hammer had begun visiting and corresponding with George at Soledad the previous spring. She was an attractive middle-aged woman, tall, tanned, blue-eyed. George didn't waste any time winning her devotion. He told her how beautiful she was, how fortunate he was to have someone of her breeding, maturity, and intelligence on his side. It didn't take long for him to have

her running around for him as one of his gofers on the outside, bringing him books and research materials and whatever else he needed or wanted. He called this "love's labor."

"If I overload you," he wrote to her in a letter, "well, it's just my style. I encircle and pull. It means simply that I think a great deal of you. And I am in such a hurry."

He sometimes signed off his letters to her with the New Agey "Love and Light, George."

"You're my eyes and ears and interpreter," he told her.

It's clear that Joan was haunted by George and thought of him in the most romantic of ways. In a letter to him, she wrote, "Do you know the paintings of Marc Chagall? Gorgeous, delicate, sensitive, airy . . . Very often over the main theme on the canvas there's a figure floating, and I often think of you in that context. How your image accompanies me, us, throughout the work of the day and the rest of the night. A presence."

Joan was also close to Jonathan and Angela, who often stayed at her house when they were in the Bay Area. On occasion, Joan and Jonathan would visit George together. After one such visit, Joan sat down when she got home and wrote to George:

> Came back this afternoon (actually I never really leave you) through all the traffic and sunny wind, past the automobile showrooms and cathedrals, past the electronic industries and ticky-tack housing tracts, along the bayfull of whipping waves, thinking and savoring and marveling over the three hours just past.
>
> We stopped for some lunch about 3 o'clock, and the beautiful manchild, who said he wasn't hungry, ate two huge sandwiches and lots of pickles. He's so bloody fine . . . and well on the way. I told him something of what I think of you and something you said about him . . . like "I love that brother about 100 times more than myself." That pleased him, and he made it even better by saying, "Yeah, and you got to understand he doesn't try to MANAGE me."
>
> Your recognition of his incipient manhood and his right to expand his experiences and judgment is one of the highest manifestations of love. The way you look at each other, clasp hands, smile, the manner in which you talk to him. My heart was bursting at the beauty of it. All the more reason to love you both.

While he was winning the heart of Joan Hammer, George was also engaged in a tugging match over Jonathan with Lester and Georgia.

"You can never understand how frightened I was that Georgia would succeed in pushing or trapping Jon in the Black Womb," George wrote to Joan. "I used to hammer into him, 'You're alone for now, expect no help from them, you'll have no childhood, no time for it, you're a man now.'"

Lester wanted his younger son to have a chance to have a normal high school life, to have some time to grow up before taking on the serious, grown-up issues that George was foisting upon him.

"My brother and Lester were here today," George wrote to Joan. "Very sad. With torrents of contradictions. Really, it's tragic. The confusion, fear, the transparent attempt to will things . . . He's going to try to keep Jon away from me in the future, watch."

After three consecutive visits with Jonathan on July 26, 27, and 28, George wrote to Joan:

> I can't help but worry myself for him. Not in the same way that his parents worry. Actually, the opposite of that. My concern is that his development not be retarded. Our immediate family is relating to him in the exact manner that they related to me. Bitter experience has taught them nothing.
>
> Jon has clearly rejected selfish love, and restraints. Their attitudes are forcing him to choose between them and the ideal. We oppress each other, smother and confuse with contradictions between the tongue and the act. They're pushing him away from them. You know he's already withdrawn. Fear responses. He said he was leaving the house there in Pasadena. That should cause some tidal waves of emotionalism. I advised him to guide his decisions by necessity first, feelings secondly. I wonder, though, if I was right.

Lester grew increasingly resentful of George's hold on Jonathan, an attitude that wasn't lost on George. On July 21, 1971, George wrote to Joan again.

"I think it best to get Jon out on his own," he said. "I'll discuss it with John T. [Thorne]. You do the same thing. Like a specific job for him and Angela up here in this area. See what John T. thinks about it." And then in a postscript: "Send me photos of the whole tribe, everyone who is not involved in secret stuff."

Joan had been renting a room in her house to a pretty blond woman named Micki Magers, a student at San Jose State. She wasn't involved in the Soledad case, but agreed to transcribe John Thorne's notes and interviews with George in exchange for rent.

She was from the Midwest, the daughter of a middle-class family from Kansas City. Micki, a nickname for Mabel, was in her early thirties, nearly twice as old as Jonathan. Perhaps because she was older and more mature than the high school girls he knew in Pasadena, Jonathan found her enormously attractive. She held off his advances for a time, protesting that she was too old for him, but Jonathan was persistent. Eventually, she gave in. Their brief love affair would result in her becoming pregnant with his son.

While he was making love on one front, Jonathan was preparing for war on the other. He and Angela were in the process of acquiring an arsenal of weapons and ammunition.

On May 30, he and Angela took Georgia Jackson to the Western Surplus Store in Los Angeles, where they bought one hundred rounds of .30-caliber ammunition in her name.

On June 15, Angela accompanied a "Steven Mitchell" to the Western Surplus Store, giving him money to buy a Jetfire 9-mm. rifle. It isn't clear who Steven Mitchell was. But it's curious to note that Steve Bingham's middle name is Mitchell—Stephen Mitchell Bingham.

In any case, Angela didn't like the rifle he bought, and later, accompanied by Jonathan, she returned it to the store, claiming it was defective. She exchanged it for an M-1 carbine, two hundred rounds of .30-caliber bullets, and two banana clips.

Angela was a regular at the gun store. The previous April, she'd bought a Plainfield carbine with collapsible stock, two 30-round banana clips, and one hundred rounds of ammunition for the rifle.

Smoking a Tiparillo cigar, she showed up there on another day in July with two men who bought army cots. She bought more bullets, this time fifty rounds of .38-caliber ammunition and one hundred rounds of .30-caliber shells.

On July 14, Angela, Jonathan, and George's father, Lester, stayed at the Bel Aire Motel in Berkeley. The next day, the three of them appeared in San Francisco Superior Court in connection with a petition for Angela to get visiting privileges with George as an investigator for his legal team. The judge denied it.

On July 28, Jonathan visited George at San Quentin and afterward

met Joan Hammer and Micki Magers, his lover, at the prison. Micki drove him to San Francisco International Airport, where he caught a flight to Los Angeles.

Jonathan spent a great deal of time with Angela over the next few days in L.A., judging from the paper trail they left that law enforcement would later follow. The day after arriving from San Francisco, he was with her when she cashed a thirty-dollar check near the UCLA campus. A day later, after she cashed a two-hundred-dollar check at a Los Angeles bank, she and Jonathan drove south across the border to Mexico. Late that night, they were detained briefly while they recrossed the border from Tijuana to San Diego.

On August 1, Los Angeles Police Department officers picked up Jonathan while he was driving Angela's car, but he was released when she came to the police station and told officers that he had her permission to drive it.

The following day, August 2, Jonathan was back in San Francisco to attend the opening of the Soledad House, a support group for the Soledad Brothers. Angela didn't make the trip, staying in L.A. in her new apartment.

On August 3, San Quentin convict James McClain, a comrade of George's, went on trial at the Marin County Hall of Justice for assaulting a San Quentin guard. That same day, Jonathan, his mother, and Joan Hammer visited George at San Quentin. That night, Angela flew up to San Francisco from L.A.

On August 4, Jonathan borrowed Micki Mager's VW bug, promising to return it the next day. He and Angela cashed a hundred-dollar check in Oakland, then went to San Quentin to visit George. He signed her in as Diane Robinson. But, once in the visiting area, Jonathan was told that he was too late, visiting hours were over. He and Angela left without seeing George.

The next morning Jonathan and Angela returned to San Quentin, checking in just before noon. Again, she signed in as Diane Robinson. While Jonathan was in the visiting room with George, Angela sat outside in the waiting area. A guard remembered her peering into the visiting room at one point, waving to George. She and Jonathan left the prison shortly after 2 P.M. and, three hours later, bought an inexpensive 12-gauge shotgun and a box of shells at a San Francisco pawn shop.

The next morning at eight o'clock, Jonathan rented a yellow Ford van from Hertz in the Potrero district of San Francisco. He paid with two twenty-dollar bills.

At 10:30 A.M., Jonathan walked into the Marin County courtroom where James McClain was on trial. McClain was acting as his own attorney and was calling inmate witnesses. Jonathan had on a knee-length overcoat and was carrying a blue briefcase that looked like it was bulging with books.

His stay in the courtroom was brief. Fifteen minutes later, with Angela now with him, Jonathan showed up at a service station across from the Marin Civic Center, saying he was having trouble starting his van. A service station attendant went with them to the civic center parking lot. The van had a dead battery. The attendant would later testify that Angela, smoking a black cigar, drove the van while he gave her a push to jump-start the vehicle.

At 11:35 A.M., Jonathan signed in at San Quentin to visit George. Joan Hammer was already there in the visiting room. When Jonathan arrived, she leaned out of the conversation as the two brothers huddled, head to head, over the visiting room table.

Then, at about 12:30 P.M., Jonathan and Angela drove out of the San Quentin parking lot in the yellow van. Jonathan was behind the wheel. From a spot inside the prison, near the east gate, a convict watched them leave. He said they appeared to be embroiled in a heated argument, screaming at each other.

At 2:00 P.M., Jonathan returned to the Marin courtroom. He didn't have the long coat on, but he was carrying a grocery bag with clothing in it. Witnesses in the courtroom noticed defendant McClain staring out at him on several occasions.

Jonathan left the courtroom and returned an hour later, at 3:00 P.M., for the third time that day. He had on the heavy coat and was carrying the briefcase, but court had recessed unexpectedly early, at 2:30 P.M., and a bailiff turned him away.

That evening, Jonathan registered for two at the Holland Motel on Lombard Street in San Francisco. The motel was the closest one in the city to the Golden Gate Bridge, which crosses over the bay to Marin County.

At 10:45 the following morning, August 7, 1971, Jonathan returned to the Marin courtroom and sat down in the back. He was wearing the long overcoat and carrying a bulging briefcase and a paper sack.

McClain had called several inmate witnesses, including William Christmas, one of George's original black guerrillas at San Quentin, and Ruchell Magee, another of George's most devoted revolutionaries.

Seeing Jonathan come in and sit down, the bailiff in the courtroom thought it odd that this young black kid was back again, wearing a heavy coat in August. As he started back to investigate, Jonathan leaped to his feet and produced the Browning .380 pistol that Angela had given him.

"Okay, gentlemen, freeze," he announced. "We're taking over."

He then pulled from under his coat the .30-caliber Plainfield carbine with a collapsible stock and banana clip that Angela had bought. He dug into the briefcase under some of Angela's books and pulled out the .12-gauge shotgun—sawed off now to fit into the briefcase—that he and Angela had bought two days earlier.

Jonathan passed the handgun to McClain and he and the other three convicts rounded up five hostages from the courtroom: three suburban housewives who were on the jury, Assistant District Attorney Gary W. Thomas, and Superior Court Judge Harold Haley.

According to one of the women on the jury, McClain was the voice of reason during all of this, trying to calm Jonathan down, talking him out of taking an infant and an elderly woman as hostages.

"I don't want to kill anybody," she quoted McClain as saying, to which Jonathan replied, "Well, I want to kill somebody."

McClain asked Jonathan for the tape, which Jonathan dutifully handed to him. McClain used the tape to fashion a crude noose that secured the shotgun under the judge's chin. Then Jonathan and the convicts slowly led their terrified party out of the courtroom and down the wide, polished hallway toward the elevator, disarming sheriff's deputies along the way.

Just before the elevator door shut to take them down one flight to the ground floor, McClain yelled, "We want the Soledad Brothers freed by twelve today."

Outside the building, Jonathan and the convicts herded the hostages into the back of the yellow van in the parking lot. According to Assistant District Attorney Thomas, McClain slid behind the wheel, telling the hostages that they were being taken to the airport to catch a plane. But McClain couldn't figure out how to drive the van, fumbling with the gearshift, so he and Jonathan exchanged places. Jonathan began driving slowly toward the frontage road that led out to Highway 101.

The building was already surrounded by sheriff's deputies, officers from local police departments, and a squad of San Quentin guards who just happened, they later claimed, to be on their way back to the prison from a nearby target shooting range.

Jonathan, the assistant district attorney would later recall, had a gun in his hand, which he pointed out of the window of the van as he drove. The prison guards crouched along the road had been trained not to recognize hostages, and one of them, a witness said, leveled his .30-caliber rifle and fired the first shot. With that, the other officers opened up.

"Jackson brought his hand back inside," Assistant District Attorney Thomas remembered. "There was blood on it and blood on the revolver. The sawed-off shotgun was being held under Judge Haley's chin by Magee. The shotgun went off. It was as if it was in slow motion—all outward features of his face moving away.

"I turned to my right and took the gun from Jackson's hand, which was lying over the engine housing—the hump in the middle of the van. I fired a shot at Jackson, maybe once or twice. McClain was moving toward the left side toward the front and I shot him in the back. I turned and fired a shot in the area of [convict] Christmas and then I shot [convict] Magee in the chest. I shot him once and he was moving and I tried to shoot again but the gun clicked. He stopped moving.

"I yelled out of the van, 'Stop firing! Please stop firing!' And right then, at the same time, I felt pain in my back. My legs gave out and I crumpled down."

The assistant district attorney had been hit in the back by a bullet fired by police from outside the van.

When the shooting had stopped and the back door of the van was thrown open by officers, a rivulet of blood flowed out and splashed in a spreading pool on the blacktop. Gore from the judge's face and head were splattered on the people inside and on the walls of the van. Jonathan Jackson was dead. So were convicts McClain and Christmas and Judge Haley. Magee, the third convict, was badly wounded. One of the jurywomen clutched at a bullet wound in her arm. The assistant district attorney was alive, but he had suffered a bullet wound that would paralyze him from the waist down for life.

"Over an inch of my spinal cord had been shot away," he said.

Inside the van, officers found Angela's M1 carbine and a briefcase loaded with the kind of .30-caliber ammunition that she'd been buying at Western Surplus in L.A.

When they searched Jonathan's body, they found a little over two dollars on him, plus a slip of paper with the telephone number of a pay phone near the American Airlines ticket counter at San Francisco International.

At 2:00 P.M. that day, Angela, carrying no luggage, only her purse, rushed up to the PSA ticket counter at the airport. She hastily wrote a check for the fare and hurried onto the plane, a shuttle jet bound for L.A.

A few days after what would become known as the Marin County Shootout, Jonathan Jackson was given a full Black Panther funeral at St. Augustine Episcopal Church in West Oakland. Angela was not among the mourners.

Investigators traced the weapons Jonathan had smuggled into the courtroom and discovered that she'd bought them. A week after the incident, she was charged with being an accomplice. By then, she had already disappeared underground.

Informant Louis Tackwood would tell police agents that Carr and a number of others around UC Santa Cruz had helped plan the courthouse raid. He said the shotgun that Jonathan carried into the courtroom, the one that killed the judge, had been sawed off in a house Professor Blake owned in Aptos, and that Angela Davis may have hidden out there for a time after the shootout.

Wearing glasses and a wig and carrying false identification, Angela was arrested two months later in a New York motel room. She was returned to California and locked up in a cell in the Marin County Jail, one floor above the courtroom where Jonathan had taken the hostages.

15

"Jonathan Was Deserted"

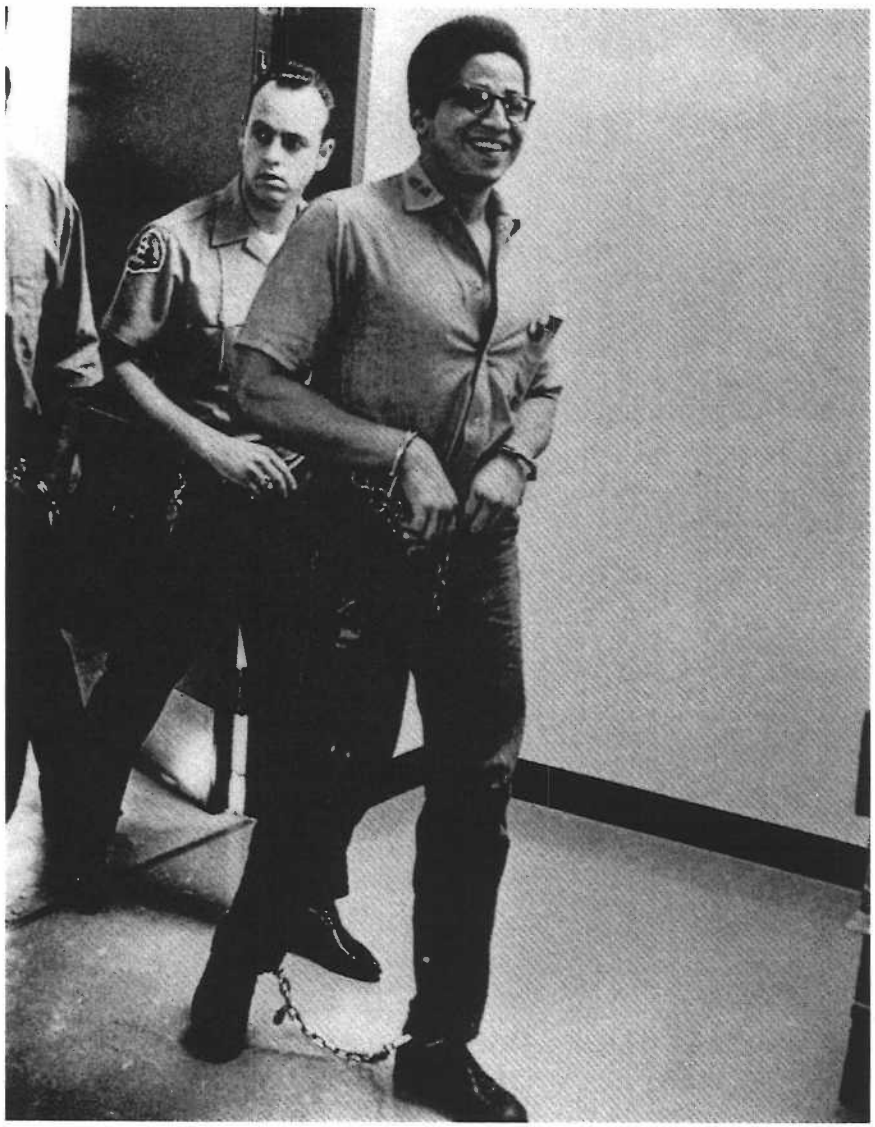
Angela met often with her legal team in preparation for her murder trial. After a legal conference one day at the jail, one of her attorneys accidentally left behind some notes. A county worker found them and turned them in to authorities. They ended up in the hands of the court. They were ordered sealed and were never introduced at her trial because they were protected by attorney-client privilege. But sources who saw them said they outlined a wide conspiracy to free George, the Soledad Brothers, and members of the Black Guerrilla Family.

According to the Angela notes, Jonathan's military action was to have involved him and the convicts in the courtroom working in concert with squads of Black Panther commandos trained by Carr in the Santa Cruz Mountains. One squad was to have backed him up at the courthouse while another hijacked a plane at San Francisco International Airport. The goal was to trade the hostages for George and the other prisoners and then fly them to Cuba. The mission went awry when Huey Newton and his Panthers, fearing that law enforcement had been alerted to the plot, issued an eleventh-hour command to withdraw forces. But Jonathan, against everyone's advice, decided to go it alone.

The FBI later obtained a communiqué allegedly circulated among radical groups by George Jackson's Black Guerrilla Family.

"Jonathan Jackson was deserted," it said. "Huey Newton ordered his functionaries to stay out of the Marin affair. Jonathan was to have had the assistance of the Black Panther Party."

The Black Guerrilla Family communiqué outlined a somewhat different version of the escape plan. In this one, Jonathan was to have gone

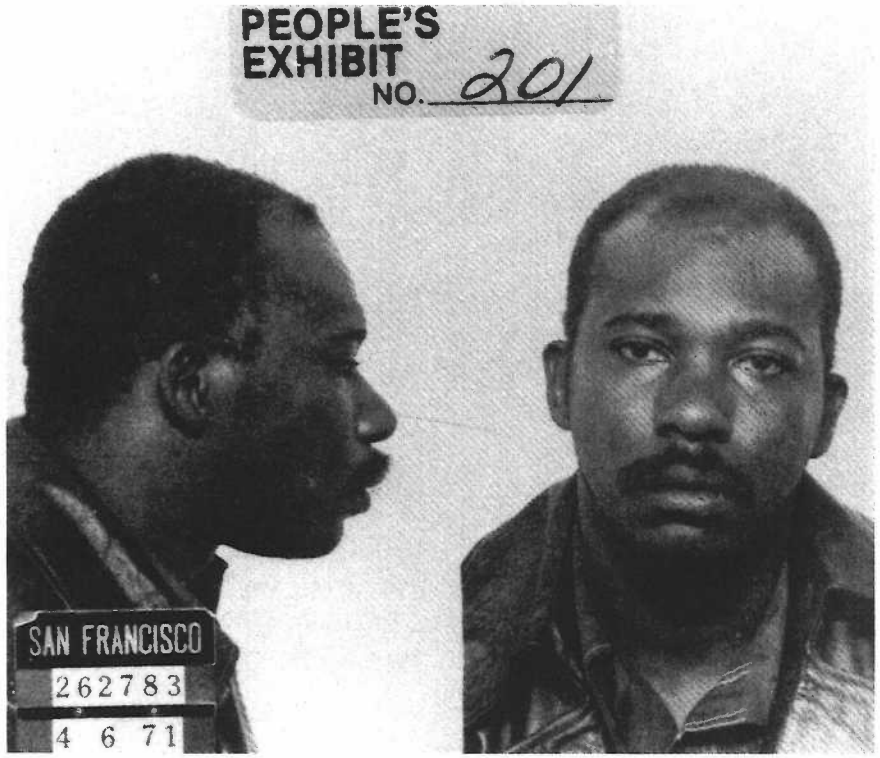


George Jackson being led into a Soledad Brothers hearing in shackles. *Courtesy of Jonathan Jackson Jr.*

George during a visit shortly before his death. *Courtesy of Jonathan Jackson Jr.*

Huey Newton, Black Panther minister of defense, decked out in full Panther regalia. He stands in front of the Panther headquarters in Oakland, California. *AP/World Wide Photos.*

George Jackson's closest friend and comrade, James Carr. *Courtesy of Marin County District Attorney's Office.*

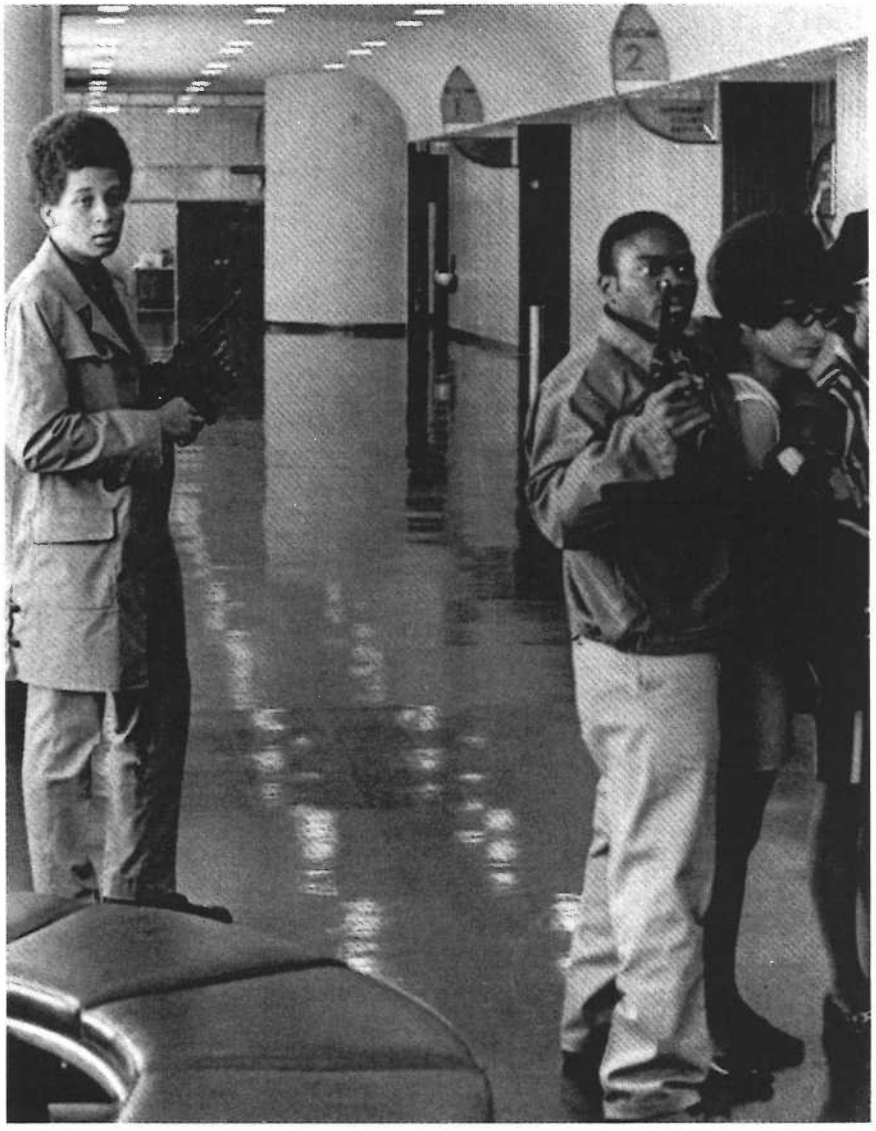


George Jackson lies dead at San Quentin Prison after being shot by a gun-rail guard on August 21, 1971. *Courtesy of Marin County District Attorney's Office.*

Mrs. Georgia Jackson, accompanied by the Rev. Cecil Williams, right, of Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco, arriving at the Hall of Justice in San Francisco for a court appearance of the two surviving Soledad Brothers, John Clutchette and Fleeta Drumgo, days after the death of her son, George Jackson. *AP/Wide World Photos.*

Approximately 1,500 mourners give the Black Panther salute as the body of George Jackson is carried from St. Augustine's Episcopal Church in Oakland. They shout "Power to the people!" *AP/Wide World Photos.*

George Jackson doing what he did so well: writing letters that made him famous. *Courtesy of Jonathan Jackson Jr.*



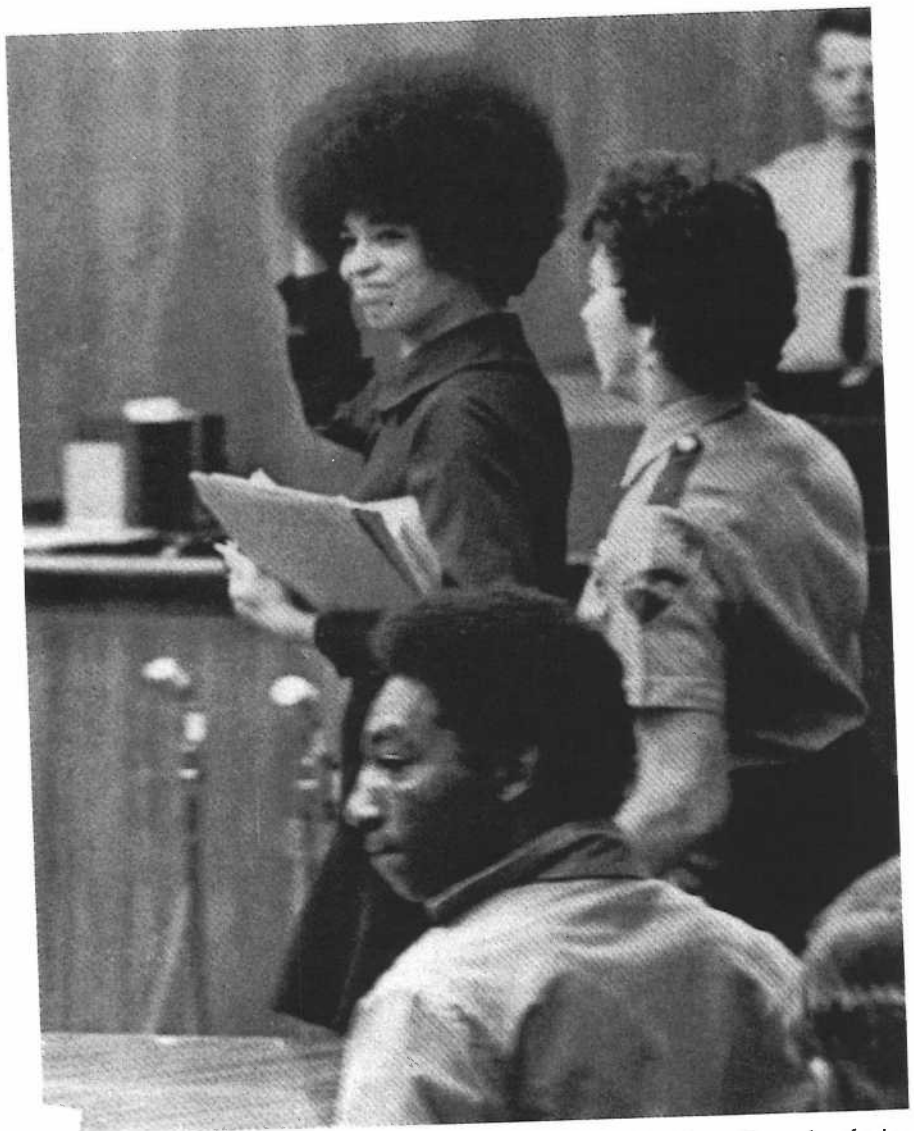
Jonathan Jackson (left) and San Quentin inmate William Christmas hold hostages at gunpoint in the hallway of the Marin County Hall of Justice on August 7, 1970. *Photo by Jim Kean. Courtesy of* Marin Independent Journal.

Convict James McClain takes aim at Harold Haley. Minutes later, Judge Haley would be killed by the shotgun taped around his neck. *Photo by Jim Kean. Courtesy of* Marin Independent Journal.

James McClain threatens police with a revolver as he leads hostages out of the Marin County Hall of Justice. *Courtesy of* Marin Independent Journal.

Jonathan Jackson and his guerrillas herd their hostages into the rented van in the parking lot outside the Marin County Hall of Justice. *Courtesy of* Marin Independent Journal.

Inside the van, Jonathan Jackson, James McClain, and William Christmas lie dead. Only convict Ruchell McGee would survive. At the time of this writing, he was incarcerated in Pelican Bay Prison, California's notorious high-tech facility. *Courtesy of* Marin Independent Journal.



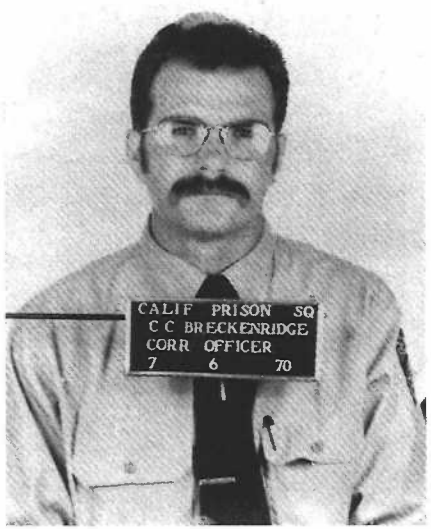
Angela Davis at a court hearing after her arrest for her alleged role in the Marin County shootout on August 7, 1970. *Photo by Jim Kean. Courtesy of* Marin Independent Journal.

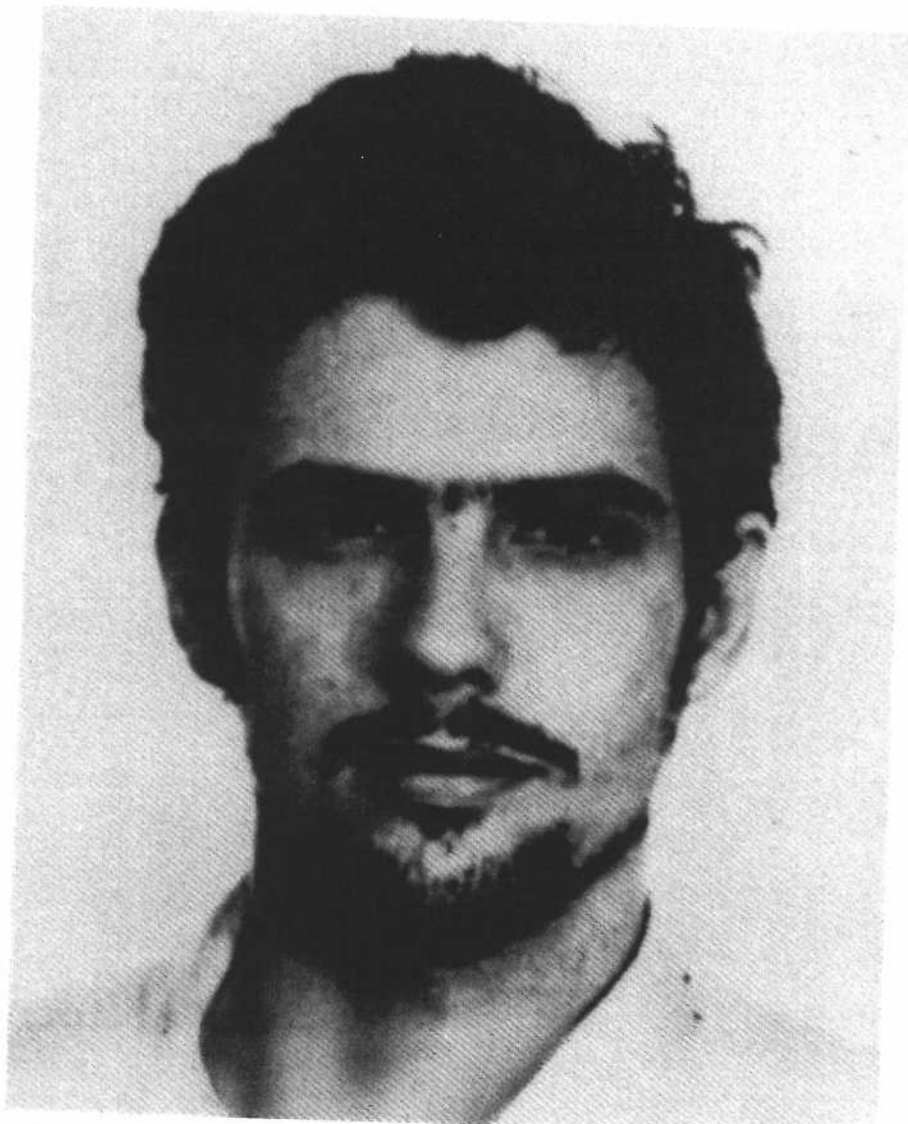
Left: Defense attorney Susan Rutberg shows to the jury the pistol that Stephen Bingham was accused of passing to George Jackson at San Quentin. Right: Stephen Bingham at the defense table with his chief attorney, M. Gerald Schwartzbach. *Both photos courtesy of* San Francisco Chronicle.

Guard Kenneth McCray survived the slaughter and became a star witness for the prosecution. *Courtesy of Marin County District Attorney's Office.*

The tempestuous guard Urbano Rubiaco allegedly found the gun in George Jackson's hair. He survived the bloodbath. *Courtesy of Marin County District Attorney's Office.*

Guard Charles Breckenridge carried a switchblade for protection. Fortunately for him, the rampaging convicts didn't find it. *Courtesy of Marin County District Attorney's Office.*





This photo of Stephen Bingham was released by law enforcement in 1971, when an all-points bulletin was issued in Berkeley for his arrest for alleged involvement in the San Quentin Massacre. *AP/World Wide Photos.*

23

August 21, 1971

"The point now is to construct a situation where someone else joins in the dying."

—GEORGE JACKSON

The phone rang in the house on North Street in Oakland that Steve shared with his friends in the movement. It was just before 8:00 on a Saturday morning that was already hot and had the makings of turning into a real summer scorcher. Steve was up and dressed and was heading out the door for a breakfast meeting with Peter Franck, his new colleague and mentor in the Telegraph Avenue law collective, when the phone rang. He picked up the call. It was John Turner, the head of the Berkeley Black Panthers.

"Can you come by the house, brother?" he asked Steve. "There's something I need to talk to you about right away. It's important."

Steve hadn't been expecting this. His day was already planned. He stammered for a moment, mentioning his breakfast meeting with his law partner, saying he'd try to come by after that. In the back of his mind, Steve hoped that whatever Turner wanted wouldn't take long because he had a lunch date with his uncle, Woodbridge Bingham, a retired University of California history professor who lived in the Berkeley Hills. It had been arranged for weeks, and he knew he'd be in deep shit with his father if he failed to show up. He'd have to fit it in before heading for his weekly Marxist-Leninist study group with the Muni Worker Caucus that evening.

After telling Turner that he'd call him back later, Steve fired up his motorcycle and rode to the Egg Shop and Apple Press restaurant on Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley, near the university. Peter Franck, the founder of the law collective, was already there. Over breakfast, Franck filled Steve in on the problems he was having in the office. Everyone seemed to have a separate agenda, he said. Everyone seemed to be mad at everyone else, arguing over what was politically correct and what wasn't, fighting over

money. Franck was discovering that running a law practice as a collective sounded good in theory, but it wasn't working in practice.

In the nearly two decades that Steve would be underground, Franck would go on to become a successful entertainment lawyer in San Francisco. When I interviewed him in the days after Steve's trial, he recalled that meeting.

"We discussed various processes to get people in the office talking with each other," he said. "Steve generally favored keeping the collective together, but others of us were thinking about going back to a traditional arrangement."

He and Steve had been talking for about an hour when Steve excused himself and went to the restaurant pay phone to call Turner at the Panther house. Turner asked Steve to cut his meeting with Franck short, explaining that a legal investigator needed to get in to see George Jackson at San Quentin, but because of a change in the prison rules, the investigator would have to be accompanied by an attorney. Since Steve was an approved member of George's legal staff, he could get in to see George.

"We didn't finish our discussion," Franck recalled. "Steve came back to the table and told me, 'I have to leave in a few minutes. I have to talk to George.'"

Steve rode his motorcycle down University Avenue to the headquarters of the Berkeley Panthers, a two-story, wood-frame house on Tenth Street in West Berkeley. He parked his bike in front at about nine-thirty, bounded up the stairs, and was ushered in.

Turner introduced him to a young black woman wearing an Afro hairdo, oversized hoop earrings, and a checked pants suit. Her name was Vanita Anderson. Vanita had just been appointed one of George's legal investigators, replacing his sister Penny, who had been barred from the prison after the toy gun incident.

Steve clearly hadn't planned on going to San Quentin that day. If he had, he wouldn't have worn blue jeans and a denim jacket. He knew very well that he couldn't get into the prison dressed like that. Visitors were prohibited from wearing jeans because inmates wore prison-issue denims and the guards didn't want any confusion over who was who.

If he were going to do this, Steve thought to himself, he'd need some different clothes. He asked Turner if he could borrow something to wear. Turner took Steve upstairs to his bedroom. After a few minutes, Steve emerged wearing a pair of beige bellbottoms and a salt and pepper tweed

sport coat. Since he and Turner were about the same size, both tall and thin, the clothes fit him almost as well as his own.

Vanita was ready to leave when Steve came downstairs. She got behind the wheel of a brown '69 Camaro parked in the driveway. Steve slid into the passenger seat beside her.

Vanita was a no-nonsense woman with a reputation for having an attitude about white people. Unlike most Panthers, who came from poverty and had learned to survive on the street, Vanita had grown up middle-class in the Midwest. Her father, Robert L. Witherspoon, was a St. Louis attorney, her mother a college professor. After high school in St. Louis, she'd gone to Fisk University in Nashville, a cauldron of black nationalism in the mid-sixties. She graduated with a degree in Spanish in 1969, and then married Julius Anderson, a soldier in the army, accompanying him when he was stationed in Germany. While overseas, she taught black history and culture to GIs. The classes were a first for the army, and she was featured in a story in *Tan* magazine.

She and her husband separated when they returned to the States because of conflicts stemming from her growing militancy. He enrolled in Tennessee State and she came out west, to Berkeley, where the action in the black movement revolved around Huey Newton and the Panthers. In the summer of 1970, Vanita took graduate courses in education at Cal and went to work for the Panthers in the party's Berkeley Community Information Center, which was the formal name for the house on Tenth Street where she lived with a number of Panther men and women. She was bright, hardworking, and self-assured, qualities that earned her a responsible position alongside John Turner in the administration of the office.

The Camaro she was driving to San Quentin had been borrowed from her boyfriend, William Lee Roberts, a Panther functionary who was the father of her newborn son. The baby, named Muntu Aluche Witherspoon-Roberts, had been born that spring, several months prematurely. Vanita hadn't told her parents in the Midwest about her pregnancy. They found out they had a grandchild when they were notified by health officials that Vanita was in an Oakland hospital, laboring through a difficult birth.

Whites often felt uncomfortable around Vanita, who had a black power edge to her that they found unsettling. She and Steve said little during the thirty-minute drive to San Quentin. She parked in a waterfront lot that was so close to the shore that they could hear tiny waves lapping

as they got out of the car and climbed the hill from the parking lot to the prison's east gate.

In the east gate office, Vanita signed the visitors' log first, neatly printing her name. Steve scrawled his signature in the space just below. She was carrying an attaché case. He had an expandable legal folder under his arm. It was 10:15 A.M.

Saturday was the heaviest visiting day of the week, reserved primarily for families who could only get out to the prison on weekends. When Steve and Vanita arrived, visitors were already streaming down the long bay-view promenade from the east gate to the Spanish-style tile-roofed admission building.

Before going into the reception area, visitors had to pass through a metal detector at what was called the Inspectroscope gate. As Vanita approached the Inspectroscope, a doorway-shaped metal detector similar to those found in airports, the guard on duty, Officer Bernard Betts, took her attaché case and set it down on the gound in plain sight beside the machine. Vanita's hoop earrings registered slightly as she passed through the metal detector, but not enough to set off the alarm.

Steve, carrying his expandable folder, breezed through with no problem. Next, Betts went through Vanita's purse, stirring the contents around with a pencil, finding nothing out of the ordinary. Then he asked Vanita to accompany him into his office so he could examine her attaché case. A cloud passed over her face. She was clearly not pleased with this procedure. When Betts testified at Steve's trial, he mentioned that she slammed the case down contemptuously on the table in the office.

Before he touched anything, Betts told Vanita that all of this would likely be a waste of time because it was a weekend and only family members would be allowed to visit inmates. Indignant, Vanita told Officer Betts in no uncertain terms that she was a legal investigator for George Jackson, that she had one of Jackson's attorneys with her, pointing at Steve waiting outside the office, and that she had every intention of visiting her client.

Betts didn't argue with her. Instead, he turned his attention to the attaché case, which he estimated to be about eighteen to twenty inches in length and twenty-two inches wide. Convex in shape, it was perhaps six to seven inches thick at the center and four to five inches across at the top, by the handle. It was made of fiberglass material, unlined, with metal bands on the edges.

Opening the case, Betts saw a stack of yellow legal pads inside and a cassette tape recorder that he figured to be about nine to ten inches long, five inches wide, and four to five inches thick. He ran his hands up and down the sides of the machine, turned it upside down, and removed the battery plate. Glancing inside, he could see diodes and capacitors and a portion of the cone speaker.

Satisfied that there was no contraband hidden there, he put the battery cover back on and set the tape recorder down again inside the attaché case, which he snapped shut and handed back to Vanita. He would later estimate that the whole process lasted about two minutes. He admitted that he had not checked the briefcase for a false bottom or false sides, and he had not turned the tape recorder on to determine if it was in working order.

As Vanita left the office, Betts called ahead to the officer in the visitors' waiting room, Dan Scarborough, letting him know that an attorney for George Jackson and a legal investigator were on their way and that they had a tape recorder with them.

Of two hundred visitors that day, Vanita would be the only one with any equipment of that size. Scarborough automatically pulled out a release form that visitors had to fill out and sign whenever they brought tape recorders into a visiting room.

Vanita took her place in the line of visitors in front of Scarborough's desk with Steve right behind her. When it was her turn, she asked to see George Jackson. Scarborough told her that wouldn't be possible, citing the new rule that limited legal investigators to one visit in a seven-day period. He reminded her that she had been informed of this when she saw Jackson the previous Tuesday.

She argued her case, contending that as she understood the regulation, she would be allowed a second visit if she had an attorney with her. Scarborough said no, that was not the way it worked. Then Steve piped up. If she couldn't see George, then he would like to see him. Scarborough knew Steve on sight as the young attorney who had tried to bring booklets on guerrilla warfare to Jackson a few months earlier, and he wasn't about to make it easy for Steve to see Jackson that day. He asked to see Steve's letter of authorization from Jackson's chief attorney, John Thorne.

Steve explained that he didn't have the letter with him because he had left home without knowing he would be going to San Quentin. Besides, he impatiently pointed out to Scarborough, he had already visited George five times previously that summer and had never had any problems before.

His visits had been approved by Associate Warden Park, as Officer Scarborough well knew.

Scarborough was unmoved. "Sorry," he said. "No letter, no visit."

Steve was pissed. He demanded to speak to the lieutenant on duty, Scarborough's supervisor. For five minutes, Steve and Vanita pleaded their case with the lieutenant, who threw up his hands and left the decision up to Warden Park.

Park lived in a state-owned house on prison property, but he wasn't at home or in his office that morning. He was out shopping with his wife and there was no telling when he would be back. Steve and Vanita decided to wait and take their chances. Over the next two hours, Steve went outside the reception room several times to use the pay phone to call Park's office. The associate warden wasn't in. At 12:30, he phoned his uncle Woodbridge in Berkeley to warn him that he would be late for lunch because he was stuck at San Quentin, waiting to see a prisoner.

"Whenever you can get here will be fine," his uncle said cheerily. "We'll save some lunch for you."

From his post at the Inspectroscope, Officer Betts noticed Steve repeatedly in the phone booth and called Scarborough in the visiting room. "What's with this guy?" he asked.

Steve made a pest of himself around Scarborough's desk, asking the officer at least a half-dozen times if he'd heard from the associate warden yet. Each time, he was told that Park was due back momentarily. Steve fumed. He and Vanita hung around in the waiting room and, for a while, sat together on a bench in the sun just outside the door.

That's when Vanita told Steve the real reason they needed to see George that day. Steve had assumed that it had something to do with the Soledad Brothers case, a legal matter, but that wasn't it. Vanita said that John Turner had been editing George's new book, *Blood in My Eye,* and George needed to approve the last edited pages before they could be sent to the publisher. Steve was a little miffed at this, feeling at first that he had been misled, that he'd been used, but his annoyance soon passed.

While Steve and Vanita waited, George Jackson paced in his cell on the first floor of the adjustment center. He was obviously expecting a visitor that morning. But as it got later and his name wasn't called, he became increasingly anxious. Several times he called down the tier to the sergeant on duty, Kenneth McCray, asking if his visitor had shown up yet. From his desk in the adjustment center foyer, McCray called the visiting room.

He was told that there was someone there to see Jackson, but the visit was pending approval from Associate Warden Park.

In his book *Soledad Brother,* George described prison guards as "twisted, disgusting epitomes of the parent monster," but Sergeant McCray didn't fit that profile. The thirty-nine-year-old officer was a good enough guy. He came from a working-class background and appreciated his job in correctional work, planning on making a career of it. At least it was better than pumping gas, which had been his previous employment.

McCray was married to an Hispanic woman and was learning to speak Spanish. He liked to practice his Spanish by talking with Hispanic cons on the tier. McCray had no ax to grind politically. He was a simple man who was only trying to do his job with as little friction as possible. That's why he didn't go into all the details with George about the problem with his visitor. He didn't want to stir George up. He just told him no, there was no visitor yet.

Warden Park and his wife returned home from shopping shortly before 1:00 P.M. If Park had gotten home a half hour later, visiting hours would have been nearly over and it would have been too late for anyone to see Jackson. But as it was, with Steve being an authorized attorney, Park really had no grounds to deny the request, particularly with the Soledad Brothers trial only two days away.

Steve found out that his visit had been approved when he heard his name called over the PA system in the reception area. Finally, Steve said to himself, starting up the steps to the visiting rooms. Just then Officer Scarborough called out, "Counselor," and motioned for Steve to come back to his desk.

Scarborough had the tape recorder release form in front of him that he'd taken out earlier. He asked if Steve planned on taking a tape recorder into the visit with him, because if he did, he'd have to fill out the form. Steve said no. He'd never used a tape recorder with George before and didn't have one with him this time, either. Vanita, standing right beside Steve, interrupted. "Why don't you take in my tape recorder," she suggested, "in case George wants to dictate some notes." Steve said okay, sure, why not. He filled out the form and took the attaché case from Vanita with the tape recorder inside.

Guard Sterling Unangst unlocked the door of visiting room A and ushered Steve inside. The guard glanced around the room, saw nothing out of the ordinary, and locked the door behind Steve. The room was about

seven feet by six feet with another door on the opposite side, the prison side, for inmates to enter. There were small windows in each door, but they weren't big enough for guards to see inside clearly from their regular positions, affording inmates and their visitors relative privacy. On more than one occasion, George had been able to have sex with some of his women admirers without arousing the attention of the guards.

The visiting room was divided by a table in the center that fit snugly against the side walls. There was a hardback wooden chair on the visitor's side and another on the prisoner's side, no other furnishings. A wire screen ran from wall to wall across the top of the table, extending up to the ceiling. A gate in the screen could be closed to prevent materials from being passed, but it was left open, as it always was for Jackson's visits. The screen was shut only for one con, a death row inmate named Robeles, and only because his attorney was afraid of him. Steve sat down and waited for George.

In the adjustment center, Sergeant McCray let George know he had a visitor. George was elated. A guard threw a lever, opening his cell door by remote control. Carrying four expandable legal folders, George left his cell and walked up the corridor to a grille gate that separated the cellblock from the foyer, where the sergeant's office and the kitchen area were located. Along the way, he paused for a moment in front of a steel mirror on the wall near the grille gate, fluffing out his long hair with an Afro pick. George usually wore his hair close-cropped, but he had recently let it grow out into an extreme Afro that stood out from his head five or six inches. He tugged at his hair so vigorously that guards were convinced that he couldn't have had any contraband concealed in it at that point.

Per prison regulations, all adjustment center inmates were strip-searched before leaving the cellblock for visits. George undressed in front of the grille gate and passed his clothes, shoes, and legal folders through an opening to the guards, who searched them and found nothing. The folders contained only papers. Then the grille gate was opened for George to enter the foyer. He was told to open his mouth and move his tongue around while a guard checked inside for contraband. Then they had him bend over and spread his cheeks, so his anus could be examined as well.

After the strip search, George put his clothes back on and waited for his escort officer to take him to the visiting rooms. After a moment, a soft-spoken twenty-three-year-old guard named Charles Breckenridge showed up. Breckenridge had recently graduated from Sonoma State University

with a bachelor's degree in psychology. He was working as a guard while he waited for a job opening with the state as a counselor or parole officer. He couldn't wait to get out of San Quentin. The tension after all the murders of guards was getting to him. After officer Leo Davis had been stabbed to death in the prison hospital the month before, Breckenridge had taken to carrying a switchblade knife when he was on duty. He knew the knife in his pocket was in violation of regulations, which prohibited guards from carrying weapons of any kind, lest they end up in the hands of a prisoner, but the young officer had a terrible fear of being caught alone and cornered by a convict and felt that the switchblade might just give him a fighting chance if this were ever to happen.

With Breckenridge right behind him, George left the adjustment center and walked the seventy-five yards across the chapel plaza to the visiting center. The chapel plaza had grass and flowers and neatly trimmed bushes. It was the only place even remotely pretty inside San Quentin. George could feel the warmth of the sun on his back, a welcome experience for a man locked up twenty-three and a half hours of every day. Adjustment center inmates were not allowed to have any contact at all with other prisoners, so no one was permitted to come close to him as he was being escorted across the yard. George and Officer Breckenridge passed under a balcony gun rail and entered the sally port in what was called "the between-gates area," where inmates were processed for their visits.

The guard in charge of between-gates was Edward Fleming, who was black and exactly George's age, twenty-nine. "What's happening, brother," George said to Fleming, to which Fleming responded cordially, "Not much, brother." Fleming was one of only a handful of black officers in the prison system and he had tasted his share of racism. He had to respect a black man like George Jackson, who maintained his strength and dignity despite his circumstances. Fleming asked George to empty his pockets, but George was carrying nothing except the legal folders. Fleming gave him a perfunctory pat search, then unlocked the door that opened into an inclined corridor that slanted down behind visiting rooms A and B. He escorted George to visiting room A, unlocked the door, and let him inside. George seemed surprised to see Steve there.

"Comrade Steve," he said, sitting down at the table and giving Steve the black power handshake. At this point, Fleming closed the door behind George and locked it.

Officer Unangst, whose job it was to supervise the open, communal visiting room for general population convicts, sat at a podium at the end of the inclined corridor, which was separated from the common visiting room by a grille gate. He would get up now and then and go over to the grille gate to admit an inmate into the big room where prisoners and visitors sat at a scatter of tables. Then and only then could he see clearly inside visiting room A through the little window in the door. On one occasion, he glanced into the room, but he could see just a portion of George's back. George was pressed up against the left wall, where it was impossible for Unangst to see him or see what he was doing. About twenty minutes after his visit with Steve had begun, George called out to Unangst, "Hey, Officer. My visitor has to go out into the other room to see an associate and get some papers signed."

Prisoners were not allowed to remain in the visiting rooms alone, so Unangst called Officer Fleming on the intercom to get George out while he opened the door for Steve. After a minute, Fleming left the between-gates area and let George out of room A. He gave him another pat search and went back to his work, leaving George in the corridor.

George was clearly excited as he waited in the corridor for Steve to return. He stepped over to visiting room B, where fellow Soledad Brother John Clutchette was visiting with his mother, Doris Maxwell. He bent down and started jiving with Mrs. Maxwell through a little window covered with wire mesh on the back wall of the visiting room.

"I love you, Mama," he shouted through the screen. Mrs. Maxwell knew George and detected immediately that he was acting strangely. Normally, he was calm and controlled; now here he was all wired and crazy. Clutchette noticed the change as well.

"You high on something?" he asked George.

George, who didn't do drugs, threw back his head and laughed at the absurdity of the question.

Hearing the commotion, Officer Fleming shouted down the hallway for George to hold it down a little in there. George complied, stepping back over behind visiting room A to wait anxiously for Steve to return.

When Officer Unangst opened the visitor's door to let Steve out, he took a quick look inside. He saw the attaché case open on the desk and papers scattered around. In the waiting room, Steve conferred with Vanita for about ten minutes before returning to visiting room A. Despite what George said about papers needing to be signed, Steve had nothing in his hands,

Unangst noticed as he let Steve back inside the room. Once Steve was inside, Officer Fleming put George back in.

Once inside the visiting room, Steve said he read an article that he had brought with him while George worked on the manuscript. Then, about 2:20 P.M., George called Officer Unangst again, letting him know that his attorney wanted to leave, that their business was finished.

After leaving George, Steve handed the attaché case back to Vanita in the visiting room and the two of them left the prison, signing out at the east gate at 2:30 P.M.

At the same time, Officer Fleming opened the visiting room door for George, then left him in the corridor with guard Frank DeLeon, a short, heavyset forty-four-year-old father of five. DeLeon would be George's escort back to the adjustment center.

The between-gates area was crowded with sixty inmates waiting to be processed out so they could return to their cellblocks. It was standard procedure for inmates to be pat-searched immediately after a visit. Fleming normally would have searched George, but because he was so swamped, he left the job for DeLeon. After returning to his post, Fleming briefly glanced down the corridor and saw George and DeLeon facing each other, the standard position for the beginning of a search. But Fleming didn't watch the search itself, so he can't say if DeLeon checked George's hair. Since DeLeon and George would both be killed that afternoon, there is no way of knowing for sure if he did, but it's unlikely that DeLeon put his hands anywhere near George's Afro.

At San Quentin, the officially prescribed procedures for searching inmates were seldom followed exactly, and DeLeon was not known for crisp efficiency on the job. The rule was that guards were supposed to actually run their fingers through a prisoner's hair, back and front, during pat searches and skin searches. After his meeting with Steve, George would have to go through one skin search and one pat search before he got back to his cell. Theoretically, his hair would be searched twice. But after so many visits that summer, George knew how lax the guards were in this regard. He knew they were reluctant to have physical contact with inmates, particularly militant blacks such as himself, who were always a threat to react violently.

As George was being escorted back to the adjustment center by DeLeon, Officer Eugene Osborne watched them walking across the chapel plaza from a second-floor window on death row. Osborne mentioned to a

sergeant that Jackson's hair looked bigger, more fluffed out than normal. The sergeant, who was also watching, said he noticed the same thing.

In the foyer of the adjustment center, Sergeant McCray looked through the window in the door and saw George and DeLeon standing there, waiting to be let inside. Two white trusties from another cellblock were also in the foyer, loading a food cart with metal trays after serving lunch. They were being supervised by Officer Paul Krasenes, who, at fifty-two, had been working in California prisons for twenty-two years.

There was a rule against adjustment center inmates being in the foyer with prisoners from other cellblocks, so McCray locked the white trusties in the kitchen at the rear of the foyer before letting George and DeLeon in. George had to step up to a table set up just inside the door and hand over his folders to McCray, who started going through them. He then shuffled down to the other end of the table and stood eye to eye in front of guard Urbano Rubiaco, a bullish, twenty-five-year-old Chicano who had been on the tactical squad at Soledad until his transfer to San Quentin just before the guard murder that George and the two other Soledad Brothers were charged with.

At Soledad, Rubiaco had been one of the tough guys who roughed up inmates considered "management problems." As a matter of fact, the guard George was accused of murdering had actually filled the vacancy created by Rubiaco's change in assignment. On a number of occasions it had occurred to Rubiaco that if he hadn't left Soledad when he did, the guard George was accused of killing could have easily been him. Needless to say, Rubiaco wasn't a big fan of George Jackson.

The feeling was mutual. In George's mind, Rubiaco was the worst kind of pig, a Third World traitor who did the dirty work of fascists who enslaved his own people. George's stomach must have clenched when he saw Rubiaco standing there across from him. He hadn't planned on Rubiaco being on duty that Saturday, which was his regular day off. But Rubiaco had switched shifts so that another officer could attend a wedding.

George once wrote, "My character and disposition are such that my response to a crisis situation always leads to a situation more desperate than the one which provoked it." It would turn out to be a deadly accurate personal assessment.

Rubiaco has testified time and again that at that moment, as George unbuttoned his shirt for the skin search, he noticed something shiny and metallic in George's hair, up on his head above his right eye. It looked to Rubiaco like the tip of a pen or a pencil.

"What's that in your hair, Jackson?" he asked.

George stared straight ahead, pretending not to have heard. Rubiaco said it again. "What's that in your hair?"

George answered, "Nothing," running his hand lightly over the top of his Afro. Rubiaco wasn't satisfied. He leaned forward, reached up, and touched the point sticking out. It didn't budge. Whatever it was, it was solidly in place. Rubiaco was confused. For a moment, he thought George had a plate or something in his head from one of his fights.

McCray glanced up from searching George's folders and caught the same metallic glint in George's Afro.

"All right, let's have it, Jackson," McCray ordered.

Then in one smooth motion George reached around to the back of his head with both hands and pulled something from beneath what looked to McCray and Rubiaco like a hair net or wig. In an instant, George had a 9-mm. pistol in his right hand and a bullet clip in his left. Another clip clattered to the floor. Rubiaco bent to pick it up, but George stopped him cold when he slammed the clip into the butt of the pistol. Nobody moved. There was a moment when they just stared at George in disbelief.

George marked the occasion by honoring his dead brother, echoing Jonathan's announcement in the courthouse shootout the year before.

"All right, gentlemen," George said. "This is it. I'm taking over."

Then, paraphrasing a passage from the prison diary of Ho Chi Minh, he spat out the most chilling words that anyone in that room would ever hear.

"The dragon," he told them, "has come."

George quickly sprang into action, ordering the four guards to lie down on their stomachs in the foyer. He yelled down the tier to his fellow prisoners. "The black dragon has come to free you. Our plans have changed. It's now or never. We've got to stick together, comrades. If you're with me, go to the doors of your cells. If you're not, don't come out."

Sergeant McCray was told to start opening the cells on the tier with the mechanical bar box on the wall of the foyer. McCray explained to George that he didn't know how the thing worked, and he was telling the truth. That job was always performed by his staff. So George turned to Rubiaco and ordered him to do it.

"If you don't, I'll shoot every one of these motherfuckers on the floor and then I'll shoot you," he said.

Rubiaco did as he was told. He got up and opened the metal cover

on the bar box, pulling levers, opening one cell door at a time, beginning with the ones that were empty. There was a way to open all the cells at once, but George didn't know that, so Rubiaco kept working deliberately, slowly. George was no fool and picked up on what Rubiaco was doing. He walked over to Rubiaco, put his mouth behind the big guard's ear, and hissed, "Stop stalling or I'll blow your head off."

While Rubiaco opened cells, George had McCray get up off the floor and unlock the grille gate separating the foyer from the tier. When he did that, McCray saw Johnny Spain, George's Black Panther lieutenant, and Yogi Pinell, another of the black guerrillas, running up the corridor toward him. The convicts had electrical cord in their hands, which they had ripped from the earphones of the radio sets in their cells. The two white inmates on the tier tied their cell doors closed with sheets, but the other twenty-seven convicts were roaming around loose.

George moved McCray and Officers Krasenes and DeLeon into the corridor and had them lie down again on their stomachs in front of his cell, 1-AC-6. Officer Krasenes, whom George and the others considered a porcine, sadistic Nazi, said something to prisoner Fleeta Drumgo, one of the Soledad Brothers. Drumgo hauled off and kicked Krasenes in the face, snapping his head back as far as it would go without his neck breaking. When Rubiaco made a move to help his fellow officer, George pressed the muzzle of the 9-mm. against his temple, spitting in his ear, "Do that again and I'll kill you where you stand."

The three guards were then hogtied with the electrical cords. McCray felt a pillowcase being slipped over his head. The next thing he felt was his throat being cut. It was a swift, painless incision extending from the middle of his neck to his right ear, followed by a great outpouring of blood. Then he was dragged into George's cell and left to bleed to death on the floor between the bunk and the commode. McCray turned his head in the direction of the flap in his throat, trying to staunch the flow from the wound. He went limp, feigning unconsciousness, fearing in his soul that he wouldn't be faking for very long.

Krasenes was then dragged into the cell and dumped on the floor alongside McCray. His throat had also been slashed, four times with a razor, and he was literally drowning in his own blood. McCray heard him gasp a last prayer, sounding as if he were underwater. "May the Lord have mercy on my soul," he gagged. Then he made gurgling, choking noises that were overheard by the convicts in the corridor. A prisoner said, "One of them is

still alive in there." McCray felt two inmates walking over his back. He heard them strangling Krasenes with an electrical cord. One said, "Tighten it up," just before Krasenes lost control of his bowels, his last act on earth. There was no sound for a moment, only the odor of shit and blood.

Now it was Officer DeLeon's turn. He was forced into the cell and thrown down on McCray's back. He had been cut on both sides of his throat with the razor, which wasn't as sharp now after being used so many times. DeLeon was still able to speak. He pleaded for mercy, crying, "Good God, no. Please. I have five children." But his appeal was not to be granted. George stepped into the cell. "It's time we found out if this piece really works," he said, placing the barrel of the automatic an inch or two from DeLeon's head. Officer McCray, lying under the pile, heard the shot and felt the concussion from it. The weight on his back shifted. Warm blood splashed on him, streamed across his face, soaked his uniform, and spread out into a sheet on the floor.

In the foyer, Rubiaco was still opening cells. After he'd released all the ones on the north tier, George ordered him to do the same thing on the south tier. Just then, George realized that someone was outside the adjustment center door, waiting to come in. It was Soledad Brother John Clutchette, coming back from his visit with his mother. Charles Breckenridge, the young guard who had taken George to his visit with Steve, was Clutchette's escort.

"Let them in," George told Rubiaco. "And no funny business or I'll blow away the pig outside." Rubiaco opened the door and Clutchette and the unsuspecting Breckenridge stepped inside the foyer.

There was a yard office, an outdoor kiosk with windows on all sides, in the chapel plaza about twenty yards from the adjustment center door. From there escorts were dispatched and guards received their daily duty assignments. While Rubiaco was letting Clutchette and Breckenridge in, his back was turned to George. Rubiaco could see Sergeant Jere Graham at the desk inside the yard office. Rubiaco screwed up his face, blinked his eyes, doing everything he could to attract Graham's attention without moving his head. Graham glanced up at Rubiaco's face in the window, looked puzzled for a brief second, then went back to his work. Rubiaco's heart sank.

As soon as Breckenridge had come into the foyer he had seen George there. Still not aware of what was going on, he complained to Rubiaco about two inmates being in the foyer at the same time. George raised his arm from his side and pointed the automatic at Breckenridge's chest, motioning for

him to go down to the south tier. Breckenridge, the psychology graduate, tried to reason with George. "Why are you doing this?" he said. "This is crazy. You'll never get away with it." George told him to shut his fucking mouth and do as he was told.

At that point, the two white trusties, John Lynn and Ronald Kane, appeared at the kitchen door. They had been locked in there the whole time and, like Breckenridge, didn't know what was happening. They had a lunch tray that they had saved for George because he had missed his meal while he was in the visiting room with Steve. George told Rubiaco to unlock the door and let them both out. When they realized that George had taken over the adjustment center, the two whites put the tray of food down on the table in the foyer and retreated into a corner, trying to stay out of the way, praying that George and his band of convicts would forget they were there.

Everyone in the room was startled when the phone rang in Sergeant McCray's office. John Spain, George's trusted lieutenant, told George to answer it. "You know what to say," he said. "Give me the gun." George said no, he wasn't about to hand over his gun. He instructed Rubiaco to pick up the phone, warning him not to try any tricks, to act as if nothing were wrong. Rubiaco picked up the receiver. It was the yard office calling, wondering where in the hell Officer DeLeon was, why he'd been in there for so long. Amazingly, Rubiaco had an inspired, plausible story. He said he'd put DeLeon to work on a plumbing problem they were having, and he sounded convincing enough.

George had Rubiaco return to the bar box to keep opening cells on the south tier. Then an inmate stepped over to George and whispered something to him. George handed the gun to Spain, gesturing at Rubiaco and saying, "If he makes a move, shoot him." The convicts wanted George to decide what they should do with Lynn and Kane, the two white trusties, who were guilty of nothing except being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But that was enough to condemn them. The fact that they were white had nothing to do with it, really. They were from another floor and couldn't be trusted to keep their mouths shut about what they had seen. In making his decision, George may have recalled what Lenin said once: "He who is not with us is against us. People independent of the march of events—that is fantasy. Even if we grant that such people did exist once, at present they do not and cannot exist."

George ordered the trusties herded into a cell and executed. Lynn's throat was hacked open with a crude handmade knife. Kane didn't suffer

as much. His jugular was severed with one swift cut of the blade. With that problem taken care of, George returned to the foyer and took the automatic back from Spain, who was still guarding Officer Rubiaco. After he had opened every cell, Rubiaco was marched down the tier to one of the strip cells. Someone snatched his handcuffs out of his back pocket and forced him down on his knees with his chest on the bunk. Officer Breckenridge was already in there, propped up against the wall beside the toilet, tied up with strips of torn sheets.

Rubiaco's hands were cuffed behind his back, then his feet were hogtied and a pillowcase was forced down over his head. From his position on the floor, Breckenridge looked up and saw an inmate, Yogi Pinell, advancing with a razorblade embedded in the handle of a toothbrush. "Don't do it, Yogi," Breckenridge pleaded. Pinell snapped back at him, "You don't know who this is," as he chopped at the officer on both sides of his throat with the razor. The young guard let out a low moan and began swallowing blood. So much was pouring down his mutilated throat that he choked on it.

Pinell turned to Rubiaco then, grabbed his hair through the pillowcase, yanked his head up, jerked it to the left for the best angle, and stuck him in the neck with the razor. Another thrust with the blade ripped open a wound on the lower part of Rubiaco's throat, just above the shoulder. During all this, the pillowcase had come off Rubiaco's head enough so that he could see Pinell's face next to his. The frenzied convict snarled into Rubiaco's face, "I love you pigs," as he tore into Rubiaco's throat once more, carving a smile-shaped wound from the guard's Adam's apple to his right ear. Then he left and rejoined George and the other prisoners in the corridor.

Amazingly, Rubiaco survived. Despite the butchery, his jugular had remained intact. Breckenridge was hanging on as well, but he was gagging audibly on the blood that was flooding into his lungs. The inmates in the corridor heard the noise of his anguished swallowing and one said with an edge of astonishment in his voice, "These pigs aren't dead yet."

Rubiaco and Breckenridge braced for another assault. Someone pushed Rubiaco's face down on the bunk in an attempt to smother him. The burly guard resisted for a moment, then thought the better of it and pretended to fall unconscious.

Another inmate looped a sheet around Breckenridge's neck and tried to strangle him with it. Like Rubiaco, Breckenridge also went limp. He was

nevertheless stuck once more for good measure in the neck with the razor, which was dull and bent by now. Breckenridge was untied so that his shirt, pants, and boots could be removed. As his trousers were being pulled off, Breckenridge heard the switchblade he'd been carrying for protection slip out of his flashlight pocket and fall to the floor. Oh God, he thought to himself, don't let them find it. This time his prayer was answered. The switchblade must have bounced under the bunk, out of sight, because the convicts left without it.

The phone rang in the yard office in the chapel plaza. Officer Carl Adams picked it up. It was Sergeant Graham calling from another cellblock. He wanted to know where in the holy hell DeLeon and Breckenridge were.

"It's about time for the three o'clock count and they haven't shown up yet," he said, annoyed. "I need them." Adams didn't have a ready explanation for their absence. As far as he knew, he said, they were still in the adjustment center. Sergeant Graham was ticked off. He slammed down the phone and marched to the yard office. "Let me in the AC," he snarled to Adams. "I'm going in there and chew their asses out."

Adams sought to defuse the situation. "They're both good guys," he said. "They must have a good reason for being late. Let me go see what's keeping them." Adams grabbed his keys and started over to the adjustment center with a seething Sergeant Graham right behind him. Adams slipped the key into the adjustment center's steel door and pulled it open. Sergeant Graham angrily brushed him aside and stormed into the foyer. Adams, standing outside the door, shrugged, rolled his eyes, closed the door behind Graham and locked it. He started back to the yard office, then decided to take a quick peek through the window in the AC door first. But when he tried to look, the blazing afternoon sun glinted off the window so that Adams couldn't see inside. He raised his arm to shield the glare and just as he did a black face materialized on the other side of the glass. It was George. He had a gun pointed right between the startled guard's eyes.

"Open this goddamn door or I'll blow your motherfucking head off!" George screamed. Adams didn't have time to think. He dropped to the ground just as George fired. The bullet blew a hole through the window. There was the sound of the shot and the shower of glass. Adams hadn't been hit. He scrambled back to the yard office on his belly, picked up the intercom microphone, and shouted into it, "Send officers to the yard office immediately. George Jackson has a gun in the AC. Hurry, for God's sake." Inside the AC, George strode into his cell and over to Sergeant Graham.

who was pushed down onto the bunk. George leveled the gun, cocked it, and shot Graham through the head, killing him.

By now, guards were running into the prison armory, grabbing carbines and machine guns and automatic pistols. On the gun rails overlooking the chapel plaza, sharpshooters with .30-caliber rifles moved into firing positions. In the sergeant's office on the second floor of the adjustment center, Officer William Hampton had heard the shots and had run down the stairs to the first floor. He opened the door at the bottom of the stairwell, stepped into the corridor off the foyer, and saw George and John Spain standing at the adjustment center door with their backs to him, staring out the window into the plaza. All at once, Spain wheeled around. He had a pistol in his hand, which he trained on Hampton. "Hold it right there," he commanded, but Hampton backpedaled into the stairwell, locked the door behind him, and bounded back up to the second floor.

George knew it was all over. He wasn't going to break out of San Quentin and lead the revolution after all. It was too bad that it had come to this. He'd been so close to accomplishing the impossible. If only the gun they brought him had been a little smaller, if it had been the derringer he had requested instead of the bulky automatic, which was over eight inches long and weighed more than two pounds, he might have been able to make it back to his cell without the gun being discovered. If that had happened, then he could have carried out his primary plan to make his escape attempt with the outside support of his secret Panther army commandos while he was being transported from San Quentin to San Francisco for the first day of the Soledad Brothers trial. That would have been when security would have been at its weakest and the guards the most vulnerable.

But it did no good to despair over what might have been. As it was, he would go down fighting, wearing the lion's skin just as his brother Jonathan had the year before. He would not die a broken man and he would take some pigs with him. As he said in one of his books, "I'll just keep fighting in hell."

George and Spain crouched there with their backs pressed against the adjustment center door. George knew the guards were moving in with all their firepower and that he had to make his move now in order to save his comrades.

"It's me they want," he announced, kicking open the adjustment center door and bursting out into the sunlit plaza with the automatic in his hand. Spain ran out behind him. George fired a shot at the gun-rail guard, Frank

Bortfeld, on the balcony above the visiting rooms on the opposite side of the plaza, then sprinted in the direction of the north wall. Bortfeld had only enough time to squeeze off a quick shot with his rifle before George disappeared behind the chapel. Bortfeld hadn't led his moving target quite enough and the bullet struck the pavement right behind George's running form, ricocheted, and pierced George's left ankle above the Achilles tendon, shattering his anklebone.

Most men suffering that kind of wound on the dead run would have fallen right then, but George was not like most men. He merely stumbled slightly, quickly regained his balance, and kept running, bent over at the waist in a crouch. Damn, Bortfeld thought to himself, I missed.

Officer John Frank was lying in a prone position on the North Block gun rail. His 30–30 Winchester carbine was cocked and ready and he knew how to use it. The forty-year-old guard had started working at San Quentin that spring after twenty-one years in the air force as a military policeman. In the service he'd had to qualify with a rifle every six months and had earned the title of sharpshooter.

Frank first saw George from behind after he had been hit in the ankle by Bortfeld's bullet. He was above and directly to the rear of George, who was about eighty yards away, bent over at the waist, running away from Frank down a steep driveway that led to the north wall of the prison, which was twenty feet tall and topped with a gun tower. Frank could see only the back of George's legs and his buttocks. He let George run another twenty or thirty yards down the driveway before getting him in his rifle sight and squeezing the trigger, firing one shot, the only one he would need.

The bullet entered George's lower back, fracturing his third, fourth, and fifth ribs as it traveled upward through his body. It passed through the soft tissue of the neck and sliced a path in the right lobe of his brain. The slug exited George's skull about midline, blowing out fragments of bone and forming a clean, round exit wound about six-tenths of a centimeter in diameter. George was dead before he hit the ground. He somersaulted and crashed to the pavement on his face, lying motionless. It was a few minutes before 3:00 P.M.

Lieutenant Eugene Ziemer was the first guard to reach George's body. Ziemer, a tall, crusty fifty-three-year-old officer, had been with the Department of Corrections since 1956. He was only too familiar with George Jackson. He'd gotten into a fight with young George the first time he'd been in San Quentin, before the fateful transfer to Soledad. George had kicked

him in the back during the brawl, rupturing four of his discs, laying Ziemer up for two weeks.

As Ziemer approached George's fallen form, he hesitated for a moment when he saw Officer Adams standing in the driveway with his palms out flat, signaling for the lieutenant to stay back. Adams had seen John Spain dive into the bushes beside the chapel just as George had been shot. Adams ordered Spain to crawl out of the bushes on his stomach. Spain did as he was told, laying a glass vial wrapped with black tape down on the pavement. "Be careful with that goddamn thing," Spain yelled as Adams picked up the vial. "You'll kill us all." Adams turned and gingerly handed the vial to another officer, who set it carefully down in a nearby laundry cart. The vial had been smuggled in to Spain during a visit that summer. George had one as well. They both thought the vials contained nitroglycerin, a powerful explosive, when in fact the fluid inside was no more than a thin solution of water and hydrochloric acid.

Ziemer, armed only with a baton, rushed past Adams and Spain and ran over to George's body, rolling it over roughly with his foot. He saw the 9-mm. that had been lying under George and kicked it into the gutter beside the drive. Then he went through George's pockets, removing a bullet clip and the second black-taped vial filled with liquid. He handed the vial to an officer and, satisfied that George was dead, ran over to the yard office. The plaza was teeming now with guards armed with .45-caliber machine guns, shotguns, and assault rifles.

Ziemer could see the adjustment center door partially open. He snatched a billy club loaded with a canister of tear gas and ordered several guards with weapons to cover him from behind. Then he slipped into the foyer, which was strangely empty—cool and dark and silent. Ziemer and his squad inched slowly through the foyer, past the open grille gate, and down the tier. They could see that the floor in front of George's cell was slick with blood. Their hearts caught in their throats when a man lurched out of George's cell, clutching at his butchered throat. It was John Lynn, one of the white trusties. He was trying to speak, to scream for help, but his vocal cords had been severed and no sound came out of his mouth as he crumpled to the floor. Ziemer and his men stepped over Lynn's body and peered inside George's cell. They had never seen such horrific carnage. One guard began to weep. Another gagged. Sergeant Graham was propped up on George's bunk, slumped over with his back against the wall.

He had been stabbed twice in the chest and twice in the stomach. There was a gaping bullet wound in his head.

The other officers were piled on the floor in a heap of gore. DeLeon was lying on top of Sergeant McCray and Officer Krasenes. Lieutenant Ziemer nearly jumped out of his skin when he heard a voice cry out from the bloody mess, "Get me out of here. I'm drowning in blood." It was Sergeant McCray, miraculously still alive.

They pulled the wounded officer from the cell, placed him on a gurney, and rushed him to the prison hospital. Ziemer then met a second contingent of officers gathered at the south tier, where the inmates were holed up in the cells, claiming they had hostages, threatening to kill them. "Hostages don't mean shit," Ziemer yelled down the corridor just as a guard fired a machine gun burst, raking the back wall of the tier.

In the strip cell in the back of the tier where they had been left for dead, Officers Rubiaco and Breckenridge heard the shots and decided it was time to stop pretending they were dead and make a break for it before they actually did bleed to death from the wounds in their throats. Breckenridge managed to slip out of his bonds and untie the strip of sheet around Rubiaco's feet, but he could do nothing about the handcuffs that were holding Rubiaco's hands behind his back. Rubiaco, blood running from the gashes in his neck, struggled to his feet and stumbled out of the cell door first. Without the use of his hands for balance, he reeled like a drunken man, tripping and falling into a cell as he made his way up the corridor. The brawny guard still had the strength to drag himself to his feet again and stagger the last few yards into the foyer.

Instead of being grateful for being alive, Rubiaco was incensed, hysterical with hate. "Get these cuffs off me and give me a gun," he raged. "Let me kill those motherfuckers." Rubiaco was so wild, so out of control, that Ziemer told his men to leave his handcuffs on. Kicking and shrieking like a madman, Rubiaco was pushed down on a gurney and hustled off to the prison hospital.

Then Officer Breckenridge came out of the strip cell. He was wearing only his underwear and was so coated with gore that he was unrecognizable. He staggered down the corridor into the foyer and collapsed into the arms of his fellow guards.

With all the officers now accounted for, Ziemer knew the convicts had no hostages. He ordered them to take off their clothes and come out of

the cells one by one. The inmates did as they were told. They were marched outside the adjustment center and thrown facedown on the plaza lawn. Then they were manacled hand and foot. Allan Mancino, the white prisoner who had been propositioned by the guards to kill George, was singled out by a guard, who shot him in his bare ass with his pistol. It was an impromptu payback for not killing George when he had been told to do so. After the convicts had been interrogated one by one, their heads were shaved and they were locked down on the second floor of the adjustment center.

Warden Park had been at home with a guest when he first heard the shooting inside the prison. By the time he got to the adjustment center, the cellblock was under control.

"I literally had to wade through the blood in the corridor," Park once commented in a phone conversation I had with him. "They were pulling bodies out of Jackson's cell like cordwood."

Officers had retaken the adjustment center, but the revolt that George Jackson ignited had erupted in other cellblocks throughout the prison. Inmates refused to return to their cells. They set fires, rampaged, resisted. Guards fired their weapons all afternoon. San Quentin sounded like a war zone, and it was. For a time, it looked like the staff would lose control of the prison. But, finally, order was restored and everyone, guard and prisoner alike, stood in the aftermath of violence and tried to make sense of what had happened.

Warden Park had the awful duty of informing the wives of Officers DeLeon and Krasenes that their husbands were dead. Mrs. DeLeon, left now to raise five children on her own, became hysterical when she was told. Park had to leave an officer with her to calm her down while he went over to the Krasenes home. Mrs. Krasenes reacted more stoically. Her two little girls were playing next door when Park arrived. She called them over and told them that their father had been killed.

"She had them kneel down and then she gave each of them a cracker," Park remembered. "It was almost like communion."

24

Bullshit Talk by Dilettante Revolutionaries

Steve and Vanita left San Quentin at about the time that George was pulling the automatic on the guards in the adjustment center. They drove across the Richmond–San Rafael Bridge and returned to the Panther house on Tenth Street in Berkeley, arriving at about three, just as George was being gunned down in the chapel plaza. Steve says that he was at the house five minutes or so, enough time to change into his jeans and jacket. Then he rode his motorcycle back to his house on North Street in Oakland and changed again, this time into a jacket and tie for his late lunch with his uncle.

But there is another version of the events that afternoon at the Panther house. One of the Panthers who was living there supplied it to the FBI in June 1972. The identity of this informant has never been revealed, and the information she gave was not admitted at Steve's trial because she feared retaliation from her former Panther colleagues and threatened to leave the country if she was called to testify. Furthermore, the report of her interview with the FBI was ordered sealed during the trial by Judge E. Warren McGuire, who refused my request to unseal it, even though I had the approval of the FBI.

Nevertheless, I was able to find out what the informant told agents. She reported that when Steve and Vanita returned to the Panther house from San Quentin that afternoon, Steve was calm and cool, but Vanita was agitated and upset. Steve went upstairs with John Turner and another Panther named David Jackson, no relation to George. They were in Turner's bedroom together for several minutes before Steve, who had changed clothes, left on his motorcycle. Later, after hearing on the radio that George had been killed at the prison, Turner telephoned George's

sister, Penny, with the news. When she arrived at the house minutes later in a car driven by Derrick Maxwell, brother of Soledad brother John Clutchette, she was hysterical.

She shrieked at Turner, "You killed my brother. Why did you do that to my brother?"

At some point, Panthers David Jackson and Deborah Love went upstairs to Turner's bedroom and began burning all of George's letters and papers, including, the informant believed, George's escape plan. The burning went on most of the afternoon. When the smoke became too thick, they brought in a fan to blow it out the window. The informant was also able to identify the gun that George had smuggled into the adjustment center. She was familiar with it because she had slept with it under her pillow every night in case the house should be raided by police during the FBI's program to crush the Panthers. She said the 9-mm. handgun that George used that day had been locked in Turner's bedroom closet with an arsenal of other weapons the night before the San Quentin episode, but when she went to look for it the next night, it was gone.

George had been dead for an hour by the time Steve arrived at his uncle's house for his delayed lunch. Woodbridge was pleased to see his nephew, although they had had their political disagreements in the past. A retired professor of Asian history at Cal, Woodbridge had argued with Steve several times about the Vietnam War. Still, Steve was a Bingham and, to Woodbridge, family was more important than ideology.

For his part, Steve was there out of a sense of duty, to fulfill his familial responsibilities, to keep his parents happy. Steve says it was just himself and his uncle and aunt who had lunch that day, but apparently his memory is faulty on this. Woodbridge's son-in-law, Richard Prosser, who lived nearby, was also there, or at least that's what he would later tell the FBI. He told agents that he met Steve for the first time that day. It was a pleasant enough experience, he said. Steve was cordial but not overly friendly or talkative. Steve discussed his labor-law work but never mentioned his experience at San Quentin, which seems odd since his ordeal at the prison was the reason he was late. But then Steve hadn't told anyone in his family, including his father, that he had been seeing George Jackson that summer.

After less than an hour with his uncle, Steve excused himself, saying that he had a meeting in San Francisco that he didn't want to miss. Woodbridge suspected that Steve was off to one of his radical groups, and

he whispered as much to his son-in-law as Steve waved good-bye and drove off on his motorcycle.

Steve dropped by North Street to change clothes and pick up materials for the Muni Worker Caucus meeting that night. "Low Spark of High-Heeled Boys" was blasting on the stereo in the living room as he breezed in with his motorcycle helmet under his arm.

Doron Weinberg was in the kitchen, stirring a pot of soup for dinner. Steve came over to the stove, lifted the lid on the pot, told Doron how delicious the soup smelled, and said he was sorry he was going to have to miss dinner that night because of his meeting. Doron laughed and said he'd save him some. Doron recalled Steve casually mentioning his lunch with his uncle and that he'd seen George earlier that afternoon at San Quentin. Then he bounded upstairs to his room, changed out of his jacket and tie and into his street clothes, for the fourth time that day, and headed off to his study group.

The exact whereabouts of the meeting that night has never been clear. Some people say it was in Oakland, others in San Francisco. Steve, surprisingly, can't recall. All that came out at his trial was that it was at somebody's house, probably one of the Muni drivers. In any case, members of the group confirmed on the witness stand that Steve did indeed show up, and that he participated in the meeting and seemed like his normal self.

Shortly after Steve left for his meeting, Doron and the rest of Steve's housemates sat down to dinner. They were interrupted by a phone call from one of their friends. Doron can't recall which friend, but the person on the other end was frantic.

"Have you heard?" he asked. Doron said no, heard what? The friend told him that the radio news was reporting that George Jackson had been killed that afternoon trying to escape from San Quentin. Three guards and two white inmates were also dead, and three other guards were wounded.

"We all went crazy," Doron said. "They were looking for Steve. The thing that bothered us most was that if Steve got into the hands of the cops, he'd be dead. This was off-the-pig time, remember. We had no doubt that they were capable of taking him into custody and we'd never hear from him again. I don't think there was anyone in our group who would have told Steve to turn himself in."

It is important to note that there had been no mention of Steve in the first news bulletins from San Quentin that day. He wouldn't be named as a suspect until late the next night. Associate Warden Park met with report-

ers at the prison at sunset on August 21, telling them that George Jackson had smuggled a pistol into the adjustment center. His information was brief and sketchy. He described the weapon, incorrectly, as a .38-caliber revolver, adding that there may have been a second gun as well as explosives and that officers were searching the adjustment center for the weapons at that moment. He dodged questions about how George could have gotten the pistol and answered "No comment" when he was asked about reports that George had met with an attorney for the Soledad case shortly before the escape attempt.

But in an emotional outburst that he would later regret, calling his remarks "intemperate," Park told the press that he was sure that there had been a conspiracy and he blamed the bloodshed that day on "bullshit talk by dilettante revolutionaries."

"We've been running scared in the face of shyster lawyers and bleeding-heart motherfuckers for too long," Park growled. "This is going to stop. It's a direct outcome of all this violent talk, kill the pigs and all this crap, but it's still murder. This revolutionary bullshit is getting people killed who didn't want to buy into it in the first place. The revolutionaries aren't lying here in a pool of blood."

At North Street, Doron and Steve's other housemates were in a panic.

"It just didn't make any sense," Doron said. "The Stephen Bingham they were talking about was not the person who smelled my soup that day. Steve had been so openly light, so loose, so carefree. I've always kept that as the strongest refutation of the charges against him. It satisfies me completely."

That night, no less than twenty of Steve's friends rushed over to the house to anxiously wait for him to return home.

"We decided that three of us would be responsible," Doron recalled. "Two of us would deal with Steve and take him elsewhere when he got in. I was on the phone, calling members of the study group, trying to find out where the meeting was that night, but no one knew."

In 1972, California authorities supplied the FBI with a list of all toll calls made from North Street on August 21. Between 6:12 and 11:49 P.M., there were nineteen outgoing calls from the house. Most of them were to young lawyers, law students, and legal workers in San Francisco, Palo Alto, Pacific Grove, and Marin County who were active in the National Lawyers Guild. Several of the numbers were called more than once. At 11:37 P.M., a call was placed to the Lawyers Guild office on Steiner Street in San Francisco. It

was charged to Marvin Stender, Fay Stender's husband and himself an activist attorney. A call was made to the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco. At 10:15 P.M., someone telephoned the Marin County Sheriff's Department. Doron denies any knowledge of that call, but there it is on the record. It may have been made to find out if there was a warrant out for Steve. There wasn't.

At San Quentin, Associate Warden Park suspected right off that the gun had come from Steve during his visit with George, but there was no hard evidence of that, nothing that would justify an arrest warrant being issued. Of course they wanted to talk to Steve, but that was all at that point.

"We decided to keep quiet about Bingham," Park told me, "and see what happened."

At 9:35 P.M., six and a half hours after George's death, a woman identifying herself as Georgia Jackson called San Quentin to ask about picking up her son's body. She spoke to Warden Park. In the course of the conversation, Park recalled, she berated him for canceling visiting rights for George's sisters.

"You people are all down on black people and you let a white motherfucker bring in a gun," she screamed into the phone.

The remark caught Park by surprise. He told Mrs. Jackson that he hadn't mentioned anything about a white visitor, and he asked her where she'd gotten her information. She said she'd heard it on the news, then she hung up.

"I checked with personnel announcing news calls and no one released any news of a white man in this connection," Park wrote in his report of the incident.

Doron says he heard Steve's motorcycle pull up in front of the house at about 11:00 P.M. Steve testified at his trial that the study group broke up at ten o'clock and he got home shortly after that. Whatever the exact time, Steve never got inside the front door. His freaked-out friends came pouring outside and turned him around on the front porch.

"They all came up to me and told me that George and the guards and other inmates had been killed at San Quentin," Steve testified at his trial. "They knew I had been visiting George and the story that was coming out was that there was a gun that had been smuggled in. They were questioning whether the visitor did it. My reaction was that that was completely ridiculous. I was just shocked that they had killed George. The story about the visitor and a gun and so forth . . . It was obviously not me. I didn't do anything."

Two of the women in the commune, Patti Roberts and Barbara Rhine, walked Steve over to another young lawyer friend's house in the neighborhood so that he could lay low there for the night.

"They said, 'We don't know what's going on, but we're afraid for your safety. We think you should see a lawyer right away,'" Steve remembered. "I did not sleep that night. My state of mind was total terror."

Steve conferred with Sheldon Otis, a criminal lawyer who had represented Huey Newton when Newton was accused of pistol-whipping his tailor.

"From what I was hearing it seemed like George Jackson had been assassinated and that I was going to be charged with something I hadn't done," Steve said.

It wasn't until almost midnight that Norm Gard, an agent with the California Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, was called at home and told to locate an attorney named Stephen Mitchell Bingham and interview him about the San Quentin incident. Earlier that summer, Gard had begun an investigation of attorneys and other activists involved in the Soledad case but he hadn't gotten very far with it. He wasn't familiar with Steve and didn't know where he lived other than in Berkeley or Oakland somewhere. The FBI had a dossier on North Street, but apparently the bureau hadn't shared its intelligence with the state attorney general. Gard had to go first to the Berkeley Police Department, where he ran down Steve's address through Department of Motor Vehicle records.

At about 2:00 A.M., Gard and two other state investigators pulled up in front of the house on North Street. Several cars were parked outside, as was Steve's motorcycle. Gard jotted down the mileage on the motorcycle's odometer, then he and the others stepped up to the front door. There was a sign on the porch that said North Street Wrecking Crew, which listed everyone in the house by name. The agents knocked, rang the bell, knocked again. The house was dark. There was no response. They staked the place out for several hours, but saw no one come or go. They left eventually, but returned at least three times in the early morning hours. No one answered when they knocked on the door. Each time they checked the mileage on Steve's motorcycle. It hadn't changed.

Across town at the Berkeley Panther house, a similar scenario was being played out. According to the informant, Vanita Anderson returned to the house at about 2:00 A.M. She and John Turner, Penny Jackson, David Jackson, and Deborah Love also stayed up all night, worried about what to

do. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale sent word that they should hide out in a cabin the Panthers had in the mountains. But the Berkeley Panthers weren't going for that. They had been at odds with Huey for some time, fighting over George's book royalties. They decided to sit tight for now.

The next day, Sunday, August 22, 1971, the front page headline of the *San Francisco Examiner* screamed "3 Guards, 3 Cons Slain in San Quentin Break Try." The story quoted Associate Warden Park extensively. The sequence of events at the prison was still cloudy. Park said that George Jackson had smuggled a gun inside the adjustment center and tried to escape, but he didn't speculate on how the weapon had gotten inside the prison, and he mentioned nothing about a visitor being suspected of carrying it in.

The story quoted George's attorney, John Thorne, who was reached at his San Jose law office, where he had been meeting with other Soledad Brother lawyers at the time of the killings.

"It looks like another tragedy due to the terrible racism in this country," he said. "It sounds like we've got several more victims of the poverty that this racism has imposed on blacks and others in this country."

That Sunday, Georgia Jackson stormed out to San Quentin with her lawyer and demanded to interview prison officials about her son's death. She was turned away. San Quentin was under total lockdown and no relatives, lawyers, reporters, or any other outsiders were being allowed inside.

Outraged, Georgia held an impromptu press conference outside the prison's east gate.

"They went to lengths to try to convince the public for ten years that George was an animal," she cried to reporters. "They set him up to be killed."

At his home in Pasadena, Lester Jackson denied that his son had been trying to escape. He said George had confided to him during a visit two weeks before that he knew he would soon be killed.

"He was in solitary confinement, in maximum security," Lester said. "There was no way possible for him to try to make an escape."

In Oakland, Bobby Seale went on radio KDIA, a black soul station, and read a prepared statement written by Huey Newton. Unlike George's family and his white lawyers, the Panthers didn't deny that George was killed trying to break out of prison.

"The first rule when a peoples' soldier is captured is to immediately start planning his escape," Seale said. "George Jackson took the only avail-

able action of redress against state murder. The state created the violent situation that exists in San Quentin today. The state had threatened to take Brother George's life. The executioner already had a hood over his head. A glass cage had been built in what was euphemistically called a courtroom. The shackles were locked. George broke the shackles, spurned the glass cage, and defended his manhood in the spirit of freedom."

On Sunday night, Steve was moved to the home of another young lawyer friend. On Monday morning, the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s lead story identified him as an attorney being sought for questioning in the San Quentin massacre. Marin County district attorney Bruce Bales would not reveal why Steve was the subject of the search. He would only say, "We have some questions we wish to ask of him concerning the incident at San Quentin."

But Steve wasn't making himself available for questioning. He consulted with a second lawyer, Malcolm Bernstein, but remained confused about what to do.

"I knew it was the most important decision in my life," he said. "I was terrified. I wanted to get away so I would be able to decide."

He had Patti Roberts and Barbara Rhine drive him to Watsonville, a farming town a few hours south of San Francisco where a cousin of his had a house. Steve had hoped to hide there for a few days so he could think, but no one was at home. Becoming increasingly desperate, Steve telephoned Karen Koonan in L.A. He told her he wasn't sure yet, but he was coming to the conclusion that he was going to have to get out of the country. Karen was working in the Bar Sinister law collective and had helped draft evaders who needed false identification to flee to Canada.

Karen had been lying on the beach, reading a book on Marxism, when someone from the law office came running up to her with the news that George Jackson had been killed at San Quentin and that Steve Bingham was on the run, suspected of giving him a gun. Karen was stunned.

"There are certain moments in history when you stop and think, What does this mean?" she said. "I felt that way when Kennedy was assassinated, and Malcolm X. It opens up a door of terror. That's how I felt that day. There were no questions about what Steve did or why. We had to help him. He was family. We had to deal with it."

From Watsonville, Patti and Barbara drove Steve to the Greyhound station in San Jose, where he would catch a bus to L.A. He bought his ticket and sat down in the coffee shop to wait for the bus to leave. His heart nearly

stopped when he glanced over at someone reading a newspaper at another table and saw his photograph on the front page. It was the booking mug shot from his grape strike bust at Cal, the one with him scowling at the camera. He was wanted, the story said, for questioning in the San Quentin massacre.

Steve suddenly felt like every eye in the room was on him. Certain that he would be recognized, he slipped out of the bus depot, bought a disposable razor, and shaved off his moustache in a public restroom. Then he went to a barbershop and got a haircut, but it wasn't short enough, he decided, and got it cut again. Steve isn't sure what day this was, but it was probably Tuesday, three days after his visit with George. The *San Francisco Chronicle* ran Steve's photo for the first time that day on page one.

Prison officials were now saying that George had decided to improvise after his gun was discovered, abandoning an elaborate plan for a mass escape from San Quentin that had been set for a future time, probably the start of the Soledad Brothers trial that Monday.

They described the gun George had when he died as a 9-mm. Spanish-made Astra automatic with the grip handles removed. They said they suspected that it had been smuggled to George in the tape recorder Steve had carried into the visit. Also on the front page of that day's paper was another story about Steve or someone associated with him contacting Marin County authorities and promising that at some point Steve would come forward to answer questions. The district attorney was so convinced of the caller's sincerity that he actually canceled the detention order for Steve.

But Steve wasn't about to turn himself in. On the bus ride to L.A., he'd made up his mind to run.

"I wasn't one hundred percent sure," he said at his trial, "but pretty sure . . . It just fit into kind of a nightmare. I had never asked to use a tape recorder . . . I had never used a tape recorder before. Strangely enough, that particular day, somebody asked me if I'm going to use a tape recorder. This woman I didn't even know, I end up taking in her briefcase. It seemed completely ridiculous, [this story about] Jackson with a gun on top of his head. I couldn't imagine any way that could have happened unless the people who worked in the prison were lying and I knew there had been cases where charges had been dismissed against inmates because the guards in fact lied."

As for the briefcase, Steve couldn't be sure if it had even been opened or not, although it would have had to have been opened to get out the manuscript pages for George to approve.

"I never saw it opened," Steve said.

Steve contacted Karen as soon as he arrived in L.A. She told him it was too dangerous for him to remain in Southern California. His photograph had been in the *Los Angeles Times,* too. She told him to take a bus to Las Vegas and wait there for her to bring him a set of identification papers in another name. She said she was making arrangements to get them, that it might take a few days.

In Vegas, Steve checked into a motel room and called Karen to let her know where he was staying. In a few days she arrived with another woman friend. They brought him a birth certificate, a Social Security card, and a Selective Service card, all in the name of Robert Boarts. They also gave him $3,000 in cash that his friends had raised.

To disguise him further, the women straightened Steve's curly hair and bleached it a lighter color. One of them flew with him to Philadelphia, where Steve applied for a passport as Robert Boarts. Passports can take weeks to process, but Steve was able to get his within twenty-four hours because a friend of his sent the passport office a telegram, claiming that there was a family emergency and that it was urgent that Mr. Boarts be able to leave the country right away.

While Steve was in Philadelphia, the Marin County district attorney announced that he had "conclusive evidence" that Steve had been involved in the San Quentin slaughter.

"If I had been ninety-nine percent sure that I needed to leave, then I knew in my mind that I had to do what I was doing," Steve said on the witness stand. "I knew I was innocent. I knew there was no evidence, conclusive or otherwise, and when they said that I knew, they were lying. I was the only person who was in the room with George, the only person who could say I didn't do it."

But Steve didn't stick around to say he didn't do it. Instead, he boarded a plane and flew to Paris.

25

The Last Visitor

On Saturday night, August 21, Alfred and Sylvia Bingham were driving home from a concert at Wolftrap in Lenox, Massachusetts, when they heard a news report on the car radio that George Jackson, author of *Soledad Brother,* had been shot and killed that afternoon in an escape attempt at San Quentin Prison in California.

"I remarked to my wife that he was the man who wrote the book Steve gave me for Christmas," Alfred recalled. "I didn't make any connection with Steve. I didn't know a thing about his contact with Jackson that summer. I had no idea that he had been to see him."

Alfred went to bed the next evening still unaware of what was happening with Steve. He was awakened at three in the morning by a telephone call from a *New York Times* reporter, who wanted to know if Alfred had heard from his son recently or knew where he was. Then he explained that Steve was suspected of giving George Jackson a gun at San Quentin, he had been Jackson's last visitor, and the police wanted to talk to him, but that he had disappeared Saturday night and no one had seen him since.

Alfred snapped awake. He knew nothing about this, he said, but surely there must be a simple explanation. This had to be a terrible mistake. He was confident that his son would come forward and clear everything up. But Alfred was not one to sit idly by waiting for that to happen. He was on the next plane to San Francisco.

The gang at the commune on North Street wasn't thrilled to see Steve's father on their doorstep, although they probably weren't surprised that he was there. All of them were refusing to talk to state investigators or the FBI. They shined on agents who came by the house or the law office.

Patti Roberts said she was speaking for the entire commune when she snarled to an FBI agent that even if they did know where Steve was, they weren't about to tell the pigs about it. And they had little to say to Alfred, whom they regarded with almost equal contempt. All they would tell him was that no one had seen Steve since he left his study group Saurday night.

"At the time, Alf was the enemy," Doron Weinberg recalled one day as he gazed out the window of his law office in an old Victorian on Octavia Street in San Francisco. "He was rich, powerful, intransigent. He came in to take care of everything. We sat there acting dumb. I'm sure he thought we were lazy and incompetent. For seven or eight years after that we told him we didn't know where Steve was. I feel badly about that."

Alfred was as suspicious of Steve's housemates as they were of him, and he wasn't about to let a bunch of arrogant kids stand in the way of his finding out what had happened to Steve. He demanded to see Steve's bedroom. Doron and the others said no. They thought it was important not to disturb anything, they said.

Alfred said to hell with that. He pushed past them and stormed upstairs to Steve's room. He rifled the papers on Steve's desk, then searched the closet and found Steve's gun, the Colt automatic. His heart sank. He could not imagine Steve as the kind of person who would own a gun. Had he really changed that much? Alfred wrote down the automatic's serial number and then put the pistol back in the closet where he found it.

At the Telegraph Avenue law collective, Alfred questioned Peter Franck, but there wasn't a great deal that Franck could tell him to relieve his fear and confusion.

"It was hard on Alfred," Franck said. "He didn't want to believe Steve was dead, but if he wasn't dead, then the only other alternative was that he was guilty. He couldn't understand why Steve would run if he were innocent."

Alfred went to see Steve's ex-wife, Gretchen, who was sympathetic and agreed to do all that she could to help. The problem was that she really didn't know much about Steve's life since they'd broken up. She knew he lived communally with a group of friends, but she didn't know them personally or much about them. She did recall that Steve occasionally liked to visit a favorite aunt who lived up the coast in the fishing village of Marshall. Maybe he'd gone up there to think things through. Gretchen and Alfred spent a day driving to the old woman's house, but she hadn't seen her nephew in ages.

Alfred set up his base of operations at his brother Woodbridge's home in the Berkeley Hills and called a press conference. He impressed reporters with his candor by characterizing his son as "one of the radicals of his generation." But he quickly added that Steve's "dedication has been to nonviolent change and an insurgent movement." He described Steve as "a romantic," which Steve may never forgive him for, and he theorized that his son may have been duped into passing the gun to George Jackson.

"It is perfectly possible that Steve could have brought a pistol to him without knowing it," he said. Asked to explain Steve's disappearance, he replied, "I have not been in touch with him and I've been able to find no one who has. He may be a victim of foul play, or he may be in some kind of detention in which he is not a free man . . . There is no rational reason for his staying out of communication. Some of his radical friends indicate he would be framed even if he were innocent . . . I'm worried about him. He's in a terrible spot."

Steve's mother, Sylvia, was out of her mind with grief and fear. She couldn't imagine that her boy, who was so devoted to helping the less fortunate, could be involved in a violent act. She told everyone that she was certain Steve had been murdered by right-wing extremists.

Alfred used all his family's influence and wealth in his campaign to get to the bottom of this. He hired private detectives to track down leads and he was even seen talking with young blacks on street corners in Oakland. He consulted with former U.S. congressman Allard Lowenstein, Steve's Mississippi mentor, who was then a visiting law professor at Stanford. He also retained attorney Gary Bellow, who knew Steve from the legal-medical project in the San Joaquin Valley and had gone on to teach law at Harvard. Alfred let them know how desperate he was and that he was willing to spend whatever it took to gather information about Steve.

One of the first things Lowenstein did was telephone Huey Newton. Their conversation was monitored by the FBI. Lowenstein asked if Huey knew anything about Steve. Had he been killed? If he was alive, where was he? Huey insisted that the Panthers had done nothing to harm the white lawyer. He said he didn't know where Steve was, but he suspected that he was hiding out with Vanita Anderson. When Lowenstein told him that he and Gary Bellow were planning to attend George Jackson's funeral, Huey, anxious to have an ex-congressman and a Harvard law professor in the audience, offered to save them a couple of seats in the church. Before hanging up, Lowenstein let Huey know that Steve's father was a wealthy man

and that he was in a position to send a lot of money the party's way for anything they could tell him about his son.

George's "revolutionary memorial service" was held in St. Augustine Episcopal, the same little West Oakland church where Jonathan's funeral had been held the year before. George's mother, Georgia, wanted the service at the much larger Glide Church in San Francisco, but Huey Newton overruled her.

With only enough room for two hundred people inside the church, another two thousand mourners, black and white, gathered outside and listened to the service over loudspeakers. In a jab at Huey, Georgia appeared at a window and shouted to the crowd outside, "The people won't give us a revolutionary church big enough."

Inside an oak casket draped with a Panther flag, George's body was clad in full Panther military dress—black beret, black polished-calf jacket, black pants, sky blue turtleneck.

Huey delivered the eulogy, saying, "They cannot kill all of us like they did George. We'll advance wave upon wave to slit every throat that threatens our lives and freedom."

After the service, George's body was flown to St. Louis. A ten-car funeral procession drove from the airport across southern Illinois to the family burial plot in Mt. Vernon. At the cemetery, two Black Panthers punched a UPI photographer in the face and took the film out of his cameras. George's mother barged into a crowd of news reporters and denounced them as "leeches who helped murder my son." Lester Jackson had to apologize for his wife's conduct.

"I should have never let her plan the burial," he said. "She's beside herself." He called for "a Kent State–style inquiry" into George's death, then added, "But there won't be any state investigation. Even if there were, it would be a whitewash."

At San Quentin, prison officials announced two days after the killings that they had found a black Afro wig partially flushed down the toilet in the cell of Hugo Pinell, one of George's closest comrades and an honorary pallbearer at his funeral. This was the wig that George had used to conceal the 9-mm. Astra that he had smuggled into the adjustment center after his visit with Bingham, they said.

The grip handles on the gun had been removed to make it lighter and the serial number had been partially filed down, but state technicians were

able to raise the numbers and trace the weapon to the Black Panthers. The Astra had been legally purchased by Landon Robert Williams, twenty-seven, a Panther field marshal assigned to the party's national headquarters in Oakland. He bought it on March 22, 1969, at the Old West Gun Room in El Cerrito, near Berkeley. A month after he bought the gun, Williams was arrested in Denver and extradited to Connecticut in connection with the murder of a suspected Panther informant. It was the same killing that Bobby Seale, Erika Huggins, and a dozen other Panthers were charged with in New Haven. At the time of the San Quentin episode, Williams had been behind bars for two years, awaiting trial.

Alfred Bingham moved quickly on this new information. He flew back to Connecticut and went to see Williams in jail. He asked Williams the same questions the FBI had already asked: What happened to the pistol after your arrest? Who had it after you? A bright, articulate young man with a kind heart, Williams had been an engineering major at San Francisco State and a leader of the student strike there. He told Alfred the same thing he'd told the FBI.

"Steve's dad was near tears," he told me when I interviewed him some months after Steve's trial. Williams, who had finished his education at UC Berkeley, was working for an agency in Oakland that was trying to make the homes of low-income people more energy efficient.

"There was nothing I could tell him," he remembered about the meeting with Alfred. "All I knew was that after I was busted, I asked my girlfriend to take all my weapons to my mother's house, but she didn't. In jail I was cut off from the party. There was no way I could track the trail of that gun."

Alfred tried to prevent the Marin County district attorney from taking the San Quentin case before the county grand jury for indictments. After the D.A. announced publicly that he had "conclusive evidence" of Steve's guilt, Alfred went to court, seeking an injunction, arguing that "statements that have received unprecedented publicity in all news media serving Marin County have inflamed and prejudiced public opinion against Stephen Bingham."

In truth, the story that was emerging from San Quentin about George hiding a gun under a wig in an escape attempt was being viewed skeptically by the press. In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the most widely circulated paper in the Bay Area, Tim Findley, a young reporter with access to Huey Newton and the Panthers, wrote in a news analysis:

Even with new revelations that a smuggled-in gun touched off Saturday's bloody incident at San Quentin, the question of motive remained in doubt. Authorities at the prison have speculated from the curious discovery of random bullets and small amounts of explosives in several adjustment center cells that some sort of major break had been carefully planned, but was far from ready. But, the authorities believe, something went wrong and George Jackson was forced to make a desperate attempt at implementing the plan prematurely. If that was the case, however, observers close to Jackson and the prison have questioned what specifically might have changed his plan. Jackson has spent seven of his 11 years in prison in San Quentin's adjustment center. He knew better than most inmates that a weapon, and particularly a gun, would be nearly impossible to conceal from the constant skin searches he went through. The 29-year-old inmate author was considered among other radical and militant convicts as well as many sympathizers outside the walls to have a brilliant mind often given to elaborate, almost military details. Even prison sources concede that if he made a mistake of some sort in planning the breakout, it would not likely be in assuming he would not be thoroughly searched. Assuming Jackson had the gun and thought he could get through the search, then his second unexplainable act is questioned. When alarms went off in the prison, Jackson and inmate John Spain ran out of the adjustment center and headed for a wall that even had they reached, would be nearly impossible to scale. In any case, they would still have been in the prison compound if they had made it over the wall. Jackson knew both facts. His dash under two gun towers was virtually suicidal. There was also speculation that the original intent of the escape plan had been for all the adjustment center inmates to rush out, seize a gun tower as quickly as possible and go out the main gate—possibly to help waiting outside. But there was no evidence of outside help for Jackson on Saturday.

State authorities kept an iron grip on the crime scene inside the prison. Outsiders were barred from San Quentin for a week while the state investigation was conducted free of public scrutiny. In protest, a desultory band of demonstrators gathered outside the east gate to demand that San Quentin be reopened. The protesters, most of them young whites, chanted "Open

the gate, smash the state," "Three pigs ain't enough," and "Murderers, murderers, the guards are murderers." But the liberal politicians, radical lawyers, and other counterculture types who had been such great supporters of George and who had been expected at the rally didn't show up. The prison movement had suddenly become unfashionable, a liability for anyone in the political mainstream.

One night soon after George's death, bombs exploded in three state prison system offices. A woman caller told police the devices were the work of the Weathermen. A letter was mailed to the *San Francisco Examiner* that said, "George Jackson, black warrior, revolutionary leader, political prisoner, was shot dead by racist forces at San Quentin. Tonight the offices of the California prison system were attacked, one outraged response to the assassination of George Jackson." Bob Dylan wrote and recorded "The Ballad of George Jackson," which was banned by some stations.

From his home in Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles, Governor Ronald Reagan, calling the killings "savage and senseless," blamed the carnage on "revolutionary elements in our society intent on extending their religion of violence, hate, and murder within the walls of our prisons."

Five days after the violence, prison authorities let the first outsiders in—attorneys, ironically enough. They were allowed to see inmates, but only those with active criminal cases. Tape recorders were forever banned. From then on, all tape recorders used by lawyers would be supplied by the prison. The reopening was bitterly opposed by the San Quentin chapter of the Correctional Officers Association, which demanded that the prison remain shut until "strict procedures are written to insure the safety of all employees."

Four days later, Associate Warden Park, saying that he was suffering from battle fatigue after presiding over "a string of overlapping crises," announced that he was taking some time off to recharge his batteries. As it would turn out, he would never return to San Quentin, although he would continue a successful career with the Department of Corrections.

"I've got to get away for a while in order to wash the fresh blood from my soul," he said in his parting speech to friends and a few sympathetic reporters. "I can do that much for sure. The stains will probably remain."

Park was still vehement in condemning outside radicals, "steam-up men" he called them, accusing them of goading George into committing revolutionary suicide:

> Jackson would be alive today if it were not for his white advisors. They know very well who they are. They had nothing to lose by setting him up to be knocked down. If they had escaped, they would have had a hero to work with. Dead, he became a martyr. The sad thing about the matter is that on both sides of this terrible thing, bloody symbols have to be set up before there is reaction of an effective nature. Even after the San Rafael courthouse killings, people didn't react sufficiently to the violent, criminal revolution that is being mounted against society. Now, with more bodies to make the point, the public seems to be getting the message. One thing is sure, insofar as I'm concerned, there will be no backing down before aggression in the future. There will be complete and total protection of our guards and personnel and of the great majority of white, black, brown, and yellow convicts who want no part of wanton, insensate assaults upon them and us. Meanwhile, I am going to make my own recovery from this incredible piece of savagery, and mourn my personal loss of the good men who fell victim to it.

Alfred Bingham's attempt to block the grand jury investigation failed. His motion for an injunction was denied. The state's case was presented to the Marin County grand jury, where it immediately ran into political problems. Three liberal jurors walked out in protest and refused to consider the evidence. One of them was Richard Beban, then a student activist at the local junior college. At the time of the Bingham trial in 1986, Beban was a San Francisco radio personality and writer; his opinion of the case hadn't changed over the years.

"I said at the time that this indictment isn't justice, but vengeance," Beban told me. "There was a concentrated effort by the state to blame lawyers for the unrest in the prisons. That's what made Bingham such a wonderful patsy."

Despite the three dissenters, on October 1, 1971, the grand jury indicted Steve and six of George's San Quentin comrades on six counts of murder and conspiracy. A portion of the eleven-page indictment read: "Defendant Stephen Mitchell Bingham and George Lester Jackson, now deceased, did prior to, and continuing until on or about August 21, 1971 . . . willfully, unlawfully, feloniously and knowingly conspire, combine, confederate and agree together with other persons whose names are unknown to the grand jury to willfully and knowingly commit felonies . . . Defendant Bingham did furnish a 9 mm automatic pistol and clips containing 9 mm cartridges to George Jackson while in a visiting room located within San Quentin State Prison. The said conspiracy resulted in the murders of Frank P. DeLeon, Paul W. Krasenes, Jere P. Graham, Johnny M. Lynn and Ronald L. Kane."